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# THE SIXTH WAR

## ISRAEL'S INVASION OF LEBANON



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# **THE SIXTH WAR ISRAEL'S INVASION OF LEBANON**

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On 12 July 2006, Hizbullah fighters kidnapped two Israeli soldiers and Hizbullah leadership asked Israel for an exchange of prisoners. Instead of a proposal for negotiation – what Hizbullah leadership had expected – Israel delivered a morning raid on Hariri International Airport in Beirut the next day, followed in the afternoon by a raid on the Beirut-Damascus Highway. The raids, while initially partially damaging their targets, were equally symbolic: Israel had started a full-scale war on Lebanon, its infrastructure and its complex web of national and regional relationships and networks. The war lasted for 34 days, leaving behind not another “New Middle East”, as the American administration had hoped, but an even more volatile Middle East. Between the declarations of a “Truthful Promise” of 12 July and that of “Divine Victory” on 22 September, the war bore no “birth pangs” but “bangs” of persistent and interconnected conflicts.

Thus, our choice of “The Sixth War” as title for this emergency issue is not a mere imitation of *al-Jazeera*’s description of the latest war between Israel and Lebanon. The editors of this issue are convinced that, in both context and intensity, what happened between 12 July and 14 August 2006 (the formal end to hostilities) and 7 September (the end of Israel’s military blockade of Lebanon) should appropriately be analyzed and understood as a sequence to and a consequence of previous wars between Israel and its neighboring countries. Like most of Israel’s previous wars, this was a war of choice passed off as a struggle for existence. The G8 meeting in St. Petersburg, which coincided with the outbreak of the war, appeased Israel and offered a diplomatic *carte blanche* on virtually all its military operations.

While there has been no shortage of media commentary and analytical essays that have tried to make sense of this war, we believe that this MIT-EJMES emergency issue was needed for two main reasons. First, it overcomes the superficiality and short-attention span that has characterized much of the war’s print and television coverage in the media. There have been free-lance journalists who braved Israeli aerial bombardments to break the silence on the dozens of ‘Guernicas’ across southern Lebanon. Where their stories made it into mainstream media they were mere fig leaves to embellish the bare, one-sided structure of news. Likewise, anti-American and anti-Israeli polemics simplify the complexity of the origins, causes and consequences of this war, let alone its day-to-day operational aspects. Second, during the course of the war and thereafter, it became clear to us that the actions, statements and decisions made by various parties involved or engaged in the war were going to have long-lasting implications on several countries of the Middle East, on the United States’ image in the Arab and Muslim world and future dynamics of the “War on Terror”. Putting those actions, statements and decisions under the microscope of independent professional analysts – long-term resident journalists, historians, political scientists and social anthropologists of

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Lebanon and the Middle East – avoids the multiple refractions in imperial policy-making and media coverage.

Our emergency issue aims at putting together a range of analytical essays, grounded in thorough empirical and conceptually sound research and tackling different facets of the war, in one volume made universally accessible online to interested readership around the world. A number of journalists and scholars, young and of older generations alike, based in the region and abroad, trained in various academic disciplines and Middle Eastern languages, were invited to draw on their intimate knowledge and research experience to present their analyses of the “Sixth War”.

As **Karim Makdisi** demonstrates in this volume, Israel’s *casus belli* was an extremely weak one indeed, and strongly suggests other motives originating in both Israeli and U.S. government designs for the Middle East region that has pushed the latter into turmoil. In a subsequent article, **Robert Blecher** sheds light on some of these policies and rationales by reading Israeli perspectives. **Reinoud Leenders** explores in his contribution the circumstances that helped frame Hizbullah’s thinking and actions, while investigating how the war affected the ways in which Hizbullah views and presents itself in relation to Lebanon and the region at large.

The outbreak of this war is closely tied to the still unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the long-term effects of continuous Israeli expulsion of Palestinians from their land. **Laleh Khalili** focuses on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and the degree to which the latest war and its underlying conflicts brought Lebanese Shiites and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon closer together. At a time when over a quarter of the Lebanese population became internally displaced by Israeli aerial bombardment the striking image of “refugees granting refuge” conjures up both the tragic longevity of Arab suffering and the remarkable humanity within it.

**Nicholas Blanford** and **Augustus Richard Norton** each separately analyze the military and strategic dimensions of the veracious clash between Israeli armed forces and Hizbullah’s fighters. The two parties’ confrontation caused a shocking level of human suffering, which, in turn, prompted a humanitarian response in Lebanon, analyzed by **Jim Quilty**. Now the dust has settled of at least this phase of the war, Lebanon is once again left counting its losses and initiating efforts toward “post-war” recovery from a conflict that, given its enduring root causes, is likely to flare up again. **Bassam Fattouh** and **Joachim Kolb** examine the costs of the war for Lebanon and the vast challenges facing reconstruction, primarily in terms of this country’s shattered economy. In her article, **Lara Deeb** critically explores the Israeli justification for its assault and its pick of “strategic” targets in Lebanon; mostly of a pure civilian nature and often entirely unrelated to Hizbullah’s military operations.

Subsequent articles focus on third parties or “external” actors, who, in fact, more often than not constitute an intrinsic part of the conflict. **Yasser Munif** forcefully demonstrates how in the current martial atmosphere media accounts are – subverting Clausewitz – a continuation of war by other means. He explores how the U.S.’ most prominent newspaper, the *New York Times*, covered and participated in the war. **Elizabeth Picard** provides what one reviewer commended as “the first in-depth, objective analysis of French policy toward the events in Lebanon.” The French role has been omnipresent especially since it pushed for UN Security Council resolutions pressuring Lebanon, Syria and Hizbullah into compliance with joint US-French demands.

This *MIT-EJMES* issue concludes with three articles that reveal deeper structural and historical developments of which the latest war is only the most recent manifestation. **Virginia Tilley** traces the roots of Israel's motives in Lebanon by highlighting the "ethnic imperative of Jewish statehood". **Asher Kaufman** investigates the latest conflict and the prospects for ending or curbing it in the context of his renowned historical research on the disputed and occupied Shab'a region situated at the provisional borders with Israel and with Syria. **Irene Gendzier** also goes back into history and draws some striking parallels between current U.S. and Israeli policies and those dating back to the 1950s.

This special issue's book review section presents detailed review essays. The first is on recent publications on Lebanon's political economy, by **Reinoud Leenders**. In the second, **Rola el-Husseini** discusses monographs on the real and purported ties between Hizbullah and Iran. The third review essay by **John McCurdy** presents the most extensive literature overview of post 9/11 publications on al-Qaeda.

The Beirut-based artist **Mazen Kerbaj** has provided the cover image for this issue. During the bombardment, Beirut's active 'blogosphere' virtually lifted the Israeli siege. It managed to interrupt mainstream journalism's consensus of blaming the victims and its indifference to Lebanese human suffering. None of the many bloggers captured the pain, powerlessness and frustration of Lebanese civilians as forcefully and creatively as his <http://mazenkerblog.blogspot.com/>. Few evoked as much international attention and empathy as Mazen Kerbaj's website. Playing on Picasso and Brecht, his drawings have universalized the visceral experience of modern life under military siege. We would like to thank him for letting us use one of his sketches.

We would also like to thank the blind peer reviewers who shared our sense of urgency and who generously gave advice even as it cut into their semester start and multiple other professional commitments. The contributors and the reviewers have helped us to shorten the production line – so notoriously long in academic journals – to mark the first month after the fragile cessation of hostilities finally came into effect. Despite the proximity to wartime events and the shifting grounds of postwar diplomacy and recovery, we believe the in-depth analyses presented here will prove to be accurate and significant for a long time to come.

It would be far too ambitious to claim that all this scholarly work will one day be viewed as the "initiation of peace by other means". Yet, if we recognize that war and bloodshed are ultimately fuelled and shaped by knowledge systems, human reason and perceptions --so is peace. It is here that this emergency issue hopes to have made a contribution.



# ISRAEL'S 2006 WAR ON LEBANON REFLECTIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL LAW OF FORCE

Karim Makdisi\*

## INTRODUCTION

*The strong do as they can, and the weak suffer as they must*

Thucydides<sup>1</sup>

*Power is not the bottom line, authority is; no army is necessary to support the authority of the king who is obeyed because the law that makes him king is respected...He who takes force for the bottom line finds life in international society to be solitary, expensive and probably nasty and brutish although perhaps not short*

Alfred Rubin<sup>2</sup>

An international dispute can be definitively resolved either by the use of force until the stronger party beats the weaker one into submission, or by the peaceful resort to agreed upon norms and laws. Thucydides' dictum coldly encapsulates the logic of social Darwinism that must exist when the rule of law fails or is replaced by brute force. It also serves as a classic expression underlying the Realist school of international relations, which remains the most influential among political elites and analysts across the ideological spectrum. Noam Chomsky, for example, has long resorted to the logic of Realism, and he once again turned to Thucydides when asked to explain Israel's, and America's, recent war on Lebanon.<sup>3</sup> Realists, it should be noted, believe that in an anarchic world composed of sovereign states only national interests count when assessing a country's foreign policies and strategies, and as such international law and organizations are ignored or, at best, cynically manipulated only when it advances the national interest.

On 12 July, 2006 Israel transformed a relatively minor border skirmish with Hizbullah--of the kind that had been taking place intermittently since Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000--into a full scale war on Lebanon. Its objective was to neutralize Hizbullah once and for all, and to assist in the imposition of a *Pax Americana* in the Middle East. This war (or to be more precise, this phase of the war) ended 34 days later on 14 August with the coming into effect of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1701, which aims at the "cessation of hostilities" in anticipation of a permanent cease-fire between Hizbullah and Israel.<sup>4</sup>

Two general observations may be made with respect to the military phase of this sixth Arab-Israeli war. First, the war very quickly evolved into an Israeli-American operation once the US decided to use what it saw as an "opportunity" to create a "new Middle East" following the catastrophic results of its policies in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>5</sup> The US consistently held Syria and, indirectly, Iran responsible for Hizbullah's actions, and tied any resolution to the conflict with

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concerns about the regional implications in its “war on terror.” The US also repeatedly rejected calls for a cease fire in order to allow Israel added time to “punish” Hizbullah<sup>6</sup>, even after the 25 July Rome Peace Conference, where Lebanon’s pro-US Prime Minister had pleaded for an immediate end to the fighting and presented a “Seven Point Plan” to end the conflict.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Hizbullah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah insinuated during the war that he considered Israel to be merely an “obedient tool” of an aggressive US policy intent on re-drawing the political map of the region, stating that “the Israelis are ready for stopping the aggression....it is the United States which insists on continuing the aggression on Lebanon.”<sup>8</sup> A poll taken during the war confirmed that 90% of Lebanese not only believed that the US was playing an active role in the war, but that it was “complicit in Israel’s war crimes against the Lebanese people.”<sup>9</sup>

Second, despite putative military superiority and a compliant UNSC, Israel failed to achieve its stated objectives—the release of the two Israeli soldiers captured by Hizbullah during the border skirmish and the neutralization of Hizbullah—by using force. Indeed, Hizbullah’s successful resistance coupled with Israel’s increasingly desperate and violent tactics against civilian targets during the war resulted in unprecedented popular support for Hizbullah and its leader Hassan Nasrallah across the Arab world. Such popular sentiment in turn forced key Arab League members such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt to ultimately, if reluctantly, withdraw their initial support for Israel’s actions.<sup>10</sup> Hizbullah’s successful resistance, and therefore leverage, also ensured that Lebanon’s political capitulation, as spelled out in the US-prepared draft resolution preceding 1701, was averted.<sup>11</sup> The draft resolution had been flatly rejected by Lebanon because it had ignored all the main points contained in the Lebanon’s “Seven Point Plan” presented to the international community at the 25 July Rome Peace Conference, and because it had called for an “international force” under Chapter VII of the UN Charter which would allow the use force as needed to “maintain peace and security.”

The failure of power politics to decisively resolve the dispute —both in terms of Israel’s inability to secure a military victory over Hizbullah and the US’s inability to use its hegemony within the SC to secure an unambiguous resolution in favor of Israel—has thus heralded the inexorable return to center stage of UN diplomacy and the debate concerning the efficacy of international law. The reason for this is that, for all its apparent flaws, the UN provides the necessary authority, and therefore legitimacy, to interpret international law in order to resolve this dispute. As Alfred Rubin argues, “power is not the bottom line, authority is.” To back his claim, Rubin recalls the scene in Plato’s *Gorgias*, where Polus asserts that the ruler of the state is “a man who can do what he pleases in the state...killing and banishing and having his own way in everything.” Socrates responds to Polus in a mocking tone, “Suppose I were to meet you in the middle of the morning with a dagger up my sleeve...Such is the power that if I decide that any of the people you see around you should die on the spot, die they shall.” For Rubin the notion that a “madman in the agora is the ruler of the polity is absurd,” because to accept this is to live in a “nasty and brutish” world.<sup>12</sup> Of course the use of force and violence can never be totally dispensed with in international relations; however, in the absence of international rules grounded in some form of state consent, a powerful player cannot hope to impose its authority purely by force on the weaker entity, at least not in the long run. In other words, there is an important distinction to be made between force and *authority*. To that end, Israel’s failure to turn three decades of

putative military superiority over, and several invasions of, Lebanon into political gains and security—even with the backing of a superpower—is precisely because it has failed to grasp that its disdain for the norms of international law and UN resolutions have transformed it into a “madman” in the agora.

This article will first review the evolution of the international law dealing with the use of force, highlighting the perennial tension between, on the one hand, the Westphalian principle of state sovereignty and, on the other hand, the ever-growing consensus within the international community that the use of force must be regulated in order to save the world from the Hobbesian condition alluded to by Rubin. The article will then analyze Israel’s attacks on Lebanon in light of this body of international law, showing clearly that Israel clearly violated the accepted norms regulating the use of force and humanitarian law. It concludes that peace and security can only come within the framework of a comprehensive and just settlement grounded in international law.

### THE USE OF FORCE IN INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE UN CHARTER

The modern international legal order is usually traced to the political and intellectual restructuring engendered in Europe by the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, which, in ending the Thirty Years War, affirmed the core principle of state sovereignty and rejected the concept of divine law.<sup>13</sup> In its most basic understanding, international law refers to a body of rules and norms that are binding on all members of the international community. According to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), its principle sources include, first and foremost, international agreements or treaties (e.g., the UN Charter), which require that states expressly consent to them to become legally binding.<sup>14</sup> The customary practice between states defines a second main source for international law. When certain practices among states are widely adhered to and repeated over a long period without challenge—when it can be demonstrated that the states accept, through their behavior, that a special norm has indeed been created—those practices become, in effect, binding. Other sources of international law recognized by the ICJ are the “general principles of law recognized by civilized nations,” and to a lesser extent the judicial decisions of courts and the most qualified jurists and scholars.<sup>15</sup> UN General Assembly resolutions, and other ‘soft law’ declarations and principles, are by definition recommendations (i.e., they are non-binding), but they may also serve as international law sources when they are taken by consensus.

From its inception in the seventeenth century, international law has been concerned with regulating the conduct of wars between states (*jus ad bellum*), as well as limiting the impact of such wars (*jus in bello*, commonly referred to as international humanitarian law). A central feature of the modern Westphalian order has been the tension between international law and the principle of sovereign equality among states that created a condition of formal anarchy in the world system such that there was no longer a supranational body (such as the Catholic Church or the Holy Roman Emperor) with the authority to tell any individual state when it could or could not go to war. As such, “War was in law a natural function of the State and a prerogative of its uncontrolled sovereignty.”<sup>16</sup> Out of this Westphalian logic grew the realist doctrine of self-help, whereby states could justify violence or war precisely because there was no legitimate centralized body that could definitively interpret international law let alone enforce it. Measures of self-

help under customary law included such legal categories as retorsion and reprisals.<sup>17</sup> Retorsion is a legal measure taken by a state to counter an unfriendly measure taken by another state (e.g. cutting off diplomatic relations with a state in response to a damaging policy pursued by that state). Reprisals, on the other hand, involve coercive measures short of war directed against a state that has allegedly committed an unlawful act. As it became over time that reprisals, such as enforcing blockades, were open to grave abuse by stronger states, certain conditions were placed on the right of reprisal. The *Naulilaa* arbitration of 1928 represents the most authoritative statement of customary law of reprisals when it set down three such conditions<sup>18</sup>:

- (a) there must have been an illegal act on the part of the other state;
- (b) they must be preceded by a request for redress of the wrong, for the necessity of resorting to force cannot be established if the possibility of obtaining redress by other means is not even explored; and
- (c) the measures adopted must not be excessive, in the sense of being out of proportion to the provocation received.

It was only during the twentieth century that international rules prohibiting the unilateral use of force by one state against another, as well as setting limits to how the war was conducted, were gradually developed. After the horrific violence of the First World War, the League of Nations (LoN) introduced the doctrine of collective security to deter aggressive states such that “any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the Members of the League or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League.”<sup>19</sup> Any “act of war,” as determined by the LoN, against one member country was thus considered to be an act of war against all members.<sup>20</sup> In case of a dispute, the LoN required the exhaustion of all avenues of dispute resolution, including arbitration or even judicial proceedings.<sup>21</sup> Article 16, however, ultimately indulged the primacy of sovereignty in sanctioning a state’s unilateral recourse to war if the LoN Council proved unable to resolve the dispute: it allowed each state to reserve “the right to take action as they shall consider necessary for the maintenance of rights and justice.” This “right” was clearly vague, and given that the “test was subjective” and there were “no formal criteria to meet,” the LoN ultimately failed to preserve international peace with devastating consequences.<sup>22</sup>

The Kellogg-Briand Pact, concluded in 1928 by the foreign ministers of the USA and France and still in force today with 63 states as parties, represented a crucial normative step in the international law of armed conflict: the parties to the Pact renounced war—for the first time in history—as an “instrument of national policy.”<sup>23</sup> It condemned “recourse to war for the solution of international controversies,” and insisted that the “settlement or solution of all disputes or conflict” should “never be sought except by pacific means.”<sup>24</sup> While there was, fatally, no mandatory dispute resolution procedures and no enforcement mechanism, this Pact “heralded a landmark development” in the law governing the use of force in that it “demonstrated that the international community can politically and legally agree on a general ban on war and formalize the agreement as a legally binding obligation.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the 1945 International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg built on the Pact’s logic, and its evident crystallization of world opinion,<sup>26</sup> to assert that “war is essentially an evil thing. Its consequences are not confined to the belligerent states alone, but affect the whole world. To initiate a war of aggression, therefore...is the supreme international crime.”<sup>27</sup>

Following the horrors of two world wars, and the realization that military technology—and in particular the proliferation of nuclear weapons—would render war against the national interests of all states, the United Nations (UN) was created in 1945 to “save the succeeding generation from the scourge of war,” as well as to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, establish conditions under which justice and the respect for the obligations of international law, and promote social progress.<sup>28</sup> A primary goal of the UN was thus to preserve international peace and security by insisting upon the peaceful settlement of disputes and outlawing the use of armed force except under extremely limited conditions. The cornerstone of this new regime is embodied in UN Charter Article 2(3) and, more authoritatively, Article 2(4). Article 2(3) calls on all states to settle their disputes by “peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered;”<sup>29</sup> while Article 2(4) states: “All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”<sup>30</sup> The UN General Assembly and Security Council have passed many resolutions over the years to reinforce this rule, while the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has strongly asserted in *Nicaragua v United States* that the general ban on the use of force reflects the customary practice of states.<sup>31</sup>

The UN Charter allows only two exceptions to the prohibition of the use of force. First, self-defense is permitted under Article 51, which states that:

Nothing in the Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs a member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defense shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.

The literature on this self-defense exception reflects is extensive and reflects the heated debate with regard to its interpretation.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly to some interpretations Article 51 apparently created a loophole for states to justify the use of force within the logic of the UN Charter. Still, there remains a general consensus that the self-defense justification in international law must meet the requirements of necessity, immanency and proportionality as established both in customary law and in various treaties.<sup>33</sup> These requirements derive historically from the 1837 *Caroline* case when British forces used the pretext of the Mackenzie Rebellion in Canada to cross the US border and destroy the *Caroline*, a ship used by the rebels.<sup>34</sup> The British Foreign Office responded to US protests that Britain had violated its sovereignty by claiming legitimate “self-defense.” In response, US Secretary of State Daniel Webster famously argued that self-defense could only be justified when the “necessity of self-defense is instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation.” Moreover, Webster continued, the British had to establish that their troops “did nothing unreasonable or excessive; since the act justified by the necessity of self-defense must be limited by that necessity and kept clearly within it.” The standards and criteria for self-defense set out by Webster

have over time become “universally accepted,” and were applied in the Nuremberg Tribunal as well as several cases under the purview of the ICJ.<sup>35</sup>

The second exception to the prohibition of the use of force is when collective force is authorized by the UN Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The UNSC must, according to Article 39, first “determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of peace, or act of aggression” before it makes “recommendations” to the parties concerned or “decides what measures need to be taken...to maintain or restore peace and security.”<sup>36</sup> Article 41 authorizes the SC to decide on measures “not involving the use of armed force” such as economic sanctions, interruption of “rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio and other means of communication and the severance of diplomatic relations.”<sup>37</sup> Finally, if the SC considers that non-forceful measures do not work, or cannot work, then Article 42 authorizes it to “take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security.”<sup>38</sup> In other words, the SC may authorize the use of force so that the imperative to maintain peace and security under the doctrine of collective security ultimately trumps the otherwise sacrosanct Westphalian principle of sovereignty also enshrined in the UN Charter.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, it should be noted here that while the customary right of reprisals remains valid as constrained by the three conditions set out in the *Naulilaa* arbitration, the UN has specifically declared that such reprisals may not involve armed force.<sup>40</sup> In order to clarify what kind of attack does constitute an unlawful use of force or “act of aggression,” the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 3314 (XXIX) by consensus in 1974, defining “aggression” as “the use of armed force by a State against the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of another State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Charter of the United Nations.”<sup>41</sup> The resolution goes on to list actions which qualify as acts of aggression, including: the invasion by the armed forces of another state, the bombardment of the territory of another state, and a blockade of the ports or coasts of a state.<sup>42</sup> The resolution also follows the Nuremberg Tribunal’s reasoning to assert that a “war of aggression is a crime against international peace.”<sup>43</sup>

In short, during the second half of the twentieth century states had clearly accepted the notion that the use of force had to be restrained by international law in order to prevent the breakdown of international order. This does not, of course, mean that states do not regularly violate this rule. It does however mean that states “invariably try to justify their actions in law.”<sup>44</sup>

### **EVALUATING ISRAEL’S ACTIONS IN LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: SELF-DEFENSE OR ILLEGAL AGGRESSION?**

According to the UN, on the morning of 12 July 2006, a Hizbullah unit crossed the Blue Line created by the 1949 Armistice between Israel and Lebanon and attacked an Israeli army patrol near the border, capturing two Israeli soldiers and killing three others.<sup>45</sup> The captured soldiers were brought back into Lebanon, and a heavy exchange of fire ensued between Hizbullah and Israel across the entire length of the Blue Line. Israel’s armed forces targeted, in these initial exchanges, not just Hizbullah positions but a number of roads and bridges in southern Lebanon; while at least one Israeli tank and platoon crossed into Lebanon to attempt to rescue the captured soldiers, resulting in the deaths of a further five



Israeli soldiers.<sup>46</sup> Israel's army chief of staff, Dan Halutz, warned that Israel would "turn back the clock in Lebanon by 20 years" if its soldiers were not released, but Hizbullah stated clearly that it would only return the Israeli prisoners through "indirect negotiations" leading to the "trade" with Lebanese prisoners detained by Israel during its two decade occupation of southern Lebanon.<sup>47</sup>

By the afternoon of 12 July, the Lebanese government had officially requested that UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon), the UN peacekeeping unit that has been in southern Lebanon since 1978, broker a ceasefire.<sup>48</sup> Israel, however, rejected this unless the two captured soldiers were returned. It then escalated the conflict when Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared that Hizbullah's actions constituted an "act of war" by the government of Lebanon and, as such, "Lebanon is responsible and Lebanon will bear the consequences of its actions."<sup>49</sup> Israel's Defense Minister Amir Peretz added that attacks would continue until the Lebanese army had replaced Hizbullah in southern Lebanon, threatening that "if the government of Lebanon fails to deploy its forces, as is expected from a sovereign government, we shall not allow any further Hizbullah to remain on the borders of the state of Israel."<sup>50</sup> For its part, the Lebanese government officially denied any responsibility or even prior knowledge of the Hizbullah operation, and disavowed completely "the events that have happened and that are happening along the international border."<sup>51</sup> Both Hizbullah and the Lebanese government once again called for an immediate cease fire.

On 13 July, Israel bombed Beirut's International Airport and imposed a total land, sea and air blockade on Lebanon. It had by then also greatly expanded its attack to include civilian areas and infrastructure throughout Lebanon, including Beirut. In retaliation, Hizbullah started firing rockets into civilian areas in northern Israel for the first time. Israel also attempted to assassinate Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah, completely destroying the residential area of southern Beirut where he lives in the process. Nasrallah threatened to respond to what he called Israel's "open war" in kind by attacking civilian areas deep inside Israel.<sup>52</sup> By 14 July, Israel's declared aims had shifted away from the return of the captured soldiers to include the total destruction of Hizbullah. IDF Brigadier General Ido Nehustan echoed Prime Minister Olmert's stance in stating: "We know that it's going to be a long and continuous operation, but its very clear: we need to put Hizbullah out of business. Our aim is to change the situation in which a terrorist organization operates from within a sovereign territory."<sup>53</sup> The tone had now been set: Israel pounded all of Lebanon, especially the South and southern suburbs of Beirut, while Hizbullah resisted by absorbing these attacks, fighting to repulse Israeli land advances, and launching retaliatory missiles strikes on northern Israel. By the time the "cessation of hostilities" called for in Resolution 1701 came into effect the morning of 14 August, at least 1,187 Lebanese had been killed and over 4,000 thousand wounded, the vast majority of them civilians, and about a third of them children. Moreover, around one million people in Lebanon had been displaced by the war, 15,000 homes destroyed, and the infrastructure throughout the country severely damaged.<sup>54</sup> Forty-three Israeli civilians (including a disproportionate number of Israeli Palestinians) and 117 Israeli soldiers were also killed during the war, while around 300,000 civilians were displaced and thousands of homes damaged.<sup>55</sup>

Israel's main legal justification for its attacks on Lebanon was its perceived inherent right of self-defense. On 12 July, Israel's Ambassador to the UN Dan

Gillerman submitted an official letter of complaint to the Secretary General stating that Israel “reserves the right to act in accordance with United Nations Charter Article 51, and exercise its right of self-defense when an armed attack is launched against a member of the United Nations.” Gillerman added that Israel would “take the appropriate actions to secure the release of the kidnapped soldiers and bring an end to the shelling that terrorizes our citizens.”<sup>56</sup> On the same day Israeli Prime Minister Olmert made it clear that Israel considered Hizbullah’s actions not a “terrorist attack” but an “act of war” by Lebanon, and asserted that “Israel will respond in an unequivocal fashion that will cause those who started this act of war to bear a very painful and far-reaching responsibility for their actions.”<sup>57</sup> In other words, Israel interpreted its right of self-defense to strike back “aggressively and harshly” not just against what it considers a “terrorist organization” (i.e., Hizbullah) but against “those who give it shelter” (i.e., Lebanon as a whole).<sup>58</sup> Foreign Minister Livni affirmed that Israel considered Hizbullah’s action as an “aggression,” and repeated that Israel held Lebanon responsible while alluding to the indirect role of the “axis of terror and hate created by Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas.”<sup>59</sup>

There are three key questions that need to be analyzed in light of these claims:

- (a) Did Israel have a right under international law to use force in response to Hizbullah’s raid and capture of its two soldiers? In other words, was the Hizbullah raid a legitimate *casus belli* for Israel’s attacks?
- (b) Did Israel respect the relevant criteria laid out as conditions of self-defense, in particular with regard to proportionality?
- (c) Did Israel respect the law of war (i.e., international humanitarian laws)?

Hizbullah’s cross-border raid did indeed constitute a violation of Israel’s sovereignty under international law (though this is based on the disputed assumption that Hizbullah did indeed cross into Israeli territory<sup>60</sup>). As such, Israel had the legal right to defend itself in the immediate aftermath of the raid by engaging Hizbullah fighters and trying to retrieve its two captured soldiers. It could even arguably justify limited attacks on infrastructure used by the Hizbullah unit in its escape. The IDF thus specifically informed the UN on 12 July that it had targeted bridges and roads near in order to “prevent Hizbullah from transferring the abducted soldiers.”<sup>61</sup> However, once it became clear that the Hizbullah raid was limited and did not constitute an immediate and overwhelming threat to the state of Israel, Israel was obligated by the UN Charter under Articles 2(3) and 2(4) to take steps to seek pacific settlement of its dispute with Lebanon and not to escalate its attacks on Lebanon. It should be recalled that in rejecting Nazi Germany’s logic of self-defense, the Nuremberg Tribunal reiterated that the requirements for self-defense must be “overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation,” and any such act “must be limited by that necessity, and kept clearly within it.” In other words, since there was clearly time for deliberation about what to do with regard to the soldiers absent any threat of continued aggression by Hizbullah, then Israel was obligated to refer this case to the SC, which then could have authorized the legitimate use of force if a decision was so taken. Condoleezza Rice’s initial statement regarding the Hizbullah attack on 12 July recognized this by stating, “All sides must act with restraint to resolve this incident peacefully and to protect innocent life and civilian infrastructure.”<sup>62</sup> For his part, UN Secretary

General Kofi Annan issued a strongly worded statement condemning “without reservation the attack on southern Lebanon” while also demanding the release of the Israeli soldiers.<sup>63</sup>

The Hizbullah raid clearly did not, under international law, constitute a *casus belli* for Israel to expand its attacks on Lebanon after the first exchanges of fire with Hizbullah ended. There is an unambiguous distinction in international law between limited border incidents, which might justify a limited reprisal, and “armed aggression” which would trigger a response justified by Article 51 or the provisions of Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The US statement with regard to the definition of “aggression” in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks acknowledges this clearly: “Aggression...is not a description that should be lightly applied to the actions of one side or the other in, for example, a border skirmish or a fishery dispute. To do so would not only degrade the concept of aggression, but raise the risk of aggravating what may be a minor dispute and making it more difficult to resolve.”<sup>64</sup> Richard Falk has recently clarified this further:<sup>65</sup>

UN Charter Article 51 deliberately tried to restrict this option to claim self-defense by requiring ‘a prior armed attack,’ which was definitely understood, as being of a much more sustained and severe initiation of violent conflict than an incident of violence due to an isolated attack or a border skirmish. More concretely, the events on the borders of Gaza and Lebanon that gave rise to sustained Israeli war making did not give Israel the legal right to act in self-defense, although it did authorize Israel to defend itself by retaliating in a *proportionate* manner. This distinction is crucial to the Charter conception of legitimate uses of international force.

Viewed in its proper context, the Hizbullah raid was thus a “border incident that under international law does not amount to an armed attack against a nation.”<sup>66</sup> This context includes the customary practice between Hizbullah and Israel over many years in which the Blue Line was frequently violated by both sides.<sup>67</sup> This custom, which was limited to border skirmishes and provocative Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace, did not change significantly following Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 and the UN’s subsequent certification that Israel had complied with Resolution 425.<sup>68</sup> This is because Lebanon officially rejected the UN assessment of the withdrawal line in 2000 because it considers that the Blue Line “does not conform in three locations to the internationally recognized borders with Israel,” including Sheba’a farms, and has since consistently maintained that Resolution 425 has yet to be fully implemented because Israel remains in occupation of these three areas which Lebanon “affirms” are an integral part of its territory.<sup>69</sup> This position did not change even after Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon. The March 2006 Lebanese National Dialogue confirmed this once again in its final statement,<sup>70</sup> and it was re-stated clearly in Lebanese government’s 25 July Seven Point Plan.<sup>71</sup>

As such the status quo since 2000 has consisted of a “tense and fragile” quiet punctuated by “serious” clashes along the Blue Line, including, most recently<sup>72</sup>:

- On 26 May 2006, two officials from Islamic Jihad were assassinated by a car bomb in the Lebanese city of Sidon. Israel was widely suspected of being behind this. On 28 May, “unidentified armed elements” shot at least eight missiles across the Blue Line towards an Israeli army position, wounding one soldier. The Israeli army retaliated by attacking a Palestinian

camp in southern Lebanon.

- On 1 February 2006, Israeli soldiers shot and killed a young Lebanese shepherd within Lebanese territory. Hizbullah retaliated on 3 February by shelling Israeli army positions in Sheba'a farms, and the Israeli army hit back.
- On 27 December 2005, "unidentified armed elements" fired four rockets across the Blue Line towards Israel, and the Israelis responded with an air strike on a Palestinian refugee camp south of Beirut.
- On 23 November 2005, an Israeli civilian paraglider crossed the Blue Line and landed in Lebanese territory, provoking an exchange of small arms fire between Hizbullah and the Israeli army.
- On 21 November 2005, a heavy exchange of fire between Hizbullah and the Israel army across the Blue Line left four Hizbullah fighters dead. The ensuing Israeli retaliation was heavy and included aerial bombing. The exchange of fire subsequently spread all along the Blue Line and lasted for over nine hours with several Israeli soldiers and Hizbullah fighters wounded.
- On 29 June 2005, two Hizbullah fighters and one Israeli soldier were killed when a Hizbullah unit crossed the Blue Line near the border and came across an Israeli patrol.
- On 9 January 2005, an Israeli soldier was killed and 3 wounded when a roadside bomb in the Sheba'a farms area was detonated by Hizbullah fighters. Israel responded first by opening gun and tank fire, which killed a French UN observer, and shelling nearby Hizbullah bases.

According to UNIFIL reports, in all of these violations of the Blue Line, reprisals were carried out in a limited manner because the 'rules of the game' were acknowledged by, and adhered to, both sides since the April 1996 "ceasefire understanding."<sup>73</sup> In the words of Augustus Richard Norton, a "dialogue of violence" existed between Hizbullah and Israel in which the "permissible limits of violent action for both IDF [i.e., Israeli army] and the resistance" were clearly defined.<sup>74</sup> These activities, in other words, constituted customary behavior as long as they were limited to military targets, such as occurred in the initial Hizbullah raid on 12 July.

Moreover, Hizbullah's 12 July capture of Israeli soldiers was not a new policy, but a declared strategy in order to free Lebanese prisoners held in Israel. On 7 and 16 October 2000 respectively, Hizbullah captured the remains of three Israeli soldiers (who has been "killed in action" according to the Israeli army) and abducted an Israeli reserve colonel.<sup>75</sup> The Israeli prisoner and the remains of the three dead Israeli soldiers were released on 29 January 2004 in a landmark prisoner exchange via German mediation that included 450 Lebanese held in Israeli jails. On the first anniversary of the prisoner exchange, Hizbullah leader Hassan Nasrallah stated clearly that "The Zionist enemy daily declares that Hizbullah has taken a strategic decision to capture Israeli soldiers. I confirm that all options are open" to free the remaining Lebanese prisoners that Israel refused to release in the 2004 exchange.<sup>76</sup> Hizbullah has, since then, attempted other such raids to capture Israeli soldiers. The most recent attempt prior to 12 July was on 27 November 2005. It was unsuccessful, but Nasrallah vowed publicly at the time that such actions would continue.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, Hizbullah's capture of Israeli soldiers may itself be justified under the international customary law of reprisals to redress a legal 'injury' by Israel's earlier capture of Lebanese prisoners during its occupation of southern Lebanon in contravention of the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions. Lebanon, it should be recalled, considers Hizbullah a "national resistance" group which exists "alongside" the Lebanese national forces.<sup>78</sup> It is also the long-held stated position of the Lebanese government that its citizens held in Israeli jails must be released as part of Resolution 425: "The Government of Lebanon...insists on the immediate liberation of all Lebanese hostages and detainees (as well as the return of all Lebanese corpses) from Israeli prisons, since their situation was related to the period of occupation and its consequences."<sup>79</sup> This position was re-stated in Lebanon's "Seven Point Plan" of 25 July 2006. Accordingly, a reprisal by Hizbullah in terms of capturing the Israeli soldiers would meet the criteria set out in the *Naulilaa* case: it follows an illegal act by Israel; was preceded by a request that Lebanese prisoners be released; and is certainly proportionate (prisoners for prisoners) to the original act.

In any case, as Richard Falk points out, any retaliation by Israel in the name of self-defense must be proportionate to the original attack. However, there was a clear consensus within the international community that, notwithstanding its right of limited self-defense, Israel's response to Hizbullah's 12 July operation was excessive, and in the words of the European Union "disproportionate."<sup>80</sup> The EU further denounced Israel's air, sea and land blockade of Lebanon as completely "unjustified."<sup>81</sup> Russia attacked what it saw as the "continuing destruction by Israel of civilian infrastructure in Lebanon and in Palestinian territory," adding that "the disproportionate use of force from which civilian populations suffer cannot be understood and justified."<sup>82</sup> The French President Jacques Chirac called Israel's response "completely disproportionate,"<sup>83</sup> while Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy stated on 13 July that "this is a disproportionate act of war...The only solution is a return to reason by both sides...We are calling for a lowering of tensions."<sup>84</sup> For his part, Kofi Annan insisted that Israel's policy of "disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the Lebanese people must stop."<sup>85</sup>

Israel has argued that in view of repeated violations of the Blue Line by Hizbullah, a "proportional" response does not mean simply a tit-for-tat retaliation, but a larger reprisal intended to weaken Hizbullah more generally. Israeli Foreign Minister Livny borrowed from the reasoning underlying US "war on terror" when she made it clear that "proportionality is against a threat, and it is not an answer to a concrete situation on the ground."<sup>86</sup> However, it is clear that even as an anticipatory measure against the "threat" posed by Hizbullah's stockpile of weapons, the threat must be *imminent* as set out by the *Caroline* case.<sup>87</sup> As outlined earlier, Hizbullah did not, on 12 July, pose an imminent threat to Israel as it had no intention of staying in Israeli territory. *The logic of allowing each state to use disproportionate force "against a threat" which only it determines (as opposed to the SC), is certainly a very dangerous one.* As such, both the EU's Javier Solana and UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland dismissed Livney's claims. Solana responded that it is disproportionate when "it inflicts more suffering on the people" than is "necessary in order to obtain an objective."<sup>88</sup> This comment is all the more important given that Israel failed to defeat Hizbullah during the war, and so the humanitarian disaster created could not even be justified in retrospect in terms of achieved objectives. For his part, Egeland stated that, "You cannot invent new kinds of proportionalities. I've never heard that the threat is supposed to be



proportional to the response. Proportionality is there in the law. The law has been made through generations of experience on the battlefield. If you kill more civilians than military personnel, one should not attack."<sup>89</sup> This is crucial in light of the fact that out that "for every civilian killed in Israel there are more than 10 killed in Lebanon," as Egeland pointed out.

Moreover, the UN SC was already dealing with this "threat" via the adoption of SC Resolution 1559 (2004), which "calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias."<sup>90</sup> Israel repeatedly justified its attacks on Lebanon by claiming that it was "defending its citizens" because of what it saw as the failure of Lebanon to implement Resolution 1559.<sup>91</sup> However, the logic of a state taking the enforcement of a UN resolution into its own hands (as opposed to the SC) flies in the face of the whole notion of 'collective security' embodied in the UN Charter and is illegal under international law.<sup>92</sup> Such a logic would mean that Lebanon could have legitimately bombed Tel Aviv until Israel complied with Resolution 425 of 1978; or that the Syrians and Palestinians have a right to use force against Israel and its citizens to force it to comply with Resolutions 242 (1967) or 338 (1973). Only the UNSC itself has a right to enforce its own resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Finally, even after Israel took the decision to use force against Lebanon, it was still bound by international humanitarian laws including the provisions of the Geneva and Hague Conventions. Israel claims that deaths of civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure were either the inevitable 'collateral damage' permitted by international law during "lawful military operations;" or due to Hizbullah's "deliberate placing of military targets in the heart of civilian areas" in which case "those who choose to locate such targets in these areas must bear responsibility for the injury to civilians which this decision engenders."<sup>93</sup> However, Israel's violation of international humanitarian laws has been well-documented by the UN and human rights groups. The UN's Jan Egeland made this clear several times<sup>94</sup>, while on 11 August UN Human Rights Council "strongly" condemned "grave Israeli violations of human rights and breeches of international humanitarian law in Lebanon" and called for the establishment of a high level committee to investigate "the systematic targeting and killings of civilians by Israel."<sup>95</sup>

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, based on extensive on-the-ground research in Lebanon, assessed Israel's conduct during the period 12 and 27 July 2006, and dismissed Israel's claim that it was trying to minimize civilian casualties, revealing instead Israel's "indiscriminate use of force" as well as "a systematic failure by the IDF to distinguish between combatants and civilians." The HRW also cast doubt on two central claims made by Israel, claiming that "Israeli forces deliberately targeted civilians" and that it "found no cases in which Hizbullah deliberately used civilians as shields..."<sup>96</sup> A more comprehensive report by Amnesty International (AI) published on 23 August 2006 describes in detail an "Israeli policy of deliberate destruction of Lebanese civilian infrastructure, which included war crimes" during the recent conflict. The report includes evidence of the following:<sup>97</sup>

- Massive destruction by Israeli forces of whole civilian neighborhoods and villages;
- Attacks on bridges in areas of no apparent strategic importance;
- Attacks on water pumping stations, water treatment plants and supermarkets despite the prohibition against targeting objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population;



- Statements by Israeli military officials indicating that the destruction of civilian infrastructure was indeed a goal of Israel's military campaign designed to press the Lebanese government and the civilian population to turn against Hizbullah.

As such, the AI report makes it clear that<sup>98</sup>:

'The evidence strongly suggests that the extensive destruction of public works, power systems, civilian homes and industry was deliberate and an integral part of the military strategy, rather than 'collateral damage' – incidental damage to civilians or civilian property resulting from targeting military objectives... The widespread destruction of apartments, houses, electricity and water services, roads, bridges, factories and ports, in addition to several statements by Israeli officials, suggests a policy of punishing both the Lebanese government and the civilian population in an effort to get them to turn against Hizbullah. Israeli attacks did not diminish, nor did their pattern appear to change, even when it became clear that the victims of the bombardment were predominantly civilians, which was the case from the first days of the conflict.

In other words, by choosing to escalate its war beyond the border area Israel pursued a policy of collective punishment against the Lebanese people as Kofi Annan confirmed, and thus it had "committed grave breaches of international humanitarian law" by causing "death and suffering on a wholly unacceptable scale."<sup>99</sup> The fact that Israel claims Hizbullah may have also violated international humanitarian laws will doubtlessly be pursued by human rights groups such as AI or HRW who are eager not to be painted with the "anti-Israel" brush. However, allegations of Hizbullah 'war crimes'—even if they are proven--do not alter or rationalize Israel's responsibility for its own war crimes.

## CONCLUSION

This article has demonstrated that Israel's actions during its war with Lebanon violated basic principles of both the law pertaining to the use of force (*jus ad bellum*) and the laws of war (*jus in bello*). In this sense, its conduct was not significantly different than its previous invasions including those of 1978, 1982, and 1996.<sup>100</sup> Clearly, international law cannot in of itself stop the putatively powerful players from using force to try and settle a dispute, but this article has suggested that such force does not confer the authority needed to reach a final settlement. In other words, non-compliance, or deviance, from the norms of international law does not take away from the authoritative character of the violated norms.

Why is that so? In part because these norms were adopted by institutions and through procedures generally perceived as endowing substantive norms with legitimacy; in part because the norms themselves reflect widely shared views about what kind of behavior is inimical to the public interest; and in part because people believe that in the absence of such norms, the behavior they prohibit would be far more widespread. In short, the norms are seen as good and as inhibitors of bad behavior.<sup>101</sup>

This war, however, is markedly different from the previous ones in that its illegality has been sanctioned by the UNSC, which on the one hand failed to condemn Israel's use of force and clear violation of international law, and, on the other hand, deliberately delayed a ceasefire for 32 days despite ample evidence of a "major humanitarian disaster."<sup>102</sup> The UNSC, in other words, had chosen to breach its own mandate and sacrifice a defenseless UN member, Lebanon, in order to satisfy the geopolitical aims of a hegemonic state, the USA, and its client state, Israel.<sup>103</sup> UN Secretary General Kofi Annan himself recognized this when he described how "profoundly disappointed" he was that a cease fire resolution had been delayed for so long while civilians "suffered such terrible, unnecessary pain and loss."<sup>104</sup> The consequences, Annan recognized, was that "this inability to act sooner has badly shaken the world's faith in its authority and integrity."<sup>105</sup>

Such UNSC weakness or, as Richard Falk suggests, collaboration must be seen within the context of the "Bush Doctrine" and the dangerous trend this doctrine engendered beginning with the 2003 Iraq war when the UNSC retroactively legitimized what was clearly seen—even by the UN itself—as an illegal war.<sup>106</sup> The UNSC, to return to Alfred Rubin's comments, has thus stood by approvingly as the "madmen" in the agora—the US in the case of the Iraq war, and Israel in the Lebanon war—have used force illegally and thus challenged the very basis of the modern international legal order. The legacy of such a radical challenge to the international order has been chaos, civil war and unimaginable violence in Iraq. In the case of Lebanon and Israel (and, of course, Palestine), protracted instability and further conflict are distinct possibilities. A long-term solution—i.e., security and justice for all parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict—can only come within the context of a just comprehensive settlement underpinned by international law and a UN that can faithfully implement its charter provisions unambiguously, not a UN that seeks to be a junior partner to the US in a *Pax Americana* built around the logic of the Bush Doctrine and military solutions.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue," *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book V,

<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/melian.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred P. Rubin, *Ethics and Authority in International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.186.

<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky, "UN Security Council Acts with Constraints Set by Great Powers," *The New Anatolian*, Interviewed by Nermeen Al Mufti.

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 1701, S/RES/1701 (2006), 11 August 2006. This resolution is ambiguous because it calls for the strengthening of the mandate and numbers of UNIFIL peacekeeping forces to assist the government of Lebanon in extending its sovereignty throughout the country; but it is not clear under what circumstances a "UNIFIL plus" force may be authorized to use force.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, according to Seymour Hersch, the US did not so much react to this perceived 'opportunity' as it did plan for it in close coordination with Israel. See Hersch, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's interests in Israel's war," *The New Yorker*, Issue of 2006-08-21, [http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060821fa\\_fact](http://www.newyorker.com/fact/content/articles/060821fa_fact).

<sup>6</sup> See Robin Wright, "Strikes are called part of broad strategy," *The Washington Post*, 16 July 2006. Wright reports that "Israel, with U.S. support, intends to resist calls for a cease-fire and continue a longer-term strategy of punishing Hizbullah, which is likely to include several weeks of precision bombing in Lebanon, according to senior Israeli and U.S. officials."

<sup>7</sup> Richard Owen and Philip Webster, "15 nations agree that a ceasefire must come...but not quite yet," *The Times*, 27 July 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Nasrallah quoted in Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "Hizbollah's Outlook in the Current Conflict, Part One: Motives, Strategy and Objectives," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Policy Outlook*, August

2006. Saad-Ghorayeb's two-part essay provides an excellent account of the Israel-Hizbullah war from Hizbullah's perspective.

<sup>9</sup> Beirut Center for Research & Information, "Poll finds support for Hizbullah's retaliation," 29 July 2006, <http://www.beirutcenter.info/default.asp?contentid=692&MenuID=46>. See also Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, "People say no," *Al-Ahram weekly*, 3-9 August 2006, Issue No. 806.

<sup>10</sup> *Naharnet*, "Jordan, Egypt join Saudi Arabia in pointing the finger at Hizbullah," 15 July 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See Karim Makdisi, "The Draft UN Resolution on Lebanon," *Counterpunch*, 7 August 2006, <http://www.counterpunch.org/makdisi08072006.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Rubin, pp. 185-6.

<sup>13</sup> See Leo Gross, "The Peace of Westphalia, 1648-1948," *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 42, No.1 (January 1948), pp. 20-41; and Rubin, pp. 35-6.

<sup>14</sup> Statutes of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Article 38(1), *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice* (New York: United Nations, No date), p.91.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Oppenheim, *International law*, Vol.2, 177-178 (7<sup>th</sup> ed. 1952) quoted in Louis Henkin, Richard Crawford Pugh, Oscar Schachter, and Hans Smit, *International Law: Cases and Materials* (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co, 1987), p. 664.

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Brierly, *The Law of Nations: An Introduction to the International Law of Peace*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), pp.398-408.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, Article 11. Available online at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/leagcov.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Articles 10-15.

<sup>22</sup> Philippe Sands, *Lawless World: America and the Making and Breaking of Global Rules* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin, 2005). P.176.

<sup>23</sup> *Treaty between the United States and other Powers Providing for the Renunciation of War as an Instrument of National Policy*, Signed at Paris, August 27, 1928, Article 1, <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/kbpact/kbpact.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 2.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher C. Joyner, *International Law in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Rules for Global Governance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), p. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Duncan E.J. Currie, "Preventive War' and International Law After Iraq," *Globelaw*, 22 May 2003, [http://www.globelaw.com/Iraq/Preventive\\_war\\_after\\_iraq.htm](http://www.globelaw.com/Iraq/Preventive_war_after_iraq.htm).

<sup>27</sup> See Yale Avalon Project, "Nuremberg Trial Proceedings Vol.1, Charter of the International Military Tribunal," <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/proc/imtconst.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Charter, Preamble.

<sup>29</sup> UN Charter, Article 2(3).

<sup>30</sup> UN Charter, Article 2(4).

<sup>31</sup> See Joyner, pp.165-6.

<sup>32</sup> It is not in the scope of this paper to analyze all the arguments in the heated debate surrounding Article 51. Suffice it to say that lawyers spend a good deal of time interpreting texts and intentions in order to back an argument they want to make. See Joyner, pp. 170-2.

<sup>33</sup> Michael N. Schmitt, "Preemptive Strategies in International Law," *Michigan Journal of International Law* (Vol. 24, Winter 2003), p. 529.

<sup>34</sup> See Yale Avalon Project, "Caroline case 1837," [www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/br-1842d.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/diplomacy/britain/br-1842d.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt, p.530.

<sup>36</sup> UN Charter, Article 39. Note that the difference between "recommendations" and "decision" in UN language is that the latter is binding while the former is not. It should be noted also that Article 40 allows the SC to "call upon the parties concerned to comply with such provisional measures as it deems necessary or desirable" before it makes either formal recommendations or decisions. This can be done to prevent aggravation of the situation which Chapter VII entails.

<sup>37</sup> UN Charter, Article 41.

<sup>38</sup> UN Charter, Article 42.

<sup>39</sup> UN Charter, Article 2(7) states that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state...but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII."

<sup>40</sup> UN, "Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations," 1970, GA Resolution 2625, UN GAOR 25<sup>th</sup> session, p. 122.

<sup>41</sup> UN, "Resolution on the Definition of Aggression," GA Resolution 3314, 1974, UN GAOR, 29<sup>th</sup> session (supp. No. 31), p. 142.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., Article 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Article 5.

<sup>44</sup> Sands, p.179.

<sup>45</sup> UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon," S/2006/560 (21 July 2006), p.1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Chris McGreal, "Capture of soldiers was 'act of war' says Israel," *The Guardian*, 13 July 2006.

<sup>48</sup> UN SC Report (21 July).

<sup>49</sup> Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), "PM Olmert: Lebanon is responsible and will bear the consequences," 12 July,

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2006/PM+Olmert+-+Lebanon+is+responsible+and+will+bear+the+consequences+12-Jul-2006.htm>.

<sup>50</sup> Conal Urquhart, "Lebanon Under Siege from Israel," *The Guardian*, 13 July 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Republic of Lebanon, Presidency of the Council of Ministers-Higher Relief Council, "Statement of the Council of Ministers, 12 July 2006",

<http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb/english/F/eNews/NewsArticle.asp?CNewsID=15>.

<sup>52</sup> Rory McCarthy, "Hizbullah leader: 'You wanted open war. We are ready for an open war,'" *The Guardian*, 15 July 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Republic of Lebanon, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Higher Relief Council, <http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb>.

<sup>55</sup> Israel, MFA, "Hizbullah attacks northern Israel and Israel's response," 12 July 2006,

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+from+Lebanon+-+Hizbullah/Hizbullah+attack+in+northern+Israel+and+Israels+response+12-Jul-2006.htm#background>.

<sup>56</sup> Amb. Dan Gillerman, Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, [http://www.israel-un.org/latest/sg\\_letters/2006/gillerman12july06.htm](http://www.israel-un.org/latest/sg_letters/2006/gillerman12july06.htm).

<sup>57</sup> Israel, MFA, "PM Olmert: Lebanon is responsible and will bear the consequences," 12 July 2006,

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2006/PM+Olmert+-+Lebanon+is+responsible+and+will+bear+the+consequences+12-Jul-2006.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Israel, MFA, "Special Cabinet Communiqué-Hizbullah attack," 12 July 2006,

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2006/Special+Cabinet+Communique+-+Hizbullah+attack+12-Jul-2006.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> Israel, MFA, "Statement by FM Livni on Hizbullah attack from Lebanon," 12 July 2006,

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/About+the+Ministry/MFA+Spokesman/2006/Statement+by+FM+Livni+on+Hizbullah+attack+from+Lebanon+12-Jul-2006.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> Serene Assir, "The importance of place," *Al-Abram Weekly*, Issue No. 809, 24-30 August 2006. Retired Lt General Amin Hteit, who helped draw up the Blue Line in 2000 following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, insists that the Hizbullah raid took place within Lebanese territory:

"According to Hteit, there is a road that runs along, and occasionally zigzags across, the Blue Line. Originally built during its period of occupation, Israel (and Israel only) continued to use the road even after it withdrew. The road, in effect, became for Israel a de facto Blue Line. Israel's continued use of this road, even when it crossed into Lebanon -- and thus was in violation of the agreement governing the Blue Line -- has been central to the obfuscation surrounding the question of where the two Israeli soldiers were really captured."

<sup>61</sup> UN Security Council Report (12 July), p.1.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Department of State, Secretary Condoleezza Rice, "Actions in Northern Israel and Southern Lebanon," 12 July 2006, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/68902.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> UN, Secretary General, Statements, "Annan condemns Hizbullah attack, Calls for immediate release of Israeli soldiers," 12 July 2006, [http://www.un.org/News/press/sg/pages/sg\\_me.htm](http://www.un.org/News/press/sg/pages/sg_me.htm). See also McGreal, *The Guardian*.

<sup>64</sup> US Department of State, "Crime of Aggression: Statement by the United States," 26 September 2001,

<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/16461.pdf#search=%22border%20skirmish%20armed%20aggression%20international%20law%22>.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Falk, "Assessing the United Nations After the Lebanon War of 2006," 16 August 2006, [http://www.transnational.org/pressinf/2006/pi241\\_Falk\\_AssessUNLeb.html](http://www.transnational.org/pressinf/2006/pi241_Falk_AssessUNLeb.html).

<sup>66</sup> See Anthony D'Amato, "The UN Mideast Ceasefire Resolution Paragraph by Paragraph," *The Jurist: Legal News and Research*, 13 August 2006.

<sup>67</sup> For detailed information on the persistent violation of the Blue Line by both sides see the UNIFIL reports, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil/unifilDrp.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> UN Security Council, S/2000/590, "Report of the Secretary General on the Implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978)," 16 June 2000, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>70</sup> UN, S/2006/248, "Decisions of the Lebanese National Dialogue (14 March 2006), Annex I, "Third semi-annual report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the Implementation of Security Resolution 1559 (2004)."

<sup>71</sup> Lebanon, "Seven Point Plan."

<sup>72</sup> Information based on "UN Reports of the Secretary General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon" of 21 July 2006, 18 January 2006, 21 July 2005, 20 January 2005 available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unifil/unifilDrp.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> Israel, MFA, "Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire Understanding," 26 April 1996, [www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Guide+to+the+Peace+Process/Israel-Lebanon+Understanding.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Guide+to+the+Peace+Process/Israel-Lebanon+Understanding.htm).

<sup>74</sup> Augustus Richard Norton, "From Radicalism to Pragmatism?," *Middle East Policy*, Vol.5, Jan.1998, No.4.

<sup>75</sup> Israel, MFA, "Israelis held by the Hizbullah: Oct 2000-Jan 2004," [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2001/2/Israelis+Held+by+the+Hizbullah+-+Oct+2000-Jan+2004.htm?DisplayMode=print](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2001/2/Israelis+Held+by+the+Hizbullah+-+Oct+2000-Jan+2004.htm?DisplayMode=print).

<sup>76</sup> Hassan Nasrallah quoted in Mohelel Fakih, "Hizbullah Defiant," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 728, 3-9 February 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Margot Dudkevitch, "Nasrallah vows more kidnapping attempts," *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 November 2005.

<sup>78</sup> UN Security Council, Press Release, SC/8181, "Security Council Declares Support for Free, Fair Presidential Election in Lebanon; Calls for Withdrawal of Foreign Forces There," 2 September 2004.

<sup>79</sup> UN Security Council, S/2000/590, "Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1979)," 16 June 2000, p.4.

<sup>80</sup> *Deutsche Welle*, "EU: Israel Uses 'Disproportionate Force' in Lebanon," 14 July 2006.

<sup>81</sup> *MSNBC News Services*, "EU accuses Israel of 'disproportionate force'," 13 July 2006.

<sup>82</sup> Tom Regan, *Christian Science Monitor*, "Israel's response in Lebanon called 'disproportionate'," 14 July 2006.

<sup>83</sup> McCarthy, *The Guardian*.

<sup>84</sup> *Reuters*, 13 July 2006.

<sup>85</sup> UNSC Report, 20 July 2006.

<sup>86</sup> Israel, MFA, "Joint press conference by FM Tzipi Livni and EU Envoy Javier Solana," 19 July 2006, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2006/Joint+press+conference+by+FM+Tzipi+Livni+and+EU+Envoy+Javier+Solana+19-Jul-2006.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> See W. Thomas Mallison and Sally V. Mallison, *The Palestine Problem in International Law and World Order* (London: Longman, 1986), p. 310.

<sup>88</sup> Israel, MFA, "Joint Press Conference."

<sup>89</sup> Hilary Leila Kreiger and Tovah Lazaroff, "UN aid chief says Israel has 'created a generation of hatred,'" *Jerusalem Post*, 27 July 2006.

<sup>90</sup> UN Security Council, S/RES/1559 (2004), Resolution 1559, 2 September 2004.

<sup>91</sup> See, for instance, Israel, MFA, "Israel's response to statement of International Conference for Lebanon," 26 July 2006, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/About+the+Ministry/MFA+Spokesman/2006/Israeli+Response+to+Statement+of+International+Conference+for+Lebanon+26-Jul-2006.htm>.

<sup>92</sup> Mallison and Mallison,

<sup>93</sup> Israel, MFA, "Responding to Hizbullah attacks from Lebanon: Issues of Proportionality," 25 July 2006, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Law/Legal+Issues+and+Rulings/Responding+to+Hizbullah+attacks+from+Lebanon+Issues+of+proportionality+July+2006.htm>.

<sup>94</sup> Kreiger and Lazaroff, "UN aid chief," and Tom Perry, "Israel bombing breaks humanitarian law-UN official," *Reuters*, 23 July 2006.

<sup>95</sup> UN News Centre, "UN rights council condemns 'Israeli violations' in Lebanon; sends team to investigate," 11 August 2006.

<sup>96</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Fatal Strikes: Israel's Indiscriminate Attacks Against Civilians in Lebanon," August 2006, Volume 18, No.3 (E), <http://hrw.org/reports/2006/lebanon0806>.

<sup>97</sup> Amnesty International, Press Release, "Israel/Lebanon: Evidence indicates deliberate destruction of civilian infrastructure," 23 August 2006, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMD020182006>.

<sup>98</sup> Amnesty International, "Israel/Lebanon: Deliberate destruction or 'collateral damage'? Israeli attacks on civilian infrastructure," 23 August 2006, <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmd180072006>.

<sup>99</sup> See Anne Bayefsky, "Kofi Annan to Hizbullah's rescue?," *The Jerusalem Post*, 8 August 2006.

<sup>100</sup> See, for instance, Mallison and Mallison.

<sup>101</sup> Tom J. Farer, "The Prospect for International Law and Order in the Wake of Iraq," *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol.97, No.3 (July 2003), p.621.

<sup>102</sup> Elise Labott, "Annan: Lebanon en route to 'humanitarian disaster'," CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/meast/07/21/mideast.diplomacy>.

<sup>103</sup> See, for instance, Richard Falk, "Assessing the United Nations After the Lebanon War of 2006,"

<sup>104</sup> UN Security Council, SC/8808, 5511<sup>th</sup> Meeting, "Security Council Calls for End to Hostilities Between Hizbullah, Israel, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1701 (2006)," 11 August 2006, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc888808.doc.htm>.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> See for instance, "Iraq war was illegal, says Annan," BBC News Service, 16 September 2004, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3661134.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3661134.stm).



## WILL WE WIN? CONVERGENCE AND ISRAEL'S LATEST LEBANON WAR

Robert Blecher\*

From the outset of Israel's latest Lebanon war, two slogans, "Israel is Strong" and "We Will Win," mushroomed on bumper stickers, advertisements, and billboards across the country. Sporting bold white lettering against a blue background, the slogans articulated a message of solidarity with a military campaign that did not go as expected. But the signs' wording betrayed a sense of anxiety: as war slogans go, these do not exactly inspire confidence. The very fact that the regional superpower needed to proclaim its strength indicated that right from the start, many in Israel were not so sure.

In the early days of the fighting, when Israelis of all political stripes were four-square behind their government, the war had not yet been dubbed "Lebanon II." It was instead a war on two fronts, in Lebanon and Gaza, which were conjoined in Israel's fight against a unified "axis of terror and hate created by Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas," in the words of Tzipi Livni, Israeli vice prime minister and minister of Foreign Affairs. Ben Caspit, one of *Ma'ariv's* leading columnists, put it more colorfully: "Israel is dealing with radical, messianic Islam, which extends its arms like an octopus, creating an axis from Tehran to Gaza by way of Damascus and Beirut. With people like these there is nothing to talk about. The fire of a war against infidels burns in them."<sup>1</sup> The only fitting response in this situation is a military one, claimed Ron Ben-Yishai in *Yediot Ahronot*, in order to "create a new strategic balance between us and radical Islam."<sup>2</sup> This belief had wide support among Israelis: the largest anti-war demonstration this summer turned out only 5,000-7,000 protestors, a number that pales in comparison to the 20,000 people who participated in a demonstration several weeks into Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Radical Islam, however, was not the defining or unifying factor that linked Israel's southern and northern fronts: Hamas and Hizbullah had different bones to pick with Israel. Hamas' struggle is against occupation, and more immediately, about how to achieve a mutual cessation of hostilities and formalize, in one way or another, its right to govern the territories of the Palestinian Authority as the Palestinians' elected government. Hizbullah's goals, at the outset of the fighting at least, were more limited: to secure the release of Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails while simultaneously flexing the movement's muscles to stave off domestic and international pressure to disarm. By lumping together these different struggles, and tying them to Damascus and distant Tehran, commentators cast resolvable political disagreements as unfathomable irrational hatred, thereby justifying Israel's broad and violent offensive.

Hizbullah, for its part, engaged in a conflation of its own. At the initial press conference after the cross-border raid that Sheikh Hasan Nasrallah said was long planned, Hizbullah presented its agenda as a Lebanese one so as to avoid the

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impression that it was serving the interest of others. But in choosing the moment of Gaza's bombardment to launch its own attack, the Lebanese Shi'i movement subsumed the struggle against Israeli occupation within a larger regional drama. Displaying the rhetorical skills and military competence that Nasrallah and his movement are known for, Hizbullah confirmed its position as the only Arab force willing and able to stand up to Israel.

What links these conflicts, beyond Israeli fear-mongering and Hizbullah's use of Palestine as a chess piece, is the future of limited withdrawals -- what Prime Minister Ehud Olmert calls "convergence" or "realignment" -- as an Israeli strategy for managing its conflict with the Palestinians. By this plan, advanced by Olmert's Kadima Party in the March election campaign, Israel would move its soldiers and settlers from much of the West Bank behind a unilaterally fixed "eastern border" for the Jewish state -- the walls and fences that Israel is building through the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Yet even before the recent conflagration, more and more Israelis, including some within Kadima, had grown skeptical. Popular support for withdrawals in the West Bank had plummeted to just over 30 percent, and Kadima luminaries Livni, Shimon Peres and Meir Sheerit had all expressed reservations. As the one-year anniversary of Gaza disengagement approached, even the left-leaning Israeli press began to ask, as did *Ha'aretz*, "Was it a mistake?"<sup>3</sup> The Israeli government, whose multi-partisan *raison d'être* is limited withdrawal, was under pressure to demonstrate the fruits of its approach. With its two-front war, the Israeli government set out to prove, emphatically, that disengagement was not a mistake.

But if Nasrallah underestimated the vehemence of Israel's response to Hizbullah's cross-border raid, Olmert miscalculated even more severely. The Israeli army's failure to achieve its objectives forced him to backtrack on his convergence agenda and has imperiled his position as prime minister and leader of the Kadima Party. The provisional and tenuous unity of the center-left and center-right brought Kadima qualified electoral success in March, garnering the support of the broad Israeli middle that wanted to lay down the burdens of occupation without paying the price of a mutually agreed, negotiated solution. But in the wake of what is widely perceived as Israel's failure in Lebanon, the equation has been reversed: Olmert today suffers the disabilities of the left but boasts few credentials from the right. Instead of holding out the possibility of both political progress and military strength, as did Sharon one year ago, the Israeli prime minister today offers neither to his people. Cut from more cosmopolitan cloth than his predecessor, Olmert has found himself drawn into an internal Israeli cultural clash. By accident of political position and personal background, he sits at the nexus of political, military, and cultural anxieties that have come together in an existential malaise.

## GETTING TO NO

Hamas had little to lose on the eve of June 25, when a raid by its military wing and two other armed groups captured Cpl. Gilad Shalit and killed two of his fellow soldiers at the Kerem Shalom army post on the Gaza-Israel border. Ever since the Islamist party formed a government in March, it has been systematically denied the resources necessary for domestic governance and the ability to implement a foreign policy. The Israeli-US-European squeeze on the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority (PA) limited the tools at the movement's disposal to damp down violence, and gave the movement even less incentive to use them.

Israel, the US and the European Union refused to accept the new Palestinian government as a negotiating partner, turning back the diplomatic clock to September 1, 1975, when Secretary of State Henry Kissinger committed the US not to talk to the Palestine Liberation Organization unless it renounced terrorism and accepted Israel's right to exist. This formula had been born in Israel one year earlier, when Labor Party members Aharon Yariv and Victor Shemtov put forward a formula calling for the Israeli government to negotiate with any Palestinian party that renounced violence and recognized Israel. Following the Palestinian elections, the Quartet, made up of the US, the UN, the EU and Russia, updated the Yariv-Shemtov formula for the twenty-first century. The putative international mediators added the requirement of accepting agreements previously signed by Palestinian representatives, including the Oslo Accords and the Roadmap.

Frozen out of official negotiations, Hamas could only carry out public diplomacy. The movement sent up a number of trial balloons soon after its election in the form of comments to the press, op-eds in the *Guardian* and *Washington Post*, and on- and off-the-record remarks to international organizations. In February, Hamas politburo head Khalid Mashaal described the PA's foundation in the Oslo accords as "a reality," and said that "we do not oppose" the 2002 Arab League initiative offering Israel "full normalization" of relations in return for a full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and an "agreed" upon solution to the refugee problem based on relevant UN resolutions.<sup>4</sup> Previously, Hamas had vehemently denounced both the Oslo agreements and the Arab initiative. But the US and Israel were not interested in pursuing what sort of avenues this newfound flexibility might open. Instead, the US and Israel boxed Hamas -- and themselves -- into a corner with stringent demands that were impossible for Hamas to accept.

Elements in the electorally defeated Fatah movement, as well in the Bush administration, initially believed that stonewalling Hamas and starving the PA of funds would cause the new government to fall within three months. They were wrong, but in the meantime Hamas became as firm in its rejection of the externally imposed conditions as Israel, the US and the EU were in insisting upon them. Besieged from within and without, the movement's rate of political change, so rapid in the months leading up to and immediately following the election, grew sluggish. Pleas for Hamas to accept the 2002 Arab initiative unequivocally came to naught.

Likewise, Hamas filibustered President Mahmoud Abbas' proposal that it sign onto the "prisoner's document." Agreed upon by jailed members of all major Palestinian factions, including Hamas, this document called for a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, implementation of Palestinian refugees' right of return, and the concentration of armed resistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These ideas were quite similar to what some Hamas leaders had proposed during their public diplomacy campaign, and Hamas, like forces on the Palestinian left, originally thought the prisoners' document could serve as the basis for national dialogue. Then, in May, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas preempted dialogue, and instead tried to use the document as a tool for wresting power from Hamas. Abbas vowed to slate a national referendum on the document's contents unless Hamas officially accepted them. This maneuver led the Hamas signatory, Sheikh 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Natsheh, to remove his name, as did the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) signatory. The eventual Fatah-Hamas reconciliation on the matter, signed by all parties except PIJ several hours after the Kerem Shalom raid, has been overtaken, at least for the time being, by events on the ground.

Much was made, especially after Shalit's capture, about the divisions within Hamas regarding the prisoners' proposals, with some analysts going so far as to suggest that the raid itself was an attempt to scuttle a deal on the final wording. Indeed, in many quarters, especially in Israel, the Kerem Shalom operation was interpreted as a virtual coup by Hamas' external leadership against the internal, but the Islamist party has always been a big tent, with decisions made by consensus through its consultative council (*majlis al-shura*). The protracted process followed by Hamas might not be commensurate with the expectation of expeditious decision-making by the prime minister's office, but one should not mistake a deliberative style for internal rupture.

As the Israeli government continued its policy of targeted assassinations and ramped up shelling of Gaza in response to Qassam rocket fire, there was no countervailing force to pull Hamas away from renouncing the unilateral ceasefire it had honored, more or less, for the previous 18 months. Jamal Abu Samhadana, the founder and leader of the Popular Resistance Committees and head of a new Hamas-led PA security force, was assassinated on June 8, and the next day, seven members of the Ghalia family were killed on a Gazan beach—by an Israeli artillery shell, most believe, though an Israeli army report claims otherwise. Hamas' armed wing, the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, called off the truce, promising "earth-shaking actions," and the rate of rocket fire increased. The denouement is well-known: Israel replied with an aggressive campaign to smother the rocket fire, including a larger than usual number of "operational failures" that elevated the death toll among Palestinian civilians. The June 25 *Observer* (London) reported that the preceding day Israeli commandos had infiltrated Gaza to seize two Palestinians said to be members of Hamas.<sup>5</sup> Hamas found itself under pressure to uphold the banner of Palestinian resistance, and the Kerem Shalom operation was launched.

Trading rocket fire was a losing proposition for Hamas, as it was used by Israel to justify aggressive retaliation. Shalit's capture, by contrast, held the potential to reverse the across-the-board rejection that Hamas had faced since January. Whether the seizure was planned in advance or resulted from an unexpected opportunity, this development offered the possibility of securing the release of Palestinian prisoners and reversing the political isolation of the Hamas-led PA by creating a precedent for negotiations. The Israeli government repeatedly proclaimed its refusal to negotiate, but did so through Egyptian intermediaries and Abbas' office. As this process broke down, Hamas once again turned to the press, with Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyya pushing, on the pages of the July 11 *Washington Post*, a proposal for a comprehensive approach to resolving the conflict.<sup>6</sup> In response, the Israeli government the next day hit an apartment building in Gaza with a half-ton bomb that failed to kill Hamas military commander Muhammad Deif, but did kill a family of nine.

### **"WE ARE LUCKY IT HASN'T HAPPENED"**

Because of the bombing of bridges and power plants, the air and ground assault in Gaza -- dubbed Operation Summer Rains -- seems to aim well beyond its ostensible goals of recovering Cpl. Shalit and stopping rocket fire. The ulterior motive, some analysts say, is to destroy the PA entirely. Successive Israeli governments have eschewed this option for fear of being left responsible for administering the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. Israel has been unsuccessful in convincing the world that Gaza disengagement has ended its

“occupation of the Palestinians” -- a declaration that has no standing in international law, as only territory can be occupied, not people. As a former head of Israel’s Civil Administration told me in 2004:

If the PA collapses or folds, we will be in a very bad situation. The international community will not allow the situation here to become like it is Sudan, and neither will we. Israel will have to take responsibility for supplying food, water, electricity, education. The problem is not the cost in money; it’s a matter of the cost in human terms. We would have to build up the whole [structure of the] Civil Administration in the West Bank and Gaza again. It would mean that army officers would need to get involved in education and television and agriculture. It would mean stepping back 20 years or more, to how it was at the beginning of the occupation. That is a very big threat to Israel. We are trying not to reach this point. If Arafat [then still president of the PA] would say, ‘You wanted Ramallah, take Ramallah. You wanted take Bethlehem, take Bethlehem. You wanted Nablus, take Nablus, I am not responsible anymore,’ we would be in a lot of trouble. We are lucky it hasn’t happened.<sup>7</sup>

Today, with the PA even weaker and more internationally ostracized, Hamas is in no position to push the implementation of its political agenda. Nevertheless, the Israeli government may have decided that the Qassam rocket fire is a political liability that can only be overcome by a grand political accomplishment: toppling the Hamas-led PA while leaving the governmental structure intact, thereby facilitating the reemergence of Fatah on top. But this strategy is risky: it is not clear that the PA could survive the fall of Hamas, or that Hamas would allow it to

Some wonder if the PA has already been fatally compromised by the siege it has been put under. As a former UN official with a long experience in the West Bank and Gaza puts it, “The international community is marching toward the abyss with their eyes open. I think we may well have passed the point where the PA in its current form cannot be sustained, and some of the more enlightened voices in the IDF are the only ones who seem to understand that.”<sup>8</sup> The “international community” -- in reality, the US and the EU -- surely has not reached this conclusion. A European official involved with the Temporary International Mechanism -- a program to prop up the most critical Palestinian social services while bypassing the Hamas-led PA government -- deprecated his government’s efforts, saying they were “hopelessly inadequate, risky and don’t address the real issues.” “The European Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner came out and said in public that there should be such a thing,” he elaborated, “so we had to scramble to put something together so she wouldn’t look bad. There wasn’t nearly enough planning for it. The program works around the PA, trying to identify beneficiaries to whom we pay allowances, a method that contributes toward further weakening the PA. Should the PA fall, it will be useful to have this mechanism in place to at least get some resources in, but the irony is that we ourselves will have helped create the situation.”<sup>9</sup>

Given today’s reality in the West Bank and especially Gaza, one could argue that the PA has in fact already collapsed. With a substantial number of Hamas parliamentarians in Israeli jails, hardly any salaries being paid, and many government services suspended, there is little left to the PA beyond a national aspiration and a

faltering institutional shell. Among Palestinians in the West Bank, the idea of simply dissolving the PA so as to force Israel to take responsibility -- or at least the blame, should Israel refuse to implement its responsibility for administering the occupation -- is growing in popularity. This idea first appeared in the wake of the Israeli incursion in the spring of 2002 and again came to prominence when Mahmoud Abbas resigned as prime minister in 2003. The idea subsequently receded from the public square, an acknowledgment of how many livelihoods and services are dependent on the PA's continuation. But as the contributions of the PA to the Palestinian economy and society have faded over the past five months, the idea has begun to gain support among Palestinian legislators, both Hamas- and Fatah-affiliated.<sup>10</sup>

### DETERRENCE AS STRATEGEM

The increased aggressiveness of Israeli military action over the past months, and especially the last weeks, stems from a shakeup in the balance of power within the Israeli government. Among the most influential arms of the IDF is the Operations Department, which is possessed of a strategic vision that, in accordance with institutional interests, is premised upon the use of military power to achieve political goals. Representatives of this department, even before the Gaza disengagement in the summer of 2005, complained that unilateral withdrawals would erode Israel's "deterrent capacity." Ariel Sharon, then prime minister, was unmoved by this argument, since his long military career had taught him that the invocation of the ostensibly neutral notion of "deterrence" was a stratagem to force the treatment of political problems through military means. For years, he himself had used the same technique to inveigh against initiatives of the political echelon. Olmert and Defense Minister Amir Peretz, by contrast, are inexperienced in military matters, and as a result, according to a source in Israeli military intelligence, they did not fully appreciate how the demand for "deterrence" can be used to shift the internal balance of power in favor of the military. When the Operations Department harped on the need to reestablish Israeli "deterrence," especially in the wake of the soldiers' capture, the civilian leadership was convinced to hew to the IDF's line. This subtle but crucial change inside Defense Ministry headquarters in Tel Aviv explains something about the enormous extent of the destruction wreaked on Lebanon in the wake of Hizbullah's cross-border raid.

Hizbullah's gambit held the potential to elevate Palestinian concerns to a grander stage, putting their demands front and center before the international community. Nasrallah initially suggested that the Palestinian and Lebanese prisoner issues could be resolved through a grand bargain,<sup>11</sup> but in the end, Hizbullah cut its own deal to the fighting, leaving Palestinians with no effective support. Hizbullah pulled the rug out from under Hamas, turning the soldier-snatching tactic to Hizbullah's advantage. Nasrallah's own moment of glory came at Hamas' expense. While some Hamas leaders were initially hopeful that the limited widening of the conflict would pry open new doors, they have remained firmly shut. Quite to the contrary, as correspondents turned their attention to Lebanon, mounting Palestinian deaths virtually disappeared from the US media.

The Israeli government has made clear that the military option will remain on the table. As Tzipi Livni told the special UN team dispatched to the region on July 18, "The diplomatic process is not intended to reduce the window of opportunity for military operations, but will take place in parallel." Israel has



followed this same philosophy since agreeing to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, as indicated by its August 19 raid in eastern Lebanon, widely though not unanimously condemned as a violation of the cessation of hostilities. Omitted from Israel's agenda is any attempt to deal with the political causes of the fighting, either in Lebanon or in Gaza. Instead, with the US and EU, the Israeli government is pushing arms interdiction along Lebanon's entire border with the ultimate goal of disarming of Hizbullah. But so long as significant numbers of Lebanese – and Palestinians -- believe that independent, non-state militias are required, disarmament has scant chance of success.

### CONVERGENCE TO THE BACK BURNER

Livni's statement to the UN team aptly describes not only the Israeli government's strategy in Lebanon but also its convergence plan. Ariel Sharon, like his successors in the Kadima Party, convinced the Israeli public that convergence would pay diplomatic dividends by securing international recognition that the occupation had ended, even as it accorded the Israeli military the freedom to exact an even heavier toll from those who might resist Israel's unilateral designs. Sharon foresaw that the diplomatic part of the plan would require military support to be successful, while military pressure upon the Palestinians was not sustainable internationally without a diplomatic component. With the military potential of this strategy undermined by the IDF's failure to deal Hizbullah a knock-out blow, the convergence agenda itself is on the ropes.

Criticism of unilateralism, both the right and the left, had been growing for sometime before the dual crises erupted in the south and the north. Those on the right who waived the orange banners in opposition to Israel's disengagement from Gaza were planning a more effective strategy to block future withdrawals; as for many on the left, negotiations were preferred over unilateral action. Initially, with the onset of the hostilities in July, it seemed that Olmert might gain back some ground. As an *Ha'aretz* editorial pointed out in the early days of the war, the US and EU accepted Israel's ferocious response to the capture of its soldiers and the rocketing of its towns with such equanimity only because of the favor that Gaza Disengagement had curried.<sup>12</sup>

Olmert himself seized on the possibility of advancing his agenda. In an interview with AP on August 2, he said, "I genuinely believe the outcome of the present [conflict] and the emergence of a new order that will provide more stability and will defeat the forces of terror will help create the necessary environment that will allow me ... to create a new momentum between us and the Palestinians.' He went on to reiterate that 'we want to separate from the Palestinians. I'm ready to do it. I'm ready to cope with these demands. It's not easy, it's very difficult, but we are elected to our positions to do things and not to sit idle.'" <sup>13</sup> The response was so vitriolic that he was forced to back down immediately. Settlement leaders and soldiers protested that they were being drafted against their will into a campaign for a political agenda they considered an anathema: "It blows your mind. Our group who lives in [the settlement of] Eli has to give up their lives so that Olmert can convince the public to support the destruction of Eli?" <sup>14</sup>

A decisive victory might have won Olmert additional support, but the drawn-out hostilities generated fierce criticism. Not only did the IDF fail to win the return of its captured soldiers, but the IDF's inability to staunch Hizbullah missile fire on northern Israel, its misplaced reliance on airpower and the deaths of many

more Israelis than expected – a number that eventually totaled 119 soldiers and 43 civilians<sup>15</sup> – generated criticism across nearly the entire political spectrum. As the fighting went on, the Israeli media, which was initially supportive of the war, became increasingly critical of the government. After 24 soldiers were killed in a single day on August 12, Defense Minister Amir Peretz took to the airwaves in an attempt to calm jangled nerves. But he wilted under the pressing questions of a Channel 2 anchor, stumbling over his words and growing visibly uncomfortable and upset. Beyond the number of deaths, the media revealed an upsetting and embarrassing military incapacity: haunting battle-field footage of wounded and terrified soldiers; reports of troops going days on end without food, water, and others supplies; and frustrated complaints of grossly unprepared and ill-trained reserve soldiers. All told, Israelis were left with the impression that their government had badly botched the war. Meanwhile, a million Israelis, living for 33 days under the threat of rocket fire, raced in and out of shelters that became a metaphor for a nation under siege.

As Israel's vaunted military machine bogged down, what was supposed to be a limited operation was soon transmuted, even for many of the left, into an existential war. Since the notion of deterrence assumes that loss today will inexorably lead to more significant loss tomorrow, it transforms every war – and potentially every military encounter – into a referendum on the future existence of the state. This is especially true when Israel is seen as being confronted with an implacable, monolithic, and irrational Islamic hostility. Ben Caspit succinctly articulated this view in an article appropriately entitled, "A War of Existence":

A month has passed and it is possible to establish with certainty: this is not an 'operation,' not a 'ground activity,' there is not a 'fight' here: we are speaking of a war of existence, fateful like the War of Independence, brutal like the Yom Kippur War ... All around, in darkness, eyes are looking at us. Tens of millions of eyes from the whole, big, Arab, Islamic world. They are waiting to see if the great, unbeatable IDF, the mightiest army in the Middle East and maybe in general, will know defeat and will let several thousand Mujahidin bring it to knees. The Mossad chief, the Military Intelligence chief, and the chief of the General Security Service, in confidential discussions yesterday and the day before, said repeatedly: the results of the war will determine the future and destiny of Israel. If there is no clear decision, we are talking about a real, gathering, existential threat.<sup>16</sup>

Some voices in Israel questioned the inevitability inherent in this racist logic (why are all the Arabs waiting in "darkness?" Israel knocked out electric only in parts of Gaza and Lebanon, not in the rest of the "big, Arab, Islamic world").<sup>17</sup> But as criticism of the government's performance grew, so too did the search for explanations. Given the shortcomings of the IDF, a bedrock institution in Israel, the perception of an existential war gave rise to an existential crisis. Without adequate fighting spirit and national cohesion around the Zionist project, the fate of the country seems bleak.

Political indecision and military unpreparedness, for a number of commentators, seemed to flow from a newly discovered cultural laxity. One author lamented the "ungrasped indifference" that characterized the attitudes toward Lebanon in the 1990s: "Few went out ... to the intersections to demonstrate, to try

to change [the situation.] Many others, among them the public, economic and cultural leaders, chose an easier solution: they gradually removed their children from the front. Some of the children took on sensitive, difficult, and important jobs in intelligence, technology and computer units. But another part – growing, spreading, and advancing – escaped. In the name of ideology, psychology, and sometimes in the name of ambition and career, they simply stayed at home. Or outside the country....This isn't a war of the political leaders, of the elite. The elite signed the emergency call up order and flew to visit their children in the US.”<sup>18</sup>

The idea that the rich escape is an anathema in Israel, where the idea of a “citizen army” is a fixture. The evening news broadcast telephone conversations between IDF officers explaining that there have been fewer war deaths among the resident of, and therefore fewer funerals in, Tel Aviv. This discussion is not just about the Americanization of Israeli army culture, such that elites escape and the poor die. Rather, it is about something broader: a crisis of ideology and nationalist anxiety, as suggested by bumpers and billboards all over the country.

Ari Shavit, writing in *Ha'aretz*, was perhaps the most venomous in his rant against the “Israeli elites” whom he accused of having gone soft:

What happened to us? What the hell happened to us? A simple thing happened: We were drugged by political correctness. The political correctness that has come to dominate Israeli discourse and Israeli awareness in the past generation was totally divorced from the Israeli situation. It did not have the tools to deal with the reality of an existential conflict....The Israeli public in general has remained for the most part sober and strong.... On the other hand, the Israeli elites of the past 20 years have become totally divorced from reality. The [sic] capital, the media and the academic world of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century, have blinded Israel and deprived it of its spirit. The repeated illusions regarding the historical reality in which the Jewish state finds itself, caused Israel to make a navigational error and to lose its way. Their unending attacks, both direct and in direct, on nationalism, on militarism and on the Zionist narrative have eaten away from the inside at the tree trunk of Israeli existence, and sucked away its life force. While the general public demonstrated sobriety, determination and energy, the elites were a disappointment.

The cultural battles around post-Zionism and rising consumerism sapped the strength of the state from within, destroying the authentic Zionist spirit. Even though it was only the “top 1000<sup>th</sup> percentile [sic] [that] abandoned the existential nationalist effort,” it nevertheless bears the responsibility for laying Israel low beneath Hizbullah rockets. Criticism and consumption are the twin evils that have transformed the “constructive elites” of past generations into today’s “dismantling elites,” who pursue the “deconstruction of the Zionist enterprise.” These “suicidal” tendencies belong to a feminized elite for whom “power was identified with fascism. Masculinity was publicly condemned.” The solution is the “renewed building of Israeli power” in the form of an army that Shavit sees not as “an army of occupation,” but rather as one that will protect, in part, “feminists and homosexuals from the fanaticism of the Middle East.”<sup>19</sup>

The misogyny and homophobia of Shavit’s words are shocking from such a prominent columnist in Israel’s newspaper or record, but the sense of crisis his

words convey, and his condemnation of social currents that are concentrated in Tel Aviv, is not unique. Indeed, *Ma'ariv's* weekly magazine published an article that tried sort out how and why it was that war “raised sentiments of resentment, hostility, and suspicion that residents of the south and north feel towards complacent Tel Aviv.” How is it, the paper wanted to know, that “no small number of Israelis hope that a missile will fall on Tel Aviv?”<sup>20</sup> Like New York City before 9/11, Israel’s Manhattan-on-the-Mediterranean is widely regarded as home to cosmopolites whose patriotism is suspect. In many quarters the war was perceived as a fight of Islam versus the West, but it was equally about Tel Aviv versus the rest (of Israel).

Ehud Olmert links together the disreputable triumvirate that includes today’s political leadership, military establishment and cultural and business elites. He might have inherited Ariel Sharon’s political mantle, but his social and cultural positioning is quite different from his predecessor’s. Sharon, like George W. Bush, cultivated an image of himself as more comfortable on the ranch than among city dwellers, with a gruff exterior that nevertheless exuded personal warmth. Olmert is the opposite. Not only does he himself have a more urban sensibility than his predecessor, but his wife is a Meretz supporter who admits to never having voted for her husband prior to this past election, and his daughter, who has spoken of a binational solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, was photographed at an anti-war rally in Jerusalem protesting the Israeli incursions into Gaza ordered by her father. Sharon traded on his authenticity, whereas Olmert has a reputation as a cigar-smoking, bon-vivant, political player. He may be just a bit too close to “complacent Tel Aviv” for his political comfort.

Under pressure on the political, military and cultural fronts, Olmert has tried to reduce his vulnerabilities. On August 18, it was reported that he had said that it was not “appropriate” to talk at this time about convergence given the need to concentrate on repairing the damage to the northern part of the country. The next day, fellow Kadima parliamentarian Meir Sheetrit sought to counter the impression that convergence was permanently off the agenda, but it is clear that Olmert does not have the political capital to push for a broad, unilateral withdrawal in the West Bank. Indeed, Israeli Channel 2 news reported on August 24 that a full 73 percent of Israelis oppose the convergence agenda. The next day, *Yediot Ahronot* reported that Olmert polled behind Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud, Avigdor Lieberman of the far-right Israel Our Home Party, and Shimon Peres, Kadima’s senior statesman.<sup>21</sup> After more than 1300 dead,<sup>22</sup> billions of dollars in damage,<sup>23</sup> and countless embittered lives, it seems the only thing that “Lebanon II” managed to deter was the convergence agenda itself.

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#### ENDNOTES

An earlier version of this article was published as “Converging Upon War,” *Middle East Report Online*, July 18, 2006. The author thanks Jeremy Pressman, Mouin Rabbani and Chris Toensing for comments on an earlier draft of this article.

<sup>1</sup> “Simanim cholim” (Blue Signs), *Ma'ariv*, 14 July 2006.

<sup>2</sup> “Milkhemet bezeq” (War of Damage), *Yediot Ahronot*, 13 July 2006.

<sup>3</sup> “Was It a Mistake?” *Ha'aretz English Edition Magazine*, 7 July 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Usher, “ Hamas Risen,” *Middle East Report* 238 (Spring 2006), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer238/usher.html>, accessed 16 July 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Cook, “Kidnapped by Israel,” [http://www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060630\\_kidnapped\\_by\\_israel.php](http://www.medialens.org/alerts/06/060630_kidnapped_by_israel.php), accessed 15 July 2006.

<sup>6</sup> “Aggression under False Pretenses,” *Washington Post*, 11 July 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with former Civil Administration head, Tel Aviv, 21 October 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with former UN official, Jerusalem, 15 June 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with EU official, Jerusalem, 17 July 2006.

<sup>10</sup> “Abbas under pressure to dissolve PA,” *Jerusalem Post*, 10 August 2006.

<sup>11</sup> At a 12 July press conference, Nasrallah said: “My message to the brother Palestinians is: More patience, steadfastness, and forbearance [sic]. What happened in Lebanon today might open a way out of the crisis in Gaza. In other words, the Israelis are saying we do not want to negotiate with Hamas, because the operation took place in Gaza. We say: All right. Israel usually negotiates with us. At first they say no, but then they accept. This may take place after a week, month, or year, but finally they will say let us negotiate. One way out might be the fact that one plus two equals three, so let us negotiate.” See <http://www.upc.org.uk/hasann12jul06.html>, accessed 27 August 2006.

<sup>12</sup> “Opponents of the disengagement and convergence, from both right and left,” the editors wrote, “will say that what is happening in Lebanon proves there is no point in another unilateral withdrawal, because the other side does not appreciate the gesture, and Israel emerges from every withdrawal weaker, which encourages its enemies to use force against it.” The editors disagreed with this assessment: “In the face of these arguments, it must be stated clearly that the unilateral withdrawal to a recognized border, and the very existence of a border that can be defended, are the reasons for the current strength of our home front, its feelings of justice and lack of choice, its support for the military operations decided upon by the government, and the unprecedented international understanding for the operation in Lebanon.” “Who’s in favor of ending terror?” *Ha’aretz English Edition*, 19 July 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in “Olmert riles right-wingers by linking convergence to war,” *Ha’aretz English Edition*, 3 August 2006.

<sup>14</sup> “Seret Katom, Kumta Homa” (Orange Ribbon, Brown Beret), *Ma’ariv Weekend Supplement*, 4 August 2006.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+from+Lebanon-Hizbullah/Israel-Hizbullah+conflict+Victims+of+rocket+attacks+and+IDF+casualties+July-Aug+2006.htm>, accessed 27 August 2006.

<sup>16</sup> “Milkhemet kiyum” (War of Existence), *Ma’ariv*, 10 August 2006.

<sup>17</sup> “Success of failure is in the mind,” *Ha’aretz English Edition*, 11 August 2006.

<sup>18</sup> “Tzva ha-`am cvar lo kayam” (The People’s Army No Longer Exists), *Ma’ariv*, 11 August 2006.

<sup>19</sup> “A spirit of absolute folly,” *Ha’aretz English Edition Weekend*, 11 August 2006.

<sup>20</sup> “Liftzoz et ha-bu`a” (Popping the Bubble), *Ma’ariv Weekend*, 11 August 2006.

<sup>21</sup> “Poll: Majority wants Olmert out,” *Ynet*, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3295576,00.html>, accessed 25 August 2006.

<sup>22</sup> On Lebanese casualties, see

<http://www.lebanonundersiege.gov.lb/english/F/Main/index.asp>, accessed 27 August 2006. On Israeli deaths, see fn. 16.

<sup>23</sup> UNDP estimates damage to Lebanon at \$15 billion. “War wiped out 15 years of Lebanese recovery – UNDP,” *Daily Star*, 23 August 2006. The Israeli Treasury estimated damage at 6 billion NIS, including both direct (e.g. buildings and property) and indirect (e.g. lost wages) damage. “Treasury shocked by cost of war,” *Ha’aretz English Edition*, 23 August 2006.

## HOW THE REBEL REGAINED HIS CAUSE HIZBULLAH & THE SIXTH ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

Reinoud Leenders\*

With Hizbullah's professed successes on the battle field having reached mythical proportions and its leader sheikh Hassan Nasrallah confidently adopting statesman-like allure in his belligerent and morale-boosting addresses to the Arab nation, it is barely conceivable that this small party appeared to be a dying species only three years ago. The odd judgment of some Israeli generals and US President George Bush aside, the consensus on the "Sixth Arab-Israeli War" rules that Hizbullah dealt the Israeli armed forces a painful blow by confronting a vast array of sophisticated military hardware with fierce determination, clever tactics and a shrewdness unprecedented in the now more than 60 years' old Arab-Israeli conflict. Such for Hizbullah upbeat assessments are a far cry from its quandary in 2003 when a range of obstacles and constraining factors were about to push this ambitious party into the drowsy status of a "rebel without a cause".<sup>1</sup> Then nervously looking for new directions after its mission of liberating south Lebanon had been mostly achieved, Hizbullah encountered one setback after the other, causing it to refrain from firing a single shot in south Lebanon for months on end. More trouble followed, foremost with the forced withdrawal of the party's Syrian guardian in April 2005 that helped eroding Hizbullah's claims to national legitimacy as the party sought refuge in its Shi'ite support base. Moreover, to many other Lebanese the party increasingly appeared as a crude apologist for Syria's continuing designs to infringe on Lebanon's sovereignty. Making matters worse, Lebanon's sectarian leaders recently presented their versions of what ought to be the country's "defense strategy", often featuring Hizbullah as a neat civilian party devoid of any military assignment. Yet one month of fierce fighting and heavy destruction inflicted by Israeli bombardments now appears to have turned the tables in Hizbullah's favour to the extent that the rebel seems to have regained his cause. This article explores the circumstances that helped causing this turnabout and investigates how the recent developments affected the ways in which Hizbullah views and presents itself in relation to Lebanon and the region at large. Depending on one's arithmetic of weighing losses in human lives against gains in symbolic capital, Hizbullah may have won this round of fighting; yet less certain is what will come after it and, whatever it is, the party cannot be sure it will continue to be the unequivocal beneficiary. The conclusion of this essay presents a tentative assessment of Hizbullah's future and of the ways in which a resumption of hostilities can be prevented.

### BENEATH 'OPERATION TRUTHFUL PROMISE'

Much speculation has centered on the question whether Hizbullah, by kidnapping 2 Israeli soldiers and killing three others, deliberately provoked Israel's

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military onslaught or, alternatively, it made a grave miscalculation that unwittingly triggered its most intense and devastating clash with Israel since the latter withdrew from south Lebanon in 2000. This question, of course, is not without moral implications. It is hardly surprising that it has been primarily raised by those pointing fingers at Hizbullah for ‘starting the war’. By the same token, Hizbullah’s replies to such accusations should be treated with caution as it naturally hopes to dissolve itself from at least some Lebanese’s astonishment if not anger regarding the destruction purportedly triggered by Hizbullah’s actions. Yet, more interestingly, Hizbullah’s abductions, whether seized on by Israel as a pretext or a cause for its own military campaign, may reveal a great deal of the party’s changing calculations and mode of organization.

At first sight, “Operation Truthful Promise”, as Hizbullah named its daring raid into Israeli territory on 12 July, does not appear to have been meant as highly provocative, and certainly not to the extent of intentionally inviting Israel’s onslaught. Hizbullah had been abducting Israeli soldiers before and without too serious repercussions, as in October 2000 when it kidnapped former Israeli colonel Elhanan Tannenbaum and three soldiers, and in November 2005 when it carried out a thwarted attempt to capture Israeli soldiers. In Hizbullah’s view, therefore, the abductions did not constitute a paradigm shift in its military strategy. Against this background, it also “did not expect the response to be of this magnitude.”<sup>2</sup>

There are some indications backing this claim. Hizbullah’s immediate responses to Israel’s reprisal attacks strongly suggest that it expected and hoped to contain the confrontation to manageable proportions. Initially, Hizbullah only fired back at Israeli outposts in the Shab’a farms, thereby indicating that it intended to stick to south Lebanon’s ‘rules of the game’ allowing both parties to occasionally let off steam in this restricted area. Hizbullah also reportedly delayed issuing orders to its members to leave their houses to two days later, after Israel carried out its first bombing raids on south Beirut, thereby suggesting it had no immediate idea of what Israel was up to.<sup>3</sup> Nasrallah later confirmed as much:

We were not the ones who began the war or the ones who launched a large-scale war. It is not from the first moment after we captured two soldiers that we began to shell Nahariya, Haifa, Tiberias and Zefat and launched war. No. Even in advancing, the Israelis were much faster than us. We were patient in the hope that things would stop at this point because we don’t want to take our country to war.<sup>4</sup>

Be that as it may, Operation Truthful Promise was not devoid of provocative meaning and, very likely, it was meant to be like that. It took place in the wake of the abduction of an Israeli soldier in Gaza that caused public outrage in Israel and continued to embarrass the new Israeli government when its efforts to retain the soldier kept failing. This failure loomed heavily in Israel especially when Hizbullah helped thwarting Palestinian President Abu Mazen’s negotiation efforts in Damascus with Hamas leader Khaled Mish’al by publicly calling on the Palestinians not to release him unless all 10,000 Palestinian prisoners had been freed from Israeli jails.<sup>5</sup> With the seasoned Lebanese champion of prisoners’ exchanges speaking, it was difficult for any Palestinian leader not to pay heed to such advice. Furthermore, Hizbullah’s operation at the Blue Line consisted of two simultaneous pinches at the rules of the game; one by abducting Israeli soldiers outside the Shab’a farms, unlike earlier such actions, and another by the synchronized shelling of an

Israeli army position near the town of Zarit, nowhere near Shab'a.<sup>6</sup> More likely, therefore, is that Hizbullah deemed it necessary to up the ante, realizing that Israel would interpret its operation as a provocation, but somehow believing it would get away with an ensuing battle that may be ferocious but that would remain limited in scope. Hizbullah's reading of Israeli military actions prior to the full-blown confrontation suggests why it thought it necessary to formulate an answer to what it perceived as dangerous Israeli attempts to mobilize renewed muscle power against Hizbullah. A series of events appears to corroborate Hizbullah's assessment, starting with the assassination of senior Islamic Jihad official Mahmoud Majzub (suspected by Israel of liaising between Hizbullah and Palestinian militants in Gaza) and his brother Nidal in Sidon on 26 May, followed by the uncovering of an extensive network of Lebanese agents allegedly responsible for the Majzoub's deaths and several other assassinations in the past and suspected of planning to direct Israeli warplanes to new targets. Subsequently, Israel's carried out its "heaviest barrage since 2000"<sup>7</sup> hitting Hizbullah positions all along the Blue Line at the end of May in response to a relatively minor incidence wherein one Hizbullah fighter opened fire on an Israeli border guard. These incidents --taking place when in Beirut Hizbullah was increasingly confronted with demands by Lebanese politicians to reign in its armed capabilities during the ongoing 'national dialogue' (initiated in March)-- made Hizbullah analysts fume over what they saw as a deliberate Israeli attempt to turn the screws on Hizbullah when it was going through its most vulnerable exercise of rallying Lebanese support behind the resistance. Quoting Israeli commentators, Hizbullah's weekly *Al-Intiqad* accused Israel of foul play by "excessively widening the recurrent events at the northern frontier which takes place every several months".<sup>8</sup> In reference to the clashes at the end of May, its op-ed commentator Yahya Dbuk reasoned:

[...] the enemy chose escalation at this time in an attempt to impose its logic and special equation, based on violating the Lebanese sovereignty and widening its attacks, exploiting the political conditions on the domestic and regional arenas. It also expected that Hizbullah and the Islamic resistance would face a critical situation should they choose to retaliate within the current political conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Equally illustrative of Hizbullah's concern over Israel tilting the balance of power in south Lebanon in its favour is a commentary by another Hizbullah analyst almost expressing hope in his assessment that "[a]fter a new attempt to impose a new equation had been frustrated, the enemy restored its sanity [...] and understood that there is a balance that cannot be modified."<sup>10</sup> However, Hizbullah's leadership is likely to have been much less trustful of Israel's intentions, especially at a time when Lebanese politicians, one by one, presented their blueprints of Lebanon's "national defense strategy" in defiance of Hizbullah's refusal to disarm, while others, including Maronite Patriarch Butros Sfeir, discarded all protocol by claiming that the desirable disarmament of Hizbullah was hindered by the fact that it had become "a pawn in the hands of Iran and Syria."<sup>11</sup> In Hizbullah's view, Israel was trying to push the "balanced symmetry of forces in the Lebanese arena"<sup>12</sup> into its favour by making Hizbullah look ridiculous in the south – a design that warranted an appropriate, military response. Moreover, the need for retorting Israel's purported intentions tidily matched Hizbullah's anticipation of how Israel would

react, at least if we can extrapolate such an assessment from the party's reading of Israeli inclinations following the abduction of one of its soldiers in Gaza:

[The abduction] led to the enrichment of an image already stored in the Israeli mind since the confrontation began with the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, [i.e.] that of the disintegration of the greater part of the legendary halo which 'Israel' uses to wrap around its forces and to impose on the world. This issue [of the soldier's abduction] will definitely drive it to yield towards a more moderate culture when [it comes to] displaying its [military] capabilities [...] when challenged by the freedom fighters of the resistance [...].<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Hizbullah thought it would get away with a military operation that in its eyes only restored the military balance in the south and countered Israeli attempts to boost the party's critics at home. Even if Hizbullah's leadership would have developed any second thoughts about this rather self-serving appraisal at the last minute, its military machine was already in full swing to seize on any kidnap opportunity as the party's semi-independent security body, *al-Amm al-Mudadd* (counter security), takes care of the abduction business, just like it did when it captured Tannenbaum in 2000.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Nasrallah's statement that "[...] even my brothers [in the leadership] should not know that this [abduction] would happen at such a time and such a place"<sup>15</sup> would suggest that more careful and astute voices within Hizbullah had no chance to question the party's optimistic view on Israel's politicians' resolve. In any case, and with the benefit of hindsight, Hizbullah was, of course, plainly wrong in its assessment of Israel's decision-makers. The latter, reportedly with US encouragement and prepared with a much more ambitious plan to eradicate Hizbullah once and for all<sup>16</sup>, unleashed the destructive force of the Israeli armed forces onto Lebanon.

### HIZBULLAH'S SYMBOLIC CAPITAL GAINS

With Israel carrying out thousands of bombing raids and troops incursions together killing at least over one thousand mostly civilian Lebanese and destroying much of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure, Hizbullah surely got an Israeli response to its much more limited operation that reached much further than it wished for. However, while Israeli officials and most of the Western media perceived the progress and setbacks on the battlefield largely in terms of the purported magnitude of Hizbullah's loss of fighters and military hardware,<sup>17</sup> Hizbullah meticulously and effectively worked on adding and expanding an additional layer to the conflict that ultimately enabled it to convincingly declare victory.<sup>18</sup> Whatever Hizbullah has to say in public is in most Israeli and Western analyses typically dismissed as mere propaganda aimed at rationalizing an intrinsically material social reality consisting of primarily military and financial assets that the party relies on to fulfill its "terrorist" goals, and that moreover originate from its ties to Iran and Syria. Hence during the fighting Israeli generals and politicians consistently bragged about "eliminating" Hizbullah's missile arsenal, inflicting heavy losses on Hizbullah's manpower and clamping down on the party's Iranian connections by literally killing off Iranian volunteers on the battlefield.<sup>19</sup> Such real or alleged losses are, of course, not irrelevant for Hizbullah. Yet in strictly military terms, all it had to demonstrate at a minimum was that, would it come to the worst-case scenario, Hizbullah still

retained its fighting capacity even if it would be no real match to the Israeli army in the face of a full onslaught. But more importantly, Hizbullah consciously focused on accumulating what may be called symbolic capital, which it sensed would enable it to legitimately and convincingly impose its views concerning the various political crises and violence pertaining the region at large. Such views included those regarding the wicked designs for a “new” Middle East by Israel and the US, regarding Lebanon’s quandary since Syria’s withdrawal of troops in 2005 and, foremost, concerning the party’s own role in resisting foreign encroachment and enhancing Arab and Lebanese steadfastness. In brief, the war enabled Hizbullah to carve out for itself and its military agenda a social and political space that, prior to this war and due to a host of reasons, had become dangerously narrow.

### FROM ‘DETERRENCE’ BACK TO ‘RESISTANCE’

For Hizbullah, Israel’s massive military campaign and sending of ground troops came as an opportunity to at least temporarily dispose of its “deterrence” argument, and engage into what it does best and with most persuasive force vis-à-vis its detractors in Lebanon; raising armed resistance against Israeli forces scrunching up Lebanese sovereignty and occupying Lebanese territory. Hizbullah’s self-declared mission to sustain a “balance of terror” had evolved since the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000 in an attempt to find new directions for the party that would preserve missionary zeal for its own militants. The liberation of Shab’a certainly formed another pretext for the party sticking to its arms, but the much more vague mission of posing as a force of deterrence would be much harder challenged by the party’s Lebanese critics. Since Syria’s pulling out of Lebanon and the initiation of a “national dialogue” to pacify international demands associated with UN Security Council Resolutions 1559 (2 September 2004) and 1680 (17 May 2006), Hizbullah argued that the right and the need for it to continue carrying arms rests on its mission to pose an effective deterrence to Israeli aggression. Its missile arsenal naturally formed the backbone of this deterrence. As Nasrallah stated last May, “[t]oday the north [of Israel] is within the range of the missiles of the resistance – their ports, their bases, their factories, everything. This creates a balance of terror between the north of Palestine and the south of Lebanon and Lebanon in its entirety.”<sup>20</sup> If anyone in Lebanon’s political class would be able to formulate an equally effective alternative “defense strategy”, Hizbullah reasoned, only then it would be happy to consider merging into the Lebanese army or disarming.<sup>21</sup>

From Hizbullah’s perspective, this deterrence strategy was suitable in the sense that it pegged future disarmament to the open-ended and ambivalent goal of removing Israel’s threat (and thus to a comprehensive settlement for the entire Middle East’s problems). In other words, Hizbullah conveniently put the issue of its disarmament on hold almost indefinitely. At its deterrence argument overshadowed the rather convoluted and far less convincing *casus belli* of Israel’s occupation of the 25 square kilometers called the Shab’a Farms and the more limited and potentially directly achievable goal of releasing Lebanese prisoners in Israel. However, the notion of deterrence never sat comfortably with the party’s self-identity as a resistance movement as months went by without Hizbullah fighters firing a single shot in south Lebanon. This, in turn, risked plunging Hizbullah’s military mission into sheer irrelevance. Ironically, there were limits to occasional party rhetoric aimed at inflating its deterrence capabilities because its real or alleged arms built-up

to deter an Israeli attack actually made the latter far more probable as Israeli officials began arguing for military operations to counter it.<sup>22</sup> In May 2003, for instance, this logic appears to have prompted Nasrallah to play down the threat Hizbullah ostensibly had been seeking to assemble.<sup>23</sup> More recently, Hizbullah's Lebanese detractors posed an additional irritant as they became increasingly vocal in dismissing the deterrence argument. While enjoying the noisy support of the US and France, backed by UN Security Council resolutions, and with Syria no longer around to shut them up, Lebanese politicians belonging to the 14 March movement capitalized on the relative quiet in the south by arguing that "[e]very day, Israeli jets stage over flights; Hizbullah's arms don't provide a balance of terror."<sup>24</sup> The question marks looming over Hizbullah's deterrence strategy clearly pushed it on the defensive. Nasrallah fired back, "[w]e are still a deterrence, we are not in Kosovo [where air power alone broke the back of Serbian forces]."<sup>25</sup> For an ideologically ambitious movement as Hizbullah, sustaining the national dialogue with what it considers corrupt Lebanese politicians and having to listen to their petty arguments for months on end also risked creating the undesirable image that a one-time belligerent Hizbullah was essentially sitting on its hands while the rest of the region and foremost Palestine went up in flames.

From this perspective, Israel's military offensive offered a golden opportunity to restore the party's symbolic capital that so heavily leans on the notion of resistance and associated concepts of dignity and martyrdom.<sup>26</sup> Battling under the banner of "honour first!"<sup>27</sup>, Hizbullah appeared like it had gleefully recovered its preferred habitat of resisting occupation:

As for the land [operations], we have 24 years of experience; we have long and real [combat] experience on land. We have high and efficient fighting capabilities, good armed capabilities and good reserves.<sup>28</sup>

Nasrallah even came across as if he was almost inviting Israel to expand its ground offence by saying that "I do not believe that the [Israeli] air raids are an achievement" and by suggesting that the Israelis needed "some commandos to enter Lebanon" to "collect intelligence" or "to capture or kill some of the mujahideen of the resistance".<sup>29</sup> Nasrallah's stated desire for Israel to invade reveals both how the notion of resistance had received full rehabilitation and how frustrated Hizbullah had become with the "deterrence" situation before 12 July:

The arrival of the Zionists in our country will enable us to inflict more harm on it, its soldiers, its officers and its tanks. This will allow us a greater opportunity to conduct direct confrontations, and to conduct a war of attrition against this enemy, instead of [the latter] continuing to hide behind its fortifications on the international border.<sup>30</sup>

Having once again found its purpose in war, Hizbullah's apparent victories over the Israeli occupier only accumulated. Its military performance, for example by fighting back Israeli commandos in Bint Jbeil, gained almost mythical proportions. This will no doubt grant the party enough symbolic capital to sustain years of commemorations and festivities that will rally thousands of ordinary Lebanese and that will be duly attended by Lebanese officials, exactly like the first years following Israel's retreat in 2000. Nasrallah already contends that in such an atmosphere even talking of disarming Hizbullah is "insensitive and immoral" and "totally

inappropriate”, bearing in mind that “the most ferocious battle in the history of Lebanon has just been waged south of the river.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, the Sixth War had enabled Hizbullah to reinvigorate and revive its resistance program, thereby effectively addressing the pitfalls of its drowsy and contradictory status of posing a mere deterrence to its main enemy Israel.

### HIZBULLAH’S POPULISM AND THE SIXTH WAR

With Hizbullah’s stock of symbolic capital receiving a rapid boost from its rediscovered resistance agenda, the party carefully maneuvered to further capitalize on the situation by adjusting and expanding its outreach and appeal to ordinary Lebanese and Arabs in the region. For a variety of reasons discussed below, this manifested itself during the war in a discourse with strong populist overtones. Hizbullah’s version of populist rallying of public support became characterized by a forceful attempt to address Lebanese and Arab “society” and the common man directly, with seemingly little regard for their various national and confessional identities. In doing so, the party’s discourse aimed beyond and, at occasions was aggressively directed against, both Lebanese and other Arab state institutions and the political elites dominating them.<sup>32</sup> Addressing the Lebanese public, Hizbullah set out to manufacture and claim wide support of what it consistently described as a “silent majority” as opposed to the “illusive majority” enjoyed by the anti-Syrian camp of the 14 March movement and Hizbullah skeptics who, in the elections of 2005, gained a majority of seats in the Lebanese Parliament. Hence, Hizbullah’s repeated claims regarding the support of ordinary Lebanese became explicitly formulated in opposition to the leaders of this “illusive majority” and, indeed, the state institutions they controlled. For instance, when being asked by *Al-Jazeera*’s presenter Ghassan Bin Jiddu about “some Lebanese parties and factions” criticizing the way in which Hizbullah had got the country involved in a major war, Nasrallah rebuked him by saying, “I am not talking about some political forces. I am talking about the people, the good people, those who in hard times reveal their chivalry, honour, and patriotism.”<sup>33</sup> Yet Nasrallah’s refusal to discuss the views of his political rivals turned aggressive when the latter began insisting on discussing Hizbullah’s weapons in a cabinet meeting just prior to the formal cease-fire on 14 August:

[I]n this emotionally difficult and fateful time, some individuals speaking in their langue de boit sit behind their desks in their air-conditioned offices and talk about these issues.[..] Are the people stones or slaves who, when a few members of the political elite in Lebanon speak, should listen and obey? This is a mistake, a big mistake.<sup>34</sup>

As far as Nasrallah was concerned, “the political elite in Lebanon” has nothing to show for when it comes to confronting Israel’s aggression. After stressing Hizbullah’s steadfastness, he expressed his disdain of “these giants” by raising the rhetorical questions whether they “brought the Shab’a Farms with them [..], do they have the prisoners with them, [..] do they have real guarantees for Lebanon’s protection?”<sup>35</sup> In the same speech, Nasrallah even went as far by hinting that these unnamed members of Lebanon’s political elite might be guilty of treason, in reference to Israeli media reports claiming that Lebanese “governmental parties” had contacted Israeli officials asking them not to stop the military



campaign against Hizbullah.<sup>36</sup> Their purported selfishness and corrupt mindset became another theme of the party's discourse during the war. Rebutting criticisms of Hizbullah's Iranian and Syrian links, Nasrallah cleverly played on widespread and longstanding resentment among Lebanese over endemic corruption among high-level state officials and politicians; indeed another favourite theme of populist discourse generally<sup>37</sup>:

Yes we are friends of Syria and Iran, but for 24 years we benefited from our friendship [...] for the sake of Lebanon. There are others who benefited from their friendship with Syria for their own seats in power, villas, wealth, and bank accounts. But for me tell me where my bank accounts are? Tell me where is the palace that I built as a result of my connections to Syrian officials in Lebanon? Never!<sup>38</sup>

In brief, Hizbullah's appeal to ordinary Lebanese's hearts and minds over the incompetent, treasonous and corrupt heads of the state became a trademark of the party's discourse during and immediately after the war. And in the midst of daily Israeli bombardments causing tremendous damage and losses in human lives, the message could not but hit a nerve among many Lebanese, including those who before had little sympathy for Hizbullah. On their television screens they watched a charismatic and candid leader<sup>39</sup> who promised to teach the Israelis a lesson while the state and its entourage had practically fallen into a coma, or worse, purportedly reached out a helping hand to the Zionists and their US accomplices. As succinctly explained by politburo member Ali Fayyad, "society is more important than the state because the state is meant to serve society. 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."<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, Hizbullah addressed the Arabs of the region in a very similar manner, by praising "the people" for their support and castigating their leaders for their treachery and complicity in joint US-Israeli designs for a "new" Middle East. Frequently referring to the joint suffering by the Palestinians, Lebanese and other Arabs under the boot of Israeli and US imperialism, Nasrallah expanded his preferred audience to include all Arabs and Muslims but, notably, excepting their state and regime symbols:

Today, I do not expect anything from certain Arab rulers. Now if you ask me about what I expect from the nation, I know if you examine the hearts of all people in the Arab and Muslim nations, they are with us. They may sit in front of TV screens, cry and show emotions. If they hear good news, they may stand up, clap and show joy; if they hear sad news, they may cry and feel sad, and if they have the chance to show emotions, they would do so. I have no doubt about this.<sup>41</sup>

By evoking the intimate atmosphere of the ordinary Arab family's living room, Nasrallah effectively magnified his personal concern for and appeal to average Arab and Muslim individuals beyond and in opposition to their unfortunate state institutions and regime cronies who, by contrast, excel in their *langue de bois* and disregard for common folk.<sup>42</sup> Nasrallah explained that in the current war simply ignoring Arab rulers would have been preferable, as "you would be aggravating yourself for nothing".<sup>43</sup> However, this changed once these leaders' irrelevance gave

way to the latter adopting a sheer obstructive attitude by providing an “Arab cover” for the Israeli bombings – a reference to Saudi, Egyptian, UAE and Jordanian leaders’ criticisms of Hizbullah’s abduction operation at the beginning of the war.<sup>44</sup> “I can decisively say that were it not for certain Arab positions, this war would not have continued; it would have stopped within hours.”<sup>45</sup>

We may safely speculate that Hizbullah’s populist discourse has been particularly effective in rallying masses of Lebanese and Arabs of the region behind it because it struck some real nerves that are rarely even touched on by Lebanese and indeed Arab officialdom. With both Palestine and Iraq in flames and Lebanese and Arab leaders being widely viewed at best as incompetent accomplices in US and Israeli attempts to dominate the region, the gap between state elites and citizens feeling disparaged and humiliated is readily filled by a radical and seemingly effective resistance movement restoring some sense of dignity (*karama*).<sup>46</sup> Keenly tuning into this sentiment, Nasrallah noted, “our main and real slogan is honour first”.<sup>47</sup> The amount of symbolic capital Hizbullah this way acquired in the region cannot be overstated and adds to the popularity this party already enjoyed among Palestinians and many Iraqi Shi’ites thanks to Hizbullah’s role in pushing Israel out of Lebanon in 2000. In fact, on 4 August Iraqi Shi’ites, mostly sympathizers of Muqtada as-Sadr’s Al-Mahdi movement, went out in the streets of Baghdad by the thousands to express their support for Hizbullah, carrying banners emphasizing an analogy between their own battles against the US occupation and the fierce resistance put up by Hizbullah.<sup>48</sup> The latter also effectively managed to universalize its message beyond the immediate Lebanese context of its operations to the region at large by taking a fiercely anti-US standpoint, much more aggressively so than before. Accordingly, Israel is portrayed as a mere pawn in the service of the US government’s wicked attempt to impose its hegemony on the region – a remarkable reversion of order compared with the party’s statements before the recent war.<sup>49</sup>

However, not all of Hizbullah’s appeal resulted from uttering the right words in the right context associated with US and Israeli policies. During the war, Nasrallah time after time could rightfully claim that he stuck to his promises, adding for good measure that he was not after “exaggeration and [...] psychological warfare, but [after stating] the facts”.<sup>50</sup> Hence, this time round it was not the Iraqi Information Minister Muhammad Sahhaf who looked like a fool in denial of his regime’s demise; It was the Israeli Prime minister Ehud Olmert, who claimed that Israel had “entirely destroyed” Hizbullah’s infrastructure while the latter sent more than 200 rockets deeper into the country than ever before.<sup>51</sup> Finally, Hizbullah’s concern for the common man went beyond just rhetoric. For example, after returning to his hometown Dabin, near Marja’yun, one Lebanese shopkeeper found that in the midst of their battles Hizbullah fighters had helped themselves to his stock of groceries – but they duly left receipts, which he cashed in for USD 1,000 at the party’s local office.<sup>52</sup>

In qualitative terms, Hizbullah’s conscientious effort to directly connect to “the good people” –variably conceived of as Lebanon’s ‘silent majority’ or the Arab or Muslim common man and attentive to their frustrations regarding their regimes’ purported complicity in Western imperialism and in corruption-- is, of course, not new. An image of bravery, dignity, integrity and a rare non-corrupt mode of operation unlike that of the state has been promoted by the party ever since it began engaging in armed resistance operations and in the provision of social services, arguably already since the 1980s and certainly since the 1990s.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Hizbullah in this respect shares much of the traits of what has been described as the

“Islamist populism” of some other Islamist, but Sunni movements in the region.<sup>54</sup> Hizbullah’s remarkable shift, however, is that shortly prior and especially during the recent war it emphasized its populist outlook to the extent it began overshadowing rivaling notions for mobilization; those of Lebanese nationalism and (Shi’ite) sectarianism.

### NAVIGATING THE PITFALLS OF POPULISM, SECTARIANISM AND NATIONALISM

As important as Hizbullah’s outreach to the constituencies it hopes to mobilize are the ways in which it excludes others. Accordingly, Hizbullah’s audiences have varied, depending on the obstacles in the party’s way and the strategies it designed to overcome them. A remarkable turning point in this respect was in the spring of 2005 when Syria pulled out its troops, elections were held and a new government was appointed – all causing a major reshuffling at Lebanon’s domestic political scene. Wary about the implications of these developments for its self-proclaimed mission of armed resistance, Hizbullah began to view Lebanese politics and society as an arena for “a new phase of confrontations”, driven by growing domestic rifts and home-based hostile elements facilitating foreign interference.<sup>55</sup> Accordingly, Hizbullah embarked on a two-sprung strategy in order to safeguard the continuation of its military prerogatives. First, the party clearly fell back on the Shi’ite community as a kind of insurance policy, both presenting itself as its best defender in terms of its more mundane political interests and as a political shield against disarmament attempts.<sup>56</sup> Particularly the party’s approach to the parliamentary elections was characterized by sectarian overtones as Hizbullah resorted to Nasrallah’s authority of *taklif shar’i* (the issuance of a commandment based on religious law) to instruct followers to vote for lists it endorsed.<sup>57</sup> The message was straightforward: “If the people from the South are firm and decisive enough, no one will dare to discuss the weapons of the Resistance.”<sup>58</sup> At the same time, Hizbullah’s rediscovery of sectarianism was implicitly directed against other confessional groups, by linking the party’s right to bear arms to the Shi’ite community’s stake in the post-Ta’ef political setup of Lebanon and associated formulae for the division of spoils. Hussein Hajj Hassan, a Hizbullah member of Parliament, said: “Not once were [our] weapons used domestically at a time Hizbullah may have been wronged a great deal as far as employment opportunities and economic development in its areas were concerned.”<sup>59</sup> To some Lebanese, this was an implicit threat: come after the weapons, and Hizbullah will go after the delicate political balance.

The second notable change in Hizbullah’s strategy became apparent on 10 June 2005 when Nasrallah announced that “from now on we are prepared to take full responsibility at all levels of the state’s institutions.”<sup>60</sup> Arguably, the main rationale for this unprecedented move was –and remains—to prevent any government succumbing to external pressures for its disarmament. Being habitually frank about their intentions, Hizbullah officials acknowledged as much.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, decision-making in the cabinet has been effectively taken hostage by Hizbullah insisting on continuing its resistance role. On at least two occasions Hizbullah already froze its participation in the government, as in December 2005, or it walked out of Cabinet meetings when the issue of disarmament was put on the agenda, as on 12 August.

By capitalizing on Lebanon's volatile sectarian conundrum and on the government's built-in institutional gridlock, Hizbullah effectively thwarted attempts by the US and France to get the Lebanese themselves to disarm it. However, for the party itself this two-sprung strategy was not without costs. For one, by playing the sectarian card Hizbullah's resistance agenda risked to be no longer based on an erstwhile valid claim that it enjoyed nation-wide support.<sup>62</sup> Hence, falling back on the Shi'ite community constituted a risky gambit that could jeopardize the party's claim to national status and enhance calls for disarming what could now be increasingly seen as a sectarian militia. Indeed, some non-Shi'ites felt that the party had not done enough to reassure them about its weapons remaining outside domestic politics.<sup>63</sup> Sensing the increased polarization, even some Shi'ite political and religious leaders, including Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, began to openly criticize the sectarian direction Hizbullah was taking.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, directly participating in Lebanon's messy and often-corrupt politics at a governmental level exposed the party to a host of unintended reasons for resentment. Most importantly, playing along the rules of Lebanon's version of consociational decision-making inevitably exacerbated the party's sectarian outlook as it now openly engaged in the pork-and-barrel game of *mubasassa* (apportionment) of the state's spoils along confessional lines. The same traits of the Lebanese political system also threatened to undermine the party's reputation of being able to deliver services quickly and efficiently; "Hizbullah's [approach] to political authority with militant puritanism."<sup>65</sup> In turn, all this did not sit well with Hizbullah's own ideology that willfully places its mission outside the realm of *le pouvoir* by building on an opposition, grassroots movement guided by other-worldly virtue.<sup>66</sup> Illustrative of the contentious nature of the issue, Nasrallah had earlier explained to highly skeptical followers why government participation would be *halal* (religiously permissible) despite being in contravention of the party's stand since its inception in the mid-1980s.<sup>67</sup> Finally, being part of the government had the immediate disadvantage of exposing the Lebanese state to Israeli military reprisals in response to Hizbullah's military operations in the south. Accordingly, and prior to the Syrian withdrawal, Hizbullah officials had indicated that this was a main reason for them not to seek senior positions in government.<sup>68</sup> However, following the Syrian withdrawal an even more threatening environment apparently had overruled such considerations.

The new strategy served Hizbullah well in the sense that it essentially paralyzed any US/France-led attempts to bolster the party's critics within Lebanon and get going with the business of disarmament.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, the political costs of sectarianism and state participation became increasingly unbearable as the party witnessed the steady erosion of its corrupt-free reputation as a resistance movement enjoying nation-wide support. Hizbullah responded by mobilizing its significant Shi'ite support base but together with likeminded activists within the country's multi-confessional trade unions to protest the government's economic austerity proposals. On 10 May an anti-government demonstration hit the streets of Beirut, with Hizbullah's media outlet *Al-Manar* claiming at least half a million protestors. Held on the eve of imminent discussions within the framework of the national dialogue on Lebanon's "defense strategy" -- i.e. Hizbullah's disarmament or its integration into Lebanon's regular armed forces--the demonstration conveyed a strong message that enabled the party to reclaim its wider support base beyond a narrow Shi'ite constituency while allowing the party to distance itself from the government it was reluctantly taking part in.<sup>70</sup> Although still unable to persuasively

claim nation-wide backing, Hizbullah effectively began pushing for a crude populist agenda that it adjusted for Lebanon's sectarian constitution: a posture sharply hostile to the state and its corrupt political class, and capturing the allegiance of an, in sectarian terms, undifferentiated constituency that is 'the good people' or 'the silent majority'.<sup>71</sup> For good measure, Hizbullah's deputy chief Na'im Qassem offered some clarifications to those who had not yet understood to what end the party would use this populist platform: "Over the past few days, we heard statements that force numerous question marks upon us –statements by some of those who openly declare their goal is to disarm Hizbullah. I will be extremely clear. Hizbullah's disarmament is not up for discussion, not around the dialogue table or anywhere else."<sup>72</sup>

As argued above, the Sixth War allowed Hizbullah to consolidate and bolster its populist outlook, primarily on a domestic level, and as soon as various Arab leaders turned their backs to Hizbullah, also on a regional level, albeit more modestly so. The party's populism --being attuned to the Lebanese context-- appeared to reconcile the contradictions between, on the one hand, the party's unpopular tactics to survive as an armed resistance movement facing an increasingly hostile environment and, on the other hand, its ideological convictions and desire not to transgress into the less appealing practices of a mere sectarian movement. And following the cease-fire of 14 August, Hizbullah followed in style with a massive aid and reconstruction program that equally bypasses the state, offers a direct helping hand to victimized families, and promises to avoid the traps associated with government-led reconstruction, i.e. aloofness from the common man, corruption and immobilism. As Nasrallah succinctly put it when he announced Hizbullah's relief and reconstruction efforts: "You will not have to ask for anyone's help, you will not have to stand in queues or go anywhere [...] We cannot of course wait for the government and its heavy vehicles and machinery because they could take a while."<sup>73</sup> Hizbullah and the state, he added, would work "in two parallel lines".<sup>74</sup>

Hizbullah has demonstrated an acute capability to navigate the pitfalls of sectarianism and Lebanon's divisive politics in order to compensate for its relative loss of nation-wide appeal as Lebanon's sectarian leaders tried to capitalize on foreign pressures for the party to disarm. The party's recent emphasis on populism constitutes yet another acrobatic maneuver to do just that. Against this background, Israel's bombing campaign and incursion into Lebanon has helped Hizbullah to broaden its symbolic capital despite all the challenges it faced and still faces within Lebanon and vis-à-vis foreign powers, including the US and France. However, and reasoned from its own perspective, the party's current posture as a religiously inspired, populist movement is not without its own contradictions and perils.

First of all, and not unlike other forms of populism, Hizbullah cannot unambiguously claim to enjoy nation-wide support. Most immediately, its populism may invoke an image of the party representing an undifferentiated political subject<sup>75</sup>, or 'the good people', but it cannot conceal that many Lebanese (and indeed their leaders) hold the view that with the Sixth War the party unnecessarily and irresponsibly invited an insufferable degree of destruction and hardship to their country. Struggling to address this argument, Hizbullah leaders first angrily dismissed such views. As Hizbullah member of Parliament Muhammad Ra'ad put it, "for God's sake, all wars witness destruction".<sup>76</sup> But subsequently Nasrallah offered an explanation highlighting that, would he have known that the Israelis had responded so fiercely to the abduction of the Israeli soldiers, he would not have



ordered the kidnappings<sup>77</sup>; a near *mea culpa* indicative of the party's highly uncomfortable position. Second, and despite all its mud slinging against the state and Lebanon's political class, Hizbullah ultimately has no interest in the disintegration or collapse of the Lebanese state.<sup>78</sup> Inter alia, the party needs the state to negotiate favourable terms at the UN Security Council, as it did during the negotiations resulting in Resolution 1701,<sup>79</sup> and to carry out large-scale reconstruction works on the country's devastated public infrastructure. Moreover, since Hizbullah joined the government, its Shi'ite constituency increasingly has come to rely on the party to defend its interests and privileges at a state level, even when it hoped to delegate most of the dirty work in this respect to its ally Nabih Berri. Acknowledging Hizbullah's role in this respect, Hizbullah Politburo member Ali Fayyad remarked in the context of the party's decision to join the government:

Neither was it possible for the government to enjoy the credibility of wide popular support with Hezbollah [on] the outside. This would have left a significant constituency – if not the largest—outside state institutions, with the likely disturbances and instability that this could cause [...].<sup>80</sup>

Against this background, Hizbullah's usurpation of the state's monopoly on violence, its control over territory dominated by Shi'ites and its taking charge of the state's responsibility for providing relief to war victims may have granted the party a prominence much greater than it wished for. Having for years carved out a delicate space for itself to in parallel with the state continue its resistance operations, a scenario of "a state within a failed state"<sup>81</sup> would for Hizbullah be a huge setback, and one that it would unlikely recover from. In sum, Hizbullah's vicious populism has, in Lebanon's political game, no future and will need to be fundamentally altered as soon as the dust of war settles. Like most other forms of populism, Hizbullah's "attitude toward towards institutions creates a set of dilemmas for it that make it self-limiting".<sup>82</sup> Yet whatever solution Hizbullah will come up with, the party's zigzagging between populism, sectarianism and nationalism is unlikely to keep doing the job.

Neither can and will Hizbullah fully rely on its seemingly spectacular gains in regional symbolic capital. Despite its keen interest in especially the Palestinian cause, Hizbullah knows that it needs to prioritize the Lebanese context, as it is here where its major opportunities for and constraints on its armed operations are situated. Accordingly, Fayyad recently stated:

[F]or over two decades [Hizbullah's] political discourse has contained positions related to the Palestinian cause. But its positions and discourse reflect a constant effort aimed at reconciling its political ideology [pertaining regional issues] and its agenda as a Lebanese national liberation movement and a key component of the political power system in Lebanon, with all the complexities and the national specificities that come with this role."<sup>83</sup>

In fact, relying too much on its regional symbolic capital may backfire and further undermine what is left of the party's nationalist credentials, especially when a significant number of Lebanese define their interests in opposition to those of Syria and Iran.<sup>84</sup> Hizbullah's perspective on regional developments has been primarily coloured by a defensive reflex instead of its alleged offensive ambitions primarily because it has feared the direct implications of the US plans for a 'new' or



‘greater’ Middle East ever since the latter invaded Iraq.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, Hizbullah’s appeal for Arab and Muslim support is not without its own problems and inherent contradictions. While the party has a close relationship with key members of the Iranian regime in terms of ideological affinity and material support, not a few Sunni Arabs feel uncomfortable about Iran’s ascendancy as regional power. Perhaps for this reason, Hizbullah officials rarely touched on the role of Iran during the latest war.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the war in Iraq is conspicuously absent in Hizbullah’s wartime discourse despite the fact that this country obviously constitutes a key element in the US’ regional designs it detests with so much *staggato* elsewhere. Here, again, the Shi’ite factor in the region may account for Hizbullah’s dodging of the Iraq theme, in addition to the party’s troublesome relations with the Iraqi Shi’ite political establishment ever since the latter chose its own and more accommodationist strategies vis-à-vis US occupying forces.

## CONCLUSION WHAT REBEL? WHAT CAUSE?

While Israel appears to be counting and assessing its losses purely in terms of ill-conceived military tactics and shoddy preparations by Israeli generals,<sup>87</sup> Hizbullah has gained tremendously in symbolic capital, both by reinvigorating its armed resistance agenda and by mustering public support beyond its narrow Shi’ite constituency, in Lebanon and the region at large. For now, therefore, Hizbullah’s status today is a far cry from the drowsy position it was in three years ago. Back in 2003, Hizbullah faced many constraints originating in a host of developments across the region –effective US pressure in the ‘war on terror’, a Palestinian truce, strained relations with Iraq’s Shi’ites caused by differences regarding US plans to overthrow Saddam Hussein, and growing Lebanese skepticism over the need to raise war over the Shab’a farms.<sup>88</sup> Consequently, the party was forced to virtually sit on its hands in what had become a largely forgotten, low-intensity conflict at the Blue Line. At the time, Hizbullah’s leadership regarded this predicament with great concern, as illustrated by its stern and dismissive response to forecasts that it was about to become “a rebel without a cause”.<sup>89</sup> Re-creating the conditions that were largely responsible for these highly effective constraints on Hizbullah will be extremely difficult as US and Israeli policies in the region have created nothing but havoc in Iraq, Palestine, and Lebanon itself.<sup>90</sup> However, glancing back at the last few years and the recent Sixth War a few conclusions and observations stand out that should be of relevance to those wishing to see the Lebanese state instead of Hizbullah guarding Lebanon’s borders with Israel.

First, a low-intensity armed conflict, like the one prevailing before the latest war, is highly preferable to full-scale warfare causing tremendous damage and loss of lives on both sides in addition to further radicalization in the region at large. Second, the conflict or multiple conflicts pertaining south Lebanon cannot be merely phrased in purely military terms or fully understood by their conventional material dimensions as it is Hizbullah’s symbolic capital gains that allow it to carve out the social and political space that is essential to its ambitions to continue operating as an armed resistance movement. Third, and related to Hizbullah’s resolve and symbolic capital, relentless foreign pressure, whether via the UN circus of accumulating Security Council resolutions or via unilateral demands from the US and France, will fail to disarm Hizbullah and only cause further gridlock in Lebanon’s political system. In turn, this gridlock will undermine the Lebanese

state's ability to embark on a comprehensive plan for political and economic reforms and, accordingly, meet the high expectations in this regard expressed during the 'Beirut Spring' of 2005. Fourth, by bombing Lebanon into submission, what one ends up with is a revitalized, armed resistance movement that previously could only pose a dormant 'deterrence' that was no real or existential threat to anyone. Fifth, the only alternative approach with some chance of success in eventually disarming Hizbullah would consist of a strategy to dilute or remove some or all of the circumstances from which its armed resistance agenda has proven to derive its pertinence, i.e. by addressing all of the so-called "seven points plan" adopted by the Lebanese government in early August<sup>91</sup> and endorsed by Hizbullah, by reviving the peace process on both Palestinian and Syrian tracks, and by fully supporting and helping to finance Lebanon's domestic reforms in order to raise the stakes in Hizbullah's calculations to carry out new military operations.<sup>92</sup>

Paradoxically perhaps, Hizbullah's recent gains from the Sixth War may well generate the best possible context and momentum to embark on such a multifaceted strategy. Hizbullah's legitimacy as a resistance movement may for now be at an all-time high, but in the not so distant future, and provided all Israeli troops will withdraw from Lebanon, both the rationale for and shape of its armed operations are far from being assured. For one, its one time strategy to erect a 'balance of terror' against Israel has been proven at best questionable or indeed flawed by Israel's invasion and bombing campaign. For this one only has to recall how, a few days before the outbreak of the latest war, Hizbullah member of Parliament Muhammad Ra'ad reiterated the need for Hizbullah's 'deterrence': "If the Palestinians in Gaza had the deterrent weapons that the Lebanese Resistance has, the enemy would not have dared to threaten with an invasion."<sup>93</sup> Finally, and for reasons detailed in this article, Hizbullah's fallback on aggressive populism --at the expense of Lebanon's state institutions and falling short of mustering nationwide support-- cannot last. From the party's own perspective, its populism would, at its own detriment, fully alienate Lebanon's political class and undermine the state functions it seeks to preserve. In other words, at a moment that Hizbullah will be busily reassessing its military and political agenda, a multifaceted strategy can help pushing the party back into its onetime status of a rebel-without-a-cause, provided such a strategy is informed by lessons learned from the past.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> International Crisis Group, *Hizbollah: Rebel Without a Cause?*, Middle East Briefing, 30 July 2003

<sup>2</sup> Mahmud Qamati, member of Hizbullah's Politburo, cited in Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbollah's Outlook in the Current Conflict*, Carnegie Endowment Policy Outlook, No 27, August 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See International Crisis Group, *Israel/ Palestine/ Lebanon: Climbing Out of the Abyss*, Middle East Report, 25 July 2006, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Nasrallah at *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Nasrallah quoted in *An-Nahar*, 3 July 2006. Before Abu Mazen's meeting with Mish'al, Palestinian Prime minister Ismail Haniyyeh appeared to favour the release of the Israeli prisoner. See *Al-Hayat*, 28 June 2006.

<sup>6</sup> See United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, for the period from 21 January 2006 to 18 July 2006*, New York, 21 July 2006.

<sup>7</sup> UNIFIL spokesperson cited by Nicholas Blanford in *The Daily Star*, 2 June 2006.

<sup>8</sup> *Al-Intiqad*, 2 June 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Sa'ad Haniyyeh in *Al-Intiqad*, 2 June 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Sfeir's remarks while on visit to the US as cited in *As-Safir*, 4 July 2006.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Intiqad*, 2 June 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Ibrahim Musawi in *Al-Intiqad*, 30 June 2006.

<sup>14</sup> See International Crisis Group, *Op. Cit.* (2003), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See Seymour M. Hersh, "Watching Lebanon, Washington's Interests in Israel's War", in *The New Yorker*, 21 August 2006. Nasrallah approvingly mentioned Hersh's article in an interview with Lebanese TV channel New TV (27 August 2006).

<sup>17</sup> See for instance the painstakingly detailed analyses of Hizbullah's purported military capabilities and weaponry in *The Washington Post*, 9 & 14 August 2006 and *The New York Times*, 17 August 2006.

<sup>18</sup> A recent survey, conducted by the Beirut Center for Studies and Information, suggested that some 72 percent of the Lebanese believe that Hizbullah was victorious. See *Al-Akbbar*, 23 August 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Israeli officials claimed to have found Iranian soldiers among the bodies of Hizbullah gunmen. See Aaron Klein at WorldNetDaily.com, 9 August 2006.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Manar*, 23 May 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Sensing the direction of the debate on Hizbullah's arms with Syria's withdrawal, Nasrallah already made this position clear in March 2005: "Disarming Hizbullah will be up for discussion, [but] we expect our partners [in the government] to offer us alternatives to defend the country and its people." Speech at *Al-Manar*, 16 March 2005.

<sup>22</sup> For this argument see the Israeli statements and assessments cited in *An-Nahar*, 3 March 2003; Gary C. Gambill, "Hezbollah's Strategic Rocket Arsenal", in *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, November-December 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Claiming that Hizbullah is able to inflict heavy casualties on the Israeli enemy, Nasrallah emphasized: "We cannot prevent them [the Israeli army] from entering our land, our cities and villages." Cited in *Al-Intiqad*, 2 May 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Samir Ja'ja (leader of the Lebanese Forces) cited in *An-Nahar*, 9 June 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in *As-Safir*, 9 June 2006.

<sup>26</sup> For details on Hizbullah's notion of the "resistance society" (*mujtama' al-muqawama*) see: Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders, "Know Thy Enemy: Hizbullah, 'Terrorism' and the Politics of Perception", in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 26, No 1, April 2005, pp. 185 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 26 July 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Nasrallah interview with *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 26 July 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Our people, we constitute a strong, capable country, a country of resistance that can defend your honor, your blood, your dignity and your pride." Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 14 August 2006.

<sup>32</sup> As one student of comparative populism noted: "Populism is portrayed as deeply ambivalent in its attitudes towards institutions – those of the state [...], bureaucracy [...]. Unsurprisingly, populism therefore fundamentally distrusts those peopling those institutions as not only corrupt but also as lacking in wisdom. Wisdom resides in the people [...]." See Paul Taggart, *Populism*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 2000, p. 11.

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 14 August 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Nasrallah clarified that he did not believe this "Israeli gossip". Ibid. However, many Lebanese watchers wondered if that was the case, why then did Hizbullah's leader bother to refer to them in a prominent public address as his 'victory speech'. During the hectic 'Beirut Spring' of 2005, Nasrallah used similar rhetoric to intimidate his Lebanese critics by drawing attention to supposedly unsubstantiated Israeli reports on collaboration by Lebanese politicians. Then, the ambiguity of false reports requiring "a clear answer by the opposition" was not missed on anyone. See Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 6 March 2006.

<sup>37</sup> See Paul Taggart, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3. For instance, one critic of the purported rise of populism in east and central European politics recently observed that its essential ingredients marry "authentic anger" and an "unrestrained hatred of the elites" with aggressive "anti-corruption rhetoric". See Ivan Krastev, "The New Europe: Respectable Populism and Clockwork Liberalism", 21 March 2006, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/content/articles/PDF/3376.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> Nasrallah in interview with *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Many populist movements rely excessively on charismatic, personal leadership. See Paul Taggart, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 100 ff.

- <sup>40</sup> Cited in Saad-Ghorayeb, *Loc. Cit.* See also Ali Fayyad, "Hezbollah and the Lebanese State Reconciling a National Strategy with a Regional Role", in: *Arab Reform Initiative, Arab Reform Brief*, No 11, August 2006, p. 8.
- <sup>41</sup> Nasrallah in interview with *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.
- <sup>42</sup> Wittingly or unwittingly perfecting this image of his warm consideration for the plight of common individuals, Nasrallah took the time in his analysis of the battlefield to profusely apologize to a Palestinian family of those killed due to a Hizbullah Katyusha rocket landing on Nazareth. *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> Most forcefully, a Saudi spokesperson called Hizbullah's abduction an "uncalculated adventure". See *An-Nabbar*, 14 July 2006.
- <sup>45</sup> Nasrallah in interview with *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.
- <sup>46</sup> Anthony Shadid's reporting constitutes a notable exception to that of the generally much less attentive corps of Western journalists in the region by stressing the significance of *karama* in Arab perceptions of the recent war. See for instance *The Washington Post*, 15 August 2006.
- <sup>47</sup> Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 26 July 2006.
- <sup>48</sup> See *The New York Times*, 5 August 2006.
- <sup>49</sup> Earlier Hizbullah argued that the US, in fact, had an "Israeli policy", stemming from the US' ideological commitment to Israel. See Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (Pluto Press, 2002), p. 91.
- <sup>50</sup> Nasrallah in interview with *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.
- <sup>51</sup> Cited by *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 August 2006.
- <sup>52</sup> See *The Washington Post*, 18 August 2006.
- <sup>53</sup> See Mona Harb and Reinoud Leenders, *Loc. Cit.* Hizbullah Politburo member Ali Fayyad recently summarized Hizbullah position as follows: "The resistance movement acquired a moral weight that was reflected in the form of a parallel authority that fulfills a normative function." Ali Fayyad, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 2.
- <sup>54</sup> This "Islamist populism" rests on "three axes": crisis, corruption and imperialism. See Alejandro Colas, "The Re-invention of Populism: Islamist Responses to Capitalist Development in the Contemporary Maghreb", in *Historical Materialism*, Vol. 12, No 4, 2004.
- <sup>55</sup> Author's interview with Hizbullah official, Beirut, 14 June 2005. See also interview with Hizbullah's second-in-command Na'im Qassem in *An-Nabbar*, 4 April 2005.
- <sup>56</sup> For details see International Crisis Group, *Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm*, Middle East Report, 5 December 2005, pp. 19-22.
- <sup>57</sup> See Nasrallah's speech at the commemoration of Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon, at *Al-Manar*, 25 May 2005. Nasrallah is Lebanon's personal representative of Iran's Supreme Leader and *Marja' at-Taqlid* (model for emulation) Ali Khamenei.
- <sup>58</sup> Na'im Qassem cited in *Al-Balad*, 31 May 2005.
- <sup>59</sup> Interview at LBC Television, 17 June 2005.
- <sup>60</sup> Cited in *As-Safir*, 11 June 2005.
- <sup>61</sup> Author's interview with Hizbullah spokesperson Hussein Nabulsi in Beirut, 14 June 2005. Being asked why Hizbullah decided to take part of the government, the party's deputy leader Na'im Qassem alluded to the Syrian withdrawal as necessitating Hizbullah's own efforts to keep Lebanon's politicians in check. "What has changed are issues related to Lebanese developments, which made us directly responsible for providing the domestic protection in a better way than before." Na'im Qassem at *Al-Manar*, 14 June 2005.
- <sup>62</sup> For Hizbullah's national aspirations see Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within* (London, Saqi Books, 2005), pp. 82 ff.
- <sup>63</sup> See for example commentary by Hazem Amin in *Al-Hayat*, 16 May 2006.
- <sup>64</sup> For details see International Crisis Group (December 2005), *Op. Cit.*, pp. 19-20.
- <sup>65</sup> Ali Fayyad, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 2. Illustrative of Hizbullah's frustrations in this respect are comments by Hizbullah's minister for Electricity, Muhammad Fneish. He expressed his exacerbation over the political bickering that hindered his reform plans. In an interview he proposed the following remedy: "The more we isolate [the implementation of Fneish's plan for electricity sector reforms] from political controversy the more we can provide a political umbrella for it with the possibility of implementation." Interview in *Al-Intiqad*, 7 July 2006.
- <sup>66</sup> The observation is borrowed from Alejandro Colas' analysis of Islamist movements in North Africa. Colas, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 249.
- <sup>67</sup> Speech by Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 19 February 2005.
- <sup>68</sup> Author's interview with Hizbullah Member of Parliament Muhammad Fneish, in Beirut, 7 July 2003.

<sup>69</sup> For details see Reinoud Leenders, “How UN Pressure on Hizballah Impedes Lebanese Reform”, *Middle East Report Online*, 23 May 2006.

<sup>70</sup> Hizballah’s reluctant participation into the government is congruent with populist attitudes toward politics generally. “[For populism] politics is messy and corrupting, and involvement comes only under extreme circumstances. In this sense, populism seeks to avoid habitual political involvement. Populism is reluctantly political. Overcoming their reluctance, populists engage in politics when they perceive crises.” Paul Taggart, *Op. Cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> This observation leans heavily on Colas, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 250. Hizballah’s weekly *Al-Intiqad* offered fierce commentary denouncing Lebanon’s corrupt political class and its self-enrichment schemes going at the expense of the poor. See especially a commentary by Ibrahim Musawi, *Al-Intiqad*, 19 May 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Cited by *Al-Manar*, 7 May 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 14 August 2006.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> “The populist conception of ‘the people’ is [...] fundamentally monolithic. They are seen as a single entity devoid of fundamental divisions and unified and solidaristic.” Paul Taggart, *Op. Cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in *An-Nabaa*, 21 August 2006.

<sup>77</sup> He added, however, that Israel’s planned military campaign would have come anyway and that with even more ferocious force. Nasrallah interviewed at New TV, 27 August 2006.

<sup>78</sup> Accordingly, Hizballah’s leaders insisted they continue to pay allegiance to the Lebanese state. See for example the interview with Naim Qassem in *Al-Akbbar*, 19 August 2006.

<sup>79</sup> In reference to the Lebanese government’s seven-points plan and UN Security Council Resolution 1701, Nasrallah said: “We also worked on strengthening the position of the state, particularly that of the government pertaining to the negotiations [preceding UNSCR 1701] and the preservation of national rights.” Nasrallah at *Al-Manar*, 12 August 2006.

<sup>80</sup> Ali Fayyad, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> See Saad-Ghorayeb, *Loc. Cit.*

<sup>82</sup> “[Populism’s] reaction against the institutions [...] is an important driving force for it, and yet, for that force to go anywhere, populism invariably has to use those institutions itself.” Paul Taggart, *Op. Cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>83</sup> Ali Fayyad, *Loc. Cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Perhaps for this reason Nasrallah stressed that the war was, in fact, not in Iran’s interest. He plausibly argued that Iran would not want to overplay its Hizballah card at a time that its disagreements with the US over its nuclear ambitions were still subject to negotiations. Interview at *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>85</sup> For instance, one Hizballah commentator described the US invasion in Iraq as “the region’s new phase, the first phase of a new era, that of American imperialism” that via Palestine would eventually have great repercussions for Hizballah in Lebanon. See Mustafa al-Hajj Ali in *Al-Intiqad*, 9 May 2003.

<sup>86</sup> For example, during his lengthy interview with *Al-Jazeera*, Nasrallah denied that Israel’s military campaign had anything to do with the party’s abduction of Israeli soldiers. Yet when he was about to explain what Israel’s intentions really were about – presumably confronting Iran—he interrupted himself and returned to the question why Hizballah had captured the Israeli soldiers. *Al-Jazeera*, 20 July 2006.

<sup>87</sup> Israeli Prime minister Ehud Olmert ordered two internal commissions into the military handling of the war in Lebanon, rejecting a more comprehensive and independent inquiry. See *Ha’aretz*, 28 August 2006.

<sup>88</sup> See International Crisis Group (2003), *Op. Cit.*

<sup>89</sup> For a reaction to the 2003 International Crisis Group report bearing this title see Hizballah’s ‘external communications director’ Nawaf al-Musawi’s commentary “If Hizballah did not exist... it would have to be created”, in *As-Safir*, 21 August 2003.

<sup>90</sup> Some analysts rightly noted that due to the setbacks in US policies in Iraq the US administration has lost leverage in the region to the extent it is no longer able to exert major restraining influence on actors such as Hizballah. See Stephen Biddle and Ray Takeyh, “The Iraq Syndrome will Haunt America”, in *The Herald Tribune*, 16 August 2006.

<sup>91</sup> The seven-points plan called, inter alia, for the release of all Lebanese prisoners and Israel’s withdrawal from the Shab’a Farms. The latter would have to be temporarily placed under UN jurisdiction. For the full text see: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/5256936.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5256936.stm)

<sup>92</sup> As noted by Lebanese Prime minister Fu’ad Siniora: “I don’t want to change Hizballah. They will change and adapt to the changes if they want. Hizballah has specified certain goals that prompt them to carry arms. If these objectives were to be met, what would they carry their weapons for?” Cited in *As-Safir*, 10 August 2006.

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<sup>93</sup> Cited in *Al-Hayat*, 6 July 2006.



# THE REFUGEES WHO GIVE REFUGE

Laleh Khalili\*

As September 2006 begins, the Burj al-Barajna refugee camp sits at the confluence of construction and destruction. The half-built Airport Expressway slowly snaking up to the camp from the East, and the half-destroyed Airport Bridge and the devastated Shi'a neighbourhoods near the camp are concrete embodiments of Rafiq Hariri's post-Civil War reconstruction project and the Israeli military's wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure in the July 2006 War, respectively.

Two aspects make the convergence of building and demolition manifested in the Airport Bridge and the *Dahiya* (the Shi'a "suburbs" of southern Beirut) metaphors for the complexity of relations between the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, their Lebanese hosts, and their Israeli adversaries. First, the scale of Israeli violence has thrown the spotlight on recent shifts in local relations and alliances of the Palestinians in surprising, and sometimes poignant, ways. Secondly, contrary to the public pronouncements of the Lebanese state, the "construction" project is considered by many Palestinians –and some of their Shi'a neighbours– to be an urban planning disaster. Struggles surrounding this project are only another expression of realignments in the relations between the aforementioned actors. These realignments transcend sectarian identities and past histories in ways that belie ominous predictions about the Sunni-Shi'a rift in the Middle East. What I hope to do in this brief article is to expand on these themes and locate them in their particular historical and sociological context, in order to better understand the location of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon today.

## THE CONTENTIOUS PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON (1948-2006)

The presence of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has always been complicated by the local complexity of sectarian conflict and the regional calculus of power. In 1948, some 100,000 Palestinians who fled or were evicted from their homes in Palestine took refuge in Lebanon. They found many of their hosts poorer than they had been and some even encountered anti-Sunni prejudice among the southern Lebanese villagers.<sup>1</sup> Others, however, were moved by the generosity of these hosts. As Umm Jamal recounted nearly more than fifty years later:

[In Qana] we lived in poverty; the men who were finding work were only getting 2 livres, and the women were getting only 75 'irshes and sometimes they would give me one livre. The people in Qana were as poor as the Palestinians, so life was hard. My father who was used to tending trees and farming wanted to find this kind of job. We were renting our home from a [Shi'a] family, but they stopped taking rent from us and we stayed in their house as if we were their family; but my father stopped taking his wages from

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them [in return for the lodging]. The people of the south were kind people, unlike other people now....<sup>2</sup>

Today, nearly 400,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) in Lebanon, and half of them reside in twelve refugee camps, mostly located in Beirut, the predominantly Shi'a areas of southern Lebanon and the Bīqā' Valley.<sup>3</sup> From the very beginning, the Palestinian refugees –whose number amounted to ten percent of the Lebanese population– were considered a threat to the “fragile sectarian composition” of Lebanon: their being predominantly Sunni Muslims imperilled the politically dominant Maronite Christians, and placed them in direct competition for jobs and resources with the numerically superior but politically disempowered Shi'a underclass. Furthermore, with the emergence and predominance of the PLO in the 1960s and 1970s, the radical politics of the Palestinian national movement was met with enthusiasm and support by large numbers of Sunnis, Druze, Shi'a, and others, but sowed anxiety and fear among the Lebanese elite who saw their continued rule jeopardised by the revolutionary possibilities promised by the Palestinian national movement.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the confessional calculations of the Lebanese sectarian elite, some Palestinian militants entrenched in the predominantly Shi'a southern Lebanon generated frictions in their interactions with the local population. The arrogance and “often poor behavior towards the Lebanese population exhibited by some” guerrillas of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) exacerbated militant-civilian tensions and were not helped by official PLO position vis-à-vis its local allies.<sup>5</sup> As an example of the latter, in 1981, and then again in January and April 1982, in the south, the PLO entered the internecine fighting between the Shi'a Amal militia and other Lebanese organizations, shelled Shi'a villages, enraging many in the Shi'a community and sowing the seeds of future conflicts.<sup>6</sup>

Israel, which regarded the PLO presence and guerrilla operations in Lebanon a threat, sought to take advantage of these tensions. Throughout the 1970s, and especially in the early 1980s, “Israeli attacks were ... directed at civilians, with the objective of alienating them from the PLO and exacerbating Palestinian-Lebanese tensions.”<sup>7</sup> Thousands of military incursions, aerial bombardments, and two full-scale invasions by the Israeli military in 1978 and 1982 led to a perpetual cycle of uprooting and return for the southern Lebanese Shi'a and Christians who eventually came to blame the PLO for their predicament, such that the 1982 Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon was met by the jubilation of some local villagers.<sup>8</sup> The June 1982 War culminated in the PLO evacuation from Lebanon and the subsequent massacre of over 1,200 residents of Sabra and Shatila at the hands of the Maronite Lebanese Forces and the Israeli proxy, the South Lebanese Army.<sup>9</sup> The horrors of Sabra and Shatila were visited upon not only the Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila, but also the Shi'a families who had been displaced from the South and who lived in the neighbourhood and the camp. Indeed, the Shi'a Miqdad family, one of whose members is today the groundskeeper of the Sabra/Shatila massacre site, lost thirty members in the slaughter.<sup>10</sup> In all, twenty-seven percent of the named victims of that massacre were Shi'a.<sup>11</sup>

The massacre at Sabra and Shatila, however, wasn't the last of the full-scale conflicts between the Palestinians and the Lebanese. The Shi'a Amal militia, which had originally been trained and armed by the PLO, but which had conflicted with it as early as the 1980s, sought to consolidate its power in southern Lebanon in the mid-1980s. It fought its former allies among Muslims and Leftists in West Beirut

and southern Lebanon,<sup>12</sup> and between 1985 and 1988, supported by Syria, placed the Palestinian refugee camps of Beirut and southern Lebanon under intermittent sieges which lasted as long as six months and resulted in the deaths of thousands of refugees. These sieges, which came to be known as the War of the Camps, left an indelible mark on Palestinians' memories, as water, food, and medicine were cut off, women were killed by sniper fire as they tried to retrieve water from communal taps at the edges of the camps, and camp residents resorted to eating cats and dogs.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, however, the lines of conflict were not wholly drawn along sectarian lines. "The reluctance of some regional [Amal] commanders, such as Mahmud al-Faqih in Nabatiyya, to mobilize their followers or to permit deployment of Amal units from other areas [to fight the Palestinians] was an added constraint [on Amal action]."<sup>14</sup> More importantly, the nascent Shi'a militia of Hizbullah came to aid the Palestinians in concrete ways still appreciated in the camps.<sup>15</sup>

In 1982, the head of Amal, Nabih Berri had predicted that if the Israelis remained in Lebanon for any length of time, the Shi'a population of Lebanon would become radicalised as the Palestinians before them had done.<sup>16</sup> Hizbullah, which at its inception included militant breakaway members of Amal, was the realisation of Berri's prediction.<sup>17</sup> Hizbullah's ideological and organisational competition with Amal and its sense of solidarity with Palestinians placed it firmly on the side of the besieged camp refugees. During the War of the Camps, Hizbullah earned the affection and loyalty of many Palestinians when its fighters risked their lives to break the Amal siege to deliver food, milk, medicine, and pumps for artesian wells to the Palestinians in Burj aj-Barajna, Rashidiyya, and Shatila camps.<sup>18</sup> Hizbullah solidarity with Palestinians through the War of the Camps affected the refugees in such a way that when I began my research in the camps in 2000, whenever the refugees spoke of "the Shi'a" as a group, they made cautious exceptions for Hizbullah and distinguished it "from the rest" of the Shi'a.

Since the end of the civil war in 1990, Hizbullah has been a vocal advocate of the Palestinian refugees' civil rights in Lebanon. In fact, after decades of draconian prohibitions on the refugees' right to work and their access to jobs in Lebanon, in June 2005, the Lebanese Labour Minister, Trad Hamadeh, who is an ally (through not a member) of Hizbullah in the cabinet, issued a decree allowing Palestinians access to menial and clerical jobs previously barred to them. Hizbullah has also demonstrated its solidarity with the Palestinians by dedicating much of the programming of their television station al-Manar to Palestine and the Palestinians. Some of these programmes have been devoted to the refugees, their camps, their concerns, and their oral histories.<sup>19</sup> The relations between Hizbullah and Palestinian refugees, however, are complicated by the sometimes overt hostility between Hizbullah and the largest and oldest Palestinian political faction representing the Palestinians, Fatah. The hostilities have meant that solidary sentiments between the refugees and their local allies have been tempered by political considerations and contentions.

If a complicated friendship defines the relationship of the Palestinian refugees and Hizbullah in Lebanon, memories of violence and long-standing hostilities shape the attitude of most other Lebanese towards the Palestinians in their midst. Public opinion polls conducted in Lebanon repeatedly confirm the widespread desire of the great majority of the Lebanese public to see the Palestinians removed from their midst. In the years immediately after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, of all sectarian groups, only the Sunni co-religionists of the Palestinians and to a lesser extent the Druze minority had

favourable and friendly reactions towards the Palestinian refugees.<sup>20</sup> The profound sense of uncertainty generated by the atmosphere of hostility is compounded by the scapegoating of Palestinians for many of the ills within the Lebanese society, including political unrest, social fissures, criminal activities, and even the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri. Indeed these hostile sentiments have become crystallised in the complex convergence of local support for the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the disarmament of not only Hizbullah, but also the Palestinian refugees.<sup>21</sup>

It was during the uneasy stand-off between various Palestinian factions, the Lebanese state, Hizbullah, and assorted other sub- and supra-state actors over UNSC1559 that the July War of 2006 convulsed Lebanon and consolidated nascent realignments.

### THE JULY WAR, 2006

What struck most local observers of the July War 2006 was how the Israeli military action and rhetoric seemed to recycle their action and rhetoric in previous wars against Lebanon. The spokespersons for the Israeli military asserted that their goal was “pushing Hizbullah out of southern Lebanon” as if Hizbullah was not indigenous to the area, but rather a “foreign” force as the PLO had purportedly been before 1982.<sup>22</sup>

More importantly, the Israeli military resorted to its *modus operandi* of attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure in order to turn local populations against Hizbullah. If the Israeli strategists had hoped that the residents of southern Lebanon would greet the Israeli military joyously, or that indeed the internal fissures within Lebanon would be widened and anti-Hizbullah alliances would spring up, they were mistaken. The Israeli military’s brutal assault against civilians resulted in a unification –however ephemeral– of the contentious social groups that make up Lebanon’s complex confessional checkerboard. The nearly one-million displaced Shi’a Lebanese who poured into Beirut and other cities in Lebanon were met by the generally warm reception of the local populations even in Sunni and Maronite Christian neighbourhoods and villages. In southern Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut, the complex mixture of solidarity, empathy, suspicion, and sometimes downright hostility the Palestinian refugees feel for their Shi’a neighbours was wholly replaced by a vocal, warm, and genuine solidary sentiment.

The refugee camps of al-Buss, Burj al-Shamali and Rashidiyya, all located near the city of Tyre in the south, and all vulnerable to the Israeli shelling of the area, were the first to open their doors to the Lebanese refugees pouring in from their bombarded villages closer to the border. UNRWA reported an influx of nearly 5,000 non-camp Palestinians and displaced Lebanese refugees into the three camps.<sup>23</sup> The Palestinian residents of the camps brought blankets and food to the UNRWA schools which were used to shelter the displaced.<sup>24</sup> The absurdity of the situation was not lost on the Palestinians, as Ibrahim al-Ali, a Palestinian social worker, said that “the irony is that refugees are accepting citizens from their own country.”<sup>25</sup> Any rivalries between Palestinians and their hosts were forgotten. A Rashidiyya camp official said, “In days like these, politics are something else.”<sup>26</sup> In the southern suburbs of Beirut (the *Dahiya*), several hundred families –primarily mixed Lebanese-Palestinian ones residing outside the camp– moved into the Burj al-Barajna camp. Most were taken in by relatives; others were housed in public buildings and supported by local NGOs.

As the Saida municipal infrastructure was overwhelmed by the number of Lebanese refugees fleeing the fighting to their south, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Saida, Ain al-Hilwa, and its smaller neighbour Mieh-Mieh, also took in more than 5,000 displaced persons from the Tyre area, most of whom were hosted by Palestinian families in their homes, while the UNRWA facilities in Saida opened their doors to 762 Shi'a refugees in the coming days.<sup>27</sup> As the new Shi'a refugees settled amidst the longer-term Palestinian refugees, it increasingly became clear to both that Israeli attacks against civilian populations and local political re-alignments had put the formerly standoffish populations on the same side. One Lebanese refugee at Ain al-Hilwa marvelled at the transformed situation, "I never thought I would have to flee to a Palestinian camp. I always thought that the war was mainly between Israel and the Palestinians."<sup>28</sup> A Palestinian physician in Ain al-Hilwa was also acutely aware of the similarities between the 1982 and 2006 invasions of Lebanon by Israel: "In 1982, we were on the run, and now it's the Lebanese." He continued, "But believe me; we are not welcoming Israeli soldiers into Lebanon," obliquely referring to the jubilation with which the residents of southern Lebanon had greeted the Israelis so many years ago, and indicating that today, solidary sentiments took the place of past hostilities.<sup>29</sup> Palestinian residents of the camps repeatedly told reporters and other observers that the war indeed showed the necessary and "natural brotherhood" of the Palestinians and the displaced. After all, many indicated, they supported Hizbullah's struggle against their common adversary and by hosting the displaced Lebanese, the Palestinians were only exhibiting this support.

Palestinians could play host to the Lebanese refugees because, surprisingly, in the Israeli air campaign waged against Lebanese residential areas, the Palestinian refugee camps were by-and-large spared the kind of destruction many of their neighbours had suffered. Rashidiyya was struck in the first day of the war and lost one resident.<sup>30</sup> Burj al-Shamali and al-Buss were not directly targeted but were hit as the neighbourhood in which it is located was bombarded.<sup>31</sup> All three camps were left without any electricity for the duration of the hostilities.<sup>32</sup>

Ain al-Hilwa was the only camp to be specifically targeted three times.<sup>33</sup> Ain al-Hilwa has a reputation as the most politically militant refugee camp in Lebanon, and has over the years become the hospitable camp to Islamist Palestinian organizations. The camp also houses the offices of several smaller political groups known to have cordial relations with Hizbullah. During the first Israeli attack against Ain al-Hilwa, on 9 August, two missiles were fired at the densely populated camp.<sup>34</sup> The Israeli military claimed that it was targeting a Hizbullah fighter's house. In fact the target had been the home of Munir Maqdah, a Palestinian militant known to oppose Fatah policies and to act as an occasional Hizbullah ally. The attack destroyed a small residential building and damaged a political office nearby.<sup>35</sup> At least two civilians were killed and many others were injured.<sup>36</sup> On 13 August, during the intensified Israeli bombing campaign in the hours leading to the cease-fire, Israeli fighter jets again attacked Ain al-Hilwa. The buildings targeted and destroyed were a kindergarten and the offices of a drinking-water project known to be funded by an Iranian charity. The attacks killed a security guard and a teenager sleeping next door and injured fifteen others.<sup>37</sup> The third attack took place only an hour before the declaration of the ceasefire, and killed a sanitation worker employed by the UNRWA and injured three others. The bombing also destroyed several buildings on the edges of the camp and displaced eighteen Palestinian families.<sup>38</sup>

I was told that during the intensive bombings of the *Dahiya* neighbourhoods of Harat Hrayk and Burj al-Barajna, the precarious buildings of the Burj al-Barajna camp were moving from side to side “as if dancing” and that several weaker structures had collapsed from the force of nearby explosions.<sup>39</sup> Several Burj al-Barajna camp residents were caught in the bombing of the *Dahiya* and perished alongside their neighbours.<sup>40</sup> Their images, banded with black, adorn the pock-marked walls of the Burj al-Barajna neighbourhood. Although camp residents with whom I spoke had survived the Israeli invasion of 1982 and several subsequent conflicts, many told me that nothing compared with the intensity of the bombardment they experienced during the 33 days of the July War.

### REALIGNED RELATIONS AND UNCERTAIN FUTURES

Although the July War of 2006 will yet reshape the Lebanese political landscape, as regards the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, it has only thrown the spotlight on the realignments *already underway* between the Palestinian refugees and various Lebanese actors. An assessment of the Palestinian refugees’ situation in Lebanon after the July War highlights three interrelated themes: the continued socioeconomic marginalisation of the Palestinian refugees; Palestinian anxieties about disarmament; and the consolidation of solidary relations between Palestinian refugees and Hizbullah, which are not only based on ideological kinship, but also the similarity of their circumstances.

The years since the end of the Lebanese civil war and leading to the July War have not been kind to Palestinians. Their position not only within the Lebanese society but also within the broader transnational Palestinian community has been much reduced. If in the 1960s and 1970s they were at the heart of the Palestinian national movement, today they are on the margins of it. Their vocal nationalism and history of sacrifice places an obligation on the Palestinian Authority to take note of their demands, even if only in the realm of rhetoric;<sup>41</sup> however, over the years, most Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have felt entirely abandoned by the PA. As the refugees increasingly despair of PA support for their right to repatriate to their homes in Israel or even to the putative state of Palestine, the refugees find other courses and futures foreclosed.<sup>42</sup>

In turn, almost all Lebanese groups are vociferous proponents of the Palestinian right of return, if for no other reason because Palestinian return would result in their decampment from Lebanon. Most Lebanese groups are opposed to granting Palestinians further civil rights for fear of their *tawtin* or “implantation” in Lebanon. Since the end of the civil war, laws have been passed and decrees have been issued which prohibit Palestinian ownership or inheritance of properties in Lebanon, limit their access to university education, and place them under greater surveillance and control. Even the decree which has allowed Palestinian refugees access to menial and clerical jobs is viewed with suspicion by the refugees. After all, the decree was issued after the Syrian military’s withdrawal from Lebanon led to a massive shortage of manual (Syrian) labour there. Because the decree still bars Palestinians from professional positions, most attribute this munificence to Lebanon’s appetite for cheap manual labour. The decree has made it easier for some refugees to obtain manual work, but for many others it may be meaningless, as many cannot afford the hundreds of dollars required to secure a work permit.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, explicit policies which circumscribe Palestinian rights are accompanied by practices and projects which –perhaps unintentionally– further



marginalise them. For example, for the 20,000 Palestinian refugees who live in the Burj al-Barajna camp, the Lebanese government's ostensible reconstruction and "development" plans that funds the Airport Expressway near their camp –Project Elissar– is indeed not really about "development." Elissar has had the authority to expropriate land, and it has done so by slicing a gash through the open space separating the camp from the neighbourhood. In effect, Elissar has deprived thousands of camp children from their only playground. In fact, a great deal of struggle by Palestinians –as well as their Shi'a neighbours– went into minutely changing the route of the Expressway so as to prevent the destruction of houses in the Burj al-Barajna neighbourhood and camp. The same sort of struggle went into preserving the Shatila cemetery from the bulldozers that threatened its destruction in service of road-building. Indeed, the Shatila cemetery is today located –rather incongruously– in a traffic roundabout. Over the last decade and a half, the politics of reconstruction have placed the Sunni elite, led by Hariri, at loggerheads with their co-religionist Palestinians, while the Hizbullah-run municipalities which surround Palestinian camps in southern Beirut have formed cordial and cooperative relations with the camp administrators. The Palestinian alliance with Hizbullah in Lebanon belies the possibilities of a Sunni-Shi'a rift so ominously advanced from a variety of quarters. Whether or not a reconstruction project following the July War 2006 will exacerbate the spatial pressure on Palestinians or result in other realignments is yet to be seen. A seeming competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia to fund reconstruction is emerging which may yet affect the Palestinian camps' access to resources in as yet indeterminate ways. Furthermore, the need for construction workers and other such menial labourers may open more work opportunities for Palestinians in the coming years.

The second theme highlighted by the War is the calls for Palestinian disarmament in Lebanon. In 2004, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 –sponsored by the US and France and supported by influential Sunni and Maronite leaders, including the late Rafiq Hariri– called "upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon" and demanded "the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias."<sup>44</sup> From the very beginning, it was obvious to all concerned parties that the militias concerned were Hizbullah and the Palestinian factions. After the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, external and internal pressure for disarmament on the Palestinians increased perceptibly. Indeed, Israeli spokespersons repeatedly stated the goals of their war against Lebanon in 2006 to be the forcible implementation of the terms of UNSC1559. In the wake of the July War, it increasingly seems unlikely that there will be an immediate move to disarm Hizbullah, but it is not wholly clear whether the Lebanese state will insist on disarming Palestinians.

The Palestinian reluctance to give up their arms arises from their experience of extreme violence during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), when thousands of Palestinians were killed –sometimes in horrific massacres– and their camps and communities were attacked, destroyed, and razed in successive sieges.<sup>45</sup> The refugees believe that the guns in the hands of the factions inside the camps are their ultimate protection, and find the calls for their disarmament distressing. Indeed, one long-time resident of Shatila refugee camp told a reporter, "I'm frightened, frightened to death. If we are disarmed, who's going to take care of us? We were disarmed once before, and look what happened,"<sup>46</sup> alluding to the Sabra/Shatila massacres which occurred after the PLO was evacuated from Lebanon in 1982.

In addition to the arms held by security corps inside the camps, a handful of small military bases outside the camps are operated by the Syria-sponsored Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) and Fatah-Intifada. Prior to the July War, activities to disarm these groups had accelerated and even had led to clashes between PFLP-GC fighters and the Lebanese army in May 2006. The sense that disarming these groups is inevitable is bolstered by Abu Mazen's implicit agreement with the Lebanese government's plan "to disarm Palestinian groups outside the country's 12 refugee camps in six months."<sup>47</sup> The extent to which the Lebanese state will be willing or able to disarm these groups depends on a constellation of factors which include the relative calm within Lebanon, the fortune of Hizbullah in Lebanese politics, the strength of Syria's hands in the coming months, and external pressures from Israel, US, or indeed various Palestinian groups in favour of or opposed to disarming these anti-PLO and pro-Syrian groups. What the war has done is that it has simultaneously – and paradoxically – strengthened the prestige of Hizbullah *and* increased the legitimacy of the Lebanese military. If Hizbullah chooses to observe local sensitivities as it seems to have been in the last few weeks –speaking directly and apologising to the Lebanese people and attempting to assuage their anxieties about Hizbullah's actions– it may not want to interfere in the disarmament of Fatah-Intifada and PFLP-GC. Thus the shape and balance of military power in Lebanon remains unpredictable and uncertain.

What *can* however be asserted with some certainty is the extent to which the July War has consolidated relations between Palestinian refugees and Hizbullah. An obvious basis of solidary sentiment between these two political actors is the devotion of both to the Palestinian cause. While the definition of the "cause" given by Palestinian nationalists and the Islamists of Hizbullah may be at variance, there is no doubt that the ideology of militant anti-Zionism is shared by both. Hizbullah has over the years been careful to nurture its pan-Arab nationalist credentials, and its political credibility been massively enhanced by its action and rhetoric in the July War. If before the war, the Hizbullah leader, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, was respected among Palestinian refugees, he is now, after Hizbullah's impressive military performance in the war, wildly popular. In my visits to Palestinian refugee camps, I have found the prevalence of the images of Nasrallah and of Hizbullah flags striking. While before the July War, such images were to be found here and there on the margins of the camp, their overwhelming conspicuousness throughout the camp was definitely something new. The triumphant music praising Hizbullah, Nasrallah, and Katyushas play just as loudly inside the camps as they do outside them in the Shi'a neighbourhoods. If before the war, Hizbullah's al-Manar had been only one of several news channels playing on the camp televisions, it has become a far more prominent source of news for the Palestinians in the camp.<sup>48</sup> Also remarkable is that today even relatively apolitical youth in the camps speak admiringly of Nasrallah. Legends about the man circulate around the camp, and Hizbullah's steadfastness, discipline, and credibility are considered "necessary if we are to liberate Palestine."<sup>49</sup>

But the possible solidarity between Palestinian and the Shi'a has a material basis also. As reconstruction efforts begin, and as Hizbullah distributes cash payments to families whose houses were destroyed in the bombings, it has compensated those Palestinian families formerly resident in Shi'a neighbourhoods who have lost their homes with the same generosity and efficiency that it has their Shi'a neighbours and it has not made any sectarian or national distinction in

distribution of aid.<sup>50</sup> More importantly, what becomes increasingly obvious as one travels through the *Dahiya*, the South, and the Bika' Valley, all predominated by the Shi'a community of Lebanon, is how much the July War of 2006 has been a war against the poor. Much of the infrastructure destroyed is that which allows for the poorer Lebanese to work and live. The destroyed Airport Bridge in Beirut is, more than anything else, a transport hub for people without private transport and a gateway to the southern suburbs of Beirut. Its destruction makes the people passing through it so much less mobile; and the people most frequently passing through, over and under the Airport Bridge, are overwhelmingly the poorer residents of Beirut. The destruction of entire *Dahiya* districts has also decimated hundreds of small businesses and put thousands of people out of work. The southern villages upon whom the wrath of the Israeli military was visited were already desperately poor and could hardly afford the cost of reconstruction in time, human effort, and money. Throughout the South, the *Dahiya*, and the Bika', Israeli bombardment has directly targeted Hizbullah kindergartens, schools, orphanages and clinics.<sup>51</sup> These services were intended for the impoverished Shi'a communities that are by-and-large the Hizbullah constituency. Their obliteration further deprives this community of much needed social services.

In a sense, however, this war against the poor brings the Shi'a community closer than ever to the Palestinian refugees, whose own history is the story of impoverishment, marginalisation, and dispossession at the hands of the Israeli state and, later, the Lebanese elite. In fact, it is astonishing to hear some Lebanese elite repeat the same hostile rhetoric about the Shi'a as they did about the Palestinians, considering them non-Lebanese agents of foreign powers bent on destroying Lebanon. This hostile rhetoric wilfully ignores the deep class and confessional lines of fissure that run within the Lebanese society and whose realignments have led to the cycles of hostility and civil war over the last fifty years. The animus in such reactions stems not only from sectarian suspicions, but as importantly, from the sense of uncertainty that comes from physical mobility and social mobilisation of previously disempowered social groups. The enhanced visibility of the Shi'a populations today, their amplified urban presence, and their representation by an increasingly powerful political actor, Hizbullah, ignites the same sorts of anxieties that Palestinian social and political mobilisation in Lebanon did in the 1960s and 1970s. This same similarity of circumstance could potentially lead to a transformation of sentiments of solidarity between Palestinians and Hizbullah into concrete political organisation.

However, as with most things in Lebanon, a broad series of sociopolitical factors and a wide spectrum of international, regional, and local political actors introduce a complexity into the issue that would make any prediction hasty. Among the factors that could influence the Palestinians' future in Lebanon are the precarious future of the Palestinian Authority in the Occupied Territories, the direction and role of Hizbullah in Lebanese politics, and the increased competition between US's Arab allies in the region (namely Saudi, Egypt and Jordan) and Iran which may play itself out in the Lebanese political arena. As important is the possibility of another conflict as the Israeli cabinet teeters on the edge; imperilled Israeli governments have in the past recuperated their domestic support through waging wars against Palestinians and other regional adversaries. Undeniably, the only course of action that can be predicted with any certainty today is the large degree of uncertainty about the future of Palestinians in Lebanon, or indeed the future political landscape of Lebanon itself.

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ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London, 1979), p. 104.
- <sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Umm Jamal, Burj al-Barajna camp, 4 March 2002.
- <sup>3</sup> Of more than a dozen Palestinian refugee camps, only two –Nahr al-Barid and Baddawi– are located in the predominantly Sunni northern Lebanon.
- <sup>4</sup> Rex Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival: The PLO in Lebanon* (New York, 1990); Helena Cobban, *Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (Cambridge, 1984); Walid Khalidi, *Conflict and Violence in Lebanon: Confrontation in the Middle East* (Cambridge MA, 1983).
- <sup>5</sup> Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival*, p. 136.
- <sup>6</sup> Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival*, pp. 134-136; Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: PLO Decision-Making during the 1982 War in Lebanon* (New York, 1985), pp. 18-20.
- <sup>7</sup> Khalidi, *Under Siege*, p. 20.
- <sup>8</sup> Khalidi, *Under Siege*, pp. 114-115.
- <sup>9</sup> Bayan al-Hout, *Sabra and Shatila, September 1982* (Ann Arbor, 1984).
- <sup>10</sup> Al-Hout, *Sabra and Shatila*, p. 85.
- <sup>11</sup> Al-Hout, *Sabra and Shatila*, p. 345.
- <sup>12</sup> Brynen, *Sanctuary and Survival*, p. 188; Elizabeth Picard, *Lebanon, A Shattered Country: Myths and Realities of the Wars in Lebanon* (New York, 2002), pp. 134-137.
- <sup>13</sup> On the War of the Camps, see Elaine C. Hagopian, *Amal and the Palestinians: Understanding the Battle of the Camps* (Washington DC, 1985) and Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: the Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed Books, 1984).
- <sup>14</sup> Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 593-595.
- <sup>15</sup> Pauline Cutting, *Children of the Siege* (New York, 1989), p. 168; Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, p. 591; Suzy Wighton, *One Day at a Time: Diaries from a Palestinian Camp* (London, 1991), p. 117; p. 138.
- <sup>16</sup> Khalidi, *Under Siege*, p. 88.
- <sup>17</sup> On Hizbullah see A. Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, 2004) and Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: A Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin, 1987).
- <sup>18</sup> In one instance, on 13 February 1987, the driver of a vehicle attempting to deliver milk to the camps was shot dead. Nevertheless, on the same evening, Hizbullah activists once again attempted re-delivery of the supplies and were successful this time. See Cutting, *Children of the Siege*, p. 178.
- <sup>19</sup> The relationship between Palestinians and Hizbullah, however, is conducted on a number of different geographic and material terrains and as such is complicated by local politics, ideological solidarities, regional considerations, and the calculus of power. See my “‘Standing with My Brother’: Hizbullah, Palestinians, and the Limits of Solidarity” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (forthcoming 2007).
- <sup>20</sup> Simon Haddad, *The Palestinian Impasse in Lebanon: The Politics of Refugee Integration* (Sussex, 2004).
- <sup>21</sup> Under the terms of the Cairo Accords (1969) between the PLO and the Lebanese state, Palestinian refugees control the administration and security of their camps.
- <sup>22</sup> See Daniel Bernstein, “A Price of Fighting Terrorism” in *Washington Post* (10 August 2006), p. A23. On “pushing the PLO out of southern Lebanon” see *The New York Times*, 7 June, 1982, p. B1.
- <sup>23</sup> Maria Gonzalez-Ubeda, “From Flight to Relief: Palestine Refugees and the Cease-Fire” in UNRWA, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/stories/CeaseFire.html> accessed on 3 September, 2006.
- <sup>24</sup> See Dawud Ibrahim, “Mukhayyat al-Laji’in al-Filastiniyin fin Lubnan Tatahawwal ila malaz l-Laji’in al-Lubnani” in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 24 July, 2006; Anthony Shadid, “Lebanese Families Find Shelter at Palestinian Camp” in *Washington Post* 25 July, 2006.
- <sup>25</sup> Shadid, “Lebanese Families Find Shelter”, p. A8.
- <sup>26</sup> Shadid, “Lebanese Families Find Shelter”, p. A8.
- <sup>27</sup> Maria Gonzalez-Ubeda, “From Flight to Relief?”.
- <sup>28</sup> See Ferry Biedermann, “Role reversal as Palestinians give shelter to Shia refugees” in *Financial Times*, 5 August, 2006), p. 5.
- <sup>29</sup> Daniel Williams, “Lebanese, Displaced by Fighting, Find Refuge Among Palestinians” in *Bloomberg*, 14 August, 2006).
- <sup>30</sup> Biederman, “Role Reversal”, p. 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibrahim, “Mukhayyat”.
- <sup>32</sup> URWA, “The Situation of Palestine Refugees in South Lebanon” in [http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2006/SouthLebSituation\\_Aug06.pdf](http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2006/SouthLebSituation_Aug06.pdf) accessed on 3 September, 2006.

- <sup>33</sup> UNRWA, "UNRWA Strongly Condemns the Killing of its Staff Member" in [http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2006/leb\\_15aug06.pdf](http://www.un.org/unrwa/news/releases/pr-2006/leb_15aug06.pdf) accessed on 3 September, 2006.
- <sup>34</sup> AFP/AP/An-Nahar, "Morning Roundup: U.S. and France at Odds on Ending Conflict in Lebanon Where Body Count Continues to Rise" in *Nabarnet.com*, 9 August, 2006), <http://www.nabarnet.com/domino/tn/NewsDesk.nsf/getstory?openform&F947AA5331390779C22571C50020EDA5> accessed 9 August 2006; Paula Zahn, "Transcript of Paula Zahn Now" in CNN, 8 August, 2006, <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0608/08/pzn.01.html> accessed on 8 August 2006.
- <sup>35</sup> UNRWA, "UNRWA Delivers Aid to Camps in Southern Lebanon" in [http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/stories/Sidon\\_aug06.html](http://www.un.org/unrwa/refugees/stories/Sidon_aug06.html) accessed on 3 September, 2006.
- <sup>36</sup> AFP/AP/An-Nahar, "Morning Roundup".
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- <sup>39</sup> Personal interview with Umm Mahmud, Burj al-Barajna, 30 August, 2006.
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- <sup>42</sup> Indeed, in early 2005, the Palestinian president Abu Mazen controversially called for the refugees accepting citizenship in their countries of residence.
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- <sup>44</sup> United Nations, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 – The Situation in the Middle East" at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/498/92/PDF/N0449892.pdf?OpenElement> accessed 3 September, 2006
- <sup>45</sup> Three of the most devastating instances of violence recounted by Palestinians are the Tal al-Za'tar siege and massacre in 1975 (4,250 Palestinians killed); the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982 (at least 1,200 refugees killed) and the War of the Camps between 1985 and 1988 (at least 5,000 people in several camps killed). For massacres as central historic events in the lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, see Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: the Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge, forthcoming).
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- <sup>47</sup> Lin Noueihed, "UN does not expect Hizbollah to be disarmed by force" in *Reuters*, 16 August, 2006) at <http://www.tiscali.co.uk/news/newswire.php/news/reuters/2006/03/26/world/un-does-not-expect-hizbollah-to-be-disarmed-by-force.html> accessed on 3 September 2006; "Abbas Discusses Arms in Lebanon" in *BBC*, 18 October, 2006) at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4354600.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4354600.stm) accessed on 3 September, 2006.
- <sup>48</sup> The same was true of audiences in the Arab world, where in a survey of Arab satellite channel viewers, IPSOS-STAT reported a jump in al-Manar ranking from number 83 in 2006 to number 10 in July and August, 2006. See Amir Mizroch, "Al-Manar TV soars into ratings 'Top 10'" in *Jerusalem Post*, 25 August, 2006.
- <sup>49</sup> Personal Interview with Abu Iskandar, Shatila camp, 30 August, 2006.
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# HIZBULLAH AND THE IDF ACCEPTING NEW REALITIES ALONG THE BLUE LINE

Nicholas Blanford\*

The 34-day war between Lebanese Hizbullah guerrillas and Israel has fundamentally changed the dynamic that existed along the Lebanon-Israel border for the past six years. While it is too soon to say with any degree of certainty how the situation will evolve in the coming months, certain lessons can be drawn from the conflict that will have profound implications for Hizbullah, both politically and militarily, and for the Israel Defense Force (IDF).

The decision over who won a war in which neither side was crushed beyond question tends to be based on perception and spin. Such was the case in the war between Israel and Hizbullah. Hizbullah argues that it fought the IDF to a standstill in south Lebanon, inflicting a powerful blow against the IDF's threat of deterrence. In the Arab and Islamic world, Hizbullah's stock has risen considerably, transcending the Shiite-Sunni divide. Iran and Syria, key members of the emerging regional anti-Western axis, have been strengthened by the military success of their Hizbullah ally. Israel achieved none of its stated aims in its war against Hizbullah. The military blows inflicted against Hizbullah were sustainable, its military wing continues to exist, its fighters remain in south Lebanon and it is unlikely that they will face a serious challenge from the Lebanese army nor a beefed up UN Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL).

On the other hand, while Israel's ground campaign may not have been as successful as initially hoped, UN Security Council Resolution 1701 contains the seeds of a new improved situation for Israel along its northern border. Hizbullah is no longer in a position to establish a new military infrastructure along the Blue Line, the UN name for the boundary separating Lebanon from Israel and Israeli-occupied Syria. The domestic recriminations against Hizbullah for dragging Lebanon into a devastating war may also play into Israel's hands as the Shiite party's margin for maneuver vis-à-vis the confrontation with Israel has narrowed.

## PREPARATIONS

This was a war that was six years in the making. Ever since the IDF withdrew unilaterally and unconditionally from south Lebanon in May 2000, Hizbullah and the IDF have been preparing for a resumption of major hostilities. From the summer of 2000, Hizbullah began building an intricate and secret military infrastructure in south Lebanon consisting of tunnels, bunkers, observation posts while stockpiling large quantities of artillery rockets of varying calibers, anti-tank missiles (ATMs), mortar shells, food, water and medical supplies.

Although the details of its military installations in south Lebanon were secret, Hizbullah officials repeatedly stated that the group was "preparing for all

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eventualities”. In February 2002, a Hizbullah official said that a war with Israel was inevitable. “This will happen and we are constantly preparing for it,” the official said.<sup>1</sup>

Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hizbullah’s deputy secretary-general, elaborated on this theme, saying “over the past six years, we have been working day and night to prepare, equip, and train because we never trusted this enemy. We knew its intentions and its plans and we were aware that it wanted to attack Lebanon and control it.”<sup>2</sup>

Its arsenal of artillery rockets comprised mainly standard 122mm Katyushas with a range of 12 miles, long used by Hizbullah to strike targets in northern Israel. It also acquired hundreds of long-range rockets (long-range in the context of the Israel-Hizbullah conflict is a rocket that has a caliber above 122mm and a range further than 12 miles), including 220mm Syrian rockets, the Fajr-3, a 240mm rocket with a 43-kilometer maximum range, the Fajr-5, a 333mm rocket with a 75-kilometer maximum range and the Zelzal-2, a 610mm rocket with a range of 210 kilometers. During the course of the war, it is thought that Hizbullah fired all these varieties albeit under different names, such as Raad-1, Raad-2 and Khaybar.

Most of these rockets were deployed in south Lebanon, close to the expected battlefield, rather than stashed away in more secure locations in Hizbullah’s stronghold in the eastern Bekaa valley. In the event of hostilities breaking out, Israeli Air Force (IAF) jets could interdict trucks transporting rockets from the Bekaa to the south, as indeed, the IAF attempted to do during the war. The rocket arsenal represented Hizbullah’s strategic weapon with which to sow as much material destruction as possible in Israel and more importantly to weaken the appetite of the often fickle Israeli public for a prolonged military campaign against Lebanon. It was imperative, therefore, that Hizbullah retained the capability of continuing to fire rockets into Israel regardless of the measures undertaken by the IDF and IAF.

Hizbullah’s principal weapon in confronting IDF ground forces was its array of anti-armor weapons. These included Sagger AT-3 wire-guided ATM, dating from the 1960s, Spigot AT-4s, the US-made TOW and the shoulder fired RPG (Rocket Propelled Grenade) 29, which features a tandem warhead capable of punching through some explosive reactive armor found on tanks. All four weapons have been used by Hizbullah in south Lebanon before the war. The Sagger was a work horse missile which Hizbullah used in large numbers (as many as 30-40 at a time) in attacks against IDF positions in the Shebaa Farms, a 12-square mile mountainside running along Lebanon’s south-east border with the Golan Heights. The RPG-29 was first used by Hizbullah in November 2005 when it launched a coordinated, but unsuccessful, assault on an IDF position in the village of Ghajar at the foot of the Shebaa Farms with the goal of abducting Israeli soldiers.

Hizbullah employed several new ATMs during the war, including the AT-5 Spandrel, which has a shaped charge warhead and a range of 4 kilometers, the AT-13 Metis-M, with a tandem warhead and a range of 1.5 kilometers, and the AT-14 Kornet-E which has a semi-automatic command-to-line-of-sight (SACLOS) laser beamriding guidance system and a range of 5 kilometers. Although it was widely anticipated that Hizbullah had long-range artillery rockets and advanced ATMs, there were two additional surprises. The first was Hizbullah’s use of the C-802 Silkworm anti-ship missile, a 715-kilogram radar-guided cruise missile with a range of 120 kilometers. The missile was first used on the evening of July 14 to strike and

cripple the Israeli navy's flagship, the INS Hanit, which was some 10 kilometers off the Beirut coast. Hizbullah claimed two more C-802 attacks against Israeli ships, both off the Tyre coastline in south Lebanon. Although Israel denied any ships were hit after the INS Hanit, shortly after Hizbullah announced it had struck a third ship on August 11, the author observed a thick plume of smoke on the horizon south-east of Tyre which lasted for about 20 minutes. Still, the presence of the C-802 led Israeli ships to maintain a far greater distance from the Lebanese coastline than in the past.

The other surprise was that despite acquiring extensive missile capabilities in terms of artillery rockets and ATMs, Hizbullah does not appear to have received advanced anti-aircraft missiles. Hizbullah has employed shoulder-fired SAM-7 Strellas for years, although it has been widely reported since at least 2001 that it had acquired the more-advanced SAM-18 Grouse. There were no reports during the war that suggested Hizbullah was using advanced SAM systems. Nonetheless, there appeared to be less helicopter gunship activity in the skies above Lebanon than in the past, and a greater reliance instead on missile-firing reconnaissance drones. Helicopters are more vulnerable to shoulder-fired SAMs than jets or low-signature drones.<sup>3</sup>

Other than the permanent observation posts along the Blue Line, such as the fortified position on Sheikh Abbad hill near the village of Houla, most of Hizbullah's construction activities were shrouded in secrecy and kept to remoter tracts of the border when the group established mini security zones, off-limits to the general public. There were persistent reports over those six years of residents of villages in remote areas of the border being kept awake at night by distant explosions as Hizbullah dynamited new bunkers and positions. The extent and thoroughness of this military infrastructure was under-estimated by observers and by the IDF, despite the latter enjoying extensive reconnaissance capabilities through overflights by jets and drones as well as possible assets on the ground in south Lebanon. Israeli troops came across some of these bunkers during the war, finding spacious well-equipped rooms 25 feet underground with side tunnels, storage chambers and TV cameras mounted at the entrances for security.<sup>4</sup>

The main access points across the border were sown with large mines, designed to destroy Israeli armored vehicles, including Merkava Main Battle Tanks. In June 2002, a shepherd inadvertently stumbled across one of these bombs and alerted the local police, much to Hizbullah's annoyance. It consisted of 180 kilograms of plastic explosive that had been buried several feet beneath a road 500 yards from the border. On July 12, the first day on the war, a Merkava was destroyed when it tripped off one of Hizbullah's anti-tank mines, estimated at 300 kilograms of explosive, killing the four-man crew.

Hizbullah also deployed trained snipers at key battlefronts to pick off IDF soldiers when opportunities arose. Although sniping is a relatively new tactic by Hizbullah, the group's marksmen have struck at least twice during the six years before the war. The first occasion was in October 2003 when a Hizbullah sniper shot dead a member of Israel's Egoz unit on the border near Kfar Kila a day after IAF jets bombed a training camp for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command outside Damascus. The second occasion came in July 2004, the same day a senior Hizbullah commander was assassinated in a car bomb explosion in Beirut. The sniper shot dead two IDF soldiers fixing an antenna on the roof of their outpost south of Aitta Shaab village – two shots to the head and one to the chest from a range of 500 yards.

In summation, the IDF faced a military force in south Lebanon that was well-equipped with appropriate weapons suited to its guerrilla-style hit and run operations, was well-trained and proficient in the use of these weapons, was intimately familiar with the terrain in which it was operating, and, crucially, was highly motivated, drawing upon religious faith and a deep-rooted sentiment of defending its land from foreign aggression. “What we face is an infantry division with state-of-the-art weaponry – night-vision gear, advanced rifles, well-equipped – deployed along our border,” said Brig. Gen. Yossi Kuperwasser, who until July was director of analysis for Israeli military intelligence. “They have some of the most advanced antitank missiles in the world”.<sup>5</sup>

## THE WAR

To the east of Naqoura, a small fishing village on the Mediterranean coast, 1.5 miles north of the border with Israel and location of UNIFIL’s headquarters, lies a rocky uninhabited hillside and deep ravine of some 12 square miles covered in a dense undergrowth of juniper bushes and scrub oak. The hillside rises to a crest along which runs the border with Israel. Over the past three years, much of this hillside was closed off by Hizbullah to the general public during which the group established an unseen, but clearly formidable network of tunnels, bunkers and weapons depots.

From almost the first day of the war until shortly before the ceasefire on August 14, an estimated 10-15 small teams of Hizbullah fighters holed up in the area were able to withstand constant IDF shelling and IAF air strikes to continue firing rockets into northern Israel, astonishingly, just a few hundred yards from the border itself. By the end of the fighting, the Hizbullah units were cut off from the safety of areas further north after the IDF pushed across the border to their east and circled around them to reach the sea to their north. Trapped by the border to the south, the sea to the west and IDF lines to the east and north, some of the Hizbullah fighters attacked the IDF in and around the villages of Teir Harfa and Biyada while others continued launching rockets into Israel.

The example of the Labboune hillside was indicative of the tenacity, resilience and preparedness of the Hizbullah units operating close to the Blue Line, both those in charge of artillery rockets, as well as combat teams engaging with the IDF. Experienced UNIFIL officers admitted being baffled at how the Hizbullah teams were able to survive the intense artillery bombing and multiple air strikes against the hillside, surmising that the defensive fortifications were far superior than anyone had previously imagined.<sup>6</sup>

The same level of preparation was evident elsewhere. In the early hours of August 6, Israeli commandoes staged a raid on a building on the edge of Tyre believed to contain a Hizbullah team which had been firing long-range rockets into northern Israel from nearby orange groves. The raiders, backed by helicopter gunships, killed at least two Hizbullah fighters, with two Israelis severely wounded in an intense five-minute firefight. Yet hours later, long-range rockets were being fired from the same location just north of Tyre, and it continued to be a source of fire until the end of fighting a week later.

Estimates of Hizbullah numbers actively engaged in ground operations in south Lebanon varied, although experienced observers put the figure at between 800 to 1,000, mainly split into semi-autonomous units of 12 to 15, or larger groups numbering 50 to 100. These units remained in contact with Hizbullah’s

headquarters using sophisticated encrypted communications that defied the IDF's jamming techniques. Local groups of fighters operating in two or three neighboring villages used a simple but effective code to communicate based on personal knowledge of each other and the local area. Each fighter had a code number which he used over the air.

As best as one can tell, the fighters were deployed in the villages throughout the south, representing successive lines of defense. For example, the fighters defending the border town of Bint Jbeil were mainly drawn from the town or the neighboring villages. Those that fought in Aitta Shaab, a village less than a mile from the border and scene of some of the most intense fighting, were all local residents. But these teams were no second-rate home guard. They were battle-hardened veterans, most of them aged from their late 20s to mid 30s, many of them with specialist training in anti-armor missiles and sniping.

Like in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the IDF under-estimated the impact of Hizbullah's ATMs on its armored vehicles, even though it had intelligence that the Lebanese group had acquired advanced ATM systems. Hizbullah's anti-armor teams made devastating use of their missiles, striking 46 tanks, penetrating the armor of 15, and 14 other armored vehicles, of which five were penetrated. At least 50 of the IDF's 118 fatalities were killed by ATMs.<sup>7</sup> Four tanks were knocked out by large anti-tank mines, killing all the crews of three. The belly of the fourth tank had protective armor and only one of the six-man crew died. In Wadi Salouqi, a deep brush-covered valley with numerous tributaries running up the central sector of south Lebanon's border district, Hizbullah ATM teams ambushed an IDF armored column advancing on the village of Ghandouriyeh, hitting 11 tanks, killing 11 soldiers.

There was no clear line of separation between the advancing IDF in south Lebanon and its Hizbullah foes, with IDF troops repeatedly stating that they were coming under fire from all directions. Hizbullah used the older AT-3 Sagger missiles to deadly effect by firing them into buildings where IDF troops were housed, the ageing missiles still capable of punching through cinder block walls. Two days before the ceasefire, Hizbullah shot down a troop transport helicopter just south of Yater village, killing the five-man crew. Hizbullah said it brought down the helicopter using a new kind of missile called the Waad.<sup>8</sup> However, security sources in south Lebanon told the author that the missile was an ATM and that the helicopter was on the ground when it was hit, having disembarked 30 IDF soldiers minutes earlier.

By the time a cessation of hostilities took effect on August 14, IDF ground forces were deployed in a series of mainly hilltop locations, the deepest location being Ghandouriyeh, 12 kilometers west of the border. However, unlike Israel's 1985-2000 occupation zone in south Lebanon, there was no clear line of separation between the IDF and Hizbullah. Indeed, the IDF was not even in control of all territory between its forward positions and the border. On the first day of the ceasefire, it was possible to reach Bint Jbeil and Aitta Shaab in the western sector of the border district – which lay behind the IDF's frontline positions in Haddatha, Rashaf and Yatar – without even seeing a single IDF soldier.

## AFTERMATH

At the outset of the war against Lebanon, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert listed three conditions that would end the operation: the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1559, among the clauses of which is a demand for the dismantling of “all Lebanese and non Lebanese militias,” a reference to Hizbullah and armed Palestinian groups; an end to rocket attacks against Israel from Lebanon; the return of the two kidnapped soldiers.

None of these three conditions were met by the time the August 14 cessation of hostilities took hold, heightening a public perception that Hizbullah won the war by not losing while the IDF lost by not winning. That explains to some extent the situation on the ground in the immediate aftermath of the hostilities. Hizbullah said it would abide by the cessation of hostilities while reserving the right to resist the continued Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory. “... as long as there are Israeli military moves, Israeli field aggression, and there are Israeli soldiers occupying our land, it is our natural right to confront and fight them, and to defend our lands, houses, and ourselves. ... We will practice this resistance in the way we deem as useful and to our benefit,” Nasrallah said in his first public reaction to Resolution 1701.<sup>9</sup>

However, Hizbullah chose not to attack IDF troops after August 14 and instead abided by the ceasefire, concentrating its resources on a massive welfare and reconstruction program. Clearly, in the immediate aftermath of the war, Hizbullah is content to rest on its laurels and rebuild its support base in the Shiite community and fend off what are sure to be strengthened domestic calls for its disarming in the weeks and months ahead. Many Shiites privately blamed Hizbullah for ruining their livelihoods and turning them into refugees, although such sentiment was rarely heard in public. Hizbullah knows it has to restore the confidence of its support base in the Shiite community, hence the distribution of \$10,000 to \$12,000 to some 15,000 homeless families as an initial stage in a broad rehousing program that will run for up to three years. The emphasis on the group’s social activities in the coming months and the political backlash it is likely to face for triggering Israel’s onslaught will reduce significantly Hizbullah’s ability to return to the status quo ante-bellum along the Blue Line.

Resolution 1701 calls for the deployment of Lebanese troops to the Blue Line and the reinforcing of UNIFIL from a pre-war strength of 2,000 to up to 15,000 peacekeepers. The US and Israel had lobbied for the resolution to be adopted under the UN’s Chapter 7 “peace enforcement” mandate rather than continue with UNIFIL’s Chapter 6 “peacekeeping” mandate. The compromise was a half-way house, dubbed by observers as “Chapter Six-and-a-half,” without it being clear what that entailed for troops on the ground. However, following meetings between UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and European foreign ministers, the UN agreed that troops could open fire on Hizbullah militants or IDF forces if either blocked UNIFIL’s movements, even if they were not fired upon first. Although Resolution 1701 calls for the fulfillment of Resolution 1559, UNIFIL will not forcibly attempt to disarm Hizbullah.

At the time of writing, it appears unlikely that the maximum figure of 15,000 will be reached. Indeed, stability on the ground is more dependent on political compromises between the Lebanese government and Hizbullah rather than the abilities of UNIFIL and the Lebanese Army to keep the peace. Hizbullah will not be able to rebuild its military infrastructure along the Blue Line, but its fighters



and weapons and ammunition will remain in the area out of sight. With the backing of Iran and Syria, Hizbullah will probably attempt to rearm itself, possibly using remote tracks across the anti-Lebanon mountains along the border with Syria or by sea.

Hizbullah will not disarm itself in the foreseeable future. The IDF's failure to crush Hizbullah or compel it to dismantle its military wing effectively rules out force as a means of disarming the group. Nothing short of the conclusion of the Middle East peace process will result in the disarming of Hizbullah. Instead of striving for the absolutist goal of disarming Hizbullah (which merely enhances the groups "bunker" mentality and aggravates the existing sectarian and political polarization in Lebanon), a more creative solution should be found, one that effectively neutralizes Hizbullah's ability to use those weapons. In the context of the Hizbullah-Israel conflict, the group's retention of a military wing is largely irrelevant if it is constrained from attacking Israel. (Admittedly, that will not fully resolve the fears of non-Shiite Lebanese who believe that Hizbullah's weapons provide the group with unfair leverage in a domestic political context.)

Resolution 1701 called upon the UN secretary-general to devise proposals for a lasting ceasefire along the Lebanon-Israel border which would take into account some of the outstanding issues between the two countries. They include the fate of the Shebaa Farms, Lebanese and Israeli prisoners held by both sides, Israeli overflights in Lebanese airspace. If agreement can be reached which would result in an IDF withdrawal from the Shebaa Farms, a comprehensive prisoner swap and a cessation of all Israeli overflights, it would contribute significantly to neutralizing Hizbullah's ability to employ its military wing aggressively against Israel.

Before the war, the remote unpopulated Shebaa Farms was a convenient arena for Hizbullah and the Israelis to occasionally let off steam with minimal risk of civilian casualties. Without the Shebaa Farms, Hizbullah may have felt compelled into undertaking riskier operations elsewhere along Lebanon's border with Israel proper, closer to Israeli population centers, to justify its military relevance. But post-war circumstances along the Blue Line and the renewed domestic political pressures on Hizbullah severely curtails the group's ability to launch attacks against Israeli targets, a situation which would be reinforced if the Shebaa Farms, prisoners and Israeli overflights were removed from the equation.

Since the cessation of hostilities came into effect there have been several incidents that suggest the IDF is attempting to goad Hizbullah into action. They include the alleged killing of several Hizbullah fighters in the first days of the ceasefire, random shelling of civilian areas and most particularly a commando raid on Baalbek on August 19. The latter was denounced by Annan as a breach of Resolution 1701. Hizbullah has downplayed the incidents and appears uninterested in becoming embroiled in a fresh flare-up with the IDF.

Despite the setbacks on the ground during the war, Israel can yet emerge from the conflict in a strategically stronger position. But the IDF will have to swallow its wounded pride, learn the lessons of the war and cease any provocative acts against Lebanon and Hizbullah. The Israeli government should agree to withdraw from the Shebaa Farms, handing it over to the UN until the sovereignty of the territory is legally resolved by Lebanon and Syria, as recommended by the Lebanese government. It should also cease all overflights and enter into negotiations with Hizbullah via a third party to secure the release of all remaining detainees and hostages.



These crucial steps will not fully remove the threat posed by Hizbullah to Israel – only the conclusion of the Middle East peace process will achieve that – but it could herald a period of welcome stability along the Blue Line.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Blanford, “Emboldened by US Jibes, Hizbullah Prepares for War,” in *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 February 2002

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Al-Manar television station, 17 August 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Ze’ev Schiff, “Hizbullah anti-tank fire causing most IDF casualties in Lebanon,” *Ha’aretz*, 6 August, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathon Finer, “Israeli Soldiers Find a Tenacious Foe in Hizbullah,” *The Washington Post*, 8 August 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Blanford, “Hizbullah's hidden stronghold sends death across the border,” *The Times*, 8 August 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ze’ev Schiff, “The War's Surprises,” *Ha’aretz*, 19 August 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Gavin Rabinowitz, “Hizbullah Shoots Down Israeli Helicopter,” *Associated Press*, 12 August 2006.

<sup>9</sup> *Al Manar*, 12 August 2006.

# THE PEACEKEEPING CHALLENGE IN LEBANON

AUGUSTUS RICHARD NORTON\*

The 2006 Israel-Lebanon war will be remembered both for the momentous miscalculation of Hizbullah, which tried to stretch the “rules of the game” with disastrous results, and for the failure of Israel to defeat its protagonist. Israel calculated that it could turn southern Lebanon into a “killing box,” devoid of civilians, where it could then defeat Hizbullah in detail. Instead, the area was turned into humanitarian disaster zone where Hizbullah was well-prepared to confront the technically superior but muscle-bound Israeli army.

When the war began, neither Israel nor its American protector even considered a serious role for United Nations peacekeepers. After 34 days of war, with civilian deaths rapidly growing (especially in Lebanon where over 1,200 innocent people died compared to 41 in Israel) and the international clamour for a ceasefire deafening, the prospect of a “robust” UN force became very attractive.

In May 2000, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Lebanon after facing unrelenting pressure from a resistance led by Hizbullah. Hizbullah began after Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon as a child of the Iranian “Islamic revolution.” If Iran was the mother of Hizbullah, Israel was its step-father because it was the Israel's two-decades long occupation that gave fostered and honed Hizbullah.

Beginning in the 1990s, “rules of the game” developed between Hizbullah and Israel. These rules provided that both sides would avoid attacking civilians and restrict their activities to clearly defined areas, especially the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. While the Golan Heights are Syrian territory, a small pocket of land there is claimed as occupied Lebanese territory.

On July 12, 2006, Hizbullah tried to stretch the rules by kidnapping two Israeli soldiers on Israeli soil. Hizbullah hoped to use the captives to bargain for three Lebanese prisoners held by Israel, but the Israeli government instead chose to exploit the provocation as a *casus belli* and to launch a war to eliminate Hizbullah as an effective militia adversary of Israel. In point of fact, the Israeli army had been chomping at the bit for a chance to settle scores with Hizbullah, and both Israel and the U.S. relished the opportunity to devastate a powerful proxy of Iran.

In the six year period that followed the end of the Israeli occupation, the Israeli-Lebanese border was quieter than it had been for the past thirty years. One Israeli civilian was killed by Hizbullah during this period, a victim of a falling anti-aircraft round fired at Israeli jets violating Lebanese air space. A total of 17 Israeli soldiers died, most either in Lebanon or on the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. While there were about a dozen incidents of Katyusha rockets fired across the border into Israel, most of the incidents were attributed to Palestinian groups, not to Hizbullah.

Thus, while the border was hardly tranquil, it was far calmer than even Israeli generals thought it would be when they left Lebanon in May 2000. Of course, it was Hizbullah's error to presume that Israel was either satisfied with the status quo or sanguine about the impressive arsenal of rockets pointed towards Israel.

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The United Nations Security Council resolution that won a ceasefire in the Israel-Hizbullah war envisages the buttressing of the existing peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon. The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had been allowed to dwindle to a skeleton force of 2,000 peacekeepers, but resolution 1701 provides for a dramatic expansion of the force to as many as 15,000 troops. Contingents have been pledged by Malaysia, Bangladesh and Indonesia, all nations that refuse diplomatic relations with Israel, but the core intent of resolution is to recreate UNIFIL as a largely European force.

One of the telling successes of Hizbullah is that it has acquired such a fierce reputation for its tough toe-to-toe battles with Israel in this summer's war that no sentient prime minister wished to send soldiers to do what Israel demonstrated it could not do. Even Turkish generals, whose army is no push-over, indicated that they were not enthusiastic about sending fighting units to Lebanon.

After France initially balked at sending a sizable contingent to Lebanon, resolution 1701 seemed to be in jeopardy. However, after two weeks of careful discussions, mostly focused on the rules of engagement that define UNIFIL's behaviour, France, Italy and Spain stepped forward as major contributors. France will lead the force until the present French commanding general's assignment ends in early 2007, and command of the force will then pass to Italy.

UNIFIL was first deployed in 1978. Its original mandate, largely crafted by the U.S., was to oversee the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon. Unlike today, when Hizbullah is seen as the culprit in Washington, President Jimmy Carter viewed Israel's 1978 invasion of Lebanon as an excessive and aggressive response to terrorism.

The area of operations for UNIFIL remains much the same today, namely Lebanon south of the Litani river. When it first deployed UNIFIL instantly found itself faced with uncooperative belligerents. Palestinian militants, who then controlled much of southern Lebanon, insisted on maintaining positions in two large sectors, including one right in the middle of the UNIFIL zone.

Israel, too, undermined UNIFIL by refusing to allow it to fully deploy. In 1978, Israel handed control of a border enclave to a gang of Lebanese Army deserters. Israel dismissed UN protests pretending that it had no control over the "Lebanese Arab Army", which it paid, trained and directed.

In contrast to the Palestinian militants who were an alien force disliked by many people in southern Lebanon, Hizbullah draws much of its membership from the local population. The Shiite party boasts strong local support in the region, as the Israelis discovered to their cost during their long occupation from 1982-2000.

After more than a month of Israeli bombardment, Hizbullah emerged with its support intact if not increased. Its impressive and rapid response to the needs of those whose homes and lives have been ravaged—mostly, but not all Shiite Muslims—has further consolidated its impressive base of support.

Outsiders often forget that the Lebanese have suffered tremendously under Israeli attacks for three decades, so one of the key tasks of UNIFIL is to insure Lebanese civilians are permitted to peacefully return to and rebuild their devastated villages. If UNIFIL-plus cannot facilitate the restoration of the civilian population, then the next few months will only be an interlude in the 2006 war.

Given Hizbullah's broad base of support, and the fact that its Lebanese supporters see no other force that can thwart Israel should it decide to reignite the war, it is completely unrealistic that the new international contingents will succeed either in disarming Hizbullah or in diminishing its appeal. If UNIFIL is going to

succeed it will need the cooperation not the animosity of Hizbullah. For its part, Hizbullah has declared its agreement any of its members found carrying arms may be detained and disarmed.

The major question is whether UNIFIL-plus will operate not only competently but fairly. The key to restoring stability to southern Lebanon is not only to see Hizbullah stand down, but also for the new force to avoid being seen as an instrument of Israeli influence or occupation.

The new force will probably total no more than 12,000 soldiers, not the 15,000 originally envisaged. It will be twice the size of UNIFIL at its earlier peak strength of 6,000. Even so, UNIFIL-plus will retain a major deficit that characterizes almost any international force, namely an endemic lack of local knowledge and language skills.

The introduction of as many as 15,000 Lebanese troops should help to mitigate this problem, especially since the UN force is to work side-by-side with the Lebanese army. Lebanese civilians have already welcomed their army, and Hizbullah has always treated the army with respect. While outgunned significantly by Israel, the Lebanese army is led by a professional officer corps and it is technically competent.

The Security Council resolution anticipates that the Lebanese soldiers will disarm Hizbullah. There is absolutely no possibility that this will happen. Many soldiers applaud it for defending Lebanon, and the army has been ordered to work "in cooperation with the resistance".

It is popular sport in some circles to castigate the United Nations for its failures, but no peacekeeping force will be any more effective than the contributing countries allow it to be. Will governments permit their soldiers to protect Lebanese civilians from Israeli "defensive" attacks, or will soldiers be ordered to mount risky offensive operations against Hizbullah if they prove necessary? These are questions that are more likely to be answered by national governments than by UNIFIL commanders. If Israel or Hizbullah attempt to thwart the peacekeepers, the success of the force may turn on the willingness of European governments to accept casualties.

Certainly, careful thought has been given to creating parameters that minimize the risks of an escalation of violence. The rules of engagement (ROE) for UNIFIL have been crafted to insure that the force has the authority to meet armed challenges, in necessary, with deadly force. The rules emphasize that when force is used it must be proportional to the threat, minimize the prospect for civilian casualties and be the minimum level of force necessary to meet the challenge. Illustrative excerpts from the ROE are provided [editor, see box to be provided].

Putting UNIFIL on steroids will probably do no more than freeze the situation in southern Lebanon. That in itself is an accomplishment, given the intensity of the war of 2006, but the real work that needs to be done is diplomatic. The diplomatic work entails patiently rebuilding a stable security framework in southern Lebanon that recognizes that both Lebanon and Israel both have legitimate security interests.

Peacekeepers do not solve crises but they do stabilize crisis zones. The integration of Hizbullah's military apparatus into the Lebanese army should be a goal of diplomacy. This solution has already suggested by Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. The success of UNIFIL-plus will probably be measured by its ability to inspire confidence in both Israel and Lebanon that Hizbullah's independent

militia role is a dangerous anachronism, but that confidence will not be born over night. Smart money would bet that the enhanced Interim Force in Lebanon, may prove more permanent than “interim” suggests.

# POLITICS AND BUSINESS, STATE AND CITIZENRY PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON THE RESPONSE TO LEBANON'S HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Jim Quilty\*

## INTRODUCTION CAPITAL THINKS ON ITS FEET

A couple of weeks into Israel's 2006 Lebanon war, Sukleen, the privately-owned waste-disposal company, announced that it would provide food and lodging to its employees. Speaking to one journalist, a company spokesman said that Sukleen had "lost" 2000 employees since the conflict had begun. This is why garbage wasn't being collected as frequently as before.

Neither was the company servicing as broad an area as previously, simply because certain areas in greater Beirut – presumably the Dahyeh<sup>1</sup> – had become too dangerous. Nevertheless, the company was determined to live up to its obligations in maintaining a level of hygiene and normalcy within Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The spokesman said dozens of groups (volunteers from the American University of Beirut, for instance) and some 300 municipalities, including that of Beirut, had provided labour to don the green-red-and-white boiler suits of Sukleen's rubbish collectors.

The company also launched several initiatives to lure labour onto the payroll. "Our salaries are constantly reviewed," the spokesman said. "On top of this, we're providing our workers with dormitories and food, as we understand how difficult it is to travel, and we want to ensure our workers' daily safety."<sup>2</sup> Sukleen has been one of the jewels of the reconstruction effort overseen by former premier Rafiq al-Hariri. Sanitation in Beirut was badly neglected during the fifteen-year civil war and the company was both awarded the rubbish-collection contract and commissioned to eliminate the St Georges refuse heap – a municipal garbage dump improvised during that war.

Since its inception, Sukleen seems to have profited from the margins afforded by migrant labour – "seems" because the company has been notably opaque about its hiring practices. Anecdotal evidence, not least the accents and languages spoken by the men who usually wear the green-red-and-white boiler suits, suggests the vast majority of the company's usual retinue of street cleaners and rubbish collectors are Syrian and South Asian.

The success of this hiring policy has been reinforced by cultural considerations – principally the perception that there are certain jobs that not even the poorest Lebanese would work at, garbage collection and street cleaning among them. Since Lebanese will not do this work, the company has been forced to rely upon guest workers, who can be paid a fraction of what Lebanese labourers would demand.

When the Israeli bombardment began, foreigners, tourists and guest workers alike, fled in droves – thus Sukleen's 2000 "lost" labourers. At the same time, Beirut was flooded with displaced people from Dahyeh and South Lebanon, a

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number of whom had permanently lost their homes and livelihoods. Evidently, Sukleen decided offering the displaced work on negotiable terms and, hence, offered a solution to their problem.

Aside from being a textbook model for good corporate PR, the narrative the Sukleen representative fashioned for the press was – like the initiative it sought to spin – an excellent example of populist neo-liberalism à-la Liban.<sup>3</sup>

On one level it represented the company as a model corporate citizen, not only by expressing its desire to live up to its contractual obligations, but by couching its responsibilities in a language redolent of Beirut's historic association of civilisation with image and hygiene.<sup>4</sup> On another, it attempted to wed the company to a Lebanese sense of civic pride and nationalism. Working for Sukleen, the spokesman said, is essentially about “being Lebanese” and people should not be afraid to get their hands dirty to help ensure the cleanliness of the country in times of war.

Finally, he did a fine job of instrumentalising the savagery of the Israeli attack. Just as he had refused to discuss the company's reliance on migrant labour before the war, the company spokesman said he preferred not to reveal who had taken up the slack in the labour market, lest Sukleen's collection vehicles themselves become targets of Israeli warplanes.

He did say Lebanese had filled many of the vacant positions. This claim could be at least partially verified, again anecdotally, by the appearance of boiler-suited young men wearing David Beckham-ish hair combs, stylish chin whiskers and listening to MP3 players – apparatus not associated with Syrian and South Asian guest workers.

### **CLIENTELISM, THE MINIMALIST STATE AND NEO-LIBERALISM**

Like the Israeli offensives of 1982 and 1996, the war of 12 July-14 August 2006 provoked a humanitarian crisis in Lebanon, as displaced persons fled their homes in South Lebanon and Dahyeh. Though it is impossible to verify the numbers, at the height of the hostilities – when the country expected a major ground offensive – the number of displaced people was reported to be around one million, about a quarter of the entire population.

The local response to this crisis has been highly informative of the strengths and weaknesses of the Lebanese polity during crisis. There are two aspects to be considered – how the state interfaces with the international network of humanitarian relief agencies set in place to assist states in coping with such crises and how it answers the needs of the people to whom it is theoretically accountable.

Such a consideration is of more than antiquarian interest. True, Lebanon is a minor player in the region, with local eccentricities that make it look quite unlike its neighbours. Aspects of the Lebanese state can be generalised beyond its borders, however, indeed beyond the geographical confines of the Mediterranean basin and Middle East.

This is because Lebanon's political class has made choices that have tended to favour open borders to protectionism, thus the interests of trade and banking to those of industry and agriculture, and open labour markets to trade union rights. Insofar as the interests of “business” have consistently been put before those of a “state” that might regulate it in the Keynesian sense, the priorities of Lebanon's political class shaped a minimalist state, one that prefigured public policies

advocated by certain late-20<sup>th</sup>-century economists and politicians ideologically opposed to “big government” – the so-called “neo-liberals”.<sup>5</sup>

Through no design of its own, then, the Lebanese state provides a good barometer for the viability of small-state “neo-liberal” regimes generally. The free market is not the sole force at work in shaping Lebanon’s political-economic landscape, of course. Several factors serve to diffuse the workings of local and international capital on the ground.

One is the much-vaunted consumer economy, buoyed up by a vibrant tertiary sector on one hand and regular infusions of foreign capital, whether Khaliji petrodollars or expatriate remissions, on the other. A second is the country’s equally vibrant civil society, the institutional expression of which is not participatory democracy but a network of local and international nongovernmental organisations. Finally, and the reason civil society lives in its NGO quarantine, is Lebanese clientelism.<sup>6</sup>

So strong are the structures of clientelism relative to the institutions of state that Lebanon’s system of governance at times appears neo-feudal, with political actors retaining facets of sovereignty that, in the conventional western model, would be surrendered to the state.<sup>7</sup> The present international discourse surrounding the drive to disarm Hizbullah focuses upon the state’s right to a monopoly over the means of coercion within its borders. In Lebanon, though, there are innumerable sectors where the state has farmed-out more mundane responsibilities or facets of sovereignty.

One that has been held up for particular mockery is road maintenance: asphaltting public roads is not the prerogative of the state, but that of the deputy of a given district, who is allotted a quota of asphalt every term. Sceptical observers suggest this custom provides politicians with the means to service their constituents directly, and punish those who support their rivals, thereby reinforcing clientele networks at the expense of state institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The social contradictions churned up by the policy priorities of the political class and the country’s proscribed economic opportunities can be deflected through emigration and absorbed through political clientelism. As the country’s history of civil conflict in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has testified, though, the efficacy of clientelist mechanisms can break down.

Such deterioration can issue from the alienation of significant portions of the polity, whether they be delineated in terms of region, clan loyalty or religious confession. This is an aspect of the minimalist state insofar as such alienation arises from the political class’ neglect of regions outside greater Beirut and Mt Lebanon – or alternatively its propensity to make greater Beirut the focus of investment, whether individual politicians originate in Beirut or not.

As was witnessed most pointedly in 1958 and 1975-90, such disruption can also issue from the travails of the regional state system. This too is a function of Lebanon’s minimalist state – insofar as the political class is so fragmented, so divergent in its various interests, that different parties will seek to shore up their positions through the patronage of different foreign states.<sup>9</sup>

The country’s political class rarely attributes the repeated periods of civil unrest to structural shortcomings in the state system. Though the class reproduces no one narrative, it is common for its spokesmen to dismiss such unrest as bad patches resulting from foreign powers playing out their regional rivalries on Lebanese soil – Nasserites in 1958, Palestinians in 1975, Syrians after 1976 and – were the events of summer 2006 to lead to civil unrest – Iran.<sup>10</sup> It will be lost on no

one that these foreign powers happen to be the patrons and allies of the “other side” of a given era’s existential debate.

Depending on how the conflict of July-August sorts itself out, the political class may well point to Lebanon’s weathering of the present storm as an acid test of the state’s viability. This paper offers some preliminary observations on how the system, and its citizens, have fared.

It will consider Lebanon’s “neo-liberal” relief effort in terms of its four principle components: “the citizenry”, for our purposes that imagined community called “civil society”; international aid organisations, to whom the state looks to fulfil conventional state obligations; “the state”, something distinct from political actors; “business”, neither a reified “other” nor individual businessmen, but the opportunities taken by individuals to turn a profit from a given situation.

Scrutinising the on-the-ground realities of how such a state responds to the challenges posed by this Israeli attack provides an opportunity to cut through the rhetoric to see how the model actually works. How “efficient” were the international aid organisations on one hand and civil and political NGOs on the other in the execution of those responsibilities that, in the days before the hegemony of neo-liberalism, were incumbent upon the state?

### CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE CRISIS OF THE DISPLACED

The story of the displaced in July-August is necessarily an anecdotal one. There are no institutions or agencies in Lebanon with the universality of access to compile useable statistics on their numbers, gender ratios, places of origin or destination and so forth. Furthermore the story changed with each day of the crisis: few families fled their homes to sit in a single refugee-relief centre for the duration of the conflict.

In the case of Dahyeh residents, most simply moved north to the incongruous safety of Beirut proper, though there were reports of some spending time with relatives in the Biq’a. Some southern families, intent on returning home as soon as the bombing was done, made short-term migrations to other southern villages where they had relatives or friends. Others fled further north to population centres like Sur and Saida. Some were welcomed in Shouf, as long as there were no militants among them. Some ended up north of Beirut, seeking aid from the small Shi’a community around Jbayl, for instance.<sup>11</sup> Most, however, ultimately landed in Beirut.

The displaced could be found throughout the city, most finding friends and relatives with room to take them in. Displaced people were more visible in West Beirut, simply because early on 31 public schools there were converted to refugee-relief centres. Soon other schools opened their doors, as did other public buildings – the old surete-generale building on Spears Street and Hamra Street’s Saroulla Building.

The first, and most dynamic, response to the crisis of the displaced came from the NGO community – the institutional reflection of “civil society” in Lebanon – augmented by thousands of youth volunteers. The largest of these and one of the first to consolidate itself eventually came to call itself Samidoun (Steadfast), but at first it was simply “Relief Centre – Sanayeh”.<sup>12</sup>

An umbrella grouping 35-plus NGOs, the organisation constituted itself to respond to the crisis caused by displaced people arriving in Sanayeh Garden and the absence of a state response. Relief Centre – Sanayeh based itself in an old villa

whose owner has recreated it as “Zicco House”, which over the last decade or so has been an ever-mutable NGO-cultural centre.

The NGOs canvassed for donations and bought provisions to distribute in food hampers and in the form of hot meals. The latter were first prepared by two sympathetic restaurants, then delivered to the displaced by volunteers. By the third week of the war, organisers say they were generating some 3,600 meals a day, but had scaled back their reliance on restaurants, having set up kitchens in three of the refugee-relief centres.

By the end of July, Samidoun’s field coordinators said they were caring for the needs of around 12,000 people at a cost of \$7,000-\$10,000 a day – provided by private and NGO donations. The organisation said they were trying to look beyond day-to-day management, to the post-conflict period, when many of these people would have no homes to return to and no way to provide for themselves.

Throughout the conflict, ad hoc organisations like Samidoun and Mouatinoun and established NGOs like Movement Sociale shared the refugee-relief field with the political parties. The big players are well known – the Hariri family’s Future Movement, the Amal Movement of House Speaker Nabih Berri, The Free Patriotic Movement of General Michel Awn, Samir Geagea’s Lebanese Forces, and of course Hizbullah.

Many parties operated through their affiliated “NGOs”, and so much relief aid was filtered through Lebanon’s clientalist system. These “political NGOs” have operated alongside civil NGOs, effectively competing with them for access to the international relief aid funnelled into the country via the Higher Relief Commission.<sup>13</sup>

Though information about Hizbullah’s relationship with the state’s relief effort is sketchy, the party was, rhetorically at least, aloof of the HRC’s provisioning efforts.<sup>14</sup> For its part, Future could afford to provide for the displaced out of its own pocket. Like the other parties, though, Future became an interlocutor with the state when international relief aid began to stream into the country.<sup>15</sup>

As a sphere of unregulated competition, the refugee relief effort was chaotic and wasteful. Field co-ordinators with the civil NGOs observed that though shelters received supplies from both the Future Movement and the Higher Relief Council, they were sporadic and uncoordinated. Political NGOs like Future would deliver hot meals unscheduled, sometimes on the same day as Samidoun. Without easy access to refrigeration facilities, a lot of food, and effort, went to waste.

Relief workers reported that the Higher Relief Council would unload boxes of relief aid at a shelter, then leave without a word to anyone and without co-ordinating with the shelter’s administrators to know what its needs were. Milk powder for infants, for instance, would be dropped at shelters where there were no infants.

By the first week of August, the situation was so bad that the civil NGOs involved in the relief effort were compelled to call a press conference to complain that the state’s refugee effort was incompetent to the point of dereliction and so opaque as to imply corruption.

They said that while the HRC said it had delivered 200,000 food hampers, an additional 280,000 were needed. Some of the food items delivered in hampers, one shelter manager complained, had expired, causing food poisoning. Needed medicines were piling up in warehouses undelivered. The state was only looking after displaced people in schools and refusing to provide for those in private homes, where three-times as many displaced people were lodging.

The NGOs also accused the state of a lack of transparency and accountability in the distribution of relief supplies. The HRC, they said, was apportioning relief aid according to political considerations, with more aid going to the Amal Movement and Future than organisations that do not represent their politically important constituencies.<sup>16</sup>

The HRC's Nabil Jisr replied to these charges with an irritable tact. "We haven't been giving Future anything," he said. "We're helping NGOs generally, with no distinction between one NGO and another. We've been giving to Awnists and to people in the South who are Amal – *but not as political parties*. We assist any NGOs working on the ground. I'm not talking about registered NGOs, but any NGO on the ground. We make no distinction between them, no matter what flag they carry ... Why don't [the critics among the civil NGOs] see that Tayyar al-Mustaqbal are helping themselves from their own pocket?"<sup>17</sup>

Civil society spokesmen criticised more than the inactivity and inefficiency of state and political actors: they were also critical the philosophy underlying the relief effort. While they were willing to step into the vacuum left by state paralysis in the first week or two of the war, they said, the NGO community is not a substitute for the state. The state was being derelict in its responsibilities to treat it as such.

In fact, the state's farming out facets of sovereignty to political actors effectively limited its access to the displaced. A case in point can be seen in the work of the Samir Qassir Foundation.<sup>18</sup> Ideologically, SQF is positioned halfway between the civil NGOs and their political counterparts but in structural terms it suffered the same predicament as the other partisan organs. It dispensed refugee relief on behalf of the Democratic Left Movement – the party Qassir had helped to found and the only non-sectarian political grouping in 14 March.<sup>19</sup>

This was a necessary subterfuge; DL activists said at the time, because they found some displaced people would not accept aid from 14 March. This strain was accentuated because the task of enunciating 14 March's criticism of Hizbullah's 12 July kidnaps<sup>20</sup> was left to DL and deputy secretary-general Elias Attallah, presumably chosen because of his prestige as the one-time leader of the communist resistance to Israeli occupation.

SQF did excellent work during the crisis, providing personal attention at its Karmel Zaytoun shelter that a larger operation like Samidoun found more difficult. Nevertheless, its well-intentioned institutional circumlocution highlights one of the problems to arise from having partisan actors assume provisioning roles that – in another country, or an antique era – would be carried out by non-partisan state institutions.

More than one anecdote drifted up from the refugee-relief effort that told of displaced Shi'a refusing aid from Future. They did so because young Sa'd Hariri – whether speaking uncensored or expressing the views of his Washington patrons – declared that Hizbullah must be punished for starting this war.<sup>21</sup>

For Shi'a from Dahyeh, Biq'a and South Lebanon, particularly Hizbullah and Amal supporters, such remarks were incongruous and insensitive – suggesting, as they did, that the hundreds of mostly Shi'a Lebanese that had been killed and the hundreds of thousands more that had been displaced were getting what they

deserved. Worse, Hariri came uncomfortably close to echoing the Israeli narrative that the war was not against Lebanon but against Hizbullah.

Though he is a deputy and has inherited the mantle of his assassinated father as the head of the Future Movement, the younger Hariri holds no official office – Future’s man in the prime minister’s office being long-time Hariri lieutenant Fouad Sinyura. It seems unlikely that the resentment young Hariri stirred up with his remarks would have been directed at a relief effort led by transparent, accountable state institutions rather than partisan proxies.

### **THE STATE AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF REFUGEE RELIEF**

In this instant, the state was neither transparent nor accountable. Lebanese state actors represented their role to be that of conduit between the resources of the international aid organisations and the grassroots actors distributing aid to the displaced. As with all patron-client relationships, this one must be considered in terms of its “upper” stages (acquisition) and its “lower” stages (disbursal).

Some Lebanese involved in the aid-acquisition equation expressed ambivalence towards how the aid community responded to state’s urgent pleas for help. International humanitarian agencies were generally of great assistance in accessing areas the state could not reach. Otherwise, Lebanese observers note, the intelligence shown in the relief effort varied from agency to agency, depending on their pre-war knowledge of Lebanon.

The World Health Organisation worked closely with the Health Ministry to set up a working group on health issues, one consultant close to the HRC remarked, and UNICEF had a similar relationship with the Social Affairs Ministry. Both agencies had an institutional presence in Lebanon before the war.<sup>22</sup>

By all accounts, the five people that remained in the UNDP’s Lebanon offices after evacuations did magnificent work in organising relief on the ground. Some international agencies tried to procure locally, so as to put money into the economy. The World Food Programme worked with the Trade and Economy Ministry to procure Lebanese wheat and have it milled locally, though it was more expensive than importing processed flour. Rather than simply importing mattresses, one agency placed mattress orders with a manufacturer in Shouf.

Aid agencies with no pre-war experience of Lebanon, on the other hand, tended to calibrate their work according to experience of disaster-relief in Africa – where there is often little in the way of a functioning state or on-the-ground expertise to draw upon. As noted above, Lebanon benefits from a thriving civil society and NGO community manned by well-educated, highly experienced professionals. It also has state and government apparatus that – if minimalist by European standards – are a good deal more knowledgeable than most international agencies.

Agencies habituated to large-scale aid imports, and lacking knowledge of specific local needs, tend to be wasteful. Importing tonnes of flour and dumping it in Sur, as one agency did, can only have a deleterious impact on an economy when there is no shortage of wheat or milling facilities. The decision of some agencies to bring their own drivers – with knowledge of neither the roads nor any of the locally spoken languages – was of questionable utility. South Lebanon was in more dire need of bottled water in late July than high-energy biscuits.<sup>23</sup>



When it came to actually distributing relief aid to the displaced, the departments purportedly most interested in humanitarian crises – the Ministries of Social Affairs and Health and the Higher Relief Commission – lived down to the expectations of the minimalist state. Compared to the dynamism of Lebanon's civil NGO workers, public sector response was torpid. At the ministerial level, the response was politicised to the point of black comedy.

The Social Affairs Minister in the Sinyura government is Nayla Ma'wad, a 14 March deputy. During a conference with the international press in the first week of the war, Ma'wad spoke mostly about how many tourist dollars were lost as a result of the Hizbullah-provoked war (which is just what Damascus wanted) and the continuing importance of the ongoing international inquiry into the assassination of former premier Rafiq al-Hariri, led these days by Belgian jurist Serge Brammertz.

When asked what plans were afoot to absorb the displaced people then streaming into Beirut by the thousands – a subject seemingly more within the mandate of her portfolio than the Brammertz Inquiry – Ma'wad said she had no idea about refugee numbers and breezily acknowledged that the Israeli attack was “a slaughter.”<sup>24</sup>

Conversations with the ministry's responsible officials during the month of attacks did not instil much confidence in the capacity of the state to answer the cries of its stricken constituents. It was impossible, in fact, to avoid a sense of well-meaning but ultimately helpless incompetence.

At the end of July, two weeks into the war, the consultant hired a year before to actually run Social Affairs said he had been running around trying to provide support for the HRC – which, it will be recalled, is run out of the premier's office – and co-ordinating with the NGOs.

He said the ministry's priorities were co-ordinating the hot meals programme, primary healthcare and implementing a management plan for every sector of the refugee relief effort, putting special effort into child-protection, social health and recreation. The purchase and distribution of relief supplies, he said, was the province of the HRC but Social Affairs was co-ordinating with the Health Ministry to centralise the distribution of medication.

The consultant's assistant later said the ministry was acting as a liaison between the NGOs and UN funding agencies, though they had also donated some office space to Samidoun. She confessed that, two weeks into the war, the ministry was still working on compiling a comprehensive list of the schools operating relief centres. They did not yet have enough data to draw the map.

At the Grand Sarail, meanwhile, HRC spokesmen explained that the commission officially disbursed aid through the state's administrative chain of command – the network of district governors (*muhafizal*) and sub-district governors (*qa'imamat*).

“To be honest,” confided Jisr's press attaché on 8 August, “it hasn't been effective until now. But we are working so hard with the UN. We can do nothing here without the UN.” Practically speaking, she continued, NGOs distributed the aid on behalf of the HRC. She later said the army was cooperating with HRC in distributing aid within Beirut.

There was a different distribution regime outside Beirut, where HRC officials said the major obstacle to distributing relief aid during the 34 days of the war was Israel's unwillingness to grant safe passage to aid convoys.

In south Lebanon, the press attaché continued, the HRC was cooperating with the UN, which distributed aid on the commission's behalf. Outside Beirut, she said later, the HRC had contracted private companies to carry out aid distribution. This solution was having limited success, since private sector employees were afraid to drive on the roads lest they be attacked by Israeli warplanes.

Speaking off the record, a source close to the HRC suggested inter-ministerial rivalry got in the way of rational aid distribution. Though the commission had instructed the qa'imaqams to distribute aid even-handedly to all groups, the HRC did not disburse to NGOs directly. The source said the commission did not want to step on the toes of the Social Affairs Ministry – which wanted all NGOs to coordinate with it, despite that fact that it did not actually have any aid to distribute.

HRC aid, the source admitted, was being hijacked by the political parties. Workers would strip off HRC or UN agency decals or the or else just slap the party logo over top. "This sort of thing," the source said, "is inevitable as long as you don't have a mechanism for tracking relief aid once it arrives."

### WHITHER BUSINESS?

It would be ironic indeed to invoke the "neo-liberal state" as a point of departure for this paper, while devoting so little time to discussing the fortunes of business during this crisis.

Most of Lebanon's private sector did not work to capitalise on the 2006 crisis of the displaced with quite the think-on-your-feet opportunism of Sukleen.<sup>25</sup> The major business story to arise from this conflict, in fact, was the effect it had in shaking investor confidence in the country. The most significant story as regards the livelihood of Lebanese – more precisely the country's Shi'a Muslims who were the targets of the vast majority of Israeli air raids – was that of how the Israeli military targeted virtually every factory in Dahyeh, South Lebanon and Bq'a'.<sup>26</sup>

Business did play an active role in this story. As noted above, some relief organisations made efforts to procure from local merchants and manufacturers and the HRC hired contractors to ship aid outside Beirut. Much business, though, operated on the less savoury margins of this war.<sup>27</sup>

Early in this war, for instance, it was reported that a Health Ministry official and two of his colleagues had been arrested.<sup>28</sup> Evidently medications – used in the treatment of such chronic conditions as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, as well as in dialysis treatment – had been donated to Lebanon as humanitarian aid by certain Arab countries. Shortly after they arrived in Beirut, someone put the drugs on the market. This, prosecutors alleged, was the work of the Health Ministry official and his two colleagues.<sup>29</sup>

The Health Ministry was not the only state actor to stand accused of acting as a conduit in channelling relief aid to the marketplace. Civil NGO activists, who it will be recalled accused the state of dereliction of duty and showing preferential treatment to the political organisations involved in the relief effort, said the HRC facilitated the sale of goods earmarked as aid. They noted that trucks that left a depot fully loaded with aid would arrive at relief centres missing up to half their goods. Meanwhile – with an Israeli air, sea and land blockade in place – brands that had never been seen on the market were appearing in corner grocery stores.<sup>30</sup>

The Economy Ministry eventually confirmed these accusations, saying it had conducted raids on retail outlets and found shelves stocked with powdered

milk products that had been part of assistance hampers. Shortly after the ceasefire, Jisr admitted to the press that food supplies intended for displaced families had been appearing in shops over the previous five weeks. He denied allegations of corruption or mismanagement in the relief effort, however.

“If a needy family wants to sell products that they don't want to a store,” Jisr said, “there is nothing we can do about it.<sup>31</sup> We aren't trying to control individual products being sold to shop owners. What we are trying to control is whether entire boxes are ending up in the wrong hands.”<sup>32</sup>

Jisr's explanation is unconvincing. It makes little economic sense that “needy families” would put the contents of their aid hampers on the market – either directly to shops or through middlemen – since the sums they could make are negligible. In any case, informants from the displaced community pointed out that the appearance of a given brand on the market corresponded to its disappearance from their food hampers.

It seems more likely that individuals put relief aid on the market in bulk – something that only those connected with mass disbursal via the HRC, members of the political NGOs for example, would be in a position to do. So it is that, by the last week of the war, numerous Beirut shopkeepers acknowledged receiving shipments of imported brands they had never seen on the market before Israel's naval blockade.

By not tracking the movement of aid shipments – effectively keeping the distribution of aid relief unregulated – responsible parties at the HRC closed their eyes to goods going on the market, just as they had averted their gaze from disproportionate amounts of aid relief going to the political parties. Alternatively, as representatives of political groups within the state, they actively facilitated this movement.

## CONCLUSION

### THE LIMITS OF CIVIC ACTIVISM AND THE CLIENTELIST STATE

In sum, the relief effort conducted in Lebanon in July-August 2006 has been characterised by a remarkable degree of imagination and activism in some quarters and an equal degree of irresponsibility and waste in others.

Starting from the top, those international relief organisations without a presence on the ground before the war tended to rely upon models of disaster-relief that in the Lebanese context were more wasteful and less effective. Most effective were those organisations with a pre-existing presence, and Lebanese employees, on the ground. They were best able to replicate the domestic functions of the state.

Next, if the primary function of the state is indeed to reproduce itself, then the Lebanese state has come out of this crisis of the displaced quite well. Insofar as its spokesmen put out the call for international assistance for the displaced, the state can be said to have acted in the best interests of its constituents.

As far as the disbursement and distribution of international aid is concerned, however, it appeared as though the state's constituency was not the displaced but the political organisations to whom it farmed out its responsibilities.

Conspicuously absent in the first week of the war and ineffectually hesitant thereafter, state functionaries perceived themselves as “conduits” and “facilitators” rather than active agents in determining the needs of the citizenry and distributing aid accordingly. This approach seems to have been premised on the assumption that – in a neo-liberal international order and the local order of the clientelist state –

the work of relief would be left to international aid organisations and the state's political surrogates.

The state was not simply absent. Whether actively or passively, its functionaries and agents were complicit in facilitating the commodification of relief. For the political groups seen to distribute international aid, it became political capital. For those who put the aid on the market, it became economic capital.

So it is that, while this 34-day war mauled Lebanese industry and shook international investor confidence, entrepreneurs with access to the state could make a few dollars out of the conflict.

Finally the citizenry, the “civil society” actors who spearheaded the relief effort, conducted itself laudably.<sup>33</sup> For all the praise observers have lavished upon the mobilisation – and the individuals who organised and staffed it – some have questioned the professional limits of what is essentially an exercise in volunteerism.<sup>34</sup>

After the ceasefire, many NGOs and civil society organisations shifted their focus from Beirut to South Lebanon and the Biq'a. In some cases they were involved in distributing aid or providing generators and water pumps. In others they have been involved in mapping the destruction – generating a non-partisan record they say they do not trust either party workers or state employees to compile.

One UK-based doctor, who devoted her summer holiday to offering the relief effort whatever help she could, accompanied a group to the South and in one village encountered some volunteers collecting data about the drug needs of residents. She noted that the volunteers' inquiries were phrased in only the most general terms. They would record that a given household needed medication for high blood pressure or heart disease, say, but did not ask necessary questions about brands or dosages.

The physician remarked that the effort would have been far more useful and effective if a health-care professional had simply drawn up a questionnaire beforehand. Exhausted volunteers, however, were not very receptive to her suggestions and – as a foreigner who had just parachuted in – she felt uncomfortable saying anything that might be construed as criticism.

The doctor's observations point out only one symptom of the shortcomings of the relief effort.<sup>35</sup> Steered by the managerial experience of NGO activists – themselves driven by progressive secular ideologies – volunteers can do a great deal on the ground. They cannot replace the competence embodied in an accountable professional in state employ.<sup>36</sup> As the Lebanese state is presently configured, however, this profile is more likely to be the exception than the rule.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “Beirut's Southern suburbs”, one of the three areas the Israeli air force singled out for unremitting punishment during this 34-day war. Israeli said these civilian targets were “Hizbullah strongholds”. Though Hizbullah certainly garners support in all three areas, the one thing they are more likely to have in common is that their inhabitants are poor Shi'a.

<sup>2</sup> Nour Samaha, “Garbage collection adapts to arduous circumstances” *The Daily Star*, 10 August, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky has questioned the need for the term “neo-liberalism”, arguing that the principles advocated by neo-liberals are neither “new” nor particularly “liberal”. Here neo-liberalism refers to the late-20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy of political-economy that rose to international hegemony since the years of Thatcher and Reagan. Its hallmarks are well known: a rejection of state intervention in national economies, de-regulation of business practice and property rights and the weakening of workers' collective bargaining rights. In foreign policy, neo-liberals have tended to apply multi-lateral means to open markets to capital penetration and state-owned industries and utilities to privatisation.

<sup>4</sup> For a fine discussion of this business see the Jens Hanssen's *Fin de Siecle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital*. Oxford University Press, 2005, particularly his discussion of the Beirut municipal council.

<sup>5</sup> Innumerable observers have made this point but none with quite the panache of Lebanese historian Fawwaz Traboulsi. Lebanon, he remarked recently, is "a free trade state, a state that does not interfere with the economy – which means it interferes in the interest of the banking sector and the service sector. It has blocked the development of industry and agriculture – at least, since the 1940s, it has intervened in the local market in the interest of importers and forced agriculture and industry to produce for the foreign market, which is absolutely what globalisation demands. [Lebanon is] one of the first globalised countries in the world. Interview, 23 August, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> For a piquant analysis of how Lebanese state and political actors mediate between the free market and their "constituents" (the Lebanese citizenry) see Reinoud Leenders' "The Politics of Corruption in Post-War Lebanon" (PhD. SOAS, 2004). Leenders is vital reading for anyone interested in getting a grasp on the workings of Lebanon's "allotment state", the principles of which guided the refugee-relief effort.

<sup>7</sup> If using the shorthand term "neoliberal" is problematic, applying "neofeudal" verges on folly. Scholars cannot agree on a definition of "feudalism" viable for discussions medieval Europe, let alone one that can be extrapolated outside that relatively narrow frame. Arguably, the 16<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup>-century Imara of the Ma'n and Shihab amirs is as close as Mt Lebanon ever came to being truly "feudal", but the term is heavy with baggage. For a concise argument of why this is the case, see Joel Beinin's *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East* (CUP, 2001) p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ruminating upon the "privatising" of facets of the Lebanese state, Traboulsi remarks, "a good part of what is usually called the monopoly of legislation – that is, an aspect of sovereignty – has been ceded to [the] sects ... One of the functions of state is public education. Article 10 of the Lebanese constitution abolishes this function in favour of private sectarian education ... In Lebanon the state is responsible for protecting and encouraging private education, 'on condition this doesn't contradict public education,' a contradiction in terms ... The theory that dominated Lebanese life since 1948 is that Lebanon's strength is its military weakness, thus efforts to strengthen the army were blocked ... From 1982, then, national defence became privatised. With Syrian help, but with the acquiescence of all, [defence] was ceded to Hizbullah. In 1990 when it was accepted that Hizbullah would remain armed, the US, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and all the militia leaders [that is a large portion of the political class] accepted it.

<sup>9</sup> This custom has a long tradition that can be traced from the relations Amir Fakr al-Din Ma'n (d.1635) maintained with certain Italian princes to the ties Sa'd Hariri, Walid Jumblatt and their allies cultivate with America and France today.

<sup>10</sup> To interrogate the structural shortcomings of the clientelist state, the narrative continues, would be to risk the imposition of a single-party dictatorship in Lebanon – Nasserist, Ba'hist, Islamic – that would erase Lebanon's distinctive identity. This narrative of Lebanese history received an existential shot in the arm in the spring and summer of 2005. The *intifadat al-istiqlal* (independence uprising or "cedar revolution" in US State Department parlance) is depicted as Lebanon's great national ingathering, with representatives of all Lebanese confessions unified against a Syrian Ba'ath political hegemony that sanctioned political assassination with impunity. Though all confessions were indeed present during these demonstrations, all Lebanon's sectarian political groupings were not – a fact that can be explained in terms of these parties being the agents of foreign states.

<sup>11</sup> See Adnan El-Ghoul, "With supplies already low, evacuees settled outside Jbeil hope to wait it out", *The Daily Star*, 24 July, 2006. One of Ghoul's informants claims to have migrated from Uza'i, in Dahyeh, to the Biq'a village of Brital before ending up in a tent outside Jbayl.

<sup>12</sup> Samidoun was not the only such organisation to spring up. "Mouatinoun" ("Citizens"), for example was formed by a group of student and youth activists. Though they accepted promises of donations from members of the Hussein family – whose most prominent member is Hussein Hussein, a Shi'a politician of rural notable origins – they resented any political association with the Husseins as political agents.

<sup>13</sup> The HRC was the locus of the state's relief activities throughout the war. Though it appears to have been part of the Ministry of Social Affairs in days past, in recent years the commission has been operating out of the premier's offices in the Grand Sarail. Its head throughout the crisis has been Nabil Jisr, a Future man who insiders say serves with the approval of all the major political groupings. When, a few days into the ceasefire, Fadl Shalaq resigned as the head of the Council for Development and Reconstruction. Siniora appointed Jisr to replace him.

<sup>14</sup> That is not to say that Hizbullah's refugee-relief effort was not politicised too. The residents of the border village of Houla tend to be partisans of Hizbullah or the Communist Party. Displaced to



Beirut, one village family recounted how, in the early days of the war, Hizbullah activists turned up with aid, but they disbursed none to communist families.

Another testimony, from a volunteer with the Sunni Maqasid Foundation, described how during the war Hizbullah provided displaced families in the charity's care with 3-4 hot meals a week.

It is problematic to generalise upon such testimonies, not least because they may represent isolated incidents – Hizbullah may have become more generous to non-Hizbullah families later in the war; the Maqasid meals may have stopped. If the anecdotes are consistent with practice, though, it suggests Hizbullah ecumenicalism is shrewdly pragmatic.

The CP is both an old rival for Shi'a loyalty – in fact the only political group besides Hizbullah to have capitalised on successfully resisting Israeli occupation – and of no particular significance in maintaining a post-conflict political balance, so delivering aid to communist Shi'a would not be a priority. Providing assistance to a high-profile Sunni charity like Maqasid, on the other hand, would bolster Hizbullah's ties with a significant player. Such gestures are particularly important given that since Israel launched this war, observers have been nervously awaiting signs of sectarian strife – today's template for civil unrest being the Sunni-Shi'a conflict in Iraq.

<sup>15</sup> Speaking as an interested observer rather than a participant in the relief effort, economist Kamal Hamdan said it was his impression was that the balance of power amongst the sects – mainly Mustaqbal, Hizbullah, Amal, PSP, and to a lesser extent FPM and the LF – regulated the distribution of the major part of the relief.

<sup>16</sup> “These [political] NGOs are more or less a reflection of the political superstructure, with [all] having their own organisations,” remarked Hamdan. “The problem was that the secular part of the NGO community – Movement Sociale, Secours Populaire and so forth – didn't have any political voice.” Interview, 25 August 2006.

On 14 August Samidoun released a statement to the press, effectively its own narrative of the civil refugee-relief effort (see appendix). It is evident from this narrative that, for certain elements within the NGO community, was ideologically guided, whether they have an effective political voice or not.

<sup>17</sup> Jisr's remarks during this 8 August interview are interesting on a number of levels. First, it is inconceivable that an official with Jisr's experience in the “allotment state” would imagine that an affiliate of Amal or 'Awn's FPM would distribute aid in the name of anyone *but* their respective parties. Second anyone with experience in the NGO field would question the wisdom of the HRC's unregulated distribution system – i.e., not checking the credentials or performance record of those claiming to be NGOs before disbursing aid to them. Presumably, Jisr's praise of Future's ability to fund its own relief effort – against the criticisms of accredited NGOs who do not have such means – simply echoes his own party loyalties, rather than any discourse of disdain towards social democrats looking for “handouts”.

<sup>18</sup> Founded after the June 2005 assassination of al-Nahar columnist and USJ politics professor of the same name, with the goal of promoting issues such as free speech and press freedom.

<sup>19</sup> “14 March” is shorthand for that conglomeration of sectarian political groupings that, under the leadership of Druze lord Walid Jumblatt and the Hariri family, took control of parliament and dominated government after the 2005 elections. The appellation comes from a carnival-like public demonstration held on 14 March, 2005, which may have brought a million people to the street, making it the largest in Lebanese history. Called one month after the assassination of former premier Rafiq al-Hariri, the demo was a response to another demonstration on 8 March, called by Hizbullah to thank the departing Syrian army for its service to Lebanon. Fielding 500,000-750,000 people, 8 March set the previous record for Lebanon's largest street demonstration.

<sup>20</sup> The kidnaps were Israel's justification for implementing a long-planned bombing campaign against Lebanon. If the redoubtable Seymour Hersh is to be trusted, policymakers in the White House and Pentagon were actively complicit in planning the Israeli bombing campaign some months before the 12 July kidnaps. Seymour M. Hersh, “Watching Lebanon”, *The New Yorker*, 21 August 2006.

<sup>21</sup> During his travels in the first week or so of the war, Hariri made a number of more or less veiled criticisms of Hizbullah for having provoked the Israeli attacks. In this he was assumed to be following the lead of the Saudi regime – see “Saudi sideswipe at Hezbollah” *Al-Jazeera*, 14 July 2006 [<http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/72BAC422-6079-419C-9DD1-2FCBF21FDA5E.htm>]. While in Saudi, Hariri was quoted as saying, “These adventurers (Hizbullah) have placed us in a difficult situation because of their irresponsibility ... We demand a reckoning with these adventurers who embroiled Lebanon in a crisis it does not need.” In an 18 July interview with al-Jazeera during an official visit with Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Egoan, Hariri was quoted as follows: “Lebanon is in an unnecessary situation. Lebanon must not turn into an arena for others' battles. Whoever wants to fight Israel should go and open their own front, they can go and fight Israel and maybe even win. The main point is they shouldn't incite people here just to open a front against Israel.” He repeated these



sentiments in Alexandria during talks with Jordan's Abdullah II and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. By the time of his 21 July press conference held at Elysee with Jacques Chirac, however, Hariri had moderated his tone. "Today I do not want to blame Hizbullah or any other Lebanese," he said. "What Lebanon needs today is the unity of the Lebanese people. What Israel is trying to do is to divide the Lebanese, through its barbaric aggressions on Lebanon." Evidently Hariri's handlers recommended that he rein in his comments.

<sup>22</sup> This experience has been echoed amongst the NGO and civil society associations who spearheaded the relief effort and continued working after the relief crisis ended in Beirut. Samidoun field coordinators working in south Lebanon say they have been working with the World Food Programme, UNHCR, UNICEF and the Humanitarian Information Centre as well as Premiere Urgence, Handicapped International, and Telecommunications Sans Frontiers. Mouatinoun volunteers say they have been coordinating with Norwegian People's Aid, the World Food Programme and the Qatari Red Crescent, as well as receiving donations from various embassies.

<sup>23</sup> Maha Yahya, a UNDP liaison officer working between the HRC/premier's office and the various UN relief agencies, reckons these problems stemmed partly from simple ignorance, partly from relief aid being moved to the Lebanon operation from another arena. 30 August 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Though callous, the minister's words were obviously selected with her international press audience in mind. Ma'wad's later remarks to the local press sounded more concerned about the welfare of the displaced. Such foreign media-consciousness is a feature of Lebanon's political class, and 14 March politicians demonstrated this with verve during the intifadat al-istiqlal – see Jim Quilty, "Performance politics in Lebanon" *Middle East International*, March 18th, 2005 [<http://meionline.com/newsanalysis/339.shtml>].

<sup>25</sup> Sukleen wasn't the only business to try to take advantage of wartime migration, though. In the second week of the war, for instance, the clothing retailer Aishti sent out a mass SMS text message informing consumers that, "Aishti wishes you the best during this hard period. Aizone is now open at Printania Hotel Broumana & Mzaar Faraya, from 10 to 10."

The message was evidently intended for Beirutis who had fled to the Mountains to escape the noise of the Dahyeh bombardment. Aishti was not the only business to issue such invitations. Several Beirut-area restaurateurs and bar owners migrated to bustling mountain towns like Broumana. One Beirut pub owner who kept his Gemayzeh bar open throughout the conflict, meanwhile, recounts how, early in the war, officers from the police station across the street berated him, accusing him of 'war profiteering'.

<sup>26</sup> Lin Noueihed "Lebanon must rebuild confidence, not just roads", *Reuters*, 29 August 2006; Jim Quilty "Israeli strikes deal major blow to Bekaa's working class", *The Daily Star*, 5 August 2006.

Given the ferocity of the Israeli air campaign, it is no surprise that the private sector shrank from this conflict. A pair of oil tankers, offshore since the war began, did not land their cargoes until the ceasefire. In an interview in week three of the war, Jisr said the companies who owned the tankers had received assurances from the Israelis through the UN, a letter of guarantee from the Lebanese government and assurances that the US navy would escort the tankers to the delivery point. The companies, evidently without war insurance, refused to take the risk. Jisr said Beirut was in negotiations with Algiers to send a small, state-owned tanker to offload and land the cargo. This plan bore no fruit either.

<sup>27</sup> This was not the case in the local business community alone. The great, untold international business story of this war concerns its greatest beneficiaries – the arms manufacturers and their salesmen. One of the reasons Hizbullah was so successful against the Israeli army in the field was the Russian, Chinese and Iranian missile technology that allowed its fighters to cripple several Merkava tanks and a Saar 5-class corvette (perhaps two) – the most advanced naval ship of its class. Like so much of the arms trade, this story remains largely inaccessible and untold, though of course it is an integral part of the globalised economy.

<sup>28</sup> AP journalist Bassem Mroué broke the story in English.

<sup>29</sup> A couple of days later it was leaked that the Health Ministry official had been released without charge. Apparently he is a client of House Speaker Nabih Berri.

<sup>30</sup> Jim Quilty, "Questions abound over state's relief effort" *The Daily Star* 9 August 2006.

<sup>31</sup> According to the HRC's Hala Saghbini, Jisr's press attaché, each weekly hamper for a family of five, contained tins of tuna or meat, rice [3 kilos] sugar [2 kilos] tea [.5 kilo] cheese [2 kilos], spaghetti, peas, cooking oil [1.5 litres], jam, and 2 kilos of powdered milk.

<sup>32</sup> Lysandra Ohrstrom "Food aid for displaced turns up in retail stores" *The Daily Star*, 16 August 2006.

<sup>33</sup> "There's a lot about the response that went well, especially the response of civil society," remarks Kamal Hamdan of the relief effort. "These tens of thousands of volunteers, young people who carried out the final distribution." An economist who heads the Economic Division of the Consulting and

Research Institute, Hamdan says that, at the end of the day, the relief effort “has not been a catastrophe. Even if 10-20 percent of aid relief was distributed informally ... It was in general a success story because the catastrophe that might have happened was averted.” Interview, 25 August 2006.

Hamdan’s praise for the work of Lebanese civil society throughout the crisis has been echoed among many who have witnessed the relief effort. “I was very impressed by the solidarity among the civil society groups,” says the UNDP’s Maha Yahya. “Especially after all that we’ve been through in this country over the last 18 months. It was exceptional.”

<sup>34</sup> Ironically, perhaps, there is no serious question that the civil actors who assumed the domestic responsibilities of state will make much political capital from their labour. It is almost amusing to imagine the recently displaced – mainly rural, often devout, most more or less committed to Hizbullah or Amal – becoming the political constituents of Samidoun’s university-educated, secular urbanites. As committed leftists – some unreconstructed Trotskyites – they are in any case ideologically ill-disposed to playing the game of allotment politics. Such incongruities are a gift of Lebanon.

<sup>35</sup> There were others. In the midst of his glowing assessment of the efforts of the civil NGO community, for instance, Hamdan, briefly remarked that “the monitoring, reporting, and collection of statistical data was chaotic. It would have been very useful if this had been compiled.” Interview, 30 August, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> The public administration staffing such a functionary would be assumed to have “a clear mandate governed by procedures and regulations with external checks and controls to ensure accountability” and “a separation of public office from private interests.” Leenders, “Politics of Corruption”, pg.273. None of these characteristics spring immediately to mind in the context of the Lebanese state.

#### APPENDIX SAMIDOUN’S OFFICIAL STATEMENT, 14 AUGUST, 2006

On July 12, 2006, leftist political groups; anti-globalization associations; associations struggling for social and sexual freedoms and development; cultural clubs; and Palestinian students groups, staged an open-ended protest in Martyrs Square in support of the Palestinian people and in condemnation of aggression against Palestine. The move was an attempt to break the wall of international and Arab silence. On that same day, war was waged against Lebanon, turning the protest into a campaign to relieve the displaced. That campaign was called “Steadfast.”

Street movement and popular solidarity granted victory to the resistance that bet on the people's support facing aggression, when government relief work was only restricted to a decision to open schools.

Since the first day, people started providing assistance by all means and large numbers of volunteers, who were not displaced yet, started heading to volunteering centers to assist about one million displaced, i.e. one quarter of the population in Lebanon. The situation proved that the decision to refrain from intervening in support of the displaced was political and had nothing to do with the deficiency of resources or the lack of true social security networks.

From our position in relief work, we believe that the battle that we and our people are waging to provide assistance and basic and direct needs to survive is a perfect political battle. It is a battle to restore rights to their owners, a battle of steadfastness, resistance in its various forms, confrontation of the official Arab and international support to aggression, and confrontation of distinction exercised by the Lebanese authorities against its people when they refrained, then hesitated, and then neglected the support of the displaced.

This act of popular solidarity is the basis to build a fair society and system, not the inhumane “democratic” systems imposed by “international community.” The United States did not achieve any results in its project to “democratize” the Middle East by creating dependent authorities. In Iraq, the US democracy entailed devastating sectarian chaos, and the US democracy fell before the Palestinian people's choice of the Hamas Movement in the latest legislative elections. And now, the Lebanese people's resistance to the Israeli aggression strikes the US administration's bet to turn Lebanon into a winning card for its project.

Some bet that with the expansion of the US hegemony in the Middle East, they could follow the project and enter the “free” world under the leadership of the US. But failure to implement Resolution 1559 politically and diplomatically and failure to contain the anti-US project movement led to entrust the Israeli war machine with the implementation of the new Middle East project in Lebanon.

As we declare our unconditional support to the resistance, we call for the formation of a popular resistance that would maintain the process of liberation by supporting the Lebanese society facing the

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invaders; a resistance movement aiming at erasing the main reasons behind repression, hostilities and wars in the region, starting with the "new" Middle East project.

Consequently, we demand:

- that the US Ambassador to Lebanon be expelled and that a clear stand be taken regarding all states supporting aggression
- that any aid officially provided by the USA be rejected
- that demonstrations be held to pressure Arab and international governments into stopping the Israeli aggression against Lebanon
- that demonstrations be held to pressure Arab governments into using the power of oil and financial assets - that demonstrations be held to pressure Lebanese government into assuming its responsibilities in relief work.

# THE OUTLOOK FOR ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION IN LEBANON AFTER THE 2006 WAR

**Bassam Fattouh\***  
and  
**Joachim Kolb†**

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of an uneasy truce, the challenges of reconstruction once again loom large in Lebanon. In a situation where much is still in flux, and basic decisions about the process of rebuilding the country remain to be made, the following pages provide a very preliminary damage assessment, while exploring the capabilities, financial resources, and strategic constraints affecting different political actors inside and outside Lebanon. Furthermore, it is argued that in the reconstruction effort, as well as during the confrontation with Israel, a weak central government has so far been ceding ground to other actors, particularly to Hizbullah, which aims to cement the advances made on the battlefield as it intends to lead the reconstruction effort. This further erosion of the Lebanese state is likely to have long-term repercussions. While post-Taif reconstruction was arguably based on a minimal and fragile consensus between the main internal and external players, it now remains to be seen what impact the extreme weakness of the centre, combined with a more confrontational international conjunction and a reassertion of sectarian identities, will have on the distribution of power and wealth.

A further field that is likely to be affected is that of defence, where the desirability of a coordinated national defence effort is belied by the reality on the ground. The Lebanese army, for a long time just one of the various armed factions in the country, is now flying its flag for the first time in decades all over the country's territory. This reassertion of military state power contrasts with the state's limited economic potential in the reconstruction effort, where Hizbullah and other actors are far quicker to take action than the central authority. While it may well be too early to draw definitive conclusions at this early stage of the reconstruction effort, the following pages provide an overview of the main arenas in which the process of both rebuilding the country's physical infrastructure and reshaping power structures while reasserting bases for authority is being played out.

## COST ESTIMATES

The month of war that devastated Lebanon just as economic growth appeared to be gathering momentum at last and the country was looking forward to a bumper tourist season has exacted a heavy toll. Although exact details will only emerge once the ongoing damage assessment is completed, preliminary assessments have been proffered.

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According to the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) official website, the IDF struck more than 7,000 targets in Lebanon and flew 15,500 sorties over Lebanon, 10,000 of which were combat missions and 2,000 helicopter combat missions. Its vessels sailed over 8,000 hours along the Lebanese coast and conducted 2,500 bombardments of targets along the Lebanese coast.<sup>1</sup> The Israeli navy also imposed an ongoing blockade on Lebanon, allowing in only a few vessels providing humanitarian aid.<sup>2</sup> According to Human Rights Watch, Israel has used artillery-fired cluster munitions in populated areas of Lebanon, which are “unacceptably inaccurate and unreliable weapons when used around civilians”.<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch also noted that “Israeli forces have systematically failed to distinguish between combatants and civilians in their military campaign against Hizballah.”<sup>4</sup>

The Lebanese government estimates the human costs at 1,183 dead (30 percent of whom are children), 4,054 injured, and 262,174 displaced<sup>5</sup>, with the latter possibly in need of upward revision.<sup>6</sup> However, figures given by the Khiam Center, an NGO supported by the Canadian embassy, are considerably higher for the number of displaced Lebanese, which is put at 980,393.<sup>7</sup> This large discrepancy may be due to the Khiam Center and the Lebanese government counting different things, i.e. temporary refugees who have homes to return to, about one million in total, versus those rendered permanently homeless by the war. This is indeed reflected in the Lebanese Economy and Trade Ministry’s announcement that “a quarter of Lebanon’s population has been forced out of their homes, and as many as 200,000 of the estimated one million evacuees may have no home to return to when the war is over”.<sup>8</sup>

Israeli strikes concentrated on civilian areas and infrastructure. As a result, damage to infrastructure and the built-up environment in general has been extensive. As of July 22, the Khiam Center listed the following toll: “28 vital points (airports, ports, water and sewage treatment, electrical plants etc.), 600 km roads, 23 fuel stations, 73 bridges, 72 overpasses, 6,800 private houses / apartments, 160 units in the commercial sector (factories, markets, farms, etc.)”. By the end of the hostilities on August 15, the damage had increased substantially: governmental sources now count 15,000 destroyed homes and 80 bridges hit.<sup>9</sup>

Especially the residential sector has been severely affected, with an estimated built-up area of around 4 million m<sup>2</sup> having suffered complete destruction. Assuming a reconstruction cost of \$550 per square meter, one source suggested that the total damage would amount to at least \$2 billion.<sup>10</sup> Although the destruction of bridges, highways and the different sectors is a nation-wide phenomenon, residential structures are mostly affected in predominantly Shi’a areas such as Bir Abed and Haret Hreik in southern Beirut, where “an almost daily barrage of missiles, bombs and gunship artillery has systematically removed Hizballah’s headquarters, its schools, clinics, sports centres and homes, along with the homes of thousands of civilians who live nearby”<sup>11</sup>, and in the south of the country. Moreover, Israel heavily targeted the transportation infrastructure such as roads and bridges, claiming that this forms an essential part of the military operation to weaken Hizballah’s rocket-launching capability and to cut off Hizballah’s weapon supplies. The total damage in the transport sector is estimated to stand at \$440 million, \$349 million of which are damages to 94 roads and 70 bridges, while \$55 million are damages to the country’s three airports.<sup>12</sup> These estimates do not include the destruction of numerous cars and trucks on the road. In a country traditionally reliant on transit and seaborne trade, the destruction of bridges, roads, ports and airports constitutes a major blow to the economy. This

can be seen most clearly in the case of the Port of Beirut. The latter, processing more than 90 percent of national exports and imports, ceased operation for the duration of the entire conflict. This closure constituted a blow to the Lebanese economy not only in terms of the loss of imports duties, estimated at around \$8 million per month, but also by undermining its role as a regional centre for transit trade after the construction of new storage facilities in 2005. One should also add the rise in the costs of insurance, which will inflate the general costs of transit trade through Beirut and very likely undermine its competitiveness in the future.<sup>13</sup> The destruction of bridges, roads and trucks have also affected transit trade to the Gulf, both directly by limiting national exports, and indirectly as freight forwarders were not able to ship goods to Persian Gulf destinations via Beirut.

**Table 1- Distribution of Costs per Region**

Region	Cost in Million of US\$	Share of Total Cost in percentage
Dahiyeh	876	33.64
Bint Jbeil	552	21.20
Marjioun	362	13.90
Tyre	219	8.41
Nabatiyeh	180	6.91
Others (mainly Baalbeck, Hermal, Hasbaia, Sidon, West Bekaa, Jezeen)	415	15.94

Source: *Al-Hayat*, 5 September, 2006, p.12.

Minister of the Economy Sami Haddad estimates the cost at 3.6 billion dollars and the distribution as shown in the table above which shows clearly that more than 85% of the destruction was concentrated in the south and South Beirut.

The agriculture sector has been badly hit. In a recent press release, the international aid agency Oxfam estimated that up to 85 percent of the country's 195,000 farmers have lost all or some of their harvest at a cost of between US\$135m and US\$185m.<sup>14</sup> The bombing prevented many farmers from harvesting their crops and as result many crops, including tobacco (which alone supports 14,000 families in Southern Lebanon), were left to wither. Damage to water pipes and pumps caused major water shortages for irrigation. The report estimates a livestock loss of one million poultry, 25,000 goats and sheep, and 4,000 cattle. These losses will have serious economic implications as 35 per cent of Lebanese either directly or indirectly rely for their livelihood on farming.<sup>15</sup>

The industrial sector has also been badly hit. Estimates suggest that ten large factories and more than 700 small and medium industrial units have been completely or partially destroyed, corresponding to a total damage of at least \$190 million.<sup>16</sup> Israeli targets have included all sorts of factories, including the country's largest milk factory, a glass factory, a detergent and foodstuff factory, a paper box factory, and prefabricated homes plants. This has led observers to question the aim of the Israeli bombardments.<sup>17</sup> The implication of such vast destruction, however, go beyond its direct costs as the factories affected used to employ around 4,000 workers who are now jobless or will very likely become so.<sup>18</sup> Fadi Abboud the President of the Association of Lebanese Industrialists president told AFP that "80



to 90 industrial firms were destroyed by Israeli attacks. Their employees were not fired for economic reasons but owing to ‘force majeure’ because the companies cannot function any longer”. Marwan Iskandar a prominent Lebanese economist, predicts that the number of jobs lost in the industrial sector could reach 10,000.<sup>19</sup>

The closure of factories naturally also implies a loss of export revenues and foreign markets. It already led to a loan crisis, as many of the destroyed businesses are no longer able to meet their debt repayments. This problem is compounded by the fact that many of the businesses that have taken loans have also lost their collateral, which is mainly their now destroyed property. Given that 30 percent of Lebanese commercial banks’ outstanding loans are to the private sector, this is likely to affect the health of the banking sector unless significant help is provided soon.<sup>20</sup>

Lebanon’s electricity, telecommunication and water sectors also received their fair share of demolition. The electricity sector has suffered losses estimated at around \$208 million, \$128 million of which are estimated losses in power transmission and \$80 million in power generation. Moreover, the destruction of five fuel storage tanks in Jiyeh’s power plant has led to an oil spill that has so far affected 100 kilometers of coastline, the country’s worst-ever environmental disaster. Observers have compared this spillage to the 1989 spill from the Exxon Valdez tanker accident in Alaska.<sup>21</sup> The price tag for cleaning up this environmental damage may add another \$50m to \$100m to the reconstruction bill.<sup>22</sup> This further reduces the chances of a recovery in the tourist sector, which had been looking forward to 1.6 million visitors for the 2006 tourist season.<sup>23</sup> Telecommunication installations were also not immune from Israeli shelling. Israel attacked many media installations such as TV antennas and, in one instance, killed a technician at the commercial Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC).

Figure 1 in the appendix provides a map of the locations bombed. As can be seen from this figure, the destruction has been mainly concentrated in predominately Shi’a areas in Beirut and the South. In financial terms, all this was tantamount to a total damage of more than US\$ 2.4bn by late July, as summarized in the table below. By the end of the war, however, this amount had increased considerably. “State reconstruction officials say direct damages from the 34-day war add up to around \$3.5bn, including 1.5bn for bridges, roads, and other infrastructure”;<sup>24</sup> which compares to a number of \$2.5bn given by the Lebanese government on August 16 for total damages to the country’s infrastructure.<sup>25</sup>

**Table 2- The Direct Costs of the War on Lebanon as of End of July 2006**

Sector	Estimated cost of destruction (in million of US dollars)	Notes
Housing and Trade	1,464	Does not include losses due to loss of furniture
Transportation	404	Bridges and Roads (94 roads and 70 bridges; 349 million) Airports (3 airports; 55 million) Does not include the cost of destruction of hundreds of cars, trucks, and other transport modes

Electricity	208	Power Generation (80 million) Power transmission (128 million)
Industrial Establishments	190	10 large factories and more than 700 small and medium industrial establishments destroyed
Telecommunication	99	
Water	74	
Military Installations	16	
Gas Stations	10	22 Gas stations destroyed

Source: "Al-Mustaqbal Tanshur Taqreer Markaz Al-Da'm Al-Iqtisadi", *Al-Mustaqbal*, August 22, 2006.

That the above numbers contain a large margin of error is to be expected in an environment wherein, until recently, continued violence hampered the accounting effort. Even if the actual number were to be closer to the lower end of the scale, however, it will be a massive burden, well in excess of 10 percent of last year's GDP, which had reached an estimated \$21.2bn.<sup>26</sup> The economic damage caused by the recent crisis occurs just as the economy was picking up after an unsatisfactory performance in 2005. Political turbulences following the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 had entailed a fall in GDP growth from an estimated 4.3 percent in 2004 to 0.1 percent in 2005.<sup>27</sup> In the current year, the recent confrontation may well lead to negative GDP growth,<sup>28</sup> which implies a loss of more than \$1 billion. The implications of the war for the government's budget are also dire. The expected increase in government expenditure, now needed to deal with immediate emergency needs, is estimated at around \$13.3 million while the government's direct and indirect revenues (mainly import duties) have been hit hard, causing a loss in government revenues of \$66.3 million, and, in turn, prompting a further deterioration of the government's budget deficit. Whether this would translate into a future fiscal crisis would be determined by the extent of the financial support and aid the Lebanese government is able to obtain. To these costs one should add the loss in export revenues due to the air, sea and land embargo, the loss in flows of foreign direct and portfolio investment estimated at \$2 billion, and the loss of tourism revenues estimated on their own at around \$3 billion.<sup>29</sup> Naturally, all these financial drains will have a negative effect on any economic reform plans the government may have had. For example, the government's privatization plans are likely to be postponed again if not halted altogether due to a loss of investors' confidence and an expected decline in revenues gained from public assets. Finally, one should also add the costs of unemployment where many economists predict that war damage and Israeli blockade will result in large layoffs and a sharp rise in unemployment with some predicting a rise in unemployment to 20% from its current level of 9% and a loss of 50,000 to 55,000 jobs.<sup>30</sup>

All these factors combined are likely to have an adverse impact on the stability of the Lebanese currency after there had been some indications of improvement in the first half of this year, as reflected in relatively high Central Bank foreign reserves at the time. During the first few days of the Israeli attack, however, the Central Bank intervened in the foreign currency market by selling dollars and buying Lebanese pounds to beef up the Lebanese pound. This resulted in a loss of around \$1 billion in the Bank's foreign reserves.<sup>31</sup> In early August, Saudi Arabia's

deposit of \$1 billion at the Central Bank, followed by Kuwait's deposit of a further \$500 million, helped stabilize the currency market<sup>32</sup>.

If all these indirect costs together are taken into account (i.e. the loss of tourism revenue, export revenue, government revenue, loss of foreign investment flows, the cost of stabilizing the currency, and failure to achieve a positive growth rate), there appear to be good reasons to adopt the estimate of total war damages in excess of \$9.5 billion.<sup>33</sup> However, the United Nations (UN) reportedly offered an even higher estimate of the overall economic costs by mentioning a figure of "at least \$15 billion, if not more."<sup>34</sup> Against this background, Jean Fabre, a spokesperson for the UN Development Program (UNDP) painted a very dark picture, claiming that "the damage is such that the last 15 years of work on reconstruction and rehabilitation, following the previous problems that Lebanon experienced, are now annihilated."<sup>35</sup> As to the chances that Lebanon will achieve the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, related efforts "have been brought back to zero. Fifteen years of work have been wiped out in a month."<sup>36</sup>

The war may also have major long-lasting repercussions on the Lebanese economy that go beyond the direct and indirect costs listed here. Indeed, if the causes of the war are perceived to persist and if this current episode is perceived to be one of many other rounds of hostilities still to come, then the costs of the war are, of course, likely to be much higher. But even if such gloomy predictions fail to materialize, the mere perception that the shock will be permanent can cause general loss of confidence and a transformation of the economic incentive system with long lasting adverse effects on the economy as a whole. These shocks are likely to affect human capital and investment the most as a general loss of human capital and skills through, for example, mass migration, and the quasi-permanent departure of private investors are very difficult to reverse. There are no exact figures available on how many Lebanese left during the crisis, but Lebanese TV footage showed thousands of Lebanese with dual nationality fleeing Lebanon. Thus, unlike natural disasters that can have devastating effects on the economy but are less likely to alter the economy's future incentive system, a permanent man-made shock can place the economy on a completely new (and negative) growth and development path, pushing the economy towards a low-growth and poverty trap. This would not only entail high direct and indirect costs, but it would also be a very difficult situation to re-emerge from. Whether Lebanon has indeed fallen into such a trap is still too early to say.

### **PERSPECTIVES ON GOVERNMENT-LED RECONSTRUCTION: PAST AND PRESENT**

The Lebanese government is ill equipped to deal alone with the present challenges. The financial stress of post-Taif reconstruction has left the Lebanese government with a debt burden that makes it very problematic for it to either commit its own financial resources to reconstruction or engage in further borrowing. Initially, massive state spending had led to strong growth driven by a construction and real estate boom that saw GDP increase by 8 percent in 1996.<sup>37</sup> However, copious financing through domestic and international loans caused massive indebtedness constituting a serious drain on the country's public resources in the years that followed. Consequently, in 2002 the country faced a severe economic crisis as national debt reached US\$ 25bn, corresponding to 150 percent

of GDP, the current account deficit was ballooning, and GDP stagnating at a flat growth rate.<sup>38</sup> With Lebanon's total public debt at \$38.8 billion as of April 2006,<sup>39</sup> debt service obligations had completely absorbed revenue increases. Reflecting Lebanon's financial troubles, yields on government bonds, which had increased to 8.7 percent after al-Hariri's assassination, remained very high. These debts levels as well as increased levels of political risk in the wake of the latest Israeli campaign are both expected to severely limit future lending potential. In this context, any additional borrowing is likely to be devoted to rolling over existing debt. More in particular, high debt levels resulting from past reconstruction activity will cap the potential for future independent financial commitments to reconstruction on the part of the Government of Lebanon.

While lack of activity in the reconstruction field is to be expected in the light of the financial constraints facing the Lebanese government, it would carry the danger of further undermining the government's authority. This leaves the government few options other than relying heavily on foreign donors. In this context, Prime Minister Fu'ad Siniora recently declared that "we said from the very beginning that the losses that were inflicted on Lebanon are something we cannot shoulder alone, so we are trying to devise some creative solutions to the problem. One of them is opening the door for individual or country donors."<sup>40</sup> Regarding the latter, a UN-sponsored donor conference in Stockholm was held on 31 August 2006 and attended by some sixty states and NGOs. It was expected to focus on "humanitarian needs and early reconstruction".<sup>41</sup> Although appreciating international efforts in this respect, Siniora warned donors that, ultimately, the Lebanese government wants to be in full control of any such aid operation, declaring that "Lebanon is not a house without any doormen. If someone wants to donate a pencil to Lebanon, the Cabinet has to approve it."<sup>42</sup>

Yet monopolizing and securing financial commitments are not enough on their own. The government has also to cast itself as the most capable candidate for undertaking efficient supervision and implementation of reconstruction activities. However, past experience with the administrative capabilities of the Lebanese government vis-à-vis this reconstruction effort gives some cause for concern. Reconstruction after the end of the civil war had both a public and a private component, even though both were closely linked and remained concentrated on the capital and the surrounding area. For the Lebanese cabinet and its most prominent post-war politician, Rafiq al-Hariri, priorities included rebuilding the country, providing infrastructure and services, and making Lebanon's service economy competitive in a post-conflict Middle East where it was expected to compete head-on with Israel in a globalized marketplace. As Perthes (2003:104) explains:

The "Project Hariri", which dominated his era, consisted mainly of two elements: first, the physical reconstruction of the country and the creation of a business-friendly climate, second, reconstituting and reasserting state power. Hariri assumed that Lebanon would soon have to compete with Israel in a new regional division of labor – a common assumption being, at least until 1996, that a speedy regional peace settlement was imminent -, and that it was hence imperative to make better use of the advantages of the Lebanese economy and establish the country as a regional service and financial centre.<sup>43</sup>

Between 1992 and the end of 2000, the Lebanese state had invested more than \$5.7bn in public infrastructure, including the electricity grid (\$1,372mn), post and telecommunications (\$769.5mn), roads and public transport (\$566.8mn), ports and airports (\$636.3mn), and the water sector (\$636.3mn).<sup>44</sup> The private reconstruction effort in the years after the Taif accord, was equally spearheaded by Rafiq al-Hariri, who was the initiator and major shareholder of Solidere.<sup>45</sup> Hariri's vast personal wealth, his prestige, particularly with Saudi investors, and his ability to attract international financing allowed him to initiate a comprehensive reconstruction project.

Following the death of Hariri, it tends to be forgotten that his reconstruction project was not without its critics and that in some instances it was, in fact, subject to fierce political opposition. It has been variously argued that in the post-1992 era the country experienced a geographically skewed reconstruction effort, in which, furthermore, the boundary between private and public interests at times became blurred beyond recognition, leaving the reconstruction effort open to political challenges. Geographically, a strong tendency of the reconstruction work to centre on the capital and the surrounding region was discernible to any visitor. While remote regions were generally at a comparative disadvantage, lack of investment particularly troubled the south, where the Israeli occupation had limited economic links to the rest of the territory until 2000. However, this problem did not go entirely unnoticed as, since the early 1990s, the state had been extending its services to the south where Shiite militias, including Amal and Hizbullah, shared a large part of the state's reconstruction budget between them. In recent years, Southern Lebanon has also benefited from emigrant money coming in from Africa, the United States and South America.<sup>46</sup> Even so, in the light of continuously high 'perceived political risk', private sector economic activity and investment have remained limited to the agricultural sector.<sup>47</sup>

Regarding the blurring of private and public spheres in reconstruction, the state's reconstruction agency, the Centre for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), stands out as a prime example. Founded in 1977, it functioned as a semi-autonomous agency by the early 1990s, when it found itself responsible both for the assessment, the implementation, and the financing of reconstruction projects; in itself a concentration of responsibilities that are likely to result in conflicts of interest. Following 1992, the CDR was soon transformed into a kind of personal fiefdom, as leading positions were given to personal friends and persons taken from Hariri's entourage.<sup>48</sup> Unsurprisingly, this capture of the state reconstruction agency by a major private-sector player negatively affected transparency.<sup>49</sup>

Furthermore, the lack of a national consensus on Hariri's reconstruction project meant that it became the object of political opposition once control of the presidency passed to Emile Lahoud in 1998 at Syria's instigation. While before his resignation in 1998 Hariri's twin role as prime minister of Lebanon and the driving force behind Solidere had lent a semi-official character to some of the latter's operations, a new-found government emphasis on fighting corruption appears to have targeted mainly persons linked to the Hariri camp. Consequently, subsequent years witnessed an overall slowdown of both the overall reconstruction effort and the economic liberalization and privatisation drive.<sup>50</sup>

In sum, past experience highlights some major flaws that are to be avoided in the current reconstruction effort. Most importantly, for reconstruction to succeed this time it should be truly nationwide in scope, more transparent, and in one way or another become more insulated from political manoeuvring and internal

bickering. However, the state's weak institutional capacities to put these principles into practice does not give much cause for optimism. When announcing his recent reconstruction plan, Prime minister Seniora insisted that all funding would be routed through the Lebanese government and pledged to handout LL50 million (\$33,000) in aid to each family whose home was completely destroyed during the war. He emphasized that these funds would be directly transferred into these families' bank accounts. Indeed, there seems to be the intention to this time round sideline some of the quasi-state organizations including the CDR. In protest, Fadl Shalak, the head of the CDR, handed in his resignation, claiming that he is no longer "in charge of anything."<sup>51</sup> Whether such changes signify 'a new game in town' or are just attempts to regain public confidence by token gestures remains to be seen.

### EXTERNAL DONORS CONFLICTING INTERESTS, UNCLEAR COMMITMENTS

Since 1992, more than \$50bn has been invested into the reconstruction of infrastructure and public facilities such as schools, energy grids, roads, ports and airports.<sup>52</sup> Much of that massive investment has now to be written off as a result of the recent Israeli bombardments. Short of international donations, it is therefore unlikely that the same public-private funding mechanisms that filled the void left by the central state in the 1990s will still be available in the future.

Against this background, an Arab League meeting was held in Cairo on August 20, where Kuwait and Saudi Arabia reportedly pledged a combined \$1.8bn.<sup>53</sup> However, the most important forum for coordinated international aid remains the donor conference, which was held in Stockholm on August 31. Still, Arab governments, the European Union (EU), individual European governments, and the US will enter the aid arena with different objectives and different constraints. For Arab regimes, many of which are experiencing overt or covert conflicts with their own domestic Islamist opposition groups, the relatively successful performance of Hizbullah on the battlefield constitutes an embarrassment that leaves them in a quandary. In principle, Arab governments have little time for the party, and sharp criticism directed against Hizbullah in the early days of the conflict reflects these apprehensions.

On the other hand, although a leading Saudi cleric, Abdullah bin Jabreen, also pronounced himself against the group<sup>54</sup>, Hizbullah received the support of Sunni mainstream opposition groups such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Under pressure from a restive population calling for decisive action on Lebanon and giving Hizbullah's leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah a status as champion of the Arab cause last enjoyed only by Gamal Abd al-Nasir, Mubarak has changed his tune, emphasizing in an interview with *Akhbar al-Yom* newspaper that the group was part of Lebanon's "national fabric"<sup>55</sup>. Whatever misgivings they may have over the party, its policies, and its backers, Arab leaders are in no position to criticize Hizbullah openly at present.

These Arab governments, therefore, will take great care to be seen as supporting an Arab position on the Lebanese and the wider Middle Eastern conflict that goes beyond such measures as the immediate financial support to the Lebanese currency provided by Kuwait and Saudi Arabia earlier in the crisis. Pledges have already been made but details of the modalities remain to be determined. At the same time, their position will be different from that of western donors, who are likely to link their aid to political conditionalities and, very likely, to measures to



curtail Hizbullah as the latter is viewed as a terrorist organization through the prism of the so-called War on Terror. For the same reason, however, Western donors are also likely to be more forthcoming in granting aid to Lebanon. For example, a US State Department Official stated recently that “the White House is “cracking the whip” on rebuilding efforts so that Iranian-backed Hizbullah is not seen as taking the lead and winning additional support among the local population”.<sup>56</sup> There exist, however, doubts on how much US or other western donors can isolate Hizbullah from benefiting from their aid, given the fact that, after all, the group is part of the Lebanese government they claim to support.

In contrast to the sums pledged by donors from the Gulf, reconstruction aid allegedly offered by Iran and Syria via Hizbullah is much harder to trace and quantify. It is evident from Hizbullah’s apparent readiness to make substantial payments to those who lost their homes during the fighting that Hizbullah does not suffer from liquidity problems. Although the quantity and provenience of these funds can only be assessed on the basis of an audit of Hizbullah’s books, it is claimed that Iranian support is massive and sustained, with \$150m apparently already being transferred to Hizbullah directly after the recent hostilities.<sup>57</sup> In this regard, the Lebanese minister for the Displaced, Nehme Tohme, claimed that he was told by Hizbullah officials that when the war would stop, “Iran would provide Hizbullah with an ‘unlimited budget’ for reconstruction.”<sup>58</sup>

While European powers eventually took an active part, the direct involvement of either the US or the UK government in the aid effort was initially considered unproductive given that many in the country see these powers as part of an enemy coalition.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, American aid organizations working in Southern Lebanon find themselves in a quandary because their own government bans them from having direct contacts with Hizbullah, which practically runs the local relief effort.<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, a week after the ceasefire, the US president announced a reconstruction and aid package of \$230m for Lebanon<sup>61</sup>, but without detailing disbursement modalities. Indicative of the atmosphere, the NGO “Construction Jihad”, the construction branch of Hizbullah, was quick to distance itself from this undertaking.<sup>62</sup> Finally, it is possible that the preponderance of funds from the Gulf will limit the leverage that western donors will enjoy as the international funding process for Lebanese reconstruction unfolds.

A further complication arises from the temptation to apply the so-called barn sale rule – “You broke it, you bought it.” – to the financing of the reconstruction efforts. The Lebanese government is reportedly considering legal action against Israel<sup>63</sup>, and even contemplating a lawsuit aimed at obtaining both moral satisfaction and financial compensation. However, the chances of success for such an undertaking are very slim. In 1999, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that called on Israel to pay compensation of US \$1.2 million as a result of its bombardment of Qana in April, 1996. Up to today, Israel has refused to pay. Taking any judicial action against Israel this time poses even greater challenges despite the various reports accusing Israel of war crimes. In a recent interview, Chibli Mallat, a Lebanese human-rights lawyer, explained some of the difficulties that any form of seeking legal resort would encounter.<sup>64</sup> Most importantly, through UN resolution 1701 (August 2006), Israel succeeded in shifting the blame to Hizbullah as being the party responsible for initiating the war. Furthermore, despite Israeli’s use of excessive force against civilians, both Israel and Hizbullah are considered in the eyes of international law as having committed war crimes as both parties targeted civilians. Resorting to the International Criminal Court may also not

be feasible, as both Israel and Lebanon are not signatories to the Rome Treaty. Although the Security Council can in theory demand the issue of compensation to be considered by the International Criminal Court, this request would probably be blocked by an US veto. Mallat therefore suggested that Lebanon's industrialists and private businesses should seek compensation without specifying the parties responsible for the damage. However, he recognized that their Israeli counterparts would, in retaliation, probably do the same thing.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Israel is already in the process of submitting a claim in a US civil court on the basis of the argument "that the Lebanese government is responsible for damages caused to residents of Israel because it didn't prevent Hizbullah from acting from its territory to harm Israeli citizens, thus violating the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorism."<sup>66</sup>

The donor conference in Stockholm succeeded in securing \$940 million in humanitarian aid exceeding the official target of \$500 million, which was set before the start of the conference. This figure does not include the pledges made by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait at the early stages of the war that amount to an additional \$800 million. Qatar was a major contributor donating alone \$300 million, but others such as the US and the European Union also made important donations. The table below summarizes the major contributions made at the Stockholm Conference.

**Table 2- Pledges for Humanitarian and Reconstruction Aid**

Stockholm Pledges for Humanitarian Aid		
Qatar	\$300 million	
Arab Fund	\$112 million	
US	\$175 million	Out of the \$230 million announced by George Bush in August 2006
European Union	\$54 million	
European Funds	\$38 million	
France	\$40 million	
Italy	\$38 million	
Others	\$183 million	
Major pledges outside Stockholm		
Saudi Arabia	\$500 million	
Kuwait	\$300 million	

Source: *As-Safir*, September 1, 2006; *Daily Star*, September 1, 2006

To assure donors that aid would not find its way to Hizbullah, Prime Minister Siniora declared that "the conference is being called [on] to assist the Lebanese government; all [funds] will be channelled through the government. This idea that it will be siphoned one way or another to Hizbullah is a fallacy."<sup>67</sup> It is also interesting to note that donors did not attach any tight conditions to their aid. This may be due to the recognition of the scale and urgency of the tasks at hand and be intended to boost the position of the Lebanese government. The UN Deputy Secretary General Mark Malloch Brown clearly expressed this view, claiming that if "the international community, [should] fail in supporting Lebanon now, we fail not just the brave Lebanese people but also their national aspiration for a stable, strong and democratic government".<sup>68</sup> It seems that, for the near future, the reform agenda will be driven mainly by developments within Lebanon rather than by western donors. Accordingly, the Economist Intelligence Unit argued that economic reforms are likely be shelved due to Lebanon's internal

political dynamics: Both Mr Siniora and the Hizbullah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, have overlaid their rivalry with conciliatory statements, the former extolling the virtues of the Lebanese resistance, and the latter expressing his commitment to Lebanese national unity. Efforts are likely to be made to engineer some form of compromise over the future of Hizbullah's military wing, probably including economic inducements. The price for Mr Siniora of any such accommodation would most likely be the postponement of his plans for economic reform.<sup>69</sup>

### HIZBULLAH AND OTHER NON-STATE DONORS WITHIN LEBANON

On the domestic front, non-governmental players, including the private business sector, the traditional political families of the country, and, most importantly, Hizbullah, have dominated the reconstruction effort. Accordingly, many major business figures have stated their commitment to contribute to reconstruction.<sup>70</sup> However, lacking the extensive organizational capacities that Hizbullah can fall back on in the areas it controls, these efforts have centred on rebuilding a limited number of the eighty bridges destroyed during the conflict. Moreover, these pledges have been directed at the demographically concentrated constituencies of such private donors. Saad al-Hariri, who has come to lead the parliamentary majority after his father's death in February 2005, pledged that his family's construction firm would rebuild three of the bridges. Najib Mikati, former prime minister and a major player in the local and regional telecommunications industry, commissioned Dar al-Handasah, a civil-engineering firm of regional reach based in Beirut, to rebuild the Madfoun bridge that links Beirut to the northern part of the country. Similarly, Casino de Liban, partly government owned and controlled by Amal leader Nabih Berri, and Byblos Bank, a Christian-owned enterprise, committed to the reconstruction of highway overpasses serving predominantly Christian tracts of the country. These efforts, however, remain marginal when compared to the vast scale of the destruction.

As noted earlier, Hizbullah has established a very powerful presence in the reconstruction scene. In a well-covered speech on 14 August, the day on which fighting came to an end, its leader Hassan Nasrallah promised a comprehensive reconstruction effort. He also promised "suitable furniture", as well as a year's rent to any Lebanese who had lost his home during the war. Nasrallah also alluded to the fact that the government cannot initiate reconstruction with the necessary speed. Given the scale of the disaster, he argued, it is vital that Hizbullah assume the responsibility of aid and reconstruction in the meantime. As one Lebanese commentator noted, "The Lebanese state takes three months to bring help. The United Nations takes three years. Hezbollah is there the next day."<sup>71</sup> Immediately after the ceasefire, a Hizbullah official claimed that "we can't wait forever until the state decides to act and help our people."<sup>72</sup>

The day of the ceasefire saw Hizbullah activists, some of whom had been fighting only hours before, survey the damage, talk to local populations in majority Shi'a areas and actually start clearing the debris that 34 days of Israeli bombardments and local resistance had left behind. As one foreign journalist noted: Hizbullah's reconstruction helpers are everywhere in southern Lebanon right now. Those men fighting in the port town of Tyre only days ago are now the ones clearing the streets, raising electricity masts and offering aid to local residents. The quick reorganization from combat to relief help made it possible for many refugees

to return to their homes. Nasrallah even claims Hizbullah will rebuild the country on its own.<sup>73</sup>

When Prime Minister Seniora and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri arrived in southern Beirut on 20 August to inspect the actual damage for the first time, Hizbullah's reconstruction effort had already reached the implementation phase.<sup>74</sup> Many people also started receiving their compensation. Distributing handouts has been accompanied by heavy propaganda carried by Hizbullah's TV channel *Al Manar*. According to a Hizbullah official, "every house owner who lost his house will receive \$12,000, and every tenant will receive \$8,000". He furthermore claimed that 5,000 families have already received their handouts and that the process would be completed very soon.<sup>75</sup>

Some observers have suggested that the insertion of expected aid and the reconstruction efforts are actually causing a boom in the economy. Marwan Iskandar, an economist, commented that "this move by Hizbullah will surely relieve the economy to some extent and will probably have a very small impact on inflation. The cash injection helped improve the country's money supply and we now have an excess of US dollar notes."<sup>76</sup> Bankers have also been surprised as to how so much dollar banknotes are flushing around at times when there is a shortage of dollar bills.<sup>77</sup> Most of these funds are being deposited in the banking system, which helped improve banks' liquidity. Although these handouts would certainly help enhance the economy, they are unlikely to turn it around in a sustainable fashion, especially as no structural reforms have taken place; it is just an artificial boost that will delay impending economic hardship.

Hence when it comes to economy and reconstruction, in bypassing the state, Hizbullah appears to be no different from the political class that it has been extremely critical of in the past. Its reconstruction activities have so far been very much a localized, community-based affair as they are concentrated in Shiite territories in southern Beirut and in southern Lebanon. With the fault-lines running between different ethnic and religious groups having, if anything, gained prominence in the course of the past eighteen months and post-war reconstruction after August 14, 2006,<sup>78</sup> these actions likely will reinforce existing divisions.

Hizbullah's commitment to reconstruction represents a significant step in other ways too. Having monopolised the defence function against Israel's real or purported aggression for the last decade, it has been keen to demonstrate its credentials also in reconstruction and humanitarian efforts. The party has always complemented its armed struggle with humanitarian and reconstruction efforts including building and supporting clinics, hospital and schools, and providing cheap loans and social security services to needy segments of the population such as farmers and poor families without access to formal or government finance. In an economy in which large segments of the population still rely on agriculture, especially in southern Lebanon and the Bika' Valley, Hizbullah's rural services proved very effective in gathering support for its cause. These services and programmes included providing cheap loans and making available heavy machinery to farmers, providing seeds and fertilizers below market price, and setting soil-testing laboratories.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, this explains to a large extent the party's popularity among the generally poorer segments of the Shiite population, although other factors come into play as well. Hizbullah's ability to perform this role stems from the gross vacuum left by the state, Shiites' needs that exceeded the needs of other sects, and the financial backing from Iran, notwithstanding Hizbullah's claims that the main source of its funding are donations by supporters. The support from Iran

has given Hizbullah its “Mr Clean image” in contrast with other political parties. Indeed, “Hizbullah could never be viewed as having preyed on the disintegrating Lebanese state”.<sup>80</sup>

All this, however, raises a series of pertinent questions. First, in addition to having a very sophisticated and expensive weapon arsenal, how can one political party accumulate so much cash? The second question is whether any such donations or funds, especially at such a large scale, should be approved by the Lebanese government. For it not to be seen as undermining the Lebanese government, the Iranian ambassador in Lebanon, Mohamed Shibani recently announced that Iran is willing to contribute to the reconstruction efforts and that any future commitments “will be directly negotiated between the Lebanese government and the Iranian government”. But when being asked about Iran’s donations to Hizbullah, the ambassador significantly avoided answering the question.<sup>81</sup> The third question is whether this ‘state-like’ approach Hizbullah is now taking should be viewed as a continuation of past developments or as a new phase in Hizbullah’s development.

Compared with its past activities in providing services, Hizbullah’s current reconstruction efforts are much more ambitious, not only in terms of their scale, but also in terms of their aims. In fact, the overriding aim appears to be to discredit the Lebanese government that failed to endorse Hizbullah’s actions on July 12 when it abducted two Israeli soldiers and killed three others. Lebanese academic Amal Saad-Ghorayeb even argued in this context that what one might soon be seeing in Lebanon is “a state within a non-state”<sup>82</sup>. In a recent article, columnist Michael Young argued similarly that since the end of the civil war, Lebanon has been defined by a duality:

Would Lebanon choose to be Hanoi, circa 1970, or Hong Kong? That is, would it seek to become an international symbol as represented by Hizbollah of militancy and armed struggle particularly against Israel or would it opt for the path laid out by Rafik Hariri... who sought to transform his country into a business entrepot for the region, a bastion of liberal capitalism and ecumenical permissiveness? <sup>83</sup>

Although not everybody would agree with this simple characterization first suggested by the Druze leader Walid Junblatt, there are certainly two irreconcilable paths competing with each other. Simply put, Lebanon cannot attract tourists, investments, and returnees and continue the armed struggle at the same time. One vision has to give way to the other. The dual role of armed struggle and reconstruction assumed by Hizbullah may give credence to the Hanoi path and demonstrate that the Hanoi model can survive in modern Lebanon. The Hanoi model requires a type of state and government, which is very different from the current one which has been described as being ‘weak and grossly unfair’. This view has been encapsulated by a Lebanese woman who, when asked about the government’s role, replied:

Where is the government? Do you see anyone from the state here? Sayyid Hasan is our state. This war may not be over, but we are not afraid. The Sayyid will protect us, and any new war will make us just stronger. Look at us now. We're much stronger than we were a month ago. <sup>84</sup>

Such views have been echoed by those in the opposite camp. For example, Abou Faour, a Member of Parliament and member of Walid Junblatt's party, claimed that "Hizbollah is stronger than the Lebanese state. We don't have anything in our hands. They have more resources, manpower, funding."<sup>85</sup> However, this does not necessarily mean that Hizbollah has the intention to disconnect from the Lebanese state or is seeking partition. On the contrary, the group has long recognized that establishing a positive and working relationship with the state and maintaining national unity are essential to the pursuit of the armed struggle against Israel. In an extensive interview with New TV Hizbollah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah explicitly denied any intention to compete with the central state. He greeted the arrival of the Lebanese army in the South, traditionally a Hizbollah stronghold, by acknowledging its right to disarm any "armed men"<sup>86</sup> it might find there. "Nasrallah also went out of this way to emphasise that the political capital Hizbollah had won with its "victory" against Israel would not be used to impose a Shia hegemony on the country's religious and sectarian patchwork."<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Hizbollah's prominence in the early days of the reconstruction effort should not be blown out of proportion; given that much of the destruction of housing stock had occurred in the predominantly Shi'a areas where it had the strongest presence to begin with, it was not unexpected that it should be the first faction to establish a presence in the arena of reconstruction, as well.<sup>88</sup>

Still, as Hizbollah has grown more confident and popular, it is projecting its vision of a fair, strong and resistant state. In doing so, it is weakening the already feeble central state in the eyes of many. This, in turn, may actually lead to the state's demise.

## CONCLUSION

National emergencies generally provide a litmus test of governmental capacity, and failures to cope with crisis management and reconstruction generally undermine the standing of the powers that be; a truth that the Bush administration has had to relearn the hard way both in Iraq since March 2003 and in the American south after a hurricane had devastated large parts of Louisiana. In the former case, the striking failure of the occupation force to reconstruct and administer the country it had conquered led to a loss of credibility that fed the incipient resistance. In the second case, the failure to provide essential services to citizens in need in a timely manner proved one of the greatest public relations disasters that the administration had faced.

Where success proved elusive for the world's most powerful nation, failure is far more problematic for a fragmented polity such as Lebanon, in which the central state apparatus has long been weak and religious affiliation retains considerable importance for the political process. While a fragmented reconstruction effort reflects the continued predominance of clientelist, communalist mechanisms in Lebanese politics, it is the enduring financial burden of a past reconstruction experience that currently restrains a central government that increasingly has to rely on the benevolence of international donors and the personal wealth of prominent supporters for implementing its policies. Earlier forecasts that the politically dominant groups in Lebanese society could ultimately do without a central state or even replace the state<sup>89</sup> have certainly moved closer to reality as a result of the latest crisis. The low extent of integration between the various reconstruction efforts initiated by different actors is threatening to remain a



constant factor as existing divisions within Lebanese society, which in turn it stands to reinforce, regain prominence in a political environment where no all-encompassing consensus survives.

The concept of victory in the Middle East has always been elusive and deceptive. In the past, wartime failures have often been turned into successes after the fact, and half-defeats have been talked up into full-blown victories. This war has introduced another novelty in that limited achievements are being glorified while a large number of casualties and tremendous costs are being overlooked. Although our vision may immediately be less appealing, we argue that for any reconstruction effort to have any chance of success, one needs to stress the latest war's costs: the civilian victims, the Lebanese economy, the sheer destruction of property, and above all the aspirations and hope of the Lebanese people for a better and more prosperous future. It remains to be seen, however, whether the Lebanese state itself will become this war's next major casualty or re-emerge strengthened by a better reconstruction performance than it offered in the past.

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#### ENDNOTES

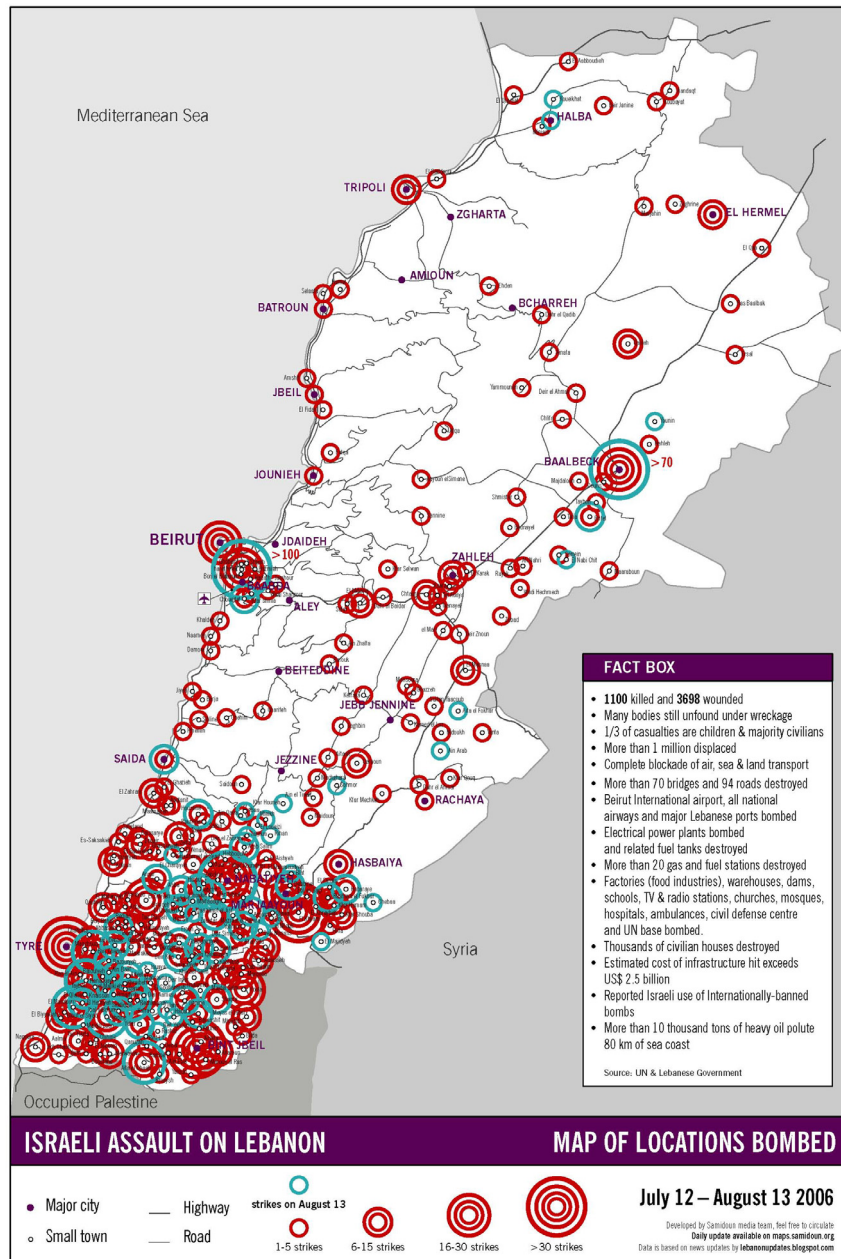
- <sup>1</sup> Israel Defense Forces Official Website at <http://www1.idf.il>
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- <sup>69</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit Country Brief, "Lebanon Economy: Back to Square One", August 14, 2006.
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- <sup>74</sup> Leila Hatoum, "Siniora, Berri tour Beirut's southern suburbs - but not everyone is impressed", *Daily Star*, August 21
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- <sup>78</sup> Neil MacDonald, "Leaders act quickly to rebuild country's broken bridges", *Financial Times*, August 18.
- <sup>79</sup> Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism*. (I.B. Tauris, London, 2005).
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>82</sup> John Kifner, "Hezbollah Leads Work to Rebuild, Gaining Stature", *New York Times*, August 16.
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- <sup>89</sup> See Michael Johnson, *Class & Client in Beirut, The Sunni Muslim Community and the Lebanese State 1840-1985*, (London, Ithaca Press: 1986), conclusion.

# APPENDIX

## FIGURE 1



## DECONSTRUCTING A 'HIZBULLAH STRONGHOLD'

Lara Deeb\*

For over a month this summer, Israeli warplanes battered so-called "Hizbullah strongholds" in Lebanon, unleashing an aerial assault on Lebanon's cities, villages, civilians and infrastructure of a scale unseen since the 1982 Israeli invasion of the country.<sup>1</sup> A naval blockade and ground invasion accompanied the air force attack. As a tenuous ceasefire holds in mid-August, in conjunction with UNSC resolution 1701, 1300 Lebanese are estimated to have been killed, the majority of whom were civilians, mainly children.<sup>2</sup> Thousands were wounded, and nearly a million displaced from their homes—one quarter of the country's population. Entire villages in the south of Lebanon have been flattened, as have whole neighborhoods in the southern suburbs of Beirut.

Analyst estimates of infrastructural damage to the country range from 3-8 billion dollars, and include the destruction of runways and fuel tanks at Beirut International Airport, roads, ports, power plants, bridges, gas stations, TV transmitters, cell phone towers, a dairy and other factories, wheat silos and grocery stores. Humanitarian and environmental crises loom, not least due to unexploded "bomblets" remaining from Israeli-dropped (U.S. manufactured) cluster munitions.<sup>3</sup> It is unknown whether these cluster bombs contained depleted uranium, as they have when the U.S. drops them in Iraq, but Lebanese scientists have documented high levels of radiation around certain bomb sites.<sup>4</sup> Lebanese doctors receiving dead and wounded have also noted that the burns on many corpses resemble chemical burns, alleging that Israeli bombs contained white phosphorus, a substance that, if used in offensive operations, is considered an illegal chemical weapon.<sup>5</sup>

In several cases, civilians who were warned by Israeli leaflets or automated telephone messages to leave their homes or villages within a certain window of time, were killed as their vehicles were targeted shortly thereafter. On July 30, Israeli planes bombed a three-story house being used as a shelter in Qana, killing tens of civilians and reawakening memories of the 1996 Qana massacre.<sup>6</sup> On August 7, two residential buildings in Chiyah, a neighborhood located between central Beirut and the southern suburbs, were flattened, killing at least forty-one civilians many of whom were people from the south who had sought refuge from the bombing with family or friends in Beirut.<sup>7</sup>

I reiterate all this to emphasize that this attack on Lebanon clearly targeted a civilian population and a civilian infrastructure.<sup>8</sup> Yet it was also a selective civilian targeting. While Lebanon and its population as a whole suffered tremendously during this attack and continue to bear the burdens of environmental hazards and rebuilding (a UNDP spokesperson noted a setback 15 years of rebuilding after the civil war),<sup>9</sup> the brunt of civilian deaths and infrastructural destruction took place in the south of the country, the Beqaa Valley, and the southern suburbs of Beirut. The purported reasoning behind this selective wreckage was that these regions are "Hizbullah strongholds." Grocery stores and dairy farms destroyed are thus

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subsumed into “terrorist targets” and civilians killed assumed to have been “harboring terrorists,” if not terrorists themselves.

While the Israeli attack on Lebanon was supposedly begun to obtain the release of two captured Israeli POWs, this was a military response so antithetical to the “rules of the game” that have governed the conflict over the Lebanon-Israel border since 1996 that it cast immediate doubt on the relationship of the attack to those captured soldiers. And indeed, between July 12 and August 14, when the ceasefire under UNSC 1701 went into effect, the stated Israeli reasons for, or goals of, the attack on Lebanon underwent considerable change. Israel’s original rhetoric gave way to two stated goals: the disarmament or at least “degrading” of Hizbullah’s militia, and the “removal” of Hizbullah from Lebanon. Soon after, it emerged that “a senior Israeli army officer” had presented plans for an offensive with these goals to U.S. and other diplomats over a year before Hizbullah’s capture of the two soldiers.<sup>10</sup> The now well-circulated piece by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* confirms these reports,<sup>11</sup> and documents U.S. advance collusion with the Israeli attack plan. This goal of “removing” Hizbullah, however phrased, from, first Lebanon, then, as Israeli hopes that the Lebanese polity and populace would fracture and turn against Hizbullah were shattered, from the south of the country, is one that treads dangerously close to ideas of depopulation.<sup>12</sup>

There exists excellent analysis of this particular Israeli attack on Lebanon (not the first),<sup>13</sup> and, rather than reiterate that here, I want to devote a few pages to unpacking some of the problems with this Israeli goal, by deconstructing these “Hizbullah strongholds” and separating the various strands of assumption that go into that phrase. I will begin by reviewing a few key points about Hizbullah, then turn to a description of the southern suburbs of Beirut and finally, provide some analysis of the relationship between Hizbullah and its civilian constituencies.<sup>14</sup>

## HIZBULLAH

One of the sentences one finds oneself having to say over and over again, as it is inconvenient to Israeli and U.S. goals in the Middle East, is the following: Hizbullah is not a terrorist organization. It is problematic, on the one hand, to characterize the group as a terrorist organization because of the vagaries of the label itself, which has become a catch-all term used to justify U.S. and allied rhetoric and violence. Only applied to non-state actors, it leaves “terror” committed by Israeli (or U.S. military forces) as “legitimate.” On the other hand, more specific to the case of Hizbullah, this is an organization that has changed and grown since its inception in the mid-1980s, from a militia dedicated to resisting the Israeli invasions and occupation of Lebanon, to a multifaceted organization that is both a legitimate political party and a vast social welfare network. It has also maintained its resistance militia, whose activities have been largely confined to liberating Lebanese territory from Israeli occupation and defending south Lebanon (the necessity of which was only reinforced by this latest Israeli attack).

Hizbullah has been participating as a legitimate political party in Lebanese elections since the first post-civil war elections were held in 1992, and today is reputed to be one of the least corrupt political parties in Lebanon, even by those who disagree with its ideologies. In the 2005 elections, the party won fourteen parliamentary seats, in a voting bloc with other parties that took thirty-five. Also in 2005, for the first time, the party chose to participate in the cabinet, and currently holds the Ministry of Energy. Hizbullah also plays the political game in Lebanon,



where candidates run as multi-confessional district slates rather than as individuals, allying (however temporarily) with politicians who do not back its program. In the 2005 parliamentary contests, the Sunni on Hizbullah's slate in Sidon was Bahiyya al-Hariri, sister of the assassinated premier. Since the elections, the strongest ally of the Shi'i movement has been former General Michel Aoun, the quintessentially "anti-Syrian" figure in Lebanese politics. This alliance was also an important component of the May 10<sup>th</sup> demonstrations in Beirut against the government's privatization plans, which would have cost jobs in Lebanon's public sector.

In playing politics, Hizbullah has also engaged in several rounds of indirect negotiations with Israel. Most recently, several years of negotiations brokered by Germany ended in a prisoner exchange in January 2004, during which an Israeli businessman (who Hizbullah claimed was a spy) and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers killed in Lebanon prior to Israel's 2000 withdrawal were exchanged for Lebanese and Arab detainees in Israel, including a Hizbullah official who had been kidnapped from Lebanon fifteen years earlier. This set a precedent and laid the groundwork for Hizbullah's July 12 operation, undertaken in order to gain bargaining chips to secure the release of the Lebanese who remain in Israeli detention. Two of these prisoners were to have been released in the 2004 deal, but were withheld by Israel at the last moment, in an effort to obtain information about an Israeli airman whose plane crashed in Lebanon in 1986. At the time, Secretary General of Hizbullah Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah vowed to secure their release through future exchange negotiations.

While Hizbullah is often accused of being a puppet of either Iran or Syria, the group's decisions and actions have generally focused on maintaining its position and the support of its constituents within the Lebanese polity. Hizbullah does officially follow Ayatollah Khamenei as the party's *marja' al-taqlid*, or source of emulation in religious matters,<sup>15</sup> consults with Iranian leaders, and receives an indeterminate amount of economic aid from Iran. This relationship does not, however, mean that Iran dictates Hizbullah's policies or decision-making, or can necessarily control the actions of the party. Meanwhile, Iranian efforts to infuse the Lebanese Shi'a with a pan-Shi'i identity centered on Iran have run up against the Arab identity and increasing Lebanese nationalism of Hizbullah itself. Similarly, while the party keeps good relations with the Syrian government, Syria does not control or dictate Hizbullah decisions or actions.<sup>16</sup> Party decisions are made in accordance with Hizbullah's view of Lebanon's interests and the party's own interests within Lebanese politics.

There is no doubt that Hizbullah is a nationalist party. Its view of nationalism differs from that of many Lebanese, especially from the nationalism based on the Phoenician origins myth espoused by Lebanon's Christian right, and from the neo-liberal U.S.-backed nationalism of Hariri's party. Hizbullah instead offers a nationalism that views Lebanon as an Arab state that cannot distance itself from Arab causes like that of Palestine. Its political ideology maintains an Islamic outlook, and the 1985 Open Letter that is often read as the party's "manifesto" notes the desire to establish an Islamic state, but only through the will of the people, stating "We don't want Islam to reign in Lebanon by force." The party's decision to participate in elections in 1992 underscored its commitment to working through the existing [sectarian] structure of the Lebanese state, and also shifted the party's focus from a pan-Islamic resistance to Israel toward internal Lebanese issues. Furthermore, since 1992, Hizbullah leaders have frequently acknowledged the contingencies of Lebanon's multi-confessional society and the importance of

sectarian coexistence and pluralism within the country. It should also be noted that many of Hizbullah's constituents do not want to live in an Islamic state; rather, they want the party to represent their interests within a pluralist Lebanon.

What also sets Hizbullah apart from other Lebanese organizations is the professional level of organization that exists within the party and its institutions. This is the Lebanese political party that best responds to its constituencies needs and desires in the country, politically and economically. In contrast (sometimes explicitly noted by party members or supporters) to many of the stereotypes about Shi'i Muslims held in Lebanon or stereotypes about religious Muslims held in the West, this is related to the party's explicit embrace and promotion of a particular conception of modernity that is integrative of material and spiritual goals of progress in such a way that the two come to depend upon one another.<sup>17</sup> In this vision, Islam and development go hand in hand, and in fact promote one another. It is the adherence to this particular vision of development and progress that appeals to many of Hizbullah's supporters, a point to which I will return below.

For example, Hizbullah-affiliated welfare organizations are among the most efficiently-run in Lebanon.<sup>18</sup> Staffed mainly by highly-trained volunteers, these institutions assess the needs of their constituents and they work to meet those needs, whether by providing monthly support, or supplemental nutritional, educational, housing, or health assistance. These social welfare institutions are located around Lebanon and serve the local people regardless of sect, though they are concentrated in the mainly Shi'i Muslim areas of the country.<sup>19</sup>

Social welfare provision is especially important in Lebanon for a number of reasons. First, a prolonged civil war (1975-1990) led to economic stagnation, government corruption and a widening gap between the ever-shrinking middle class and the ever-expanding ranks of the poor. Shi'i areas of Beirut also had to cope with massive displacements from the south and the Bekaa during prior Israeli invasions. Furthermore, Lebanon's sectarian government system, by which positions (and often, unofficially, resources) are allocated by sect, has ensured that sectarian clientelism is a necessary survival tool for all groups. Rather than a state with a state, as Hizbullah is often accused of being, Hizbullah's welfare provision fills a lacuna left by the Lebanese state.

It is in part this efficiency and efficacy on the ground that will contribute to the maintenance and increase in Hizbullah's popularity among many Lebanese in the months to come. In a televised address marking the end of this round of violence, Nasrallah devoted one third of his airtime to discussing plans to rebuild homes and house the displaced. And indeed, the very next day, party volunteers with clipboards were out assessing damage, prioritizing repairs, providing rent money and basic needs for displaced families and school supplies for students, and beginning the work of reconstruction.<sup>20</sup> The Lebanese government has also vowed to reconstruct the country, but has thus far focused on such aspects as the tourism industry.<sup>21</sup>

I want to turn now to one of the most devastated areas of the country, and certainly the most devastated area of Beirut: al-Dahiyya, the southern suburbs, so called "Hizbullah stronghold," an area where I have conducted field research since 1998, including a two-year continuous period in 1999-2001.

## AL-DAHIYYA, THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS OF BEIRUT

Residents and outsiders alike refer to the southern suburbs of Beirut as “*al-Dahiyya*” – a word that simply means “the suburb”<sup>22</sup> in Arabic, but that inaccurately connotes “the Shi’i ghetto” to people in other parts of the city. Rumors, like those about gun-toting bearded Hizbullah guards who insist that all women wear full Islamic dress, fuel the notion that this area is a “Hizbullah stronghold,” and therefore, according to the Israeli military, a legitimate target. These misnomers underline racist stereotypes, both Lebanese and Israeli, while masking the vibrant urban diversity of this array of municipalities and dense urban neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup> While Israeli racism is blatant in the differential valuations of Arab and Muslim versus Jewish Israeli lives, anti-Shi’i and often classist sentiments emerge among Lebanese in jokes as well as in right-leaning media commentary.<sup>24</sup>

One of the characteristics of stereotypes is that they homogenize. Within the multiple municipalities and neighborhoods that make up al-Dahiyya, there is immense variation with regard to class, length of residency in the area, and political leanings, as well as some religious diversity. Al-Dahiyya is not only or entirely “poor”, “illegal”, or “Hizbullah.” The region signified by the term included areas where Amal, the other major Shi’i political party in Lebanon, was the principal political presence rather than Hizbullah, older legal residential districts as well as newly built “illegal” neighborhoods, where building codes and laws have been ignored, Christian residents, “original” residents mingled in among those displaced from the south, wealthy residents, old money, return émigrés, and an emerging Shi’i “middle-class” of professionals and small-business owners. In 2000, the mayor of one municipality, Haret Hrayk, was a Maronite Christian who worked in close cooperation with Hizbullah. This is a municipality where entire blocks have been flattened by Israeli bombardment and where the “Hizbullah security zone” existed. Elaborate homes coexist in these neighborhoods alongside run-down buildings, as do shops selling European fashions alongside those selling Islamic dress, all interspersed with internet cafés, vegetable stands, salons, charity organization offices, and corner markets.

Walking through the streets of the wealthier municipalities in al-Dahiyya, prior to their destruction under Israeli bombardment, one was struck by the numbers of *jam’iyyat*, or charitable organizations, whose offices were located here. Some encompassed entire buildings, others offices the size of a flat, a small sign on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> floor indicating their presence. These offices were administrative hubs for much of the social welfare work they coordinated. Only a few, the larger ones, fell under the Hizbullah institutional umbrella. Others were affiliated with the independent religious leader Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah.<sup>25</sup> Many were smaller organizations founded and run by women that acted as conduits between the wealthy and those in need, while others were family associations, serving as gathering spaces or links for the various branches of a large extended family.

Stereotypes also belie the fact that this area has not always been predominately Shi’i, nor (sub)urban. Prior to the end of World War I and the subsequent French mandate in Lebanon, al-Dahiyya was rural and several of its current municipalities were villages.<sup>26</sup> Thirty years ago, much of it was semi-rural, its population a mix of Shi’i Muslims and Maronite Christians. Over a quarter century and a civil war later, this became the second most densely populated area of Lebanon, exceeded only by the Palestinian refugee camps, and it was predominately though not entirely Shi’i Muslim. Much of the initial population growth was due to

the wave of rural to urban migration that occurred throughout Lebanon in the 1950s and 60s. Later, during the civil war years, thousands of Shi'i refugees from the northeastern suburbs of Beirut, the south, and the Beqaa arrived, as the war precipitated an entrenchment of sectarianism in the urban landscape. Al-Dahiyya grew southward and westward throughout the violence, and especially in 1978, 1982, and 1993, as villagers from the South and the Beqaa fled Israeli invasions and bombardments. These migrations, coupled with Maronite emigration to South America, shifted the population ratio in Al-Dahiyya so that by the late 1990s, the area was approximately 80% Shi'i Muslim.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, this "Hizbullah stronghold" is in fact a diverse urban area, one that is not uniform or coterminous with Shi'ism in any form, with Hizbullah, or with a particular politics. There exist within al-Dahiyya other political perspectives, religious beliefs and identities, social welfare organizations, and lifestyles. Even Haret Hreik, the neighborhood that used to house the party headquarters, was a residential area, not simply a place of guards and important buildings. One of the buildings on a street that was completely destroyed contained the media relations office of the party, a suite of rooms on the second floor where reporters from around the world were greeted and granted interviews, and where researchers such as myself were able to set up interviews or gain permission to visit schools or charity institutions. That street included apartments where everyday people lived, the offices of one of the party's welfare organizations that facilitated orphan sponsorships, small stores that sold everything from clothing to toys, and a fantastic bakery and juice bar, a far cry from the trappings of "terrorist targets."

An Amnesty International press release of August 23, 2006,<sup>28</sup> reports that the Israeli government's position is that "they were targeting Hizbullah positions and support facilities and that other damage done to civilian infrastructure was a result of Hizbullah using the civilian population as a 'human shield.'" Amnesty International rightly notes that this claim is "simply not credible," based on "the pattern, scope and scale of the attacks." The Executive Director of Human Rights Watch (HRW) similarly notes that the Israeli assertion that Hizbullah was hiding among civilians "doesn't stand up to the facts," citing as an example HRW's on-the-ground investigators' findings that there had been no Hizbullah presence in Qana at the time of the Israeli attack there, and stating, "[The IDF] has yet to show that Hizbullah was in a civilian building or vehicle at the time of an Israeli attack that killed civilians."<sup>29</sup> These reports are using "Hizbullah" to mean only armed fighters, which is one reading in the context of this military conflict, and they importantly point out that there were no armed combatants in or near the investigated civilian sites when they were destroyed by Israeli bombardment. Either the technologically-advanced Israeli military was consistently mistaken in its efforts to target armed combatants, or it was targeting something else. The latter is the conclusion drawn by the Amnesty International report, as it points to Israel's "*deliberate* destruction of civilian infrastructure" (emphasis added).<sup>30</sup> Destroying civilian infrastructure entails attacking a civilian population. As I conclude, I want to further unravel the complex relationship of Hizbullah to the Lebanese population, in order to highlight the problems with the idea of "removing" the party from the country.

### CIVILIAN CONSTITUENCIES: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A “HIZBULLAH SUPPORTER”?

Hizbullah is of Lebanon, but does not have a metonymic relationship to Lebanon. It does not represent all Lebanese, nor does it represent all Shi'i Muslim Lebanese, though many Shi'i Muslims support the party. Similarly, not all Hizbullah supporters are Shi'i Muslim. The religion one is born into, the religion one may or may not practice, does not determine one's political affiliations or preferences.

Nor does one's socio-economic status. It is sometimes assumed that Hizbullah is using its social organizations to “buy” support, a view that betrays a simplistic view of the party. Hizbullah's constituents are not only the poor, but increasingly come from the middle classes and include many upwardly mobile, highly educated Lebanese. In fact, much of the financial backing of the party's institutions comes from its supporters, including many expatriate Lebanese. The idea that Hizbullah's work of rebuilding will be funded entirely by Iran ignores that millions of dollars that are donated to the party annually by Shi'i Muslims around the world, in the form of religious taxes, individual contributions, and orphan sponsorships. Pious Shi'i Muslims pay an annual tithe called the *khums*, one fifth of the income they do not need for their own family's upkeep. Half of this tithe is given to the care of a *marji' al-taqlid*, a religious leader who is emulated and consulted on religious matters, of their choice. Since 1995, when Ayatollah Khamenei appointed Nasrallah and another Hizbullah leader as his religious deputies in Lebanon,<sup>31</sup> the *khums* revenues of Lebanese Shi'a who follow Khamenei have gone directly into Hizbullah's coffers. These Shi'a also give their *zakat*, the alms required of all Muslims able to pay, to Hizbullah's vast network of social welfare institutions. Other Lebanese Shi'a instead pay this tithe to the care of Sayyid Fadlallah, and many of the independent social welfare organizations in the southern suburbs have been delegated acceptable “surrogates” for these donations as well.

Hizbullah's popularity among Lebanese is multi-faceted, based on a combination of its resistance (and crucially, successful resistance) to Israeli occupation and attacks, Islamic ideology, political platforms and record in Lebanon, and an approach to political-economic development that includes an efficient welfare-provision network. Different Lebanese find different aspects of the party appealing for different reasons. As with political affiliation and allegiance anywhere, these are not simple equations.

For some, Hizbullah is viewed as providing a viable alternative to a U.S.-supported government (it is part of the opposition in the current government) and its neo-liberal economic project in Lebanon and as an active opposition to the role of the U.S. in the Middle East more broadly. For others, Hizbullah is seen as the only viable possibility for protecting their villages and homes and livelihoods from Israeli attack. For some, the ability to send their children to schools that teach Islamic values along with the Lebanese state curriculum, or to visit single-sex beaches or restaurants that do not serve alcohol is appealing. For others, the financial support provided by the party's organizations was invaluable in helping them rebuild their lives after the civil war. Various of these views may coexist, and there are also people who vehemently oppose the party's Islamic outlook, while supporting Hizbullah's resistance militia's activities and their right to defend the south. Even many of those Lebanese who believe that Hizbullah's July 12 capture



of Israeli soldiers was a mistake simultaneously support the Resistance and view Israel as their enemy. These are not mutually exclusive positions.

What holds much of Hizbullah's project together is a notion of development that includes both material modernization (including infrastructure, technology, scientific progress, etc) and an Islamic outlook. Assumptions that there is a lack of thought-out desire involved in embracing some aspect of Hizbullah's project, or assumptions that its project is somehow less modern than other projects for Lebanon (most explicitly the neoliberal one of the Hariri-Siniora government), are rooted in prejudices that refuse to acknowledge the possibility of a modernity that incorporates an Islamic worldview. It is this alternative modernity that appeals to many of the party's most active supporters.<sup>32</sup>

"Hizbullah supporter" itself is a vague phrase. There are official members of the party; there are fighters with the Resistance; there are volunteers in party-affiliated social welfare organizations; there are recipients of aid from those organizations; there are those who voted for the party in the last election; there are those who support the Resistance in the current conflict without supporting other aspects of the party's political platform; among many others. The best way to think of the relationship among these various ideologies, positions and activities, and the Lebanese who support or align themselves with them, is to think of imperfectly overlapping circles and ideas that are constantly shifting. Individuals traverse this terrain of institutions and ideologies in complex ways, as they do in any society.

The Israel goal of "removing" Hizbullah from Lebanon simply does not make sense -- unless one is talking about ethnic cleansing or depopulation. Who is this Hizbullah that the Israeli military so desperately wished to "remove"? What if one member of a family is a party member and others are not? What if the daughter of the family attends a school funded by Hizbullah, does that make that family a legitimate target by Israeli reasoning? Or Fatima, a volunteer who cooks for the poor during Ramadan at a Hizbullah welfare organization? Is she a target? So is Wafaa Hoteit, official party spokesperson and liaison to the press and researchers? What about the democratically-elected Hizbullah Parliament members or Mohammad Fneish, Minister of Energy? What exactly was Israel trying to destroy in the southern suburbs, and in the south of Lebanon and Beqaa Valley, if not the fabric of life itself? Unpacking such phrasings as "Hizbullah stronghold" or "Hizbullah supporter" may seem besides the point in the face of the devastation wrought in Lebanon by the Israeli military attack, but it is precisely such slippages that are put into play in Israeli and U.S. state justifications of violence against civilians.

The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure, and strikes on civilian convoys and residences, indicate the Israeli government's understanding that Hizbullah is much more than an armed militia. And indeed, as we have seen, in addition to its resistance militia, Hizbullah is a political party and a social welfare network. It has to do with economic interests as well as religious ideologies, local politics and anti-imperialist stances. This does not however, legitimate the deliberate targeting of civilians. Israeli claims that Hizbullah was "hiding behind civilians" work to counter these accusations of deliberate targeting, by reasserting the separation between people who were and were not carrying arms and placing the blame for the conflation on Hizbullah. Yet both the Amnesty International (AI) and the Human Rights Watch reports found that those claims did not hold up under investigation.<sup>33</sup>

To remove Hizbullah from Lebanon would require the "removal" of a



civilian population and infrastructure, precisely what Israel was undertaking in this attack. Indeed, the AI report states that “Israel’s destruction of [civilian infrastructure] was an integral part of Israel’s military strategy.”<sup>34</sup> Playing devil’s advocate, one could say that the enmeshment of Hizbullah with civilian life in Lebanon legitimates strikes against civilian targets “because the water is as hostile as the fish swimming in it.”<sup>35</sup> I would respond that by extension, draining the pond would be tantamount to ethnic cleansing. It should not be necessary to justify the value of civilian lives, including the lives of civilians who are Hizbullah supporters.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the best coverage of this war was available through online sources, including [www.electroniclebanon.net](http://www.electroniclebanon.net), [www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), and the numerous blogs that documented and commented on events.

<sup>2</sup> During this time, Hizbullah killed 118 Israeli soldiers and 41 civilians. Israel claims to have killed over 300 Hizbullah fighters, but Hizbullah denies that number and has been publicly mourning its dead at much lower numbers. The ratio of Lebanese to Israeli civilian casualties is 30:1.

<sup>3</sup> See “Israeli Cluster Munitions Hit Civilians in Lebanon” (Human Rights Watch, Beirut, July 24, 2006). Available at [www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/24/isrlpa13798.htm](http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/24/isrlpa13798.htm) (accessed August 26, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> “Scientists suspect Israeli arms used in South contain radioactive matter” (*Daily Star*, Beirut, August 21, 2006). Available at

[www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?article\\_ID=74891&categ\\_ID=1&edition\\_id=1#](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?article_ID=74891&categ_ID=1&edition_id=1#) (accessed August 28, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> [www.indymedia.ie/article/77507](http://www.indymedia.ie/article/77507) (accessed August 28, 2006) and Agence France Presse report (July 30, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> On April 18, 1996, Israel bombed a UN bunker in Qana where civilians had taken refuge, killing over one hundred people. The UN report on this incident, dated May 1, 1996, states that contrary to Israeli claims, “it is unlikely that the shelling of the United Nations compound was the result of gross technical and/or procedural errors.”

<sup>7</sup> This is the Lebanese government figure.

<sup>8</sup> An Amnesty International Press release dated August 23, 2006 points to “an Israeli policy of deliberate destruction of Lebanese civilian infrastructure, which included war crimes.” This is available at <http://news.amnesty.org/mavp/news.nsf/print/ENGMDE020182006> (accessed August 23, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Agence France Press (August 23, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Matthew Kalman, “Israel set war plan more than a year ago,” *San Francisco Chronicle* (July 21, 2006). Available at

[www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/07/21/MIDEAST.TMP](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/07/21/MIDEAST.TMP) (accessed July 22, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Seymour Hersh, “Watching Lebanon: Washington’s interests in Israel’s war,” *The New Yorker* (August 21, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> “Removing” Hizbullah is in fact a recycled goal, one that emerged in Israeli rhetoric and strategy during the attacks on Lebanon in 1993 and 1996 as well. Depopulation of certain areas has long been an Israeli strategy, and a euphemism for the ethnic cleansing of territory. See, for example, Gabriel Piterberg, “Erasures” *New Left Review* 10 (July/August 2001), pp. 31-46; and Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington DC, Institute for Palestine Studies).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the writings and interviews of political anthropologist Augustus Richard Norton in various media sources, posted on his blog at [www.bostonuniversity.com](http://www.bostonuniversity.com), the commentary of political scientist As’ad AbuKhalil at [www.angryarab.blogspot.com](http://www.angryarab.blogspot.com), and collected analyses at [www.electroniclebanon.net](http://www.electroniclebanon.net). While U.S. and Israeli sources place the blame for the Israeli attack on Lebanon on Hizbullah, calling it a “retaliation” for the July 12 capture of two Israeli soldiers, in actuality, this conflict has been ongoing for decades. The July 12 operation fit within a set of “rules of the game” for cross-border conflict around the still-occupied Shebaa Farms region. Within those

rules, Israel would have responded in a limited fashion militarily and then agreed to indirect prisoner-exchange negotiations, which have taken place in the past. See also Lara Deeb, "Hizbullah: A Primer," *Middle East Report Online* (July 31, 2006), Available at [www.merip.org](http://www.merip.org). For more on Hizbullah's military activity and these "rules of the game," see Augustus Richard Norton, "Hizbullah and the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 30 (2000), p.22-35; and Daniel Sobelman, "Still playing by the rules," *Bitterlemons International*, 36, no 2 (2004), available at [www.bitterlemons-international.org](http://www.bitterlemons-international.org).

<sup>14</sup> On Hizbullah, see especially Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizbullah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics*. (New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 1999). See also Dalal el-Bizri, *Islamistes, parlementaires et Libanais: Les interventions a l'Assemblée des élus de la Jama'a Islamiyya et du Hizb Allah (1992-1996)*, (Centre d'études et de recherches sur le Moyen-Orient contemporain, 1999); Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse University Press, 2004); Judith Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London, I.B.Tauris, 1996); and Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizb'ullah: Politics and Religion* (London, Pluto Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Party members, however, are free to follow any *marja' al-taqlid* they choose, and many follow Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah instead. For more on the *marji'yya* (the term for the institution of this practice), see Faleh Abdul-Jabar, "The genesis and development of *marja'ism* versus the state," In *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq* (London, Saqi Books, 2002); and Ahmed Moussavi, "Establishment of the position of *marja'yyi-i-taqlid* in the Twelver Shi'i community," *Iranian Studies* 18 (1985), p. 35-51.

<sup>16</sup> After the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in February 2005, and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, Hizbullah's position was often inaccurately described as "pro-Syrian." In fact, the party's rhetoric was carefully chosen not to oppose Syrian withdrawal, but to recast it as a withdrawal that would not sever all ties with Lebanon, and that would take place under an umbrella of "gratitude."

<sup>17</sup> This is explicated in Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Hizbullah's social welfare network builds on foundations laid in the 1960s and 1970s, with key actors including Sayyid Musa al-Sadr and Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, among others.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this social welfare network, see Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern* (2006).

<sup>20</sup> Personal communication from several of the displaced. See also "Hizbullah's efficiency leaves Lebanese government behind" (Agence France Presse, in the *Daily Star*, Beirut August 28, 2006). Available at [www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition\\_id=1&categ\\_id=3&article\\_id=75062](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=3&article_id=75062) (accessed August 28, 2006).

<sup>21</sup> For example, the government has revealed a plan for tax relief for the tourism industry (Agence France Presse, August 23, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Although the southern suburb is not Beirut's only suburb, popular usage has designated it "the suburb", while other outlying areas of the city are referred to by name. For excellent discussion of the southern suburbs in all their complexity see Mona Harb el-Kak, *Politiques urbaines dans la banlieue-sud de Beyrouth* (Beirut, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain, 1996); Mona Harb el-Kak, "Transforming the site of dereliction into the urban culture of modernity: Beirut's southern suburb and the Elisar project," In *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the construction and reconstruction of a modern city*, eds. Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis (Munich, Prestel, 1998), p. 173-82; and Mona Harb, "Post-war Beirut: Resources, negotiations, and contestations in the Elyssar Project," *Arab World Geographer*, 3, (2000), p. 272-89.

<sup>23</sup> With a combined population of between one half and three quarters of a million people, al-Dahiyya is home to approximately one third of Beirut's total population.

<sup>24</sup> These jokes were often circulated on email, just one example that epitomizes anti-Shi'i and classist prejudices in Lebanon praises Nasrallah for "finally" putting the entire Shi'i population of Lebanon in schools (where many of the displaced were temporarily housed). By right-leaning media, I mean, for example, some of the commentary on LBC or in *An-Nahar*.

<sup>25</sup> Sayyid Fadlallah is perhaps the most respected Shi'i religious leader and *marja' al-taqlid* in Lebanon today, and has an international following. He is often cast by U.S. sources, including the State Department, as the "spiritual leader of Hizbullah." Both he and the party have always denied these claims. In fact, while Fadlallah is the *marja' al-taqlid* of choice for many individual party members, he has always held the traditionalist view that religious leaders should not affiliate with specific political groups, and has disagreed with the party on various issues, most notably on the *wilayat al-faqih* (rule of the jurispudent).

<sup>26</sup> See Fuad Khuri, *From village to suburb: Order and change in Greater Beirut* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1975).

<sup>27</sup> See Harb el-Kak, "Transforming the site of dereliction," and Muhammad Faour, "The demography of Lebanon: A reappraisal," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27 (1991), p.631-41.

<sup>28</sup> Available at: <http://news.amnesty.org/mavp/news.nsf/print/ENGMDE020182006> (accessed August 23, 2006).

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Roth (Executive Director of Human Rights Watch), "Indiscriminate Bombardment," *Jerusalem Post* (August 17, 2006). Available at [www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154525892021&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154525892021&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull) (accessed August 28, 2006). See also Jonathan Cook, "Hypocrisy and the clamor against Hizbullah" (*Electronic Lebanon*, August 9, 2006). Available at <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article5465.shtml> (accessed August 27, 2006). Cook writes, "While there has been little convincing evidence that Hizbullah is firing its rocket from towns and villages in south Lebanon, or that its fighters are hiding there among civilians, it can be known beyond a shadow of a doubt that Israeli army camps and military installations are based in northern Israeli communities."

<sup>30</sup> Amnesty International press release (August 23, 2006).

<sup>31</sup> This is not a political appointment, but rather, an appointment as Khamenei's deputies in his (contested) capacity as *marji' al-taqlid*. The importance of this appointment is that it allows for the collection of *khums* on his behalf.

<sup>32</sup> Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern* (2006)

<sup>33</sup> Amnesty International press release (August 23, 2006) and Roth, "Indiscriminate Bombardment" (2006).

<sup>34</sup> Amnesty International press release (August 23, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this phrasing.

# MEDIA IS THE CONTINUATION OF WAR WITH OTHER MEANS *THE NEW YORK TIMES'* COVERAGE OF THE ISRAELI WAR ON LEBANON

Yasser Munif\*

## INTRODUCTION

If Carl von Clausewitz had written *On War* in the twenty-first century, he might have come up with the following dictum: “media is nothing but the continuation of war with other means.”<sup>1</sup> The American war on Iraq and Afghanistan and the Israeli war on Lebanon would not have been possible without the active and complicit role played by corporate media.

The following article analyzes *The New York Times'* (hereafter NYT) coverage of the war on Lebanon to deconstruct the complex relationship among the military, political and media apparatuses in the US. However, this is not an invitation to an ontological separation between the representation of the war in the media and the actual lethal war taking place on the terrain. Such an enterprise might be helpful for analytical purposes; however, it would not reflect the actual intermeshed relationship between journalists and US military personnel. Does a journalist embedded in the army belong to the media apparatus? Would a military expert working for a news agency be considered a combatant? The act of physically fighting the enemy and the process of representing that enemy cannot be neatly disentangled from one another. In that sense the colonization of mind and the colonization of space can be considered two ‘moments’ of the same process. I focus on the NYT because it is one of the most powerful media institutions in the United States. Its aura of objectivity – albeit tarnished by recent improprieties<sup>2</sup> – not only deeply affects its own readership but it also shapes wider political debates and influences foreign policy.

This paper questions the NYT’s journalistic strategies and techniques used during the Israeli war on Lebanon and their implications for the subjectivities of the readers. Although the reporting of the newspaper is obviously not homogeneous nor monolithic and the coverage goes through a slow transformation as the events unfold, the myth of fair and balanced journalism brandished by the NYT<sup>3</sup> is refuted by showing how it is primarily affected by the political economy of the media, US foreign policy, Orientalist national narratives, and the active effort of Israeli lobbies.

Three governmental strategies employed by the NYT will be briefly described, to illustrate the newspaper’s rationalization of Israel’s attacks on Lebanon where there is overwhelming evidence that proves the juridical and ethical illegitimacy of those attacks.<sup>4</sup> A fourth tactic, which will be this paper’s in-depth case study, is the construction of a harmless Israeli army image. This governmental tactic shows the intricate mechanisms deployed by the media institution as part of a larger programme to govern citizens.

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## THE NYT'S COVERAGE OF ISRAEL AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The first dimension affecting the *NYT*'s reporting is the political economy of the media. In a seminal study, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman<sup>5</sup> demonstrate how imperatives of profit-seeking push corporate media to filter, censor and distort the information that reaches the audience. The *NYT* is primarily a corporate entity with an audience consisting of liberal and privileged consumers. Within this scheme, the function of the institution is to "sell audiences to other corporations." Media experts routinely follow market strategies to determine the content to be communicated. Chomsky explains:

The *NYT* is certainly the most important newspaper in the United States, and one could argue the most important newspaper in the world. *The New York Times* plays an enormous role in shaping the perception of the current world on the part of the politically active, educated classes. Also *The New York Times* has a special role, and I believe its editors probably feel that they bear a heavy burden, in the sense that the *NYT* creates history.<sup>6</sup>

With over a million copies sold every day<sup>7</sup> and a growing number of online visitors<sup>8</sup>, the *NYT* occupies a privileged position in the global media market. Advertisers and new shareholders seek it because its coverage reaches a large and affluent audience. One can thus speculate that it has no interest in challenging the extant world order or in questioning the hegemony of the political elite.

An understanding of US foreign policy is another essential analytical tool to comprehend mainstream media coverage. Beginning with the 1967 Israeli war against Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and Syria, the US established a long-lasting relationship with Israel in order to contain the Soviet Union's influence in the region. Since 1949, the US has contributed roughly 100 billion of taxpayers' dollars in aid<sup>9</sup> to Israel, and by 1967, Israel had become one of the most important beneficiary of U.S. foreign aid. Due to its close relationship to the government<sup>10</sup>, the US mainstream media has played a central role in establishing and maintaining a strategic partnership between the United States and Israel throughout the period following the 1967 war.

Third, an understanding of the way Islam has been constructed within the Western imaginary constitutes an important entry point for any exploration of mainstream media in the US. As Edward Said argues, rhetoric about "the Islamic threat" has been occupying a central position in the media since the Iranian revolution of 1979. In *Covering Islam*, he writes:

When the *NYT* explains a surprisingly strong Iranian resistance to Iraq's incursion, it resorts to a formula about the "Shi'a penchant for martyrdom." Superficially, phrases like that have certain plausibility, but in fact I think they are used to cover a great deal of what the reporter knows nothing about. Not knowing the language is only part of a much greater ignorance, for often enough the reporter is sent to a strange country with no preparation or experience, just because he or she is canny at picking up things quickly or happens already to be in the general vicinity of where front-page news is happening.<sup>11</sup>

Said shows that journalistic knowledge about people living in the periphery of "the West" is usually based on an Orientalist narrative, defined in opposition to Western national identity. The nation is not solely a collection of "authentic" characteristics found within the metropole, it is also determined by an assemblage

of what it is not, i.e. it defines itself in opposition to its Other. “The West” and “the Orient” can be considered relational concepts that are frequently constructed through the negation of one another: “The West” is what “the Orient” is not and vice versa. However, this oppositional relationship is also crucial to map the matrix of power to understand how identities are defined and according to whose interests. Said reminds us that Orientalism is a form of power/knowledge used by “the West” to control, structure, and dominate “the Orient.” Orientalism, as an ontology, creates on the one hand a rational, civilized, Christian, democratic and just “West” and on the other, an irrational, exotic, erotic, Islamic, and despotic “East.” Orientalism, as an epistemology, perpetuates a relationship of unevenness between “the Orient” and “the West” and it legitimizes domination which becomes commonsensical with time. Many institutions reproduce the Orientalist historiography by constructing “expert” knowledge according to assumptions that do not question the foundations of European modernity.

The fourth, more recent and more practical dimension influencing the *NYT*’s content includes the numerous well-funded think-tanks that proactively produce stereotypical and racist images of Muslims as part of a campaign of blanket support for any and all Israeli actions vis-à-vis Palestinians and its Arab neighbors. In doing so, they portray Israel as a modern island surrounded by a sea of threatening and pre-modern Muslims. Any deviation from the official political agenda of Israel or the United States is harshly sanctioned by a number of Zionist and neo-conservative think-tanks such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA), and Honest Reporting<sup>12</sup>. The latter proudly claims a mailing list of over 140,000 subscribers who get alert emails whenever alleged liberal media digress from the editorial line. The subscribers are often ready to bombard the target media outlet with angry emails to denounce the “bias” (read: humanizing Palestinians and Lebanese or denouncing Israeli war crimes). During the 33-day war against Lebanon, AIPAC released dozens of memos to inform journalists and the general public that the Israeli army was doing its best to minimize the number of civilian casualties<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, AIPAC published several factual sheets about Hizbullah’s military capabilities and its violations of the law of war.<sup>14</sup> To put it mildly, the *NYT* operates within an environment friendly to official Israeli policy.

With this backdrop in mind, in what follows, I attempt to explain the coverage of the war using a media governmentality framework. A number of studies using a political economy framework have examined the role played by the *NYT* to maintain and reproduce American structures of domination.<sup>15</sup> Political economy concentrates on the media as an ideological state apparatus and shows how the political elites’ hegemonic agenda is communicated to citizens. To study media content, scholars frequently employ discourse analysis, which is based on the interpretation of text using various theoretical tools and discourses already available within a certain repertoire.<sup>16</sup> Discourse analysis usually draws a line between discourse and actual practices: the former seeks to represent the latter.

In contrast, media governmentality explores the “intentional and nonsubjective” effects of government technologies which evolve and adjust according to current events. This approach proposes a study of the media that does not seek to uncover hidden “agendas” or to locate the decision-makers of fixed set of principles that control the minds of the audience. Instead it explores the tactics and strategies that lead to the coverage’s self-regulation in a “matrix of transformation,”<sup>17</sup> and strives to understand the forms of conditioning that



produces subjects' self-governance. Media's governmental techniques are part of a large regime of government that extends from news outlet to the military apparatus. However, such an examination, which claims continuity between the micro and macro levels, necessitates content analysis and ethnographic research that are beyond the scope of this conceptual elaboration.

### **MEDIA GOVERNMENTALITY IN THE *NYT***

Foucault defines governmentality as “the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security.”<sup>18</sup> Simply put, governmentality is the art of improving rule. When an institution faces a new situation that creates a crisis of governance, actors within the institution come up with techniques and tactics to achieve an enhanced form of government. The first implementation phase of governmental techniques is ‘problematization’ and it involves the identification of the problem and the conceptualization of the object of study. A second phase usually consists of proposing solutions that solve the crisis of government: this is known as ‘rationalization’. Foucault explains:

Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective. If in fact they are intelligible, this is not because they are the effect of another instance that “explains” them, but rather because they are imbued, through and through with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; let us not look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality; neither the castle which governs [...]; the rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed (the local cynicism of power), tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems[.]<sup>19</sup>

An “analytics of government,” which is the study of governmentality, examines the techniques, tactics, and rationalities that shape the behavior and thinking of disparate subjects according to a desired pattern. It prioritizes an exploration from below rather than the more common top-down discourse analysis. Below, I briefly present three techniques of government used by journalists throughout their reporting of the war, namely the denial of historicity, the legitimization of Israeli retaliation and the representation of a Middle East infected by a violence pandemic. A fourth technique, the reversal of the balance of power, is then taken up as case study and examined in more detail.

The analysis is mainly based on the *NYT*'s front-page coverage of the war on Lebanon from July 13 to August 11 and it comprises sixty articles. Out of approximately 300 news reports featuring the war on Lebanon, 20 percent appeared on the front-page. While this is not an exhaustive study, the front-page was chosen because it makes a first impression on readers and invites them to read the newspaper according to the editors' tactical plan. “Traditional formats for printed newspapers define a hierarchy of stories by arranging them linearly in rough order of importance from the front to inside pages.”<sup>20</sup> This hierarchy implies that the

editorial team designs the front-page with a set of constraints in mind: conveying an acceptable image to its readers and attracting an array of advertisers.

A media governmentality study that focuses on one month's front-page articles has some disadvantages: it does not explore the layout grammar; it does not take into consideration visuals and the captions that accompany them; it does not situate the *NYT*'s coverage within a larger and more diverse media sphere; and finally it does not show how the coverage evolves over an extended period. Despite those limitations, a genealogy of government makes political rationalities more explicit and explains some aspects of the relationship between the political, and media.

Before delving into the four techniques used by the *NYT*, it is worth noting that the coverage can be analyzed thematically or chronologically. A thematic methodology is preferred here since the period covered in this paper is too short to make a clear distinction among different possible temporalities.<sup>21</sup>

### *DENIAL OF HISTORICITY*

The denial of the historicity of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a first common tactic used by the *NYT* to *govern* the thinking of its readership. By de-linking the war on Lebanon from the past, journalists introduce a temporality that corresponds to their own priorities. The war, which can be read as an instance of a neocolonial process within a matrix of global domination, is presented by the *NYT* as an accidental outburst. To achieve the decontextualization of a historical event, mainstream media can choose between writing history according to the dominant narrative, or evading it altogether. For example, the *NYT* announced the beginning of the war on its July 13 front-page as a retaliatory action taken by the Israeli government to defend itself against a "terrorist" organization. Throughout the war, the *NYT* excludes from its front-page coverage any temporal contextualization other than a timeline starting on July 12.

Subaltern history is dismissed and instead the Middle East is presented as a timeless region inhabited by immutable people: "Hezbollah [who] used zealots [to re-introduce] the medieval practice of suicide attacks to the region"<sup>22</sup> Here, the *NYT*'s Orientalist narrative inscribes Hizbullah's behavior within the realm of an ageless practice that does not require further contextualization. Self-reflexive historicity of the sort implied by Frederic Jameson's "always historicize!"<sup>23</sup> is absent from the *NYT*'s reporting. The war, which Clausewitz tells us, is the continuation of policy in other means, is systematically disconnected from the political sphere on the front-page coverage. Such unchallenged ahistorical accounts prepare the terrain for the deployment of the next stage of governmental tactics: retaliation.

### *ISRAEL'S RETALIATION*

Since the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, there has been on average one Israeli violation of the Blue Line per day. In the January 2006 report, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) notes: "The Israeli Air Force violated Lebanese airspace on many occasions during the reporting period, disturbing the relative calm along the Blue Line. [...] There were no instances of Hizbullah anti-aircraft fire across the Blue Line [...]"<sup>24</sup>. The August 2006 Human Rights Watch report accuses Israel of war crimes: "The pattern of attacks during the Israeli offensive in Lebanon suggests that the failures cannot be explained or dismissed as mere accidents; the extent of the pattern and the seriousness of the consequences indicate the commission of war crimes."<sup>25</sup> Those reports never make

it to the pages of the NYT and journalists rarely refer to international law to assess Israel's actions.<sup>26</sup> In an article published in July 2006 in the San Francisco Chronicle, Matthew Kalman shows how the war had been planned for more than a year before Hizbullah's capture of the Israeli soldiers. He writes:

'Of all of Israel's wars since 1948, this was the one for which Israel was most prepared,' said Gerald Steinberg, professor of political science at Bar-Ilan University. 'In a sense, the preparation began in May 2000, immediately after the Israeli withdrawal, when it became clear the international community was not going to prevent Hizbullah from stockpiling missiles and attacking Israel. By 2004, the military campaign scheduled to last about three weeks that we're seeing now had already been blocked out and, in the last year or two, it's been simulated and rehearsed across the board.'<sup>27</sup>

The NYT chose to dismiss the above evidence only to portray Hizbullah as solely responsible for the violence and the war. Almost 50% of the NYT's front-page articles (approximately an article every day) remind readers that Israel's war on Lebanon is merely retaliation to Hizbullah's initial provocations.<sup>28</sup> Readers are informed that "Israel's fierce response to the Hizbullah attack on July 12"<sup>29</sup> is legitimate since it comes as self-defense. Consequently, the newspaper is able to normalize the Israeli ambassador's logic who remarks: " '[s]ince when should a response to aggression and murder be proportionate?' " and explains further, " '[l]et us finish the job', [...] 'We will excise the cancer in Lebanon', and 'cut off the fingers' of Hezbollah"; "Lebanon, [...] has been 'raped' by Hezbollah and its patron, Syria"<sup>30</sup> Even if Israel's attacks on Lebanon are repetitive and systematic, they are presented as responses to an aggression: "Hezbollah had expected 'the usual, limited' response such as commando raids or limited attacks on Hezbollah strongholds."<sup>31</sup> Following are another two examples of the NYT's reporting: The current conflict began when Hizbullah fighters crossed into Israel and captured two Israeli soldiers on July 12, and Israel immediately attacked Hizbullah positions in Lebanon, calling the initial incursion an act of war.<sup>32</sup>

On Wednesday, Hizbullah militants in Lebanon, following the example of the Palestinian group Hamas, mounted a raid that captured two Israeli soldiers -- and provoked a far-reaching Israeli military reaction that plunged the region into crisis.<sup>33</sup>

And when the South Lebanese village of Qana is attacked on July 30, for the second time in ten years, the NYT presents the 1996 massacre as "[...] Israel, responding to mortar fire, mistakenly shelled a United Nations post in Qana where refugees were taking shelter, killing 100 people and wounding another 100."<sup>34</sup> This story however, is incompatible with the UN investigation which found that "it is unlikely that the shelling of the United Nations compound was the result of gross technical and/or procedural errors."<sup>35</sup> Likewise, the NYT's narrative conflicts with Amnesty International's account, which concluded in its report that "The IDF have failed to substantiate their claim that the attack was a mistake."<sup>36</sup> The 2006 Israeli airstrikes on Qana which killed a large number of civilians are described as retaliatory acts of self-defense: "Israel [...] fired at a rocket-launching team in Qana on Sunday and killed dozens of civilians in a nearby building."<sup>37</sup> Here again, Human Rights Watch notes that the large number of civilians deaths is a "predictable result of Israel's indiscriminate bombing campaign in Lebanon[.]"<sup>38</sup> This instance shows the NYT's insistence on representing Qana's shelling as an error while there is overwhelming evidence that proves the opposite.

Throughout the months of July and August, Israeli attacks on Lebanon are presented by the *NYT* as legitimate, merely because they are “just” multifaceted responses to Hizbullah’s initial *casus belli*. The lack of historical contextualization, combined with a rhetorical bombardment campaign with terms such as “retaliation”, “reaction” and “response to,” leads to one-sided reporting that subtly dismisses the Lebanese perspective of the story.

### IRRATIONAL VIOLENCE

Ahistorical reporting opens the door for the most invidious interpretations of the regional situation. The *NYT*’s reporting presents the war on Lebanon as part of a never ending cycle of violence instigated by a culture of terrorism and hatred. According to one journalist, “[t]he far-flung extremists share an ideology of violent Islamic militancy, hostility to the West and a vicious intolerance of other creeds.” He also warns against “the outsize[d] role that small numbers of violent extremists play in fueling conflict and controlling global events.”<sup>39</sup> Journalists often hide their lack of knowledge about the region by using an Orientalist semantic to describe Islamic movements. This process reinforces the idea, already alive in Western collective memory, of an irrevocable rupture between ‘the West’ and ‘the Orient.’ The following example show how the concepts of violence and sacrifice can easily reemerge to constitute master signifiers in the *NYT*’s coverage:

Although Hezbollah has been integrated into the Lebanese political system, [its leader] had to remind [the Israelis] that Hezbollah is a regional player and an Islamic organization whose members are driven by a jihadi ideology, by a sacrificial ideology and ‘they don’t give a damn about the consequences’.<sup>40</sup>

And the following comment probably tells more about the fears of the reporter than those of the Arab countries being referred to:

For Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states, the specter of a Shi’ite crescent running from Iran through Iraq to the militant Shi’ites of Hezbollah in Lebanon is terrifying. It is not just a matter of age-old tensions between Sunni and Shi’ite Islam. The status, and safety, of the Sunni Arab leadership is at stake.<sup>41</sup>

These examples illustrate how a rhetoric of violence and irrationality is repeatedly employed by the *NYT* to explain current and past events in the Middle East. In *Covering Islam*, Edward Said showed that “[t]o demonize and dehumanize a whole culture on the ground that it is “enraged” at modernity is to turn Muslims into the objects of a therapeutic, punitive attention.”<sup>42</sup> Explaining military violence against Israel as motivated by religious impulses thus constitutes a common shorthand practice among mainstream journalists who view Islam as irrational and thus, unpredictable.

### RATIONALIZATION OF THE OVERWHELMING SUPERIORITY OF THE ISRAELI ARMY

What follows is an attempt to conduct an analytics of government that uncovers the process of rationalization of the overwhelming superiority of the Israeli army. The implications of the governmental technique shown in this analysis are twofold: 1) they determine what constitutes a suitable problem or permissible

thought, i.e. ‘problematization’, and 2) they prescribe a desired solution, i.e. ‘rationalization’. The newspaper employs several mechanisms to justify its support for a state that is calling for unlimited violence on Lebanon (well beyond Hizbullah’s “state-within-the-state”) and carrying the aggression long enough to deter any party from thinking about attacking Israel in the future. To that end, journalists use various strategies: they boost Hizbullah’s military capabilities; they demonize its leaders and members; they trivialize civilian Lebanese casualties; they emphasize the suffering of the Israeli population; they bombard readers with nauseating references to Israel’s right to defend itself, and they stress the precautions taken by the Israeli army to minimize civilian casualties.

An analytics of government suggests that ‘problematization’, i.e. the fact that journalists choose to tackle the event according to the Israeli perspective as shown earlier, and the *problems* faced by the Israeli side, is crucial to understand the governmental strategy used by the newspaper. The analytics of government endeavors to make clear the *thoughts* associated with a specific regime of government.

The governmental tactic examined here involves the ‘problematization’ of Hizbullah, as an entity, and its use of violence. This is achieved through asymmetric reporting and the construction of a pejorative image of Hizbullah. The subsequent step in the *NYT*’s strategy resides in a process of rationalization. In other words, the coverage is “intentional and nonsubjective,”<sup>43</sup> and comes across as undogmatic, self-adjustable and facts on-the-ground based.

### *Asymmetric Reporting*

Once violence is decontextualized as above, the challenge ahead of the *NYT* becomes the justification of a war between two protagonists of monumentally uneven powers. On one side an Israeli state with an overwhelming control over the Lebanese airspace, which can enforce a naval blockade, and which possesses one of the most high-tech armies in the world, on the other side there is a powerless Lebanese population and a guerilla-type organization of a few thousand combatants which possesses several thousand short range missiles. In order to let the audience sympathize with the former and repudiate the latter, the *NYT* embraces the Israeli government positions on virtually all substantive issues.

By focusing on Hizbullah’s weaponry and down-playing Israel’s lethal military equipment, journalists set up a specific debate for the public; they clearly define the boundaries of what constitutes “permissible” thought. During the few days following the capture of the Israeli soldiers, journalists report extensively on the Hizbullah’s military equipment.<sup>44</sup> During the war, the *NYT* featured an interactive graphic on its online page that shows the range reached by different Hizbullah rockets. For every type of rocket chosen by the cursor, a corresponding area in Israel appears in bright color that shows the range reached by the weapon. No such interactive graphic exists for Lebanese territory. Further, the following excerpt illustrates the *NYT*’s constant focus on Hizbullah’s military force:

Hezbollah, according to the senior Israeli military official, has some 12,000 120-millimeter Katyusha rockets, with a range of 6 to 15 miles and a warhead of some 40 pounds. So far, they have launched fewer than 900 of them.

Hezbollah also has “a few hundred” Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 missiles -- the older Fajr-3, a 240- millimeter missile with a range of some 30 miles, and the Fajr-5, a 333-millimeter missile with a range of about 40 to 45 miles, the

official said. Both carry larger warheads, the first with a payload of almost 200 pounds (of which roughly half is high explosive), and the second, of 400 pounds.

Hizbullah also has a small number of missiles with a range longer than the Fajr-5, the official said, but he would not be more specific. Some analysts believe that Hizbullah has a few Iranian Zelzal missiles, with a range of 60 to 80 miles, which could reach the outskirts of Tel Aviv.<sup>45</sup>

While the readers of the *NYT* are updated with the exact number of rockets that hit Israel every day, the number of aerial raids carried out by the Israeli Aerial Forces is never among “All The News That’s Fit To Print,” and it is virtually impossible to find information about the most sophisticated and lethal weapons that the Israeli army used against Lebanese civilians. When the Israeli army invades Lebanon and occupies its southern territories, the *NYT* uses Israeli rhetoric to describe the purpose of the operation, which is according to the newspaper, the creation of a “buffer zone.” The asymmetric reporting has a twofold psychological function: it tells readers that the “terrorist” Lebanese organization is more harmful than it appears to be and that Israel has the right to defend itself at all costs.

### *The Construction of “the Other”*

The construction of identity and difference has been widely studied by media analysts<sup>46</sup>; it usually consists of drawing the line between “us” and “them” in a way that would not challenge or alter hegemonic structures or dominant discourses. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have shown that those identities are usually articulated around empty signifiers and are therefore the opposite of monolithic or fixed meanings.<sup>47</sup> Identity is therefore in constant motion; it can be partially fixed when it is articulated around a hegemonic discourse. In the coverage of the *NYT*, while Hizbullah members<sup>48</sup> are demonized and their identity is partially fixed, the identity of Lebanese individuals found dead can be anything on a continuum that stretches from “human shields”<sup>49</sup> used by the Hizbullah to “dead [that] may be civilians associated with Hezbollah, assisting it or storing its rockets.”<sup>50</sup>

On the Israeli side, the distinction between civilians and soldiers is blurred and the number of Israelis killed is often announced in the headline and first paragraph. On August 4<sup>th</sup>, Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Steven Erlanger write an article with the following headline: “12 Israelis Die; Sheik Threatens To Bomb Tel Aviv”. The message conveyed from the title is that a large number of Israeli citizens were killed by a zealot who is now threatening to bomb the capital of Israel. However, if one reads the first paragraph, one will find out that 4 out of the 12 individuals killed by Hizbullah are soldiers. If one pursues reading few more paragraphs one will learn that Hassan Nassrallah has very clearly stated that Tel Aviv would be targeted if, and only if, Beirut, the Lebanese capital, is hit. Moreover, journalists did not report the number of Lebanese deaths that day.

An attentive reader of the *NYT* immediately remarks that the coverage of casualties differs depending on the identity of the victims. When the victims are Lebanese, the number of deaths is often buried in the middle of the article and never appears in the headline. In a similar vein, a study conducted by *If Americans Knew* shows that the *NYT*’s coverage of the Israeli aggression on Palestinians is shockingly skewed.<sup>51</sup> The study shows for example that during the first year of the second Intifada, the death of Israeli children is almost always reported in the



headline or first paragraphs and is often cited more than once (leading to a total number of deaths higher than the actual number); on the Palestinian side however, only 18% of children's casualties is reported in the same fashion. In June and July of 2004, the number of Israeli children casualties reported is equal to 400% of the actual number while the number of Palestinian children deaths reported for the same period is only 39% of the actual number.

This process of "truth production" involves the construction of the empathy-eliciting Self and the amorphous Other. This dynamic polices the boundaries of the dominant discourse. In that context, the representation of "the Other" is not only a humiliating misrepresentation, but it also serves to colonize minds and to prepare the terrain for the occupation of the land, as Said reminds us.<sup>52</sup>

### *Colonial Archives and Neocolonial Repertoires*

The *NYT*'s reporting on the war on Lebanon reflects a general Orientalist attitude rooted in a colonial past. Edward Said presciently warned that the colonial archive should not be seen solely as a resource to understand the past but also as a repertoire used by neocolonial powers to manage their territories and subjects.<sup>53</sup> Many postcolonial critics have shown that the present neocolonial practices can be traced to the colonial repertoire of previous centuries. Critics warn however, against the dangers of essentializing colonialism's continuity in time and space which might lead to the reproduction of a totalizing master narrative. In their readings, they emphasize the importance of stressing the Foucauldian discontinuity if one is to break from a unilinear and Eurocentric History and therefore give a voice to the multiple intertwined and heterogeneous historical narratives<sup>54</sup>.

Reminding ourselves that the *NYT* is a conduit used by neo-colonial powers with domineering aspirations is a key component in the analysis of its coverage. For example, journalists' reporting changes according to obstacles encountered by the military on the ground. The Israeli military institution is shocked when it launches its ground offensives and discovers that the defeat of Hizbullah is not as easy as it had predicted. A few days later, it announces that disarming the organization is in fact, impossible. Since the rationalization of unlimited violence against Hizbullah is not sufficient to achieve its quick defeat, the *NYT* proposes instead to understand the "enemy" better. The surprise of the Israeli army following the ground offensive had massive repercussions on the *NYT*'s reporting which had prepared its audience for a rapid and easy Israeli victory. Consequently, towards the end of the month of July and the beginning of August, reporters start desiccating Hizbullah to understand its strategy of resistance and its steadfastness. "Unlike the Palestinian militias, Hizbullah is organized into specialty units: one to fire long-range missiles, another to fire antitank rockets, still another for demolitions. They are well trained by Iranians, in Iran, Lebanon or Iraq", General Amidror tells the readers of the *NYT* and he adds "[e]ach combat unit fights as a unit, with tactics. The full-time fighters number about 3,000 [...]. A wider circle of part-time militiamen -- guards, Katyusha launchers -- numbers several thousand more."<sup>55</sup> The techniques used by the *NYT* are not new. In fact, in the past, colonial powers often gathered information about their enemies as a preliminary stage to understand their frame of thought and to subsequently colonize them. Critical liberalism scholars Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller note that: By means of inscription, reality is made stable, mobile, comparable, combinable. It is rendered in a form in which it can be debated and diagnosed. Information in this

sense is not the outcome of a neutral recording function. It is itself a way of acting upon the real, a way of devising techniques for inscribing it in such a way as to make the domain in question susceptible to evaluation, calculation and intervention.<sup>56</sup>

Inscription as a neo-colonial governmental media technique has a double purpose: it normalizes the crimes committed by the Israeli government by presenting them as part of a civilizing mission; it also enables the scrutinization of the enemy through a process of evaluation and intervention. The first phase requires understanding the situation from a dominant standpoint; the second phase enables the “expert” to act upon his/her object of study and to prescribe “cures.”

### *White Men are Saving Brown Women from Brown Men*

A technique used extensively by *NYT* reporters consists of portraying Israeli military as good in essence. To justify the Israeli army’s overwhelming lethal power, journalists convey the idea that the Israeli government is trying to save the Lebanese population from a Shiite “monster.” Reporters often interviews individuals with whom they already agree and dismiss those who are opposed to their views. The *NYT* systematically ignores Hizbullah’s viewpoints and to a lesser extent, those of the Lebanese officials, while it extensively quotes Israeli and American “experts,” military generals, intelligence and officials. Lebanese “experts” whose views can be read in the flagship newspaper usually echo official Israeli rhetoric. Sometimes, even when Lebanese voices are used by journalists, it is to criticize an official Lebanese position on an issue that does not conform to the *NYT* editorial line. Lebanese individuals are also frequently used to show that Hizbullah is a totalitarian and sectarian organization. In some cases, when Hizbullah sympathizers appear on the front-page, they are carefully chosen, to reiterate stereotypes about Islam, fundamentalism and violence. Lebanese are often portrayed as specifically Shiite, Sunni, Druze or Christian, whereas Israeli citizens’ political and confessional identity is almost never revealed. What matters and what is communicated to the readers about Israeli individuals is their pain and suffering. Silencing the Lebanese population and offering a loudspeaker to Israeli politicians and military “experts” forms a disturbing pattern in the reporting of the *NYT*. These journalistic practices produce a simplistic dichotomy where the heroes fight the villains and where it is relatively easy for reader to take sides.

Furthermore, when Lebanese citizens or officials appear on the front-page, they are effeminized and represented as weak, while Hizbullah combatants are portrayed as subhuman and violent. Ania Loomba notes that “the Oriental male [is] effeminized, portrayed as homosexual, or else depicted as lusty villain from whom the virile but courteous European [can] rescue the native [...]”<sup>57</sup> The unwillingness of the native Shiite “villain” to embrace Israeli Western values has been one of the primary justification for the war on Lebanon. Another Israeli claimed goal throughout the military campaign has been to “help” a weak Lebanese government uproot the “terrorist” organization. The Foreign Minister, Ms. Livni tells one of the *NYT* journalists “The leaders who support an acceptable process are the weak ones [...]. Siniora is against the Syrians and has the same ideas as the international community, and Abu Mazen favors a two-state solution, but neither of them can deliver.”<sup>58</sup> However, the comments of a former Israeli national security adviser to the conservative reporter Steven Erlanger convey best the neocolonial political stance of the newspaper:

What mattered more than any new military offensive was the eventual shape of Lebanon, and whether the government of Mr. Siniora could operate in the interests of all Lebanese or remain a hostage to Hizbullah's decisions.<sup>59</sup>

What is implied from the above quotation is that the Israeli government is only doing what is best for the Lebanese themselves. “Gayatri Spivak telescopes this dynamic into a pithy sentence: ‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’.”<sup>60</sup> In the eyes of the *NYT*, the war against Lebanon is an example of a peaceful army willing to sacrifice its national agenda in order to save “the brown feminized” Lebanese population from the “villain” male Hizbullah. And in case the Israeli intentions are still ambiguous to some readers, the Jerusalem correspondent interview of former director of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Yossi Alpher, makes them clear: “Israel has developed ‘a broad understanding of the regional picture,’ which includes the involvement of Iran and Syria and a recognition of the weakness of the Lebanese government, which will never be able to confront Hezbollah without international help.”<sup>61</sup> Neo-colonial powers, under the pretext of alleviating the humanitarian conditions within particular countries, particularly since William Clinton’s presidency<sup>62</sup>, have frequently invaded new territories to impose a novel matrix of power. The Israeli offer to “help” the Lebanese government fits within this larger framework.

## CONCLUSION

The ‘problematization’ employed by the *NYT* regulates its coverage to produce what it considers to be ‘permissible’ thought, and invariably rationalizes the Israeli aggression. The media not only transmits military propaganda, it also allows for the experimentation of different strategies of government by avoiding the historicization of its coverage, by presenting the Israeli war as a logical retaliatory response to Hizbullah’s initial attacks, by showing that the region is permeated by irrational violence, and finally by promoting a skewed analytical framework where the balance of power is reversed. Those techniques adhere to specific programmes of government and change according to the efficiency of their impact on the audiences. Moreover, the *NYT*’s coverage dramatically shifts with time, depending on the needs of policy makers, the army’s performance on the terrain, and the effect of the coverage on the readers. The debates on the *NYT*’s front-page represent a spectrum of Israeli perspectives while they repeatedly silence the Lebanese standpoint. Clausewitz’s sums up the relationship between the media and the military astutely by urging us to: “learn to regard a war, and the separate campaigns of which it is composed, as a chain of linked engagements each leading to the next [...]”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, attempts to de-link the representation of war from the actual event should be rethought fundamentally.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This is a variation on Carl von Clausewitz’s famous line: “War is nothing but the continuation of policy with other means.” *On War*, <http://www.binternet.com/~glynhughes/squashed/clausewitz.htm>. Accessed 23 August, 2006. In *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76* (New York, 2003), Foucault conducts a

related inversion of Clausewitz's proposition by stating that "power is the continuation of war by other means."

<sup>2</sup> See *The Record of the Paper: How the New York Times Misreports US Foreign Policy* by Howard Friel and Richard A. Falk.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Okrent, "Is The New York Times a Liberal Newspaper?" *New York Times* 25 Jul, 2004, late ed., sec. 4: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Hizbullah's violation of international conventions is systematically reported in The New York Times while there is a haunting silence about the Israeli violation of such conventions. Those violations are documented by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International among other organizations.

<sup>5</sup> Noam Chomsky, and Edward S. Herman. *Manufacturing Consent: A Propaganda Model*, (New York, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Noam Chomsky, "What makes Mainstream Media Mainstream," June 1997. *Zmag*, <<http://www.zmag.org/zmag/articles/chomoc97.htm>>.

<sup>7</sup> New York Times Company. Sep 4 2006. <http://www.nytc.com/investors-nyt-circulation.html>.

<sup>8</sup> New York Times Digital. Sep 4 2006. <http://www.nytdigital.com/learn/pdf/NYTDMar06.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Assistance to Israel, Jewish Virtual Library. <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/U.S.Assistance.to.Israel1.html>>. Accessed 20 August, 2006.

<sup>10</sup> See *Manufacturing Consent*.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts determine How we see the Rest of the World*, (New York, 1997), p. li.

<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive account of the Israel lobby in the U.S., read "The Israel Lobby" by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in *The London Review of Books* 28:6, 23 March, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> AIPAC. "Israel Taking Significant Steps to Prevent Casualties as Hizbullah Hides Behind Civilians," 1 August, 2006, <http://www.aipac.org/PDFDocs/AIPAC%20Memo%20-%20SignificantSteps.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> AIPAC. "International Community Must Ensure Hizballah's Disarmament," 26 July, 2006, <http://www.aipac.org/PDFDocs/AIPAC%20Memo%20-%20EnsureHizballahsDisarmament.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> *The Record of the Paper: How the New York Times Misreports US Foreign Policy* by Howard Friel and Richard A. Falk shows how the NYT systematically dismiss international law in its coverage of the United States foreign policy to advance a conservative agenda. *The Language of Empire: Abu Ghraib and the American Media* by Lila Rajiva analyzes the mainstream media and particularly the NYT's complicity in the justification of the American empire's crimes. *Manufacturing Consent: A Propaganda Model* is a seminal study using a political economy framework to examine the coverage of the NYT and other mainstream media.

<sup>16</sup> For more on discourse analysis, see for example, Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, (London, 2003); Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Antisemitism*, (London, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Foucault contends that "continual variations" is one of the rules of discourse production. In *The History of Sexuality*, he writes: "We must seek [...] the pattern of modifications which the relationships of force imply by the nature of their process. [...] Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are 'matrices of transformations'." (New York, 1990), p. 99.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, Michel. "Governmentality". *The Essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York, 2003), p. 244.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>20</sup> Scott L. Althaus and David Tewksbury, "Agenda Setting and the "New" News: Patterns of Issue Importance Among Readers of the Paper and Online Versions of the New York Times," *Communication Research*, 29:2, April 2002, p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> A cursory examination of the chronology shows that the coverage goes through three phases that are neither mutually exclusive nor totally overlapping: The first one starts with the Hezbollah's 'provocation' on July 12, while the massacre of Lebanese civilians in Qana on July 30 constitutes the beginning of the second one; the third phase starts roughly with the ground operations when the Israeli army discovers that the Hezbollah cannot be defeated as easily as the political and military 'intelligentsia' has predicted.

<sup>22</sup> Neil Macfarquhar and Hassan M. Fattah, "In Hezbollah Mix of Politics and Arms, Arms Win Out." *New York Times*, 16 July, 2006, late ed., sec. 1, p. 1+.

<sup>23</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, 1981), p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> For the period from 22 July, 2005, to 20 January, 2006. Accessed 3 August, 2006. <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/420/36/PDF/N0542036.pdf?OpenElement>

- <sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch, August 2006 report.  
[http://hrw.org/reports/2006/lebanon0806/2.htm#\\_Toc142299220](http://hrw.org/reports/2006/lebanon0806/2.htm#_Toc142299220) . Accessed 3 August, 2006.
- <sup>26</sup> See *The Record of the Paper: How the New York Times Misreports US Foreign Policy* by Howard Friel and Richard A. Falk.
- <sup>27</sup> Kalman, Matthew. "Israel set war plan more than a year ago Strategy was put in motion as Hezbollah began increasing its military strength," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 July, 2006, p. A1+
- <sup>28</sup> 26 articles out of a total of 60 present the Israeli attacks as retaliatory, and none of them blames Israel for initiating the war.
- <sup>29</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Weighing Foreign Forces: Sea Change for Israel," *New York Times* 24 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>30</sup> Clyde Haberman, "At Israel Rally, A Word Fails," *New York Times*, 18 July, 2006, late ed., p. B1+.
- <sup>31</sup> Greg Myre, and Helene Cooper, "Israel To Occupy Area Of Lebanon As Security Zone," *New York Times*, 26 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>32</sup> Steven Erlanger and Jad Mouawad, "Diplomats Seek Foreign Patrols To Calm Mideast," *New York Times*, 18 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>33</sup> Scott Shane, "Fighting Locally, Fighting Globally," *New York Times*, 16 July, 2006, late ed., sec. 4, p. 1+.
- <sup>34</sup> Steven Erlanger, and Hassan M. Fattah. "Israel Suspending Lebanon Air Raids After Dozens Die." *New York Times*, 31 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>35</sup> United Nations. Letter Dated 7 May, 1996 From The Secretary-General Addressed To The President Of The Security Council. 7 May 1996.  
<http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/62d5aa740c14293b85256324005179bc?OpenDocument>
- <sup>36</sup> Amnesty International, *Unlawful Killings During Operation "Grapes of Wrath,"* 24 July, 1996.  
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/engMDE150421996>.
- <sup>37</sup> Craig S. Smith, and Steven Erlanger, "Israel Pushes On Despite Agreeing To Airstrike Lull," *New York Times*, 1 August, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch, "Israel/Lebanon: Qana Death Toll at 28," 2 August, 2006.  
<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/08/02/lebanon13899.txt.htm>
- <sup>39</sup> Scott Shane, "Fighting Locally, Fighting Globally," *New York Times*, 16 July, 2006, late ed., sec. 4, p. 1+.
- <sup>40</sup> Neil Macfarquhar and Hassan M. Fattah, "In Hezbollah Mix of Politics and Arms, Arms Win Out," *New York Times*, 16 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>41</sup> F. Robert Worth, "For the U.S., a Newfangled Compass," *New York Times*, 23 July, 2006, late ed., sec. 4, p.1+.
- <sup>42</sup> Said, Edward. *Covering Islam*, p. xxxvi.
- <sup>43</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p. 94.
- <sup>44</sup> During the coverage of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the journalists of *The New York Times* gave plenty of details about the weapons used by the Palestinians while the information about Israeli military equipment is almost absent. A noticeable difference between July 2006 war on Lebanon and the Israeli operation *Peace in Galilee*, lies in the fact that Wafa, the Palestinian Liberation Organization radio station, was sometimes considered a source of information for the journalists of *The New York Times* whereas *Al Manar*, the Hezbollah TV station, is totally dismissed because it is viewed solely a propaganda tool.
- <sup>45</sup> Jad Mouawad, and Steven Erlanger, "Israel Bombards Lebanon After Hezbollah Hits Haifa With Missiles," *New York Times* 17 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>46</sup> For more on the role of the media on shaping identity, see for example, Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London, 1997).
- <sup>47</sup> See David Howarth and Yannis Stavarakakis, *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis: Identities, Hegemony and Social Change*, (Manchester, 2000), p. 1-23.
- <sup>48</sup> When "Hezbollah" appears in an article, it is often followed with "neighborhood," "stronghold," "militia," and "a state-within-the-state" and its members are systematically referred to as "gunmen", "militants," "guerillas," and "targets."
- <sup>49</sup> John Kifner, and Warren Hoge, "200 Missiles Hit Israel As Battle Rages In Lebanon." *New York Times*, 3 August, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>50</sup> Steven Erlanger, "With Israeli Use of Force, Debate Over Proportion," *New York Times*, 19 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.
- <sup>51</sup> "Off the Charts: Accuracy in Reporting of Israel/Palestine." *If Americans Knew*, 10 August, 2006.  
<http://www.ifamericansknew.org/media/nyt-report.html>.

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<sup>52</sup> Edward Said writes: "To say simply that Orientalism was a rationalization of colonial rule is to ignore the extent to which colonial rule was justified in advance by Orientalism, rather than after the fact." Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York, 1979), p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Gregory Derek, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> Steven Erlanger, and Thom Shanker, "Israel Finding A Difficult Foe In Hezbollah," *New York Times* 26 July, 2006, late ed., A1+.

<sup>56</sup> Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller. "Political Power beyond the State: problematics of government," *British Journal Of Sociology* 43 ( 1992), p. 173-205

<sup>57</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London 1998), p. 152

<sup>58</sup> Steven Erlanger, "With Israeli Use of Force, Debate Over Proportion," *New York Times* 19 July, 2006, Late ed., p. A1+.

<sup>59</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Israel, Seeking Rocket Buffer, Sets Expansion," *New York Times*, 10 August, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.

<sup>60</sup> Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, (London, 1998), p. 154.

<sup>61</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Weighing Foreign Forces: Sea Change for Israel." 24 July, 2006, late ed., p. A1+.

<sup>62</sup> See Anne Orford, *Reading Humanitarian Intervention: Human Rights and the Use of Force in International Law*, (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>63</sup> von Clausewitz, *On War*.



## GREAT EXPECTATIONS, LIMITED MEANS FRANCE AND THE 2006 ISRAELI-LEBANESE WAR

Elizabeth Picard\*

For the future historians of the Middle East, the successive shifts in the French response to the Israeli-Lebanese war of the summer 2006 might offer a good illustration of the ambitions and frustrations of a Western second-rank power meddling in regional politics at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At first, France joined the international western chorus condemning Hizbullah for its provocations; subsequently France supported a more nuanced Lebanese position before the U.N., before refusing to reinforce their support militarily and finally giving rise to an unexpected European common intervention. Such apparent hesitation will bear testimony to the growing intertwining of European and Middle East security policies as a consequence of the failure of American unilateral rule.

This article proposes to analyze the successive postures of French foreign policy first as the effect of an international policy driven by a president anxious to seize the occasion to polish his tarnished political image, but also of a president who is torn between his orientation as an Atlanticist and a desire to maintain privileged relations with the Arab world generally and Lebanon in particular.

To better understand the events of the summer 2006, this article will examine the French position within its historical context, looking first at the colonial experiment of the first half of the 20th century and more recently, at the French military interventions (UNIFIL and MF) during the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990. As heir to the Gaullist doctrine of a French "Arab policy", Chirac has tried to re-assert French diplomacy in the Levant since the late 1990s. His policy is worth examining in comparison with the U.S. *broad*, then *new*, Middle East and North Africa initiative.

Can French policy with respect to the war in Lebanon trigger a strategic shift in the Middle East given that such policy would be essentially European, different from that of the United States and autonomous as to their means of implementation? And could such uncoupling of European politics from U.S. strategy in the Middle East reinforce the chances of success for the second UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL-Plus)?

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## FROM THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM TO THE DEFENSE OF LEBANON

In the first weeks of the war, France reacted both on the field and diplomatically, sending a double message, one of reluctance to engage on the one hand and a message of alignment with the United States (and thus, of support for the Israeli position) on the other. From the first Israeli air raids, ministerial and even presidential declarations (Jacques Chirac's traditional speech of July 14 from the Elysée [the presidential palace]) and embassy activities in Beirut focused on the evacuation of some 15,000 French citizens and Franco-Lebanese. Ferry boats were dispatched from Larnaca, Cyprus and Prime minister de Villepin went on a highly publicized trip to Beirut harbor to greet the first evacuees who shouted "vive la France" for the television cameras. In the days that followed, French officials and media continued to express concern for expatriates caught by the Israeli blockade. A Special Forces operation to evacuate a French high school in Habboush (Nabatiye) thanks to a truce negotiated with the Israeli army constituted the most outstanding intervention of French troops positioned off the Lebanese coasts. In the meantime, only limited medical and humanitarian aid was reaching the Lebanese. The implicit message of this massive and hasty evacuation went against French declarations of sympathy while implicitly acquiescing in the prospect of a long and destructive war to which only Tel-Aviv and Washington could put a term. It was also a message of non-support for the Lebanese government of Fuad Siniora who endeavored throughout the conflict to maintain solidarity with all communities and all areas of the country; by choosing cautious withdrawal, France contributed to the frustration of civil society and the Christian populations, thus encouraging the emigration option.

This cautious withdrawal was accompanied at first by a conspicuous alignment with the American position at the G-8 summit in Saint Petersburg (17 July), at the meeting of the Lebanon Core Group in Rome (26 July) and finally at the Security Council (5 August). France basked in the glory of co-sponsoring, with the United States, UN Security Council resolution 1559 (2 September 2004) which called for and resulted in Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, but which also called for the disarmament of all militias. On July 12, the French government reiterated their call for an "indispensable" disarmament and held Hizbullah responsible for breaking the quasi-truce which had prevailed for several months on the Israeli-Lebanese border, allowing Israeli Foreign minister Tzipi Livni to declare that Israeli army's offensive only aimed "at enforcing resolution 1559"<sup>1</sup> thus offering an image of a French-American-Israeli convergence. When, following a private meeting with George Bush on July 16, Jacques Chirac declared, "It is necessary to dissuade the forces which threaten the safety, stability and sovereignty of Lebanon", he repeated the exact words of the American president. He too seemed unaware of the complexities of the Lebanese domestic scene. He appeared to embrace the same Manichean vision of a democratic Lebanon allied with the West (that of the Christians, of Hariri and Junblatt) against its "destructors" (Islamist Hizbullah and Syria's allies). Chirac's concern for maintaining an image of French-American connivance in the fight against Islamic terrorism and on the Lebanese issue at the Security Council led further to the joint first draft of resolution 1701: a unilateral sentence against Hizbullah and a plan to send international forces under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in order to achieve the "disarmament of armed groups [...] between the Blue line and the Litani river".<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the United States

began bullying France into taking the lead of the peacekeeping force which was to be responsible for following up Israeli policy in Lebanon.

It took more than the firm rejection by the Siniora government of an unacceptable and above all unenforceable plan to bend the position of France and remind Jacques Chirac of the realities of Middle-Eastern political balances. Intense exchanges with the Egyptian president and Saudi rulers initiated by the *Afrique du Nord-Moyen-Orient* directorate at the Quai d'Orsay (French ministry of Foreign Affairs) together with a progressive shift in Hizbullah's stance convinced the president that there could be no military solution to the crisis and that means of persuasion would be needed in order for Hizbullah to reach the conclusion that it had no option but to give up its weapons. He therefore presented a three-step action plan in *Le Monde* (27 July): first, an "immediate and permanent" cease-fire to put an end to the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Lebanon; second, an engagement of the international community towards both Israel and Lebanon – the latter being responsible for negotiations leading to the disarmament of Hizbullah; finally the use of a multinational force to support the deployment of the Lebanese army south of the Litani river up to the Israeli border.

Thus, the French representative to the Security Council accepted – cautiously, belatedly and unremarkably – to take into consideration Arab reservations about the first UN draft<sup>3</sup> by making explicit reference to the Lebanese Prime minister's seven-step plan, including the decision to "deploy an armed force of 15,000 troops [...] as the Israeli army withdraws" and their insistence on "exercising full sovereignty". In order to be approved unanimously (including, therefore by the United States) the 11 August 2006 SC resolution 1701 remained imprecise and its implementation depended on a number of intricate conditions. As such, it was greeted as a victory for France and a reward for president Chirac's "ethical" position when he had claimed that letting the current situation persist would be "the most immoral attitude".<sup>4</sup> There is nothing like "a good" international crisis to rehabilitate a president caught up in failures and scandals and at the end of his second term.<sup>5</sup>

In the days that followed rumors spread that the reinforced UNIFIL would include a large French contingent (up to 5,000 of the 15,000 men) and would be under French command.<sup>6</sup> "France takes lead role on Lebanon" commented the BBC<sup>7</sup> – a France known as "a friend and protector of Lebanon". What was the rationale behind such a sentimental cliché?

## BETWEEN NOSTALGIA AND REVENGE

The relations between France and Lebanon (or, before the creation of the state, the population of Mount Lebanon) constitute a long narrative of history and myth.<sup>8</sup> Even though there is abundance of serious works on the history of European imperialism and colonialism in the region,<sup>9</sup> such narratives remain woven into an emotional veil of mutual stereotypes such as "Lebanon is France's oldest daughter" or France is the "tender mother (*umm banîn*) of Lebanon". It is true that Lebanon is partly (but only partly)<sup>10</sup> a French invention and that following the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire the country was detached from the province of Syria in 1920 by General Gouraud who established its boundaries, remaining under French mandate during a quarter of a century.<sup>11</sup> In order to promote strategic interests arising in modern times since the intervention of the Second Empire in the war between Maronites and Druze,<sup>12</sup> France argued

successively for the protection of Christians (and Maronites in particular), for an acculturation of the Lebanese to state modernity, for the solidarity of the Western camp first in the face of the Arab and Muslim world and later in the confrontation with the Soviet camp, and finally for “francophonie” - French as a universal language. “Francophonie” bears a more geopolitical even ideological understanding than the mere sharing of the French language (which lost its status as Lebanon’s second language to English in the mid 1990’s)<sup>13</sup>. It is the latest twist in the special relationship which authorizes Paris to offer as much cultural and technical aid to Lebanon (4 million inhabitants) as it does to Egypt (70 million). The new trend encourages French diplomacy to focus not so much on Christians – at a time when high school and college education in English is rapidly progressing among Maronites – but to reach out to Tripoli’s Sunnis and especially to Lebanese Shiites, of whom they assume many became French speakers thanks to their emigration to Western Africa.<sup>14</sup>

Would such redeployment of Franco-Lebanese relations towards the country’s Muslim communities prove sufficient grounds to renew a solid alliance? Not when taking into account both the nostalgia of some and the hostility of others. The nostalgia of the old Lebanese elites holding on to the idea of privileged relations; the nostalgia of both “rightwing” and “leftwing” French, who cling to the image of a Christian and/or secular Lebanon, and choose to ignore its demographic and social changes since the end of the civil war. As for the sentiment of hostility, it has been progressively growing between France and Arab and Muslim societies as a result of the never-ending Palestinian agony, as it has grown between the Arab world and the West as a whole. Gone is the time (December 1968) when General de Gaulle raised Lebanese (and Arab) approval by declaring “unacceptable” the principle of retaliatory Israeli attacks against the Beirut airport.<sup>15</sup>

Since then, the Western world generally, and France in particular have tolerated a number of Israeli interventions contrary to international law. UNIFIL, the observation force created in April 1978 by UN Security Council resolution 425 following the first massive invasion of the country by Israel, has watched powerlessly for 22 years as the fighting continued between the Lebanese resistance and the occupying army. Its French contingent remained confined to logistic and humanitarian tasks. Lives were lost in the crossfire and the force’s legitimacy was tarnished by its inaction.<sup>16</sup> France scored only once in the eyes of the Lebanese when they co-sponsored with the United States the April 1996 agreement between Israel, Lebanon and Syria following the 1996 Israeli Operation Grapes of Wrath.<sup>17</sup>

During the second phase of the Lebanese civil war, following the 1982 Israeli invasion and as a consequence of the political and military support given to Saddam Hussein since the 1970’s (Chirac was Prime minister and leader of the Gaullist party) and especially in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988),<sup>18</sup> the relationship between France and the Shiite community, namely the Lebanese Shiites, deteriorated. In 1982, after another Israeli invasion, some 800 French troops joined an equal number of U.S. Marines and 400 Italian troops to supervise the evacuation of the PLO from Lebanon. This Multinational Force (MF) operated in close co-operation with the regime of President Amin Gemayel. They had to confront Shiite militants, in particular the then nascent Hizbullah. Attacks (58 French paratroopers killed in the Drakkar building in Beirut on 23 October 1983) were followed by reprisals (against Hizbullah barracks on 17 November, 1983 in Baalbek), by kidnappings of civilians and terrorist attacks even on French soil between December 1985 and September 1986.<sup>19</sup>

Following the end of the civil war, France was not particularly successful in mending fences with the Lebanese Shiite militant groups and their Iranian patron: their boldest move was to invite Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hizbullah, to participate in the Francophone Summit in Beirut in October 2002 but, the following year, Chirac's relationship with Hizbullah deteriorated because of France's ban on headscarves in public schools. In a letter to Chirac, Sayyid Hussein Fadlallah threatened with "likely complications" when the ban was approved in 2004. Then came the ban on *al-Manar*, Hizbullah's television channel, accused of anti-Semitic propaganda.<sup>20</sup> On the whole, French policies towards Lebanon during that phase of reconstruction were thus based on an ambivalent set of memories, built around idealized friendliness and unresolved hatred and resentment. New imperatives on the French national scene further constrained the Chirac administration's great expectations.

### FRENCH DOMESTIC SCENE AND LEBANON: LITTLE SENSE, TOO MUCH SENSIBILITY

As mentioned earlier, the "right-wing/ left-wing" division in the French political life tends to blur when it comes to foreign policy. It even disappears sometimes, when faced with a serious crisis: thus it was that French political actors spoke with a rare unanimous voice against American unilateralism at the outset of the Second Gulf War, in March 2003, and the episode briefly revived ambitions for an independent French policy in the Middle East. Most of the time however, the consensus is weak. We may note a historical proximity between the socialist Party and Israel (the generation who visited the kibbutzim in the 1960's is now in the lead) and François Mitterrand's declared sympathy with the Labor Party leaders,<sup>21</sup> and no one has forgotten Lionel Jospin's trip as a Prime minister to Israel and Palestine in February 2000, when he spoke of Hizbullah as a "terrorist organization".<sup>22</sup> At the same time, within the Gaullist party, the ambition of an "independent French Arab policy" quickly faded, weakened by the contradictions between ideology (opposition to "fundamentalism", for example) and business requirements. Moreover, French actors showed little skill to impose themselves amid the backstage plots thriving in the Middle East political arena.<sup>23</sup> In 2006, Jacques Chirac's ministers and potential successors to the presidency (elections are scheduled for April 2007), Nicolas Sarkozy, Interior minister, and Dominique de Villepin, Prime minister, are both inclined to compete for Israel's sympathy in order to attract Jewish voters: Sarkozy telephoned his support to his Israeli counterpart in Tel-Aviv as early as July 12. As for Villepin, he gave new momentum to cultural and military cooperation in 2002 when he was minister of Foreign Affairs.<sup>24</sup>

This may explain the tacit consensus on Middle East politics – from the intellectuals to the business world, not to mention the military, some of whom have been struck by the "Vietnam syndrome" following tours-of-duty in UNIFIL or in the MF.<sup>25</sup> The academic world specializing in Arab politics were required to take time out.<sup>26</sup> Diplomats at the Quai d'Orsay are kept in the dark.<sup>27</sup> Rather than to a strategic debate, the Lebanese crisis gives rise to political jockeying and the pursuit of corporate interests. The only resistance to the consensus on Chirac's Middle East policy comes from the fringes of the political spectrum, among unrelenting pro-Arabs: anti-Semitic right-wing extremists, anti-imperialist left-wing extremists and Islamist militants,<sup>28</sup> all of whom are *de facto* excluded from the decision arena. What's more, the war of the summer 2006, like the 1982 invasion, occurred during

the French “grandes vacances” [summer holidays], which is to say, during a period of widespread social and political indifference. A few isolated and contradictory demonstrations organized by Palestinians and Lebanese in Paris (all in support of Lebanon, but not all of them supporting Hizbullah) complete the picture of a lazy if indifferent French polity.

Add to this that Jacques Chirac has personally followed Lebanese affairs since 1998, but excluding the subject from parliamentary debate. Throughout the summer of 2006 the president remained omnipresent by means of solemn pronouncements and extraordinary cabinet and summit meetings. He seemed to be managing the crisis “from the gut”, as suggested by an editorial in *Libération*,<sup>29</sup> which invited comparison to Chirac’s criticism of George Bush in 2003 for relying on his “gut feeling” in dealing with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Even if monopolization and close management of Foreign policy by the president is nothing new – Mitterrand also monopolized this “regalian” function<sup>30</sup> – Chirac has put a great deal of feeling into Arab politics. It is well documented that he established France’s foreign alliances according to his personal affinities and does not hesitate to mix public policy and business interests, a style of patronage recognized as common practice among Middle Eastern states and not altogether unfamiliar to “Northern democracies”, whatever they may claim.<sup>31</sup> An example of such practices might be the special protection he granted to Hafez al-Assad’s son and heir, Bashar, who was received at the Elysée when his father was still alive and whose unsuccessful efforts at political, economic and administrative reform, were successively welcomed by an obliging French diplomacy during three years (2000-2003). Afterwards, Chirac’s personal resentment against Bashar and his determination to exclude his protégé not only from the Lebanese scene, but also from regional negotiations, revealed the same impulsive and emotional behavior that hampers the management of a rational foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> Another example would be the close ties that the French president established with Rafic Hariri and later, following the father’s assassination, with his son Saad. Without going so far as to repeat the charges of corruption made in relation to the two men, the Saudi-Lebanese billionaire and the French politician, we should at least acknowledge for better or worse, that Chirac’s perceptions of post-war Lebanon and French policy in that country were influenced by the market driven and ultra-liberal ideas of Rafic Hariri.<sup>33</sup> How could such emotionally driven policy, harshly labeled “limited and anecdotic”<sup>34</sup>, fit with the vast projects of the American power in the Middle East?

### FROM BAGHDAD TO BEIRUT AN ATTEMPT TO AT TRANSATLANTIC RECONCILIATION

In taking the lead against American unilateralism in Iraq in 2003, France secured for herself esteem among the international community. However, it was not able to convert it into political gain on the ground, especially in the Middle East. Conscious of the fragility of the anti-war coalition (Germany was already covertly supporting American forces in Iraq), France very quickly sought to call for a “Euro-American partnership” in order to “promote security” in Iraq, “renew the peace process” in the Middle East and fight “terrorism and its proliferation”.<sup>35</sup> The underlying objective was to defuse the “war of civilizations” between the West and Islam by playing honest broker between the American super power and Arab regimes frustrated by American unilateralism and Washington’s unconditional support for Israel. Three years later, in view of the lasting American entanglement



in Iraq and the standoff between America under Bush and Iran under Ahmadinejad, there seems to be little room for alternative policies in the region. As a result, there is a clear danger for France to appear as Washington's partner implementing strategic complementarities: the United States and the United Kingdom in Iraq, and France in the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) as in colonial times or during the Cold War.

In Lebanon, France, pressed by its usual local interlocutors,<sup>36</sup> endeavored to accelerate the departure of the Syrian armed forces while consolidating a pro-Western coalition led by Rafic Hariri, able to replace the pro-Syrian regime of president Lahoud. Indeed, the unanimous adoption of SC resolution 1559, the "Cedar Revolution" (March 2005)<sup>37</sup> in the wake of the dramatic assassination of Hariri, and election in June of a Parliament dominated by the Hariri coalition,<sup>38</sup> appeared to mark a peaceful democratization process, against a backdrop of French-American reconciliation. Since SC resolution 1559, the U.N. appointed an international commission of enquiry to investigate the Hariri assassination; then passed SC resolution 1680 introduced by France (17 May 2006), requiring Syria to delimit its borders with Lebanon. In the meantime, French-American anti-terrorist co-operation was fully operational.<sup>39</sup>

The "New Middle East" was on the move. For eighteen months, American and French ambassadors haunted the corridors of the Grand Sérail, the seat of Lebanese government. In Beirut, they were mocked as the "high commissioners" in reference to the French ruler under the mandate. Washington and Paris followed closely the "national dialogue" opened in April 2006 to tackle Lebanon's major political issues, one of which is the disarmament of Hizbullah. While diplomats in the US embassy kept a pro-active and optimistic tone (a kind of "democracy if I want where I want"), the mood became somber in the *Résidence des Pins* (the French embassy in Beirut) as the window of opportunity opened by the so-called Cedar Revolution closed inexorably<sup>40</sup>. Still, at the time of the kidnapping by Hizbullah of two Israeli soldiers, Washington and Paris shared the same indignation and the same analysis of the belligerent influence of Damascus and Teheran in the Lebanese-Israeli crisis.<sup>41</sup> The first draft of Security Council resolution 1701 reflected this persistent transatlantic consensus. Even so, unlike the United States, France was aware of the Lebanese stalemate. But it was not in a position to antagonize the regional players behind the scene at the cost of its own security, energy supply and public image.

First and foremost was Iran, whose potential to play a "stabilizing role" in the Lebanese-Israeli war was publicly underscored by minister of Foreign Affairs Philippe Douste-Blazy in the wake of his meeting in Beirut (31 July 2006) with his Iranian counterpart, Manouchehr Mottaki. Although his declaration surprised and shocked many, it was in line with French policy towards Iran. Beginning with the terrorist and counter-terrorist war of the 1980s, and even more since the negotiation of the Agreement of April 1996, the French government has been convinced that Teheran holds the key to peace in southern Lebanon, if not in Palestine. Without a political guarantee from Iran, sending troops to secure peace in South Lebanon might lure France into a confrontation with Hizbullah in the name (and place) of the Israeli army. Hizbullah spiritual leader, Muhamad Hussein Fadlallah himself, warned against such a scenario.<sup>42</sup> Rather, Paris thought of taking advantage of the looming crisis over the development of Iran nuclear power, to open a line of negotiations in which the future of the Iranian nuclear power would be balanced against the disengagement of the Islamic Republic in the Levant. Secret

contacts intensified during August 2006, as the deadline approached for Iran to respond to Security Council proposals. However, to date, there is no evidence of any political guarantee secured by France from Iran for its participation in the UNIFIL-Plus in Lebanon.

Then, there was a possible threat from Syria, a regime France has deeply antagonized by promoting SC resolutions 1559 and 1680 and its intimate support to the new anti-Syrian Lebanese majority - Hariri, Junblatt and the 14-March Coalition. Here the recent wave of booby-trapping cars in Beirut in 2004-2005 combined with the unveiled threats by Syrian minister of Foreign Affairs, Walid Moallem<sup>43</sup> and president Bashar al-Asad reignited again memories of the civil war (namely assassination of ambassador Louis Delamare in Beirut in September 1981)<sup>44</sup>. But unlike its policy towards Iran, French strategy towards Syria remained aligned to the American determination to isolate Damascus, in spite of contrary advices from both its ambassador in Damascus and its German and Spanish partners.<sup>45</sup>

On the whole however, second thoughts about the regional balance of power drifted France apart from its American ally. Between the first draft of SC resolution 1701 (5 August) and the second draft (11 August), French diplomacy retreated. It differed from the American position by supporting the Lebanese government's refusal to place the UNIFIL-Plus mission within the framework of chapter VII of the UN Charter, and its insistence on remaining sovereign in the maintenance of peace on its national soil. In so doing, France reaffirmed its Westphalian doctrine, somewhat discredited following the end of the Cold War, of respect for national sovereignty.<sup>46</sup> In the meantime, by providing support for the Siniora government, France worked on avoiding the escalating spiral toward unilateral intervention in which the American administration openly wished to involve it along with Germany and Spain who also had escaped the Iraqi trap, with a risk of further deepening the rift between the West and the Arab and Muslim world.

French strategy in Lebanon had to reconcile differences arising between its diplomatic posturing on the eve of a United Nations deployment and its realistic evaluation of the forces on the ground, in particular in southern Lebanon.<sup>47</sup> For the French military, the perspective of facing a strong Hizbullah militia capable of withstanding the Israeli onslaught for 4 weeks awakened the worst memories of 1982-1983. Add to this the direct knowledge of the weaknesses of the new Lebanese army that UNIFIL-Plus was supposed to assist<sup>48</sup> and the spectacle of looming dissension within the Siniora government with regard to the mission of this army, notwithstanding the risk of an ever-present danger of a strike by Israel. A closer reading of resolution 1701 revealed that the text was obscure, even silent on the matter of political or military objectives of deployment as well as on the means (the "rules of engagement") by which these would be achieved.<sup>49</sup> Although Lebanon is not Somalia nor even Afghanistan, France opted to set political and security preconditions to its involvement on the field.<sup>50</sup> While raising the ire of its American ally in Lebanon, its cautious strategy resulted in an unexpected and innovative European commitment.

### THE SEARCH FOR A COMMON EUROPEAN POLICY

As mentioned previously, there is hardly an indication that France did receive "political guaranties" from Middle Eastern actors beyond the Israeli and the Lebanese governments. In the meantime Kofi Annan made it plain that the UN

force would not disarm Hizbullah and would only police the Lebanon border with Syria if asked by the Lebanese government, thus confirming the lack of “political agreement” demanded by Jacques Chirac in his interview with *Le Monde*. the Secretary General could neither expound the precise mandate to the 25 Foreign ministers of the European Union he met in Brussels nor the new rules of engagement for the “strong, credible and robust forces” the UN wants to send rapidly in beyond a shortening of the chain of command, the use of heavy weaponry, and the fact that the force has a single commander on the ground at all times.<sup>51</sup> And yet, in the end Douste-Blazy, like his fellow ministers, expressed his country’s satisfaction and its willingness to send as many as 2,000 troops in the coming weeks.<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, the Europeans are taking a considerable risk by stepping into in the UNIFIL-Plus shoes for a failing French commitment. With some 7,000 soldiers – approximately half the forces required – South Lebanon will be their biggest common operation ever: in their take over from NATO in Bosnia in 2004, they sent 6,500 troops. However, this innovative move can be interpreted in two different ways and only the observation of UNIFIL-Plus on the ground will tell which one was right. The optimistic interpretation is that the French semi-withdrawal offered a long awaited opportunity for the EU to undertake in Lebanon and the Middle East a policy less flamboyant but better suited to the capacities of the Europeans, conceived from a regional “multipolar” and Euro-Mediterranean perspective, whose independence with respect to the United States will grant legitimacy in the region. From such perspective, the dramatic war on Lebanon of the summer 2006 might lead to dearly needed multilateral peace negotiations under UN auspices.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Samaha, “Fransa fi ‘aradi ‘ada’iyya” [France in hostile territory], *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), 16 August 2006.

<sup>2</sup> *The Daily Star* (Beirut), 7 August 2006, “Text of the UN Security Council Draft Resolution”.

<sup>3</sup> *Haaretz*, 7 August 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Presidential declaration of August 9, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Pascal Virot, “À Paris, de rares bémols contre l’exécutif français”, *Libération*, 9 August 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Already the case in the summer 2006 and in theory, up to February 2007. *Le Monde*, 14 August 2006, « La France pourrait former la colonne vertébrale de la Finul renforcée ».

<sup>7</sup> William Horsley, “France takes lead role on Lebanon”, *BBC News*, 8 August 2006.

<sup>8</sup> For a recent sample see the French ambassador’s speech delivered during the traditional 15 August mass celebrated by Beirut’s Maronite archbishop in *L’Orient-Le Jour*, 16 August 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Among others : John Spagnolo, *France & Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1914* (London: Ithaca Press, 1977); Jacques Thobie, *Intérêts et impérialisme français dans l’Empire ottoman, 1895-1914* (Paris : Publications de la Sorbonne, 1977) ; Antoine Hokayem, Marie-Claude Bittar, *L’Empire ottoman, les Arabes et les grandes puissances, 1914-1920* (Beirut : Éditions universitaires du Liban, 1981) ; Henry Laurens, *Le royaume impossible : la France et la genèse du monde arabe* (Paris : Armand Colin, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> On indigenous contribution at state invention, see Carol Hakim-Dowek, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1914* (Oxford: D. Phil., 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in Comparative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> Beginning with the 9<sup>th</sup> Summit of Francophone States in Beirut (October 2002), French diplomacy has focused on defending « tri-lingualism » in Lebanon. See the interview with Frédéric Clavier, French *Conseiller culturel*, in *la Revue du Liban*, 3919, 18 October 2003.

- <sup>14</sup> See Sélim Abou, Chorig Kasparian, and Katia Haddad, *Anatomie de la francophonie libanaise* (Beirut: FMA, 1996).
- <sup>15</sup> See Samy Cohen, *De Gaulle, les gaullistes et Israël* (Paris : Alain Moreau, 1974).
- <sup>16</sup> Pierre Le Peillet, *Les bérets bleus de l'ONU* (Paris: Édition France-Empire, 1988) ; Marianne Heiberg, *Peacekeeping in Southern Lebanon : Past, Present and Future* (Oslo : NUPI, 1991).
- <sup>17</sup> Éric Canal-Forgues, "La surveillance de l'application de l'arrangement du 26 avril 1996 (Israël-Liban)," *Revue générale de droit international public*, 3 (July-September 1998), p. 723-746.
- <sup>18</sup> See David Styran, *France & Iraq: Oil, Arms and French Policymaking in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).
- <sup>19</sup> See Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) especially chapters 13 ("The Return of the Multinational Force") through 16 ("Islamic Jihad and the Torment of Lebanon").
- <sup>20</sup> Olivier Guitta, "The French-Hezbollah connection", *Weekly Standard*, 31 July 2006.
- <sup>21</sup> Samir Kassir and Farouk Mardam Bey, *Itinéraires de Paris à Jérusalem: la France et le conflit israélo-arabe* (Paris : Éditions de la revue d'Études palestiniennes, 1992) ; Jean-Pierre Filiu, Mitterrand et la Palestine : l'ami d'Israël qui sauva par trois fois Yasser Arafat (Paris : Fayard, 2005).
- <sup>22</sup> This earned him a 'stoning' upon arrival at Bir Zeit University and a heated lecture from Chirac who reminded him that French foreign policy is the prerogative of the president, not the Prime minister.
- <sup>23</sup> Olivier Roy, "Sur la 'politique arabe de la France'", *Maghreb-Machrek*, 132, (April/June 1991), p. 15-21.
- <sup>24</sup> Alain Gresh, "Middle East: France Rejoins the Pack", *Le Monde Diplomatique* (English version), June 2006.
- <sup>25</sup> Which incited some French officers, beaten by the "Viets" to seek revenge on the Algerian "fellaghas". See Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: la mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1998).
- <sup>26</sup> A renowned specialist on Lebanese Shiites doing field research in South Lebanon in 2004-2006 was strongly advised by the French embassy to avoid political matters.
- <sup>27</sup> Both the Ambassador and the *Conseiller culturel* on station in Lebanon in July 2006 had served with Jacques Chirac at Elysée Palace. They keep direct connection with the president's diplomatic advisor, Maurice Gourdault-Montagne.
- <sup>28</sup> These militant groups should not be confused with the vast majority of French Muslims of Arab origins whose opposition is motivated by economic and social frustration. See Vincent Geisser, *La nouvelle islamophobie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2004).
- <sup>29</sup> Yves Thénard, "La partition libanaise de Jacques Chirac", *Libération*, 10 August 2006.
- <sup>30</sup> Which is to say, reserved to the King as in a monarchy.
- <sup>31</sup> Shmuel Eisenstadt and René Lemarchand, eds., *Political Clientelism, Patronage and Development* (London: Sage, 1981) ; Jean-Louis Briquet and Frédéric Sawicki, eds., *Le clientélisme politique dans les sociétés contemporaines* (Paris: PUF, 1998).
- <sup>32</sup> Beyond the "disappointment" of the French godfather when confronted with Bashar's inability to extricate his country from authoritarian immobility, the loss of a natural gas contract and Damascus' insistence on prolonging the presidential term of Emile Lahoud in Lebanon beyond September 2004 provoked a reversal in French policies toward Syria. See Elizabeth Picard, "Syrie : la coalition au pouvoir fait de la résistance", *Politique Étrangère* 4, October 2005, p. 757-768 ; Scott Lasensky, Mona Yacoubian, "Syria and Political Change 1", *USIPeace Briefing*, December 2005, [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2005/1212\\_syria.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2005/1212_syria.html) ; "Syria and Political Change 2", *USIPeace Briefing*, March 2006, [http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace\\_briefings/2006/0301\\_syria.html](http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2006/0301_syria.html)
- <sup>33</sup> For a radical critique of the political economy of Hariri's Lebanon and of French policies towards him, see Georges Corm, *Al-I'mâr wal-maslaha l-'amma fi iqtisad ma ba'd al-harb wa siyasatuh* [Reconstruction and public good in post-war economy and politics](Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Abhath al-Madaniyya, 1996).
- <sup>34</sup> Joseph Bahout, presentation at the seminar "Européens et Américains face aux crises du Moyen-Orient" organized by the *Institut Français des Relations Internationales*, Paris, 5 September 2005. See [http://www.ifri.org/frontDispatcher/ifri/publications/publications\\_en\\_ligne\\_1044623469287/publi\\_P\\_publi\\_mmm\\_seminaire\\_euromesco\\_1150472707764](http://www.ifri.org/frontDispatcher/ifri/publications/publications_en_ligne_1044623469287/publi_P_publi_mmm_seminaire_euromesco_1150472707764)
- <sup>35</sup> Dominique de Villepin, statement before the Chamber of deputies, Paris, 30 April 2003. <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/cr-cafe/02-03/c0203051.asp>
- <sup>36</sup> Rafic Hariri, Marwan Hamadeh (Walid Junblatt's advisor in the Druze PSP and Ghassan T'waini's brother in law), and probably, Ghassan Salameh, former minister of Culture in Hariri's government,

currently professor at the prestigious *Institut d'Études Politiques* in Paris. General Michel Aoun claims that he lobbied the United States Department of State in the same sense.

<sup>37</sup> Only in the West do people refer to the “uprising for independence” (*intifādat al-istiqlāl*) of 14 March 2005 in this way. This label is a politically abusive and counter-productive reappropriation which serves only to underscore the sensationalized and ephemeral character of the event.

<sup>38</sup> Sateh Nouredine and Laurie King-Irani, “Elections Pose Lebanon's Old Questions Anew”, *Middle East Report*, 31 May 2005. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero053105.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Dana Priest, “Help from France key in Covert Operations”, *The Washington Post*, 3 July 2005.

<sup>40</sup> See Agnès Favier, “La spirale de la crise dans le Liban libéré (2004-2006)”, *Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Perspectives Moyen-Orient / Maghreb* (juin 2006), <http://www.ifri.org/frontDispatcher/ifri/publications>

<sup>41</sup> See minister of Foreign Affairs Philippe Douste-Blazy's press conference in Haifa, 23 July 2006. <http://fr.ambafrance-il.org/popup.asp?t=agenda&h=Agenda&cind=456>

<sup>42</sup> Interview in *Al-Manar*, 7 August 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Declaration during the Beirut conference of Arab ministers of Foreign Affairs, 7 August 2006.

<sup>44</sup> 15 August 2000, see <http://www.sana.org/eng/21/2006/08/15/57835.htm>

<sup>45</sup> Miguel Angel Moratinos, Spanish minister of Foreign Affairs, returned from Damascus on 4 August bearing a Syrian request for a comprehensive and lasting peace in exchange for the pacification of its Lebanese allies and clients.

<sup>46</sup> See Richard Falk, *Law in an Emerging Global Village: A post-Westphalian Perspective* (New York: Transnational Publishers, 1998).

<sup>47</sup> In spite of repeated official denial, there was looming tension between policy-makers in the Elysée who favored a robust and publicised armed intervention, and the ministry of Defense whose evaluation of the risks on the ground was pessimistic. The interview of Michèle Alliot-Marie, minister of Defense, to the public TV *Antenne 2*, on 18 August, gave a strong signal of France's second thoughts.

<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth Picard, “Authoritarianism and Liberalism in the Reconstruction of the Lebanese Armed Forces” *Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mediterranean Social and Political Research Forum*, European University Institute, Florence, 2003, <http://www.iue.it/RSCAS/Research/Mediterranean/mspr2002/Index.shtml>

<sup>49</sup> Etienne de Durand, “Le piège de l'interposition”, *Le Figaro*, 14 August 2006.

<sup>50</sup> These preconditions are referred to by president Chirac in his televised statement of 24 August announcing further French engagement in the UNIFIL-Plus. He refers to “a number of guarantees from the parties to the conflict” and states that France has “received assurances from Lebanon and Israel”. Then he states, “We have obtained the necessary clarification from the United Nations regarding the chain of command [...] and the rules of engagement”. See <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/>

<sup>51</sup> Press conference of UNSG Kofi Annan in Brussels, 25 August 2006. See <http://www.eu2006.fi>

<sup>52</sup> Ewen MacAskill and David Gow, “EU to Commit Biggest Force in its History to Keep the Peace”, *The Guardian*, 26 August 2006.

# Israel in Lebanon

## The Foreign Policy Logics of Jewish Statehood

Virginia Tilley\*

To date, Israel's motives in the 2006 war with Hizbullah have not been clarified by the rush of academic analyses. The dominant explanation, that Israel sought simply to end the threat of Hizbullah's rocket attacks, is narrow to the point of inaccuracy, particularly since those attacks had taken few Israeli casualties over the past decade. Some scholars have described background motives: e.g., Ilan Pappé has described an under-utilized Israeli military seeking to justify its budget and demonstrate its prowess.<sup>1</sup> Some offer close analyses of proximate security logics: e.g., Robert Blecher has detailed how Israel's strategy toward the Palestinians has influenced its response to Hamas and Hizbullah.<sup>2</sup> Other explanations incline toward motives and identities that derive more from polemics than scholarship: e.g., generic accusations of Israeli expansionism, US imperialism, and radical Islam (or "Islamofascism"). Attempts to deepen these models too often psychologize the conflict by blaming primordial ethnic hatreds or cultural clash: e.g., Arab prejudice against Jews, Jewish-Zionist racism against Arabs, Muslim "rage," or an East-West "clash of civilizations".

Many of these factors, even when imaginary, are not precisely incorrect or irrelevant, as they shape the behaviour and influence of key actors. But most lack theoretical and empirical rigour as explanations, for they focus not on the causes but the effects of a more fundamental problem. At root, Israel's motives in Lebanon trace to one primary source: the ethnic imperative of Jewish statehood — the belief that a Jewish state requires an overwhelming Jewish-ethnic majority within Israel's territory — which has been incorporated into the Israeli government's understanding of state security.

Focusing on Israel's domestic ethnic doctrines might seem counterproductive at this juncture, diverting energies away from urgent conflict resolution in southern Lebanon and toward an ideological dispute that has long proved irreconcilable. The purpose here is not to engage in moral or ideological contest, however, but to redirect analysis toward the strategic logics that steer Israel's foreign policy, which are inseparable from its domestic geostrategy. So far, the international community has proved unwilling to tackle this "third rail" of Middle East politics. But until Israel's doctrine of ethnic statehood is addressed, none of its spin-off effects, including Israel's continuing military ambitions in Lebanon, can be addressed effectively either. This discussion will briefly explain why international pressure on Israel to democratize and enfranchise Palestine's native people is not only essential to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but is also fundamental to collective security.

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## NATIONAL IDENTITY AND FOREIGN POLICY

Classical realist theory (and its rational-choice and game-theory derivatives) assumes that state behaviour in international affairs is driven by self-help and concerns with power (whether political or economic). In Lebanon, this lens brings focus on such questions as Israel's need to eliminate Hizbullah's capacity to attack its northern towns or its need for security guarantees before it agrees to peace talks with the Palestinian Authority. The present United Nations intervention to orchestrate a ceasefire in Lebanon, Security Council Resolution 1701, reflects this view by concentrating narrowly on separating the warring parties, disarming Hizbullah, and securing Israel's withdrawal from Lebanese land. Lebanon's internal politics are implicated only in so far as they are relevant to extending "the authority of the government of Lebanon" over all of Lebanese territory. Israel's internal politics are not addressed or implicated at all.

A constructivist approach reveals the inadequacy of this approach to generating a stable peace. Other factors can drive state behaviour, such as knowledge systems that shape perceptions and related logics. Especially, the domestic discourse of the national identity can inform government and popular conceptions of the national interest, which in turn informs the state's foreign policy. Within Israel, the shared understanding among Israeli Jews that Israel must remain a "Jewish state" is such a discursive formula. This perceived imperative has shaped Israel's regional strategy regarding borders, water, immigration, military occupation, and external security in ways that authorized or even mandated the policy to attack Hizbullah and therefore must now dominate international concerns. Understanding Israel's demographic imperative is therefore the *sine qua non* for addressing the policies that logically derive from it.

## THE "DEMOGRAPHIC THREAT"

Israel's ethnic imperative (Jewish statehood) is often promoted as *sui generis*, deriving from the unique experience of Jews in Europe and especially the Holocaust. In fact, its intellectual history is firmly rooted in the early decades of the twentieth century, when the new "nation-state" concept and the racial pseudo-sciences intersected to propose an organic (racial-spiritual) quality to nations.<sup>3</sup> From about 1880 through the 1930s, nation-builders in all world regions globally absorbed the tenet, promoted by some European racial and political theorists, that racial homogeneity was essential to healthy and viable nation- and state-building. This premise led state-builders globally to seek various coercive methods — whether assimilationist, ethnocidal, or genocidal — to achieve such homogeneity on whatever terms made local social and political sense. Hence Zionist founder Theodor Herzl understood that a Jewish state in Palestine would have to consolidate a Jewish majority. By the 1930s this demographic imperative was embedded in Zionist doctrine as a central strategic goal (although not without contemporary controversy). For Jewish-nationalist architects like Ben Gurion, the imperative of ethnic homogeneity was understood both to necessitate and legitimate ethnic cleansing: i.e., expulsion of the non-Jewish Arab population from their cities and villages in what became Israel and subsequent refusal to allow the refugees to return.

By mid-century, however, the old racial concept of nationhood was discredited by experience of its inherent predilection to generate precisely such

discrimination and human rights abuses. Especially, the horrors of Nazi and Japanese racial nationalisms forced the international community to abandon ethno-racial premises for nationhood in favour of territorial definitions (even as they greatly stoked Zionist commitment to the ethnic formula).<sup>4</sup> Changing norms did not transform social views entirely, of course: today, racial and ethnic biases certainly persist everywhere in popular nationalist thought just as they persist in nationalist canons (imagery, founding narratives, heroes, etc.). Immigration quotas in many countries also reflect continuing nervousness about preserving the nation's established (or imagined) ethnic character. But constitutional provisions to enforce a titular ethnic majority are abjured on grounds that conflating territorial statehood with ethnic nationalism will inevitably discriminate against minorities and foster conflict that can spill into regional unrest. Even in ethnic hotbeds like Serbia, constitutional or basic law provides ethnic-neutral rights, which domestic minorities (or majorities) can use in the *longue durée* fight against discrimination.

Israeli law and Zionist discourse that insist on Jewish-ethnic dominion within Israel are therefore both anachronistic and unique in continuing to laud the state's founding ethnic premise with full early-twentieth-century ardour.<sup>5</sup> One manifestation of this ardour is its invention of the so-called "demographic threat": the possibility that Arabs may someday constitute a majority in Israel and vote Jewish statehood – i.e., the body of laws that secures Jewish-ethnic privilege in Israel – out of existence. Since Jewish-ethnic statehood and "Israel" are considered the same thing in Zionist discourse, this "threat" is perceived as a threat to Israel's "survival" – a rhetorical twist that converts easily, for propaganda purposes and within the psychology of many Zionists, into equating full non-racial democracy in Israel with physical Jewish-Israeli extermination. Again, this formula is not new: it is precisely the understanding that once dominated nationalist thought everywhere (generating, for example, the extermination campaigns against Native Americans in the United States, which some Zionist polemicists cite today as a legitimizing precedent).

Hence Israel's latitude to pursue the domestic demographic policies that ensure the state's Jewish "character" is translated into an imperative for its foreign policy. In other words, Israel's security, in a military-strategic sense, is understood to require a regional security environment that secures its capacity to preserve a domestic Jewish majority. For theorists of nationalism and international relations, the case is absorbing: no other state today defends its ethnic character to the point of regional war-making. For those concerned with its implications for international stability, however, Israel's demographic imperative must be seen as untenable due to its implications for international instability. Some precise links between Israel's domestic and foreign policy are traced below.

### **IDENTITY, BORDERS, AND HIZBULLAH: THE "CONVERGENCE PLAN"**

The demographic threat requires that Israel control and/or partition historic Palestine in ways that exclude the Palestinian population making any claims on citizenship. Exactly how to do this remains debated, however, and the latest solution has been sabotaged by the war with Hizbullah.

The problem derives from a basic quandary: how to obtain land without people. Some leftist-liberal thought has held that the best way to obviate the threat of an Arab majority is to give up land: i.e., withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip

and consolidate Israel's permanent borders within the 1948 green line. This manoeuvre would secure a roughly 75-percent Jewish majority.<sup>6</sup> It also has the advantage of according with the directives of SC Resolution 242 and most international consensus about a just resolution to the conflict. (From the Zionist perspective, natural increase of Arab Israelis throws an obvious wrench into this solution, but no clear answer to that problem has yet gained Israeli consensus.)

Full withdrawal has run afoul of several currents of Zionist thought that view withdrawal from the West Bank as an anathema: e.g., some Orthodox religious belief that the biblical West Bank highlands are the spiritual heartland of Jewish life; secular nationalist beliefs that the highlands are an inextricable part of Israel's geographic imaginary (Eretz Israel); and security arguments that the highlands comprise a vital buffer zone against Arab attack. Control of the West Bank aquifer adds a more purely material dimension to this attachment, as does the immense economic cost of withdrawing a half-million people from sizable cities. Assembling these disparate views into a "neo-Zionist" alliance, right-wing Israeli thought has therefore sought to retain the West Bank, including Greater Jerusalem. Yet annexing all of the West Bank and Gaza Strip would convert 3.5 million Palestinians into a disenfranchised domestic population, on an openly apartheid model. The South African example is cautionary here: inevitably linking politically to Israel's Arab citizenry, the Palestinians would quickly comprise a civil rights movement that Israel's democracy (like all other racial democracies) would find impossible to defeat. (Forced transfer remains one option urged by some, but is vetoed by those who believe transfer inhumane or simply that it would too seriously damage Israel's international standing or security.)

Israel's "convergence" plan, launched by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and continued by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert through the Kadima Party, proposed to resolve this dilemma through a new partition: aggregating the smaller outlying West Bank settlements into a few large settlement blocs that cut across the West Bank highlands, retaining the entire Jordan Valley (except for an enclave around Jericho), and allowing autonomous Palestinian governance in the remaining enclaves. The plan is premised on the assumption that sealing 3.5 million Palestinians behind the "security barrier" (Wall) in disarticulated chunks of territory called a "state" will satisfy Palestinian political aspirations and allow Israelis to live peacefully within settlement cities annexed to Israel, such as Ariel and Ma'ale Adumim. The Wall itself is essential to this plan, preventing the two juxtaposed populations from mixing and thereby permitting Israel to remain "Jewish and democratic" — i.e., a democracy that preserves its pro-Jewish legal system through majority-Jewish rule. On the other side of the Wall, Palestinians are expected eventually to normalize their society, economy and politics, probably by reorienting both toward Jordan. Demographic separation would then be ensured by watch towers and electronic surveillance for which Palestinian authorities would also be held responsible. Ironically, this plan requires that Israel postpone peace talks long enough to complete the Wall and consolidate the Palestinian population within their autonomous enclaves, where their separation will be ensured, but with US assistance these delays have proved easy to orchestrate. The convergence plan is already well underway, pursued through accelerated expansion of the major settlement cities and especially construction of the Wall.

Removing or neutralizing Hizbullah became integral to the convergence plan as it became plain to Israel's leadership that the plan could not be implemented without violent repression of the Palestinians, who are losing land, livelihoods, and

social cohesion to it and therefore continue to resist it. A general collaboration is the first problem: Hizbullah and Hamas routinely share intelligence and resources. Although direct aid from Hizbullah inside the Palestinian territories is limited, it still provides crucial support, frustrating Israel's attempts to strangle Hamas financially. Hizbullah is also positioned to lob Katyushas and larger missiles at Israel as conditions in the Palestinian territories deteriorate. Although for the past decade this threat has been latent (Hizbullah has restrained its attacks to retaliating against Israeli incursions into Lebanon), Hizbullah's capture of two Israeli soldiers on July 12 was suggestive of this solidarity. The Gaza Strip had then been under several weeks of a concerted Israeli attack, including destruction of Gaza's only power plant, intended to terminate the ineffectual but (for Israelis) demoralizing stream of home-made Hamas missiles regularly lobbed from northern Gaza into Israel's southern communities. Some reports have confirmed an agreement between Hamas and Hizbullah to "warm up" the northern border and take pressure off Hamas, although the scale of Israel's response was clearly not anticipated.<sup>7</sup> A truly free hand for Israel regarding its occupation policy requires that this threat be eliminated.

The second problem, however, is far more important for the Israeli government. Within Israel, political support for the government's convergence plan relies on Israeli-Jewish public belief that a unilateral "sacrifice" of West Bank territory will ultimately result in a stable peace. Hizbullah's capacity to launch rockets into Israel has raised the spectre that Hamas will also grow to constitute a serious guerrilla threat in the Palestinian areas of a partly evacuated West Bank.

The Israeli government was already plagued by this political problem after orchestrating the withdrawal from Gaza. Israel's withdrawal of its Gaza settlements was argued to be a "sacrifice" justified by the promise of peace. But Israel retained control of Gaza's borders and cut off trade and monetary transfers, generating prison-like conditions in which Palestinian social conditions deteriorated rapidly and Palestinian resistance continued. Among other measures, Hamas militants regularly fired primitive rockets from the Gaza Strip into proximate Israeli towns. Ineffectual in damaging Israel directly, these symbolic attacks nevertheless belied Israeli government promises that unilateral withdrawal would pacify Palestinian militancy. Hizbullah's blooming military capacity on Israel's northern border further suggested that, under conditions of genuine Palestinian sovereignty, Palestinian rocket attacks could make the Wall ineffectual as a security barrier and develop into a similarly serious threat.<sup>8</sup>

It was largely out of anxiety to discredit these dire omens for the convergence plan that, in late June, the Israel government launched its military campaign to crush Hamas in the Gaza Strip — a campaign that, by early July, was wreaking unprecedented levels of destruction and, at this writing, has cost 191 Palestinian lives. The same concern prompted Israel to prepare for an attack on Hizbullah as much as a year before the border incident provided the pretext for it.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, eradicating Hizbullah has become fundamental to Israel's strategy for averting the demographic threat. First, the Israeli government needs to eliminate a Palestinian ally that was impeding its capacity to repress Palestinian resistance. Second, the government urgently needs to retain Jewish-Israeli political support for the all-important convergence plan, by dispelling rising Jewish-Israeli fears that Hamas will emulate Hizbullah by building a serious guerrilla force within vacated West Bank enclaves. Hence Israel's failure to eliminate Hizbullah in the recent war has probably spelled the ruin of the convergence plan. On the same grounds, however, it has also spelled the ruin of leftist arguments for withdrawing from the

West Bank completely, as the same risk of a hostile guerrilla force could arguably develop across a Wall positioned along the green line. Israel's need to eradicate or at least disarm Hizbullah and Hamas therefore remains salient as long as its Jewish-ethnic imperative remains operative.

### THE ETHNIC IMPERATIVE AND IRAN

The US and Israel have been planning to attack Iran, and seeking political cover for doing so, for the past year.<sup>10</sup> From Israel's perspective, Iran is the primary supporter (in arms, training, and some finances) of Hizbullah and Hamas. Iran also runs its supply lines through Syria, the only frontline state not to have made peace with Israel and whose insistence on return of the Golan Heights presents difficult dilemmas for Israel (especially concerning the Golan's important watershed). Syria is militarily weak, but Iranian connections to Hizbullah create a geopolitical "arc" of anti-Israeli networks that facilitate anti-Israeli militancy and limit Israeli ambitions in the entire Middle East.<sup>11</sup> Installing a pro-western regime in Iran would both cut off support to local guerrilla groups and isolate Syria, allowing Israel to pursue regime change in Syria as well. Iran is therefore the last serious obstacle to consolidating the pacified and compliant Middle East that the Zionist movement has sought to create since the 1930s and that would now allow Israel full latitude to set its borders as it wishes.<sup>12</sup> This agenda has become more urgent, however, as Iran has developed a nuclear energy program. If Iran uses enriched uranium to develop a nuclear weapon, it could deter Israel attack on Iran or any other regional target. One of the world's largest nuclear powers, Israel has been determined to preserve its regional monopoly on nuclear deterrence.

From the perspective of the Bush administration, Israel's agenda regarding Iran is fully compatible with US interests. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein and dissolution of Iraq's army, Iran has emerged as the sole regional power capable of contesting unfettered US hegemony in the world's richest oil region. The US therefore seeks regime change in Iran for classic realist reasons. Installing a pro-western Iranian government is also a long-standing goal in the neocon vision of a "new Middle East" which is informed by a conflation of corporate interests, militarism, Zionism, and recidivist notions that the US must play a vanguard role in the west's anti-Islamic civilizing mission.<sup>13</sup> For the past two years the White House has been consulting with Pentagon and Air Force advisors about how to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities, partly on the belief that such a strike would trigger domestic outrage, revolution, and ascension of a pro-western regime. (This fantasy remains impressively immune to past experience in Iraq and Lebanon, as well as all independent expert advice, including the Pentagon and the State Department.)<sup>14</sup>

A major air strike on Iran requires a sufficient *casus belli*, however, or at least sufficient political cover to secure international passivity. Public statements by Israel and the US over the past year have therefore attempted to cultivate an international consensus conducive to military intervention against Iran: especially, through a disinformation campaign exaggerating intelligence about Iran's intentions and capacity to develop nuclear weapons, coupled with a push in the Security Council (SC) to pass a resolution that will legitimize force against Iran if it does not abandon its uranium enrichment program (on the apparent expectation that Iran will refuse to do so).

Throughout 2006, Israel has also been stoking domestic and international belief that Iran is threatening to "annihilate" Israel, especially by promoting



mistranslations of President Ahmadinejad's statements that falsely cast him as openly threatening to "destroy Israel" or "wipe Israel off the map". (Ahmadinejad's statements have actually indicated a desire for, or fatalistic expectation of, regime change in Israel, not plans for a military attack. Mistranslations have distorted these statements, but the discursive conflation noted above — of Jewish statehood and Israel's material survival — also serves Israeli propagandists here.) Together, these measures portend a reprise of the Iraq strategy: whipping up international tensions about an imminent nuclear threat, followed by a unilateral US strike that adopts the mantle of UN legitimacy while dismissing SC reluctance to authorize military intervention.<sup>15</sup>

Relevant here is that neutralizing Hizbullah is prerequisite to a US attack on Iran, because Hizbullah is too well-positioned to bombard Israel's northern cities in the event of an attack on its Iranian ally and patron. Supporting Hizbullah's capacity in this regard indeed provides Iran with an important deterrent to attack by Israel or the US. (Cast as "evil" by the Bush administration, this satellite manoeuvre reflects a classically realist strategy on Iran's part.)

Hizbullah's deterrent would matter even if the US attacks Iran, as Israel is understood to be a key ally of the US. But it is especially important if Israel attacks Iran. Striking Iran is difficult for the US to do directly, as its occupation forces in Iraq and naval bases in the Gulf would be vulnerable to the impassioned anti-US (and anti-British) guerrilla campaign that would immediately erupt. Hence, the Israeli Air Force might strike Iran instead. In recent years, Israel has purchased new "bunker-busting" missiles, a fleet of new F-16 fighter jets, and five leading-edge German Dolphin submarines — i.e., the appropriate weaponry for striking Iran's nuclear installations and deterring its retaliation. In 2005, the *Times of London* reported that Israel had constructed a mock-up of Iran's Natanz facility in the desert and was conducting practice bombing raids.<sup>16</sup> In recent months, Israeli officials have openly stated Israel will unilaterally bomb Iran if the UN fails to take decisive action to terminate Iran's nuclear energy program.

However, Israel's failure to disarm Hizbullah by aerial bombing has seriously impacted all options for military action against Iran, in several ways. First, Israel's massive bombardment of Lebanon could not remove Hizbullah's underground facilities even using the latest bunker-busting technology, and so has discredited rather than supported White House arguments that the US Air Force will be successful regarding Iran's vastly larger and deeper nuclear complexes. Second, by leaving a proximate armed threat on Israel's northern border (and demonstrating the actual size of that threat), it has left Israel's flank vulnerable to retaliation by Iran's regional ally, making it dangerous for Israel itself to attack Iran. Third, by galvanizing new Lebanese political unity in collective loathing for Israel, it has further belied the already strained neocon assumption that military intervention, whether by Israel or the US, will trigger an internal coup or revolution in Iran that will install a pro-western government. Finally, it has caused delay. With only two years before the elections, time may now be too short to orchestrate the strike on Iran before Bush leaves office.

In sum, Hizbullah's successful resistance has damaged Israeli and neocon hopes to create a "new Middle East" uniformly supine to US and Israeli interests. While Iran's Islamic government survives, Hizbullah will survive. While Hizbullah survives, the attack on Iran is stalled. While the Iran-Hizbullah axis endures, the Israeli government cannot pursue the program of land annexation and ethnic engineering that will secure Jewish statehood. That prospect may only inspire more



extreme measures, however, for the present impasse raises the stakes. With the costs of the occupation rising, repression of Palestinian resistance increasingly costly, and Israel's international image deteriorating rapidly, Israel's need to defeat Palestinian resistance and secure its final borders in ways that secure its Jewish majority is becoming more urgent.

### USING THE UNITED NATIONS: RESOLUTION 1701

Possibly the most far-reaching effect of Israel's demographic imperative is how it has shaped its relationship to the United Nations and ultimately affected the UN itself. Israel has a long history of ignoring Security Council (SC) resolutions related to territorial withdrawal and the return of Palestinian refugees, and has even formally announced its autonomy from UN authority.<sup>17</sup> Israel has also consistently rejected any suggestion that an international force might assume responsibility for monitoring peace in southern Lebanon or the Palestinian occupied territories. These stands have contributed to UN weakness, as the US has consistently supported Israel prerogatives through use of the SC veto.

With its unexpected defeat in its attempt to disarm Hizbullah, however, Israel now needs precisely the intervention it has long rejected: an effective international peacekeeping force on its border. Israel's real strategic goal in the war with Hizbullah was not precisely to destroy or even necessarily disarm Hizbullah but to remove its capacity to attack Israel at will. The last hope for this plan is UN Resolution 1701, written primarily by the US with Israeli input, which makes the entire international community responsible for this outcome. But by enlisting the SC to serve Israel's foreign policy agenda, first by delaying the resolution and then through its wording, Israel has made the UN not merely passive or ineffectual but complicit in its project of preserving ethnic statehood. The effect on the UN has been a serious loss of credibility.<sup>18</sup>

The wording of 1701 is complicated and even slippery, but its essential formulas are clearly in service to Israeli agendas. The resolution establishes that Israel's withdrawal should happen "in parallel" with the arrival of the Lebanese army, but does not specify whether the army's arrival is sufficient for Israel's withdrawal or must be associated with Hizbullah's effective disarmament. The resolution establishes no arbiter to monitor this question, leaving Israel to determine when "the authority of the government of Lebanon" has been truly imposed. The resolution also confirms that rebuilding Lebanon must not translate into Hizbullah's resupplying and rebuilding its military capacity in the south. If Israel deems that reconstruction is serving Hizbullah's military capacity (which it doubtless will, as Hizbullah and the army will necessarily collaborate in the reconstruction of heavily Shi'a areas), then under the terms of 1701, Israel can declare Hizbullah in breach and itself authorized to stop or even bomb reconstruction efforts that contribute to Hizbullah's capacity. Since Israel has already clarified that all civilian infrastructure falls into this category, reconstruction could be effectively stopped or reversed.

The resolution also provides Israel with an external guarantor of Hizbullah's disarmament: an expanded UNIFIL. UNIFIL also provides the Lebanese government with a friendly international force that can monitor and even oppose any Israeli intervention. Yet UNIFIL lacks any real capacity to implement authority over Hizbullah or to repel Israeli aggression. Its primary responsibility—to "ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any

kind”—pertains solely to containing Hizbullah. Since the rest of the resolution provides multiple loopholes for Israeli aggression (e.g., redefining it as “defense”), this clause sets up UNIFIL for failure to protect civilians from any action Israel may want to take. It also sets up international troops for targeting by Hizbullah, whose leadership will accurately perceive their true role as a surrogate for Israel’s agendas. In sum, Resolution 1701 is designed to accomplish Israel’s strategic goal through a method far better (and cheaper) than direct Israeli military occupation: by installing Lebanese government and international forces in southern Lebanon that are obligated by the UN to render Hizbullah incapable of launching any attack on Israel on its own authority. Hence Israel has not precisely “lost” a war that resulted in UN endorsement for Israel’s original objective. Israeli military chief Lt. General Dan Halutz’s comment indicates this view: “Tallying up the points, it is definitely a victory, perhaps not a knockout, but in terms of achievements, it is [a victory].”<sup>19</sup> If the provisions of 1701 do achieve Israel’s goals, the Israeli government’s plans to seal the Palestinians within ethnic enclaves and the US-Israeli plan to attack Iran will again be viable.

## CONCLUSION

Israel’s recent aggression in Lebanon, still simmering in its first fragile ceasefire at this writing, is now routinely called a “war”. The term is apt, given the scale of events, but its use is nevertheless significant. This conflict was not between two states, the usual meaning of “war”. Nor is it a “guerrilla war” in the usual sense—guerrilla resistance to a state’s government or military within the state’s territory, as presently is happening in Iraq. Indeed, from Israel’s perspective, its attack was never meant to be a “war”. Israel and the United States clearly anticipated a swift unilateral aggression that would eradicate Hizbullah’s military capacity with days (thirty-five, in one estimation), approximating the speed and success of Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The venture was designed and expected to be a one-sided bombing campaign with little risk to Israel, taking NATO’s bombing of Kosovo as its model. In the event, the venture “failed”. But failure has altered only the means, not the goals, of Israel’s larger strategy, which is driven by its ethnic imperative and will remain largely unchanged as long as that imperative endures.

Consequently, Israel’s demographic doctrine is the proverbial elephant on the table. Far from an ideological or even moral question, that doctrine must be addressed as matter of international security, as it is central to Israel’s realist geopolitics. The logic boils down to linked contingencies:

- Israel cannot sustain a Jewish majority without excluding the Palestinians from citizenship.
- It cannot exclude the Palestinian population from citizenship within the state in apartheid-like conditions without confronting their eventual insistence on citizenship.
- It cannot fix its permanent borders in ways that consign the Palestinians to autonomous (yet unviable) cantons without committing serious human rights abuses and generating violent Palestinian resistance.
- It cannot muster sufficient domestic Jewish-Israeli support for creating the cantons as long as the Palestinians are resisting it.

- It can neither repress Palestinian resistance nor reassure the Jewish-Israeli public while Hizbullah is positioned on its border with a significant arsenal and links to Hamas.
- It cannot eradicate Hizbullah and Hamas (or any similar groups that may arise) until their sources of support (Syria and Iran) are also eliminated.

Hence Israel's ethnic imperative to maintain a Jewish state necessitates its program of regional aggression. The imperative has already inspired Israel to demolish much of Lebanon and now pose an imminent threat to Iran. It is even arguably dangerous to Israeli security, as it is galvanizing unprecedented degrees of threat to Israel. The only interest it serves is ethnic statehood — which is not only anachronistic in today's world but is demonstrating, as it does everywhere, its inherent propensity to violence.

Ethnic demographic is certainly not the only factor driving Israeli foreign policy: the variables noted at the beginning of this paper are all relevant, if some exist only as imagined identities or emerge from racial stereotyping. But their study distracts from the underlying problem. Only by addressing the originating logic of Israel's geostrategy — Zionist dedication to preserving a Jewish-ethnic majority in a land holding an equal number of non-Jews — can the determinants of violence be unmasked and, with care, dismantled.

The task for international intervention is therefore dual: (1) to impose international human rights standards on Israel in the urgent interests of international stability; and (2) to create (or compel) a process of consultation and negotiation that can adequately allay Jewish-Zionist fears about what will befall Jews if the Jewish state morphs into a secular democracy. The South African experience has much to say about appeasing an aggressive ethnic nationalism through negotiation and compromise. The international community will, however, have to muster the necessary political will to orchestrate a workable process — not out of humanitarian concern for the Palestinians (a motive that has proved demonstrably inadequate), but in the interest of collective security.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ilan Pappé, "What Does Israel Want?" *Electronic Intifada*, 14 July 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Blecher, "Converging Upon War," *Middle East Report*, (18 July 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Zionism is a complicated doctrine with many internal currents, some of which have contradictory implications for land policy and governance, but this discussion is beyond the scope of this article: see bibliography and discussion in the author's *The One-State Solution: A breakthrough for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian deadlock* (University of Michigan Press and Manchester University Press, 2005), 131-182.

<sup>4</sup> On this normative switch, see J. S. Barkin, J. S. and Bruce Cronin, "The state and the nation: Changing norms and the rules of sovereignty in international relations," *International Organization* 48 (1994), 107-30.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Judt has highlighted this "anachronistic" quality in his "Israel: The Alternative," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 50 No. 16 (23 October 2003).

<sup>6</sup> The last Israeli census found that 19.5 percent of Israeli was Arab. Another 4 percent were non-Jewish and non-Arab. This population includes non-Jews who entered with the Russian "Jewish" immigration in the early 1990s. Studies of the Russian population suggest that as much as 70 percent may be non-Jewish. If just half (about 500,000) are non-Jewish, then the non-Jewish population of Israel is closer to 30 percent.

<sup>7</sup> Seymour Hersh, "Last Stand: The Military's Problem with the President's Iran Policy," *The New Yorker*, 10 July 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Numerous commentators have observed this connection: see, for example, Robert Blecher, "Converging Upon War," op cit.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Kelman, "Israel set war plan more than a year ago," *San Francisco Chronicle* (21 July 2006); Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's Interests in Israel's War," *The New Yorker* (21 August 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Some administration officials have urged this attack since the 1990s; Israeli planners since the 1980s: see discussion in Tilley, *The One-State Solution*, 111-113.

<sup>11</sup> BBC News, "Blair warns of 'arc of extremism'", 2 August 2006: available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/5236862.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/5236862.stm).

<sup>12</sup> This argument traces from Vladimir Jabotinsky, whose writings were very influential for Ariel Sharon and the line of political leaders that created the Likud Party: see Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*.

<sup>13</sup> The nature of this worldview is suggested by President Bush's fondness for biographies about Theodore Roosevelt, who presided over the US imperialist expansion into Latin America and the Philippines. It is also articulated by Daniel Pipes, principal intellectual architect of neocon lens on the Middle East.

<sup>14</sup> Seymour Hersh, "Last Stand," op cit., and "Watching Lebanon: Washington's Interests in Israel's War," *The New Yorker* (21 August 2006)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Uzi Mahnaimi, "Revealed: Israel Plans Strike on Iranian Nuclear Plant", *Times of London*, 13 March 2005.

<sup>17</sup> "Let no one make the mistake of thinking that the people of Israel might be swayed by inequitable pronouncements. .... not Security Council resolutions, but the attitude and actions of the governments in the area will determine the destiny of the Middle East." Mr. Tekoah, reacting to Security Council Resolution 262 (1968) which denounced Israel for an attack on Beirut in reprisal for a PFLP attack on its planes. Cited in Falk Richard Falk, "The Beirut Raid and International Law of Retaliation", in Jean Allain, ed., *Unlocking the Middle East: The Writings of Richard Falk* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2003), 286 n. 20.

<sup>18</sup> "All members of this Council must be aware that its inability to act sooner has badly shaken the world's faith in its authority and integrity. ...Delays will mean only more lost lives, more shattered hopes, and a further decline in the standing and authority of this Council and the Organization." Address by Sec Gen Kofi Anan to the UN Security Council, 11 August 2006, following passage of SC Resolution 262.

<sup>19</sup> For example, "Halutz says Lebanon conflict a 'definite victory'", *Jerusalem Post* (20 August 2006): available at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1154525908859&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>.

# SIZE DOES NOT MATTER

## THE SHEBAA FARMS IN HISTORY AND CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

Asher Kaufman\*

When Hizballah launched its first military operation in the area of the Shebaa farms on May 21, 2000 and opened the battle for the “liberation” of this piece of land, nobody could have known, arguably not even (by now the mythical) Hassan Nasrallah that this small territory could become the razor’s edge of war and peace between Lebanon and Israel. The Shebaa farms, that until April 2000 were one of the most neglected uncared for pieces of real-estate in the region, have been disproportionally transformed in the past six years into a sacred territory and a source of national pride for Lebanon, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, into a strategic asset for Israel without which its national security could be undermined.

The following essay attempts to bring the Shebaa farms’ border conflict into perspective through a discussion of three themes: a historical description of the evolution of the Shebaa imbroglio; an analysis of the place this piece of land holds in the political considerations of all parties involved: Hizballah, the Lebanese government, Israel and Syria; and a discussion of the political, procedural and technical challenges involved in a possible future border demarcation in the area.

### THE SHEBAA FARMS 1920-2000

Let us begin by putting things in a geographical perspective. The area of the Shebaa farms, located south of the villages of Shebaa and Shuba, on the western slopes of the Hermon Mountain, was part of the border zone between Syria and Lebanon until 1967. It is about 14 km in length and approximately 1.5-2 km in width at altitudes ranging from 400 meters in the west to 2,000 meters in the east. Within this area there were some 14 agricultural (most of them were seasonal) farmlands that until 1967 had been used by farmers from the Lebanese villages of Shebaa and Shuba. In addition to these farmlands there are at least two other villages west of the western slopes of the Hermon, in the 'Ayun valley, that would have to be taken into account in any discussion about the future of the Shebaa farms. The first is the village of Nukheileh, abandoned and in ruins since the 1967 war, that has been demanded by Hizballah along with the Shebaa farms. The second is the village of Ghajar that Hizballah and Lebanon recognize as a Syrian village and therefore do not incorporate it within their territorial demands from Israel. Beyond this description it is impossible to know exactly the circumference of the area that is demanded by Hizballah and Lebanon, for the simple reason that the “Shebaa farms” were never a recognized territorial entity and the boundaries of this

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area have never been defined. Contrary to some Lebanese claims, the area has never been inhabited by Israeli civilians and today does not use for any purpose other than a military zone maintained by Israel Defense Forces.

It is now a well-known fact that the Syrian-Lebanese boundary has never been officially determined. Nevertheless, in May 2000, when the UN delineated the Blue Line, the Israeli line of withdrawal from South Lebanon, UN officials were caught by surprise when they found out that there were no internationally-binding documents they could use to determine this line in the area of the Golan Heights, which in fact, was the borderline between Syria and Lebanon until June 1967. The UN had to settle with the existing maps that clearly put the Shebaa farms area and Nukheileh within the Syrian Golan Heights. Thus, in fact the UN sided with the Israeli stand, relying on its own maps of the UN interim forces in South Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the Golan Heights (UNDOF) and on many Lebanese and Syrian maps, and drew the Blue Line, leaving the Shebaa farms and Nukheileh within the Israeli occupied Syrian Golan Height. Yet, in his report to the UN Security Council, Secretary-General Kofi Annan acknowledged an ambiguity in the area of the farmlands due to the absence of any official border demarcation in the region. "I recommend," therefore, he wrote in his report, "[...] that a viable solution, which is without prejudice to the positions of Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic concerning their international boundaries, would be to proceed on the basis of the line separating the areas of operation of UNIFIL and UNDOF along the relevant portions of the Lebanese-Syrian boundary."<sup>1</sup>

How was this ambiguity created? Generally, the process of border determination includes three steps—A. allocation: assigning a particular piece of territory to a state; B. delimitation: the actual description of a border in a written document; and C. demarcation: the actual marking on the ground.<sup>2</sup> Of these three steps only the first phase was completed in Lebanon. France, as the mandatory power at the time, did delineate a border between the two countries on various maps, but this was never carried out by official or professional surveyors on the ground. From the early days of the mandate maps drafted by the *Service Topographique des Forces Françaises du Levant* located the Shebaa farms and Nkheileh within Syrian territory.<sup>3</sup> In practice, however, the residents of the area continued to consider themselves part of Lebanon. They paid taxes to Lebanon and conducted all their legal and administrative affairs in Hasbaya and Marj 'Ayun, rather than in Quneitra, the contiguous Syrian regional capital. French officers who served in the region noticed this anomaly and reported to the High Commission in Beirut on the discrepancy between maps and de facto practice.<sup>4</sup> However, nothing was done to resolve the matter, neither by France nor later by the Syrian or Lebanese governments.

The border anomaly in the area of the Shebaa farms continued after Lebanon's attainment of political independence in 1943. It should be emphasized that border anomalies existed throughout the Syrian-Lebanese boundary. Syria had not fully reconciled with Lebanon's independence, at least not formally. It, therefore, avoided discussions of border demarcation with Lebanon. Since borders are one of the prime attributes of independence and sovereignty, any Syrian initiative to discuss its boundary with its neighbor would have implicitly implied recognition of Lebanon as a sovereign state. For this reason, in 1945, when Syria and Lebanon were both accepted to the newly established UN, they did not present any border agreements as required by new members of the organization, simply because no agreement existed.



This reality concerning the Syrian-Lebanese border in general and in the area of the Shebaa farms in particular continued uninterrupted until Israel occupied the Golan Heights in June 1967. Syrian and Lebanese border residents continued to live their lives for the most part disregarding the artificial and unmarked borderline. From the early 1950s, Syria started to station soldiers in the region, at first with the agreement of the Lebanese government and later without.<sup>5</sup> As Syrian-Lebanese relations deteriorated in the late 1950s because of the pro-Western policy of Lebanese President Camille Chamoun and Syria's Nasserist orientation, Syria physically attempted to force its sovereignty on the region by demanding that its residents relinquish their Lebanese identity cards in favor of Syrian cards. Syria even included the residents of the area in a state census in 1960.<sup>6</sup> In 1964, as relations improved, both countries made an attempt to officially determine their shared border, but this attempt did not result in an official border demarcation and agreement.<sup>7</sup> When Israel occupied the Golan Heights in June 1967 it considered the western slopes of the Hermon Mountain to be part of Syria, as all maps of the region illustrated. The fact that Syrian troops were stationed in Nukheileh and in some of the Shebaa farmlands only reinforced what the maps already indicated.<sup>8</sup>

The successive Lebanese governments never cared much about issues that related to the periphery, let alone the southeast corner of the country, one of the most neglected locales in Lebanon. Beirut's indifference to the periphery, in general, and to the Shebaa area, in particular, becomes crystal clear when examining Lebanese newspapers from the months immediately after the June 1967 war. Reading through *al-Nabaa* and *al-Hayat*, then the two most important dailies in Lebanon, between June-September 1967 I found no mention of the fact that Israel had occupied any Lebanese land. Furthermore, Lebanese official complaints against Israel after the war were numerous, yet none referred to the Shebaa farms.<sup>9</sup> From early 1968, the area became a war zone between Israel and Palestinian guerilla organizations, a fact that entirely altered the focus on the region. Lebanese papers of the time reported on these skirmishes and some referred to the region as Syrian, occupied by Israel in the June 1967 war.<sup>10</sup> The breakout of the Lebanese civil war in April 1975 left no space in the public consciousness for "petty" issues such as the Shebaa farms. Furthermore, following the Israeli military activities in South Lebanon from 1978 on, the international border between Israel and Lebanon lost its relevance. Interestingly, it was actually during this time that Israel allowed owners of the farms to cross the border and cultivate their land. They continued to work on their farmlands irregularly until the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000.

At least twice in the 1970s Lebanon and Syria had the chance to claim or disclaim sovereignty over the region. In 1974, with the signing of the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement and the deployment of UN forces in the Golan Heights, Syria accepted the existing maps which located the Shebaa farms within the occupied Golan Heights. Similarly, with the deployment of the UN forces in South Lebanon in 1978 the Lebanese government endorsed the same maps which excluded the Shebaa farms from its sphere of sovereignty.

In the early 1980s the issue of the Shebaa farms began resurfacing in occasional reports on Israeli misconduct in South Lebanon.<sup>11</sup> The establishment of Hizballah in 1982 only accelerated this development. A new genre of writing developed in South Lebanon focusing on Israeli activities in the region. Scores of books, brochures and cheap pamphlets from that period document Israeli activities in South Lebanon. In the long list of Israeli deeds and misdeeds one often found

references to the claim that in June 1967 Israel occupied a Lebanese tract of land in the area of the Shebaa farms despite the fact that Lebanon did not participate in the war.<sup>12</sup> As is well known, Hizballah was not only preoccupied in fighting Israel militarily but was also busy documenting Israeli activities in Lebanon. It seems that in this project Hizballah also brought back to the public consciousness all matters of Lebanese grievances against Israel. One of these was clearly the loss of land by the residents of the Shebaa farmlands in 1967.

The fact that the Shebaa farms became a matter of concern for informed Lebanese before the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon could also be seen in the list of demands Lebanon compiled in preparation for a possible peace accord with Israel. The withdrawal from Lebanon was at the center of Israeli public debate initially since 1997, and specifically after Ehud Barak, as a contender for prime minister, made it a principal component of his 1999 electoral platform. Lebanon could not remain indifferent to these developments and indeed Lebanese specialists made lists of territorial, financial and other demands from Israel.<sup>13</sup> One of the numerous accusations put forth by Lebanese border specialists was that Israel intended to annex the Shebaa farms even if it withdrew from South Lebanon and that the Lebanese government must thus prepare for such a step and assert its rights over the area.<sup>14</sup> The Lebanese government, however, made it an official Lebanese claim only on May 4, 2000, demonstrating (again) its neglectful handling of the matter. Kofi Annan noted the fact that this was a “new position” of the Lebanese government regarding the definition of its territory, implicitly criticizing Lebanon.<sup>15</sup> On May 21, 2000, Hizballah launched its first military operation in the area and the Shebaa farms border dispute began.

### THE SHEBAA FARMS: MAY 2000 – JULY 2006

It was quite remarkable to observe the transformation of the Shebaa farms from the neglected margins into the center of public and political attention in Lebanon, Israel and Syria and it was thanks to Hizballah’s relentless military and media campaigns that this transformation was made possible. Following the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon the Shi’i organization made a strategic decision to uphold its armed wing and continue the *Muqawama*, or resistance, in effect and in spirit. In order to do so, Hizballah needed a good pretext. The Shebaa farmlands were only one item on the long list of demands on Israel and Hizballah could have probably chosen other “items” as an excuse to justify the continued armed struggle. For example, on the eve of the Israeli withdrawal Hizballah, followed by the Lebanese government, demanded that Israel secede also from territories which until 1948 were inhabited by seven Shi’i villages within mandatory Palestine.<sup>16</sup> In the 1948 war these villages were depopulated and their residents became refugees in Lebanon together with over 100,000 other Palestinian refugees. As was the case with many other Palestinian villages, after the 1948 war these seven villages were re-settled and became Jewish agricultural communities. Although the seven villages continue to be on Hizballah’s “wish list” from Israel, in May 2000 the organization chose to put this issue on the back burner and focus instead on the Shebaa farms.<sup>17</sup> The reason was twofold. First, the organization exploited the border anomaly in the Shebaa farms. Since no official border demarcation existed in the region of the farms, it was easier to make territorial claims from Israel and to present to the Lebanese society a justified continuation of the armed struggle. Second, of the entire Israeli-Lebanese borderline only the area of the Shebaa farms has no civilian

population. Thus, when it so chose, Hizballah was able to launch military operations in the area without potentially hitting Israeli civilians. In this way rules of engagements were created between Israel and Hizballah where, on the whole, Israel tolerated the organizations' attacks in the region and, to a large degree, the conflict was contained within the area of the Shebaa farms.<sup>18</sup> On July 12, 2006 Hizballah broke these rules, although not for the first time, by launching a cross-border military operation inside Israel in the Upper Galilee, bombarding civilians' villages in the vicinity of the area to divert IDF attention, kidnapping two soldiers and killing several others. Incidentally or not, this operation took place on the agricultural lands of Tarbikha, one of the aforementioned seven Shi'i villages demanded by the organization.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps, in Hizballah's logic, this was a continuation of the old rules of the game?

There is little doubt that Hizballah operates in close alliance with Syria and Iran and shares with these countries a similar, though by no means identical, political agenda. In this context, undoubtedly the perpetuation of the Shebaa imbroglio serves the interests of these two states. Nevertheless, I would like to focus here on the domestic arena within which Hizballah operates, an arena that is too often disregarded in analytical literature on the organization. It is essential to mention that, first and foremost, Hizballah uses the Shebaa farms for the realization of its Lebanese domestic interests, primarily by asserting itself as dominant political force in the country. In addition, the language Hizballah uses to justify its campaign to liberate the Shebaa farms is imbued with references to Lebanese national interests and sovereignty. Thus, while until the recent war Hizballah did not allow the state to exercise its sovereignty in south Lebanon, it has presented itself as a protector of Lebanese sovereignty and national interests. Moreover, in order to appeal to larger sectors of the Lebanese society the organization uses the language of Lebanese territorial nationalism in its media campaign that accompanies the armed struggle for the liberation of the farms. Paradoxically perhaps, Hizballah has become a staunch defender of the territorial idea of "Greater Lebanon," that concept that was first introduced in the early twentieth century by Christian Lebanese nationalists. Consequently, in its struggle against Israel Hizballah presents itself as a protector of these boundaries, including the area of the Shebaa farms therein. In the June 2005 election campaign, for example, Hassan Nasrallah used the Shebaa farms (and the seven villages) to recruit support of Christian voters and to justify the continued armed struggle against Israel. In one of his election speeches, Nasrallah invoked the well-known phrase of the assassinated head of the Lebanese Forces Bashir al-Jemayyel, who declared that the area of this Greater Lebanon is 10,452 sq. km. Al-Jemayyel uttered this in the context of his opposition to dividing Lebanon into sectarian cantons in the days of the Civil War, but Nasrallah resurrected the Maronite leader from the dead and turned him into a supporter of the armed struggle of Hizballah by implying that al-Jemayyel had included the Shebaa Farms (and the seven villages) within this territory.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Hizballah has used the Shebaa farms not only as an excuse to continue the armed struggle against Israel, but also as a tool for empowering itself domestically and giving the Shi'i community in Lebanon a sense of confidence and self-esteem. This is the same community that was brushed aside by Lebanese non-Shi'i elites throughout the twentieth century, and this is the same community that today, through Hizballah, has become the defender of Lebanese territory and the guardian of its sovereignty.

To be sure, Hizballah's campaign in the Shebaa farms has drawn also harsh criticism from various Lebanese political forces that shared two concerns. First was the concern that the continuation of the armed struggle against Israel would jeopardize Lebanon's process of post-civil war reconstruction, a fear that proved to be justified. Second, Hizballah's rise to prominence in Lebanon has been regarded as a challenge to other political forces in the country that do not share with the organization its domestic and regional political agendas. Of the many critical voices, Walid Junblatt, the Druze leader, has stood out as the most vocal opposition against Hizballah's operations in the Shebaa farms. Although in the last six years he has not always been consistent in his opinions about the Shebaa farms,<sup>21</sup> recently he has been unequivocal in arguing that the farms are part of Syria and that Hizballah, in close collaboration with Syria, uses them as an excuse to maintain its military wing in contradiction to UN resolution 1559.<sup>22</sup> The rivalry between Junblatt and Hizballah reflects, obviously, a power struggle between two opposing political camps, but it relies also on two different understandings of what Lebanon is all about. On the one hand is Junblatt, a scion of a classical Lebanese feudal family, a leader of a community that sees itself as Lebanese *par excellence* and whose entire world of reference is Mount Lebanon. On the other hand is Hizballah, a new comer to the Lebanese social and political scene that introduces new (some would say foreign) ideas to Lebanon and that holds an entirely different historical framework with regards to Lebanon than the one that it held by the Druze community.

There are other domestic opposition voices to Hizballah's actions in the Shebaa farms as demonstrated in the often-cited LBC TV satire that among other things mocked at Hizballah's struggle to liberate the Shebaa farms, depicting it as an excuse to maintain its arms. And any discussion of Lebanese opposition to Hizballah's conduct in the Shebaa farms would be incomplete without mentioning former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri who, although he closely cooperated with Hizballah, was also very critical of the organization's operations in the Shebaa farms, rightfully fearing that they could jeopardize his post-civil war reconstruction project.<sup>23</sup> As the late Gébran Tuéni (who shared with Hariri not only the same fatal fate but also similar views about Hizballah and the Shebaa farms) eloquently put it, the dispute between Rafiq al-Hariri and Hassan Nasrallah was a dispute between two different visions of Lebanon, the former imagining Lebanon as Hong Kong, while the latter imagining the country as Hanoi.<sup>24</sup> Al-Hariri now must be turning in his grave.

Despite this domestic opposition it is apparent that, on the whole, Hizballah has been successful in inserting the Shebaa farms into Lebanese national agenda and deep into Lebanese public consciousness as Lebanese occupied land that Israel holds illegitimately. Through a very effective media campaign the organization was able to capitalize on popular images of Israel as an aggressive expansionist entity that is still in control of Lebanese land. While many Lebanese may disagree with Hizballah over the means of retrieving this land, preferring a diplomatic track, they still strongly believe in Lebanon's legitimate ownership of it. And if one needed a final affirmation of Lebanon's perceptions of the Shebaa farms, one only has to look at the debates in the National Dialogue and the subsequent statement regarding Lebanese identity of the farms. This forum of fourteen leading Lebanese politicians who met in March 2006 to discuss the most sensitive and contested issues related to Lebanon's political order in the post-Syrian withdrawal era, spent a good portion of its discussions ironing out a joint statement that acknowledged the "Lebanese identity" of this region.<sup>25</sup> This terminology is

interesting in and of itself, for it takes the discussion over the Shebaa farms and puts it, yet again, within Lebanese national discourse. Lebanese have been debating over the nature of their national identity (is Lebanon Arab, Mediterranean, Phoenician, etc.?) since the formation of Greater Lebanon in 1920. It is apparent that the identity discourse about the Shebaa farms has been borrowed from the ethnic-cultural realm into the territorial realm and used, first by Hizballah and later by other Lebanese politicians from the National Dialogue, to assert Lebanon's sovereignty over this piece of territory.

Despite the centrality of the Shebaa farms in the National Dialogue, it is abundantly clear that this issue masks more serious problems relating to Lebanon's relations with Syria and to the Lebanese domestic political order. Since the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon on May 2005, the Lebanese government, dominated by anti-Syrian forces, and with an unprecedented support of the international community, has demanded to regulate its political relationship with Syria. One of the pressing items on the agenda of Lebanon has been a long over-due border demarcation project that would finally lead to a Syrian-Lebanese border treaty and the beginning of normal diplomatic relations between the two countries. But it is against Syria's interest to mark its shared boundary with Lebanon, for it would leave the Syrian regime that aspires to be a major regional player without an important card to play in the regional game. Thus, despite the fact that since May 2000 (and not a day before) Syria has accepted Lebanon's claim that the Shebaa farms are Lebanese territory it has not been willing to officially demarcate its overall boundary with Lebanon and particularly in the area of the Shebaa farms.<sup>26</sup> In this way the Shebaa imbroglio has gained another dimension and evolved to be a Syrian card not only against Israel – tying the fate of this region with a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights – but also against the anti-Syrian forces in Lebanon who wish to see Syria's involvement in Lebanese domestic affairs diminish. This is one of the reasons why Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora went in April on his diplomatic tour to western capitals to try and harness the international community, in particular the US, to convince Israel to secede from the Shebaa farms. It was his way to circumvent the Syrian problem, on the one hand, and to attempt to remove Hizballah's pretext in maintaining its armed wing, on the other hand.

In the meantime, in order to defy UN demarcated Blue Line, and to try and reverse Lebanese cartographic reality, the Lebanese army and the Ministry of Tourism have produced new maps of Lebanon which for the first time put the area of the Shebaa farms inside the boundaries of the country.<sup>27</sup> This is yet another example of the effectiveness of Hizballah's campaign which has been able to enter official state institutes and influence their discourse with regards to the status of the farms. Lebanon has had a chance at least since 1943 to produce such maps but has not done so until after 2000. The drawing of these maps was done very unprofessionally, including therein territories that are undisputedly part of Syrian occupied territories. In a way, these maps are reminiscent of the way French officers determined the boundary of Lebanon in the 1920s. Like their Lebanese heirs eighty years later also they sat in Beirut and drew unprofessional lines on maps thus giving birth to various border anomalies, Shebaa farms included. Sadly, these are official maps of the state which do not articulate a serious approach of Lebanon to this problem.

What is the Israeli stand with regards to the Shebaa imbroglio? On May 2000, when Hizballah and the government of Lebanon claimed that the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon would be incomplete without seceding from the



Shebaa farms, the Israeli public felt it received another indication that the conflict with Hizballah (and in fact with the Arab world) is not about the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, but rather about Israel's actual existence. According to popular thought in Israel, the UN had determined the Blue Line of withdrawal, which Israel followed meticulously and, still, Hizballah was looking for an excuse to continue the armed struggle against Israel. Many believed that if Israel pulled back from the Shebaa farms Hizballah would look for a new excuse to keep alive the armed struggle against Israel. The Shi'i organization itself helped to sustain this view by insisting even before the recent war that a withdrawal from the Shebaa farms would not terminate the armed resistance against Israel.<sup>28</sup> Within Israeli public discourse about the Shebaa farms there is no mentioning at all that Lebanese demand has some historical validity. In fact, Israeli military and political officials have insisted time and again that the conflict over the Shebaa farms was fabricated and invented in May 2000 as an excuse to continue Hizballah's armed struggle against Israel. Although, as I have shown this is probably the case, it does not invalidate the fact that Hizballah has used to its own advantage a real problem and that it did not invent an excuse *ex nihilo*. Despite the fact that my findings (published in 2002 in *Middle East Journal*) about the historical evolution of the Shebaa border anomaly have reached Israeli major media outlets, all in all, Israeli officials have successfully managed to discount them, for it does not serve their interests to acknowledge the shades of gray of this conflict.

Israeli concerns with regards to the Shebaa imbroglio were recently summarized by Reuven Erlich, an Israeli official who has served for many years in the Israeli Ministry of Security in the capacity of advisor and specialist of Lebanese affairs.<sup>29</sup> According to him, since May 2000 Israel has refused to hold negotiations over the fate of the Shebaa farms for three main reasons. First, Israel refuses to succumb to an unjustified demand of a terrorist organization. Should the Shebaa farms issue be raised again in the UN, Hizballah would see it as a victory and as an excuse to continue the armed struggle against Israel to gain other concessions. Second, transferring the Shebaa farms into Lebanese hands "would set a political precedent with strongly negative implications for it would encourage the Syrian-Iranian strategy of using terrorism as a weapon to gain territory and extort political concessions from Israel." Third, the area of the Shebaa farms is essential for Israeli security and strategic concerns because topographically it dominates Jordan River sources.

It is clear from Erlich's account that the most pressing issue for him, and in fact for many others in the Israeli establishment,<sup>30</sup> is the symbolic significance of the Shebaa farms. More relevant than the strategic value is the fact that the Shebaa farms have become a symbol of Hizballah's steadfastness, of the organization's audacity and its ability to dictate the regional agenda, to the great chagrin of Israel. It is even possible to argue that Israel has began relating to the Shebaa farms in a similar manner to Hizballah's view of this region. For Israel, it is no longer an issue of a small insignificant piece of territory, a border dispute emanating from nebulous sovereignty, but rather it is a conflict that reflects and may change regional balance of power, involving no less than the Iranian-Israeli struggle for regional hegemony.



## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AFTER THE ISRAEL-HIZBALLAH WAR

UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which was passed unanimously on August 11, 2006 refers specifically to the Shebaa farms border conflict and ties its untangling with a future political arrangement between Lebanon and Israel. According to the Resolution, the Security Council requests the Secretary-General to develop, in liaison with relevant international actors and the concerned parties, proposals to implement the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords, and resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), including disarmament, and for delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, including by dealing with the Shebaa farms area, and to present to the Security Council those proposals within thirty days.<sup>31</sup>

By making the link between a post-war political arrangement and a new assessment of the Shebaa farms problem, this U.N. Resolution reflects a major change that has taken place in the international community within the past six years with regards to the Shebaa farms. On May 2000, the U.N. ridiculed Lebanese demand about the Shebaa farms deeming it ungrounded.<sup>32</sup> Six years have passed and the same U.N. headed by the same Secretary-General is now willing to re-open the Shebaa farms file and reconsider the fate of this area. This change was made possible through the work of two opposing forces, Hizballah and Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. First were the military and media campaigns of Hizballah which, although kept this issue continually present in local and international headlines, did not change U.N. views with regards to the farms. Then followed the diplomatic campaign by Fouad Siniora, who, months before the war, presented the possible transfer of the Shebaa farms into Lebanese hands as a means of resolving the two most pressing issues for Lebanon: Hizballah's arms and Lebanon's relationship with Syria. On July 25, while the war was still raging Siniora raised a similar proposal in his seven-point plan to end the fighting where he proposed that the U.N. Security Council commit itself to placing the Shebaa Farms area under U.N. jurisdiction until border delineation and Lebanese sovereignty over them are fully settled.<sup>33</sup> Siniora's seven-point plan, including his aforementioned Shebaa proposal, was well-received by the U.N. Security Council and was echoed in parts of the text of UN Resolution 1701.

Indeed, behind the Resolution of the Security Council lies the premise that in a future political arrangement between Israel and Lebanon, facilitated by the international community, Israel might be expected to pull out from this piece of territory. In theory, such a withdrawal could be done in a context of a package deal that would involve disarmament of Hizballah, extension of Lebanon's sovereignty in the south of the country and release of the two abducted Israeli soldiers in exchange for Lebanese prisoners in Israel and Hizballah's prisoners of war. This deal had already been proposed a few days after the beginning of the fighting by U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice<sup>34</sup> and it may be brought up again by the U.N., should the ceasefire last. In practice, however, such an agreement would face major difficulties such as Hizballah's unwillingness to disarm, not even in the south of the country; the inability of the Lebanese government to enforce its sovereignty over the south; and Israel's and Syria's doubtful interest to facilitate the implementation of such a deal.

But let us leave aside for a moment the greater challenges and treat this border conflict in isolation in order to bring to mind two other “smaller” challenges. The first relates to the procedure of negotiations and the second to the actual process of border determination in the region. In order to resolve any border disagreement in a peaceful manner it is essential first that the parties involved agree on the mechanism of resolution. This could be done through bilateral or multilateral negotiations between the contesting parties or through third party arbitration. I will begin with a brief analysis of the former. Sometimes we tend to forget, but, at the core, the Shebaa border dispute is between Syria and Lebanon over their shared boundaries. While Lebanon has pressed for the demarcation of its entire boundary with Syria, in general, and the area of the Shebaa farms in particular, Syria has persistently refused to do so for reasons I have already discussed earlier. It is practically impossible to even begin negotiating over this territory when one party refuses to engage in these negotiations, whatever its reasons might be.<sup>35</sup> As far as international law is concerned Israel is not a legal party to this conflict for the simple reason that it occupies this piece of land together with the entire Golan Heights. Therefore, theoretically, if Syria and Lebanon sign a border treaty which puts the Shebaa farms inside Lebanon and submit this treaty to the UN, Israel would be asked to secede from this area and hand it over to Lebanon. But without a Syrian-Lebanese defined boundary, Israel has no line behind which it could withdraw. Demanding that Israel pull out from this area without a precise definition of the line of withdrawal will only provide new pretexts for further tension to be used by the parties that are interested in keeping the region in flames. To be sure, Israel *is* and will be a party in any future negotiations over this territory because, being a *de facto* sovereign in the region, it would have to facilitate the process of border demarcation in the area of the Shebaa farms.

The second mechanism of resolution is arbitration. In order for arbitration to be successful the contesting parties must agree to resolve their disagreements peacefully through an international institution (such as the International Court of Justice) and to abide by its decisions. Although the Blue Line that defined the May 2000 Israeli line of withdrawal from South Lebanon was not determined through a normative process of arbitration, it still serves an example of how a decision of an international institution was not respected by one side—Hizballah and the Lebanese government—because it disagreed with the UN decisions. Arbitration could only work when the sides agree to respect the decisions of the mediating body, whatever they might be. This requires good will from all parties involved, which, unfortunately, is lacking in the current political atmosphere in the region.

But let us assume that the mechanism has been agreed upon. Now, the contesting parties or the arbitration committee would have to deal with the second major challenge: the actual determination and delimitation of the border in the area. Since there is no treaty or other consensual agreement between Syria and Lebanon that could facilitate the determination of the border, there is a need to resort to other means. In 2000, the UN used maps which unquestionably put the Shebaa farms within the Syrian Golan Heights. Assuming that the UN is interested today in changing the status quo and since the use of maps would leave the status quo intact there is a need to resort to other avenues, one of which is custom. In other words, Lebanon will need to prove its historic rights over this area by means of demonstrating that despite the fact that maps indicate that the region is in Syria, it was Lebanon that exercised its sovereignty in the area until 1967. But as most evidence shows, Lebanon did not implement its authority in the Shebaa farms and

in fact (with minor exceptions) it was indifferent to Syria's effective control of the region. Lebanon's claims, that the land deeds of the Lebanese owners of the Shebaa farms are a good enough proof that the area has been under its sovereignty, are extremely weak. Intentional Law (and common sense) does not support private property as a proof of sovereignty. Had private property been sufficient to determine inter-states boundaries, then some Israeli farmers from Metulla would have been eligible to reclaim their property inside Lebanon which they owned and farmed until the 1948 war.

The key to untangling this "territorial knot" may not be by resorting to custom, maps or land ownership, but rather by going back to the Mandate years when this border anomaly was created. French documents from the 1930s, which I have already published in 2002, do provide some indication as to where the Syrian-Lebanese boundary could pass in this disputed area.<sup>36</sup> In 1937, Pierre Bart, the administrative councilor of the district of South Lebanon wrote a report to the High Commission in Beirut indicating a discrepancy between the existing maps and the de facto reality in the area of the Shebaa farms. In lieu of the borderline as depicted in the existing maps (which is roughly the Blue Line today), Bart portrayed a de facto line that was used by the local inhabitants and by French colonial officers who served in the region:

About 4 km east-north-east of Ghajar in the actual place of the border site, instead of continuing eastward reaching the summit of Rouss Mountain, the frontier inclines unequivocally southward in order to include the village of Nukheileh, as well as the dependent territories of the village, retaking thereafter the direction of north-east, passing only 700-800 meters north of the village of Mughur Shebaa and east of this village joining Wadi al-'Assal, which it follows along its entire course arriving finally at the crest of Mount Hermon, about two km south-south-east of Shebaa.

Wadi al-'Assal does provide a good topographical mark as a possible borderline between Syria and Lebanon. Yet, the demarcation becomes challenging not there, but rather in the 'Ayun valley in the area where Nukheileh and Ghajar are located. If one includes Nukheileh within Lebanon but excludes Ghajar, leaving it within Syrian territory, then a problematic geo-political reality would be created (already noted in 1937 by Bart), where Ghajar is a Syrian village without almost any territorial continuity with the Syrian Golan Heights. A 1939 French report on the Shebaa farms border anomaly, which followed up on Bart's account, complicated matters further by arguing that Nukheileh was actually a Lebanese enclave inside Syrian territory. Whoever thinks about determining the boundary in this area has to take these problems into account. This ambiguous territorial reality existed before 1967 because the border was porous and very few people, if any, were concerned about its exact location. Needless to say, this is not the situation today.

## CONCLUSION

UN Resolution 1701 asks Secretary-General Kofi Annan to draft a proposal with regards to the Shebaa farms and to present it to the Security Council by September 11. As these words are written the proposal has not yet been submitted and it remains to be seen how creative the U.N. would be in thinking about solutions to this territorial/political problem. One major question that should be asked in this context is whether it is possible to isolate the Shebaa farms territorial problem and "resolve" it without taking into account broader regional

political considerations. After all, it is clear that this border conflict is a symptom of much larger issues pertaining to Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights (and in fact to its occupation of the Palestinian occupied territories as well), to the murky Syrian-Lebanese relationship, to Hizballah's strategic designs in Lebanon and the Middle East, and to Iran's attempts to play a leading role in the conflict against Israel. Thinking about the Shebaa farms in this way casts heavy doubts on any possibility to resolve this territorial problem any time soon. As I have demonstrated in this essay, even if we do isolate the Shebaa farms and treat it as a local territorial border problem between Syria and Lebanon the procedural and practical obstacles would still be difficult to overcome, but not insurmountable. The bigger problem, however, does not lie in the territorial aspect of this conflict but rather in the symbolic, metaphysical and ideological dimensions and these cannot be resolved by any U.N. resolution.

The *zeitgeist* in which we live today in the Middle East does not seem to suggest that a regional conciliatory approach is a viable option. This leaves us with the localized option and far more modest objectives. Assuming that the U.N. sides with Lebanon in its upcoming report, surmounts the obstacles I have already described above, and asks Israel to withdraw from the region, would an Israeli pullout strengthen the Lebanese government and weaken Hizballah, or perhaps do the exact opposite? My own inclinations tilt towards the second option. Fouad Siniora could present such a withdrawal as a victory of the diplomatic track and of the State of Lebanon, but there is hardly any question that Hizballah would capitalize on the withdrawal and portray it as a victory of its own resistance, and it would not be off the chart in so claiming. Is a stronger Hizballah good for the Middle East? The answer of course depends on one's point of view and political camp. I believe that a more powerful Hizballah would simply lead to a second round of this unfinished war. A second round may harm Israel, Syria and perhaps other regional players and it will undoubtedly devastate Lebanon to its foundations.

Had I written this piece before July 12, I would have undoubtedly supported an Israeli withdrawal from the Shebaa farms arguing that such a withdrawal might have reduced the strength of Hizballah, and empowered Fouad Siniora and the constructive forces in Lebanon. A withdrawal could have also worked to the benefit of Israel, allowing it to gain points in the intentional arena, to indirectly assist in the internal Lebanese process that strove to transform Hizballah into a regular political party and, who knows, maybe also to reignite the Syrian-Israeli peace track (assuming, as I do, that these are positive developments for Israel). The picture has changed after the war. The Israeli government, after its poor performance during the war and facing major internal criticism, cannot withdraw from the Shebaa farms without getting definite guarantees that Hizballah would not deploy its forces along Wadi al-'Assal with its commanding view of Kiryat Shemona and its environs. On the other hand, the Lebanese government is in desperate need for such a withdrawal in order to begin rehabilitate its strength and to come to terms with Hizballah's military wing. Can a U.N. proposal bridge the gap between these two opposing stands and square the circle? I would desperately like to believe that it would, but given U.N. inability to enforce Security Council Resolutions 1559 and 1680 it would be challenging to come up with a formula that addresses Israeli and Lebanese concerns with regards to the Shebaa farms. Perhaps a constructive way out of this seeming deadlock is first to metaphorically bring this area back to its original small size and modest significance. It might then be easier to come up with a constructive territorial resolution. Otherwise we might be left with a bleak reality

on the regional level and with a border dispute that may remain unresolved so long as the region as a whole does not change the belligerent course into which it is heading.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council, S/2000/460, Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Bothe, "Boundaries," in *Encyclopedia of Public International Law* (Amsterdam, 1992), Vol. 1, 446.

<sup>3</sup> Already the first map used by France to delineate the Lebanese border placed the area of the Shebaa farms within Syria. This was the 1861 French map that was used in 1920 as an appendix to edict 318 that proclaimed the establishment of Greater Lebanon on 31 August, 1920. See the edict and the map in Archives Diplomatiques, Nantes, Carton 448.

<sup>4</sup> Asher Kaufman, "Who Owns the Shebaa Farms? Chronicle of a Territorial Dispute," *Middle East Journal* (Fall 2002), pp. 584-589.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 589-593.

<sup>6</sup> Sami al-Sulh, the Lebanese prime minister at the time, wrote about this incident in 1960 in his memoirs. Sami al-Sulh, *Mudhakkirat Sami al-Sulh* (Beirut, 1960), p. 524.

<sup>7</sup> In Annan's report to the Security Council there is a reference to a 1964 attempt to officially demarcate the border, an attempt that ultimately failed. See also 'Issam Khalifeh, *Lubnan: Al-Miyah wa al-Hudud* [Lebanon: Water and Borders] (Beirut, 2001), p. 138. See also Kaufman, "Who Owns the Shebaa Farms?"

<sup>8</sup> Matityahu Mayzel, *Hama'aracha 'al Hagolan, Yuni 1967* [The Golan Heights Campaign, June 1967] (Tel Aviv, 2001), pp. 115, 133.

<sup>9</sup> PRO FCO 17/328 Political Affairs, Lebanese Relations with Israel; PRO, FCO 17/318, Lebanese View of Middle East Situation, 6.11.1967; Brief for the Minister of State's Meeting with the Lebanese Ambassador, 18.6.1968; British Embassy, Beirut, Report on Boutros' Overseas Tour, 29.6.1968.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, a report of Israeli-Palestinian border skirmishes in the area of the Shebaa farms and Nukheileh in *al-Hayat*, 29 September, 1968, where the area is described as Syrian.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, the journal *Al-Thawri*, 21 March, 1981, p. 11; *al-Nabar*, 2 April, 1982, as quoted in Mundhir Mahmud Jabir, *Al-shar'it al-lubnani al-mubtall, masalik al-ibtalal, masarat al-muwajaha, masa'ir al-ahali* (The Occupied Lebanese Border Strip: The Paths of Occupation, the Lines of Confrontation, the Fate of the Population (Beirut, 1999), p. 426.

<sup>12</sup> 'Adnan al-Sayid Hussein, *Al-Tawasu' fi al-Istratijiyya al-Israiliyya* (Beirut, 1989), pp. 109-110; Muhammad Ghanim, *Qadiyyat Sha'b wa 'Ard* (Beirut, 1991), pp. 55, 60.

<sup>13</sup> See the book *Istiqlal al-Dawla al-Lubnaniyya wa Mufawadat al-Salam al-Mubtamila* [Independence of the Lebanese State and the Possible Peace Negotiations] (Al-Haraka al-Thaqafiyya – Antilyas, November 1999).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 121, 141.

<sup>15</sup> UN Security Council, S/2000/460, Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), 3.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-'Ahd*, 14 January, 2000; 5 May, 2000.

<sup>17</sup> On the issue of the seven villages see my forthcoming article "Between Palestine and Lebanon: Seven Shi'i Villages as a Case Study of Boundaries, Identities and Conflict" in *Middle East Journal* (Fall 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Sobelman, "New Rules of the Game: Israel and Hizbollah after the Israeli Withdrawal," Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, January 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Many thanks to Fred Hof for bringing this information to my attention.

<sup>20</sup> *Al-Bayan*, 10 June, 2005; *al-Kifah al-'Arabi*, 12 June, 2005; *Al-Watan*, 10 June 2005; *Al-Hayat*, 9 June 2005.

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Nabar*, 5 June, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> See Junblatt's presentation on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006 at the Brookings Institute in <http://www.cgsl.org/publicdocs/20060306.pdf>. Accessed August 20, 2006

<sup>23</sup> For example, *al-Mustaqbal*, 19 February, 2001; 15 April, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Yossi Baidatz, "Lebanon: Between Hong Kong and Hanoi," *Policy Watch*, Vol. 523, 9 March, 2001. See also Tueni's last editorial which, among other things, harshly criticized Hizballah's struggle in the Shebaa farms in *al-Nabar*, 8 December, 2005.

<sup>25</sup> *Al-Nabar*, 15 March, 2006; *The Daily Star*, 15 March, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> See for example in *Al-Hayat*, 22 November, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of National Defense, Lebanese Army, Directorate of Geographic Affairs *Touristic Map of Lebanon*, 1:200,000, (Beirut, no date); GEO Projects, *Liban*, 1:200,000 (Beirut, 2002); *Tourist Map of Lebanon*, 1:200,000, (Beirut, 2005-2006). On the front cover of the last map there is a drawing of a small map of Lebanon which still leaves the Shebaa farms in the Syrian Golan Heights. All of these maps were updated and approved by the Directorate of Geographic Affairs of the Lebanese Army.

<sup>28</sup> Nicholas Blanford, "Only a Package Deal," *Bitterlemons-international*, 29 June, 2006 in <http://www.bitterlemons-international.org/previous.php?opt=1&id=138>. Accessed 20 August, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Reuven Erlich, "Raising the issue of the Sheba'a Farms in the proposed American-French Security Council draft resolution for ending the fighting: background information and significance" (9 August, 2006) in

[http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/html/sheba\\_farms\\_e.htm](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/html/sheba_farms_e.htm).

Accessed 20 August, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> See another view of Israeli officials that focus on the symbolism of the Shebaa farms in <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3289532,00.html>. Accessed 26 August, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm>. Accessed 26 August, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> *The Daily Star*, May 9, 2000

<sup>33</sup> Fouad Siniora, "End This Tragedy Now," *The Washington Post*, 9 August, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 27 July, 2006; *Haaretz*, 30 July, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> During Kofi Anan's visit to Damascus on 1 September, 2006, Syria refused again to demarcate its boundary with Lebanon in the Shebaa farms so long as it is occupied by Israel, a stand that clearly creates a "Catch 22" situation. See *al-Hayat*, 2 September, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> See my "Who Owns the Shebaa farms?" *Middle East Journal* (Fall 2002), pp. 584-589, for a detailed analysis of these documents.

## APPENDIX I





# EXPORTING DEATH AS DEMOCRACY: AN ESSAY ON U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN LEBANON

Irene L. Gendzier\*

## 'PUBLIC DIPLOMACY' A HISTORY OF PUBLIC DECEPTION

In 1983, a Memorandum entitled "Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy Strategies for Lebanon and the Middle East" was prepared for the Chair of the International Political Committee at the US National Security Council (NSC). It was signed by Robert C McFarlane, as Chairman of the NSC Special Planning Group. Its purpose was to mobilize public opinion in support of U.S. policy in Lebanon. Its premise was that such support was lacking because "many Americans have difficulty relating the complicated politics of Lebanon to U.S. vital interests. Appealing to our regional interests, i.e., Israeli security or our hope for democracy in Lebanon, is not likely by itself to convince the American people [that] the costs are worth it."<sup>1</sup>

To overcome such limitations, the same Memorandum argued for "an effective short-term strategy which coherently argues why Lebanon is of strategic importance to the United States, not merely because of its relationship to the Soviet and Syrian threat in the Eastern Mediterranean, but also because of the linkage between what happens in Syria and Lebanon and the future stability of the Persian Gulf." Conveying this information properly required another kind of strategy, one that would "penetrate the twelve media centers in the U.S" in addition to reaching out to business, labor, special interest groups, as well as educational and religious institutions with the assistance of reliable "heavy hitters."

The above memo was as applicable in 2006 as when it was issued in 1983. Both periods followed U.S.-supported Israeli invasions of Lebanon, which were justified in similar terms by the Reagan and later, by the G.W. Bush administrations. Then as now, the administration claimed that its policies were critical to the protection of vital U.S. national interests that included the protection of Israel and the support of democracy in Lebanon. In both instances, developments in Lebanon were linked to those in Damascus and the Gulf. In both periods, radical Lebanese Shi'ites were suspected of harboring Iranian connections. And then as now, public diplomacy was an instrument of public deception designed to effectively mask Washington's policies and those of its allies in the region.

Yet the above Memorandum remains useful. In summary form, it identifies elements of continuity in U.S. policy in Beirut that remains relevant nearly a quarter of a century after it was issued. By framing U.S. policy in terms of support for Israel and the protection of U.S. interests in the Gulf, the authors of the above Memorandum accurately conveyed Washington's assessment of Beirut's place in its broader Middle East design. It was one in which Lebanon was inextricably linked to the Israeli/Palestine struggle and to the conflicting currents of the Arab world and the Gulf.

From the outset, U.S. policymakers were well aware of Lebanon's regional predicament and its impact on local Lebanese politics. They did not fail to

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recognize that some 200,000 Palestinian refugees had entered Lebanon as a result of the 1948 war, and that the number had roughly doubled by 1982.<sup>2</sup> But Washington's interest in Beirut rested elsewhere. It was anchored in its commercial and strategic possibilities for U.S. oil. Under the circumstances, Washington's prime objective in Beirut was identifying the segment of the Lebanese elite that could be reliably counted on in an environment increasingly open to the challenge of nationalist and radical forces. It was this context that shaped Washington's permanently suspicious outlook on the Palestinian resistance in Beirut and elsewhere, as it constituted a permanent risk of radicalization.

This was the basis of the congruence with Israeli policies in Lebanon. But after 1967, it was but a portion of the far more ambitious role assigned by the U.S. to Israel in the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. In the Lebanese context, U.S. officials understood that Israel's courtship of Lebanon's Christians, which preceded 1948, was premised on the proposition that like minded minorities shared a common heritage and a common political outlook, notably, a hostility to Arab nationalism and Palestinian resistance. The description by no means applied to all Lebanese Christians. Hence, Israel's support was limited to those who qualified in its terms, such as the Phalangists and their militias, which Tel Aviv supported through the 1982 Israeli invasion.

The role played by the U.S. in that invasion and what followed, when U.S. Marines were sent to Beirut as part of the Multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon, was directly relevant to the timing of the October 23, 1983, Memorandum identified above. Three days earlier a truck bomb exploded at the headquarters of the U.S. Marines in Beirut, leaving 241 dead.

Public opinion polls taken in early 1984 demonstrated that there was increasing "discontent with President Reagan's policy in Lebanon," and the desire to "extricate marines from a country where 250 Americans have already died."<sup>3</sup> By then, the estimated casualty toll of the Israeli invasion in Lebanon was between 17,000 and 20,000.

How much did the U.S. public know or recall of U.S. policy in Lebanon? Mainstream media coverage among some of the major newspapers on the East Coast, was shattering in its images of war and glaring in what it chose to neglect. Washington had supported Israel's policies in Lebanon prior to the 1982 invasion, and it supported Syrian intervention in 1976, as did Israel, when that was directed against the Lebanese left and the PLO. The U.S. endorsed Israel's tactical alliance with right wing Lebanese parties and militias bent on destroying the PLO, which was the justification for the 1982 invasion.

Accounts of the Israeli invasion, images of devastation, reports of prison camps, testimony of foreign doctors working with Palestinians, evidence of the scale of destruction of Beirut, the agony of the Lebanese *Guernica*,<sup>4</sup> were on record, even if it was sorely incomplete, as with respect to the impact of Israel's invasion on the south. Nonetheless, Israel's use of U.S.-made cluster bombs and phosphorus bombs in densely populated civilian areas, led then President Reagan, who fully supported the invasion, to call for an indefinite "suspension of shipments of such weapons to Israel," which, in reality, "applied only to a single shipment then ready for transport."<sup>5</sup> In a calculated effort to salvage U.S. interests, Washington called for an end to violence, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Beirut, and support for its initiatives to deal with the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The invitation excluded the Palestinians, a fraudulent and fateful omission given the nature of the conflict, but one overlooked by those unaware of –or unprepared to– question Washington's

'honest broker' image. The authors of the 1983 Memorandum were no doubt correct in assuming that many Americans were not supporting U.S. policy. The origins and objectives of that policy remained obscure. But they were hardly invisible.

Over the intervening years, U.S. presidential doctrines consistently reiterated their support for a unified Lebanese state, which in translation meant a state governed by a regime deemed sufficiently in harmony with U.S. interests to merit support. Chief among such interests in the postwar decades was protecting Lebanon's transit role in the regional oil economy and promoting Beirut as a financial, trading and commercial center in the Middle East. Assuring the status quo in keeping with policies compatible with U.S. interests led to overt and covert interventions in Lebanon's internal political struggles. It meant deliberately undermining those advocating reformist programs in Lebanon's first civil war in 1958, and supporting Christian right-wing forces advocating anti-Palestinian, anti-left and pro-American policies, in the second that broke out in 1975 and continued in different forms through 1990.

Washington's objective in Lebanon was to assure the elimination of radical forces, to contain the Palestinian resistance, and from the late 1970s on, to align Beirut with Washington's allies, Riyadh, Amman and Cairo, following the 1978 signing of the Israeli-Egyptian Camp David agreement, which Lebanon failed to join. What were the origins of U.S. policies? The past was on record, but as in the case of more recent events, it remained for many, invisible.

### U.S. POLICY IN THE 1950s

Following World War II, U.S. interests in Lebanon were defined primarily in commercial terms whose strategic importance was clearly understood by U.S. policymakers and oil executives alike. Lebanon was valued for its role as a transit state, one whose indispensable function was to carry ARAMCO's oil through the related U.S. built Tapline, from Saudi Arabia to the Lebanese port of Sidon. Beirut oil related enterprises, in short, were part of the vast complex that was under the control of the Petroleum Cartel. Its history is inseparable from that of U.S. oil and political interests in the decades following World War II.

In 1958, at the time of the first Lebanese civil war and the Iraqi revolution U.S. officials in Lebanon had the responsibility of guaranteeing the protection of both the U.S. and UK pipelines, the latter connecting the Iraq Petroleum Company's oil (which did not belong to Iraq) to Tripoli. Yet long before 1958, Washington developed a network of relations with Lebanon's financial, commercial and political elite, which reinforced its assessment of the considerable value of this very small state in the protection and projection of its interests and power across the region. In a period when Washington feared the sweep of radical change that its officials viewed as inevitable in a region that they described as overtaken by the 'struggle between defenders of the status quo and advocates of change,' Beirut represented the pole of resistance against Egyptian President Nasser. Of incomparably greater influence in the region, the Egyptian leader was consistently courted and undermined by U.S. officials who suspected his role in every regional crisis, including that which gripped Lebanon in the year of its first civil war. Hence, the sense of increasing alarm that affected U.S. officials as they viewed the evidence of increasing disaffection with the regime in Beirut.<sup>6</sup>

On 14 July, the British supported Iraqi monarchy collapsed before the forces of the Iraqi revolution. The news arrived as the U.S. was preparing for military intervention in Beirut, a move designed to shore up its Lebanese allies. In London, however, British Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, urged U.S. President Eisenhower to drop the idea of intervening in Lebanon and to turn, instead, to a joint intervention in Baghdad. The idea had no appeal in Washington where the prospects of a diminished British presence in the Gulf were hardly a threat. Eisenhower therefore rejected the invitation but added the following in his 18 July, response to MacMillan:

Whatever happens in Iraq and other parts of the area, we must, I think, not only try to bolster up both the loyalties and the military and economic strength of Lebanon and Jordan, we must also, and this seems to me even more important, see that the Persian Gulf area stays within the Western orbit. The Kuwait-Dhahran-Abadan areas become extremely important and Turkey and Iran have become more important. We shall seek ways to help them be sturdy allies, first in quality and second in quantity, insofar as that quantity can be usefully provided and maintained.<sup>7</sup>

The members of the U.S. Senate were not consulted on these questions, as their complaints made clear. Members of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who met over the course of the summer of 1958 to consider the 'situation in the Middle East,' with briefings on U.S. policy by administration officials, were privy to little of what was actually going on in the region. Their prime concern was with U.S. intervention in Lebanon, though they had numerous questions about Iraq and the failure of U.S. Intelligence to anticipate the revolution. At the outset, Senate critics, demanded to know the legal basis for U.S. intervention in Lebanon, obviously irritated by the evident disdain for Congressional opinion. Such questions led beyond Lebanon to Iraq, and the more general question of U.S. oil interests in the region.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning Lebanon, senators were told that U.S. intervention was a necessary and just response to the predicament facing the Lebanese President. They were made to understand that its broader implications were justified by Washington's firm stance against radical currents in a region open to Soviet penetration and local subversion. Questions pertaining to Lebanon's civil war and the precise source of external danger to which the Lebanese President and his U.S. ally consistently pointed, went unanswered, save for repetitive accusations against Egypt, Syria, and radio propaganda that was considered a form of 'aggressive indirect aggression.'

As to Iraq, senators were told that U.S. officials, including those in the Intelligence community, were unaware and unprepared for news of the Iraqi revolution. Some Senators, however, took issue with the derogatory descriptions of the event, suggesting that Iraqis might have exercised their legitimate rights in revolting against a corrupt and unrepresentative government. Questions concerning U.S. oil interests in the Gulf, including Kuwait, indicated more than a passing knowledge, but they were categorically set aside. Indeed, the juxtaposition of Senate hearings with what the record shows of parallel U.S. communiqués with Britain on the subject, offer striking evidence of the profound dis-connection between public talk and inside policy.

At the same time as the Senate welcomed administration officials (with the illusory hope of clarifying U.S. policy) the U.S. President assured Prime Minister Macmillan of the U.S. commitment to the defense of Anglo-American interests in

the Gulf. As Senate hearings continued, U.S. officials offered their versions of the Iraqi 'coup,' while Senate critics disputed a policy of intervention at the will of the executive, repeatedly raising the question of Congressional authorization. Again, in virtually parallel though secret exchanges, the U.S. Secretary of State assured British officials that "we can put up sand bags around positions we must protect- the first group being Israel and Lebanon and the second being the oil positions around the Persian Gulf."<sup>9</sup>

### THE NEW DISORDER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

That was in 1958. In the two long decades that followed, the region was subjected to unprecedented turmoil as civil wars and regional wars and revolutions fundamentally altered the political contours of the region. For the vast majority whose interests were routinely ignored, the results involved loss and displacement and a chronic political discontent. There was Israel's 1967 war and that of October 1973, which enhanced Israeli territorial acquisitions at the expense of Palestinians, as well as Egyptians and Syrians, leading not only to renewed conflict but to the imposition of an oil embargo that had entirely different repercussions. In 1975 the Lebanese civil war exploded, a toxic mix of inseparable factors whose origins were to be found in Lebanese as well as regional politics.

In the same year, Washington debated the possibilities of intervention to assure its control over oil,<sup>10</sup> a preoccupation that was to be magnified by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1978 and, above all, by the 1979 Iranian revolution that forced the exile of the U.S. backed Shah. On 18 July 1979, *The Guardian* (UK) reported that "On 16 July 1979 Saddam Hussein came to power in Iraq."

Washington's response to developments in Iran was to promote attempts to foment a military coup, to get arms to the Iranian military, and once the Iraq-Iran broke out, to assure the defeat of Iran. The introduction of the Rapid Deployment Force into the Gulf by then President Carter was another means of asserting American power, one whose capacity to intervene was significantly expanded by President Reagan in 1988.<sup>11</sup>

Earlier, Washington considered it's crafting of the Camp David Agreement signed by Egypt and Israel in 1978, a major achievement. At the regional level, Washington rewarded Egypt and Israel, previously the recipient of generous support after its 1967 victory, with arms sales and economic assistance. According to a report of a meeting between "an Israeli official who participated in the Blair House military talks with Egypt and the US in 1979," what emerged from those sessions was not a set of "formal alliances 'but a loose division of labor,' in which the US would supply the military assistance for Egypt to police the Arab world and Israel to protect the Sadat regime against retaliation."<sup>12</sup> Israel's role was more extensive in the Middle East, where it supplied arms to potential opponents of the Iranian regime with U.S. support, as well as outside the region, in parts of Africa and Latin America and later extending to Asia.<sup>13</sup>

In Lebanon, the 1967 war helped to transform Lebanon into the principal Palestinian base. The results deeply affected Lebanese domestic politics, inciting opposition among those Christians and Muslims who shared a profound unease about the presence of the Palestinian resistance movement and its potential consequences. For some, as in the case of the right wing Christian Phalangist Party, the result was openness to Israeli support as well as that of the U.S.

Intertwined with this struggle in Lebanon was another whose class roots were to be found in the aggravated consequences of the country's uneven socioeconomic development and its transformation into an unproductive service economy. The Lebanese south was arguably the most impoverished part of the country, with its predominantly Shi'ite population increasingly radicalized as a result. But Lebanon's Shi'ite population was neither exclusively southern and rural nor monolithic in its socioeconomic and political status. It was the disenfranchised of the south, however, who formed the supportive base of the "Movement of the Dispossessed" and its military arm, Amal. And it was the forces of Amal that, at a later stage, were locked in conflict with the Palestinian resistance and the left, in the mid 1980s.

These separate but interrelated factors figured in the different phases of Lebanon's second civil war, including the bitter Palestinian-Lebanese struggles that deepened intra-Lebanese divisions, which Israeli, Syria and the U.S. exploited and reinforced. The principal coalition of opposition forces represented in the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) was linked with the Palestinian resistance, a combination anathema to Israel and to Washington, and for a different set of reasons, to Syria that had initially supported the left. In this context, the LNM's proposed reforms which should have been welcome to Washington as a form of political modernization and secularization, was depicted as endangering U.S. interests in the region with the result that Washington and Tel Aviv supported Lebanese right wing forces with the assistance of Syria, as of 1976.

In 1976, the U.S. State Department issued a statement reaffirming its opposition to partition and its support of measures "which will insure security and opportunity for all individuals and communities in the country."<sup>14</sup>

The U.S. Department of Defense justified its Security Assistance Program for Lebanon, for 1978 and 1979, in terms of U.S. support for Lebanon's national integrity and the urgency of reconstruction. Its proposal for assistance was couched in terms of the U.S. objective of improving the capacity of the central government to promote the restoration of a moderate and a democratic state that would be favorable to Lebanon's reintegration into the international economy.<sup>15</sup> As the DOD program proposal acknowledged, the end of civil war had not resolved fighting in the south among "contending armed factions" that required effective intervention by the central government,

What the directives of the DOD formally ignored was the terrain of the "contending armed factions." To a former Israeli conscript who had served in southern Lebanon as part of a platoon, the Christian militias were "Israeli-paid gunmen [who] acted as informants, interrogators, and enforcers. Israel's strategy was to disrupt Palestinian guerrillas by punishing the surrounding Lebanese population; the result was deeply felt Lebanese anger."<sup>16</sup>

The Israeli press offered its readers the views of then retired Gen. Mordechai Gur on Israel's March 1978 invasion of parts of southern Lebanon in the 'Litany Operation', which further clarified the relations of the 'contending armed factions.' Gur's description provided instructive details concerning the Israeli military in occupied territories, Jordan, Egypt as well as southern Lebanon. Reaching the Litany was the Israeli objective as Gur made clear. Following that, there was the possibility of an accord with a strengthened Lebanese government and a role for the UN. If the former was lacking, Israel's presence would be extended. Gen. Gur expressed no doubts as to Israel's course or his own, when he ordered "the IDF to enter a populated area and sanction free-fire."<sup>17</sup>



Israeli forces were to remain in control of parts of the Lebanese south from 1978 to 2000, the year in which the Lebanese resistance, led primarily by the Hizbullah, succeeded in forcing their ouster. That withdrawal was to be the preface to Israel's 2006 invasion of Lebanon, one in which the PLO was no longer the justification for Israeli action. This time, the target was Hizbullah; the reason, its resistance to Israeli control, a position supported by Washington policymakers who viewed it as a regional threat-additionally allied to Washington's nemesis in Teheran.

### AND NOW FOR THE PAST PRESENT

The most recent example of U.S. Israeli collaboration in the invasion of Lebanon offered a perverted echo of past policies whose impact was deepened by the transformations that occurred in the region and at the international level since 1982. Among the results were those catalogued in the reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch that addressed the scale of destruction and the evidence of war crimes in Lebanon, as well UN reports that bore witness to the dire conditions affecting Gaza as a result of Israel's systematic destruction of its social, political and economic infrastructure.

U.S. policy operated in a region that had been altered by the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1989 and the subsequent advances of the U.S. in Central Asia and the Caucuses, to which the first US invasion of Iraq in 1991 must be added. In this radically changed environment, U.S. officials justified their intervention in terms of their commitment to the export of democracy and the values of western civilization. Unprecedented oil profits in the hands of well-protected pro-American regimes in the oil producing states of the Arab world minimized the risks to U.S. policy as well as democracy, however. The new 'axis of evil', was represented by Tehran, Damascus and the so-called, non-state actor, the Lebanese Hizbullah, which came to epitomize the newest form of international scourge to the sovereignty of the state.

By contrast, the U.S.-Israeli relationship had been eminently strengthened since the 1982 war and the 1988 U.S.-Israeli 'memorandum of understanding,' that basically confirmed past agreements while describing Israel as 'a major non-NATO ally.' Neither Israel's invasion of Lebanon nor its steady denial of Palestinian rights in Gaza and the West Bank undermined the relationship.

Nonetheless, resistance to Israeli policies in occupied territories as in southern Lebanon persisted and their elimination remained objectives of Washington and Tel Aviv, as evidence of planning for the 2006 invasion of Lebanon suggests. Washington justified its policies not only in terms of protecting the security of its special ally, but as firmly eliminating the threat from 'extremists' in the region and bringing about the transformation of the 'new Middle East.' Examples of the latter included states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, along with the states of the Gulf, to which Washington hoped to eventually include a newly reconstituted Lebanon, provided an appropriate regime was in place.

In Washington's regional order, Israel played a significant role in the 'war against terror' in the Middle East; a war waged in Lebanon against the Lebanese resistance that the GW Bush administration claimed was Iran's proxy, the Hizbullah. In spite of the near destruction of the Lebanese state that was the result of US backed Israeli policy, both Washington and Tel Aviv insisted that they were supporters of Lebanon and its democratization.

The symbol of U.S-Israeli collaboration in 2006, as in 1982, was the evidence of U.S. made and supplied cluster bombs. In 2006, as it had been earlier, Israel was charged with using U.S. made cluster bombs in violation of prior agreements.<sup>18</sup> This time, the U.N. joined in the denunciation of Israel's use of such weapons, revealing that clearance experts had thus far found 100,000 unexploded cluster bomblets at 359 separate sites. The map of Israeli landmines in Lebanon was one of the demands previously made by Hizbullah to the Israeli government, as part of its prisoner exchanges, without success.

On August 23, the Office of the Spokesman of the Department of State issued a statement on the subject of "United States Emergency Aid to Lebanon to Clear Explosive Remnants of War." In its first paragraph it revealed that

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs is quickly expanding its nearly decade-long landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) humanitarian clearance program in Lebanon in order to help remove the newest explosive remnants of war that endanger the Lebanese who are returning to their homes in the southern part of the country.<sup>19</sup>

The Office of the DOS was apparently far ahead of the U.S. Senate that, according to the Associated Press, voted on Wednesday, September 6, 2006, by a margin of 70 (opposed) to 30 (in favor) to oppose the Pentagon from halting the use of cluster bombs near civilian targets and that, similarly, opposed any limitations on the sale of such weapons.

There were other tangible signs of US support for Israel.<sup>20</sup> At the end of July 2006, Washington accelerated delivery of 'High Technology Bombs' to the Israeli military. The target was ostensibly, Hizbullah. Arrangements for financing U.S. military assistance to Israel had always been a lucrative business for U.S. corporations such as, Raytheon, Lockheed Martin and Boeing, since according to U.S. law, 74 percent of such assistance had to be spent on U.S. military materiel.<sup>21</sup> In 2004, according to a U.S. Congressional Research Service report, Washington increased military aid to Israel to \$2.4 billion annually, from about \$1.8 billion. Estimates of U.S. arms exports to Israel between 1994-2003 were approximately \$6.9 billion, with Israel in possession of "more F-16s than any other country besides the U.S."<sup>22</sup> Washington did not entirely ignore its favored Arab partners. Suffice it to recall the recent sale of more than \$6 billion worth of military equipment to Saudi Arabia.

It is worth reiterating that in southern Lebanon, "Operation Peace for Galilee", the 1982 Israeli invasion, had continued until 2000. As Gen Gur had predicted, Israel remained in place. It expanded the 'security zone' it had defined for its operations in 1978. This was in spite of UN Security Council Resolution 425 of March 1978 that called for respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and integrity, and called on Israel "immediately to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory." Instead, incursions, abductions and attacks followed, such as those of 1993 and 1996 in Qana, the latter involving an Israeli attack on the UN post in which an estimated 100 were killed and roughly the same number injured. Israeli forces were involved in abductions of Sheikh Obeid on 28 July 1988 and Mustafa Dirani, on 21 May 1994.

As Zeev Maoz recently recalled in *Ha'aretz*, "During operations 'Accountability' [in 1993] and 'Grapes of Wrath' [in 1996], Israel's mass bombardments of civilian targets caused mass evacuations of Southern Lebanon, the estimated number of refugees in each case exceeded 500,000 Lebanese. We do not have a good estimate of the number of civilian fatalities in each of these incidents, but during the "Grapes of Wrath" operation, Israeli shells hit a civilian shelter killing 103 civilians including many women and children."<sup>23</sup> After Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, after an 18-year occupation, largely as a result of Hizbullah's resistance, "Israel has violated Lebanese airspace by carrying out aerial reconnaissance missions virtually every day since its withdrawal from Southern Lebanon six years ago."<sup>24</sup>

Preparations for war began, it appears, after the 2000 withdrawal. Discussions of such prospects with U.S. diplomats, journalists and various lobbying groups in Washington additionally provide evidence of collaboration, which was later denied. Those less reticent to confirm US-Israeli consultations, if not collaboration on the Lebanon invasion, indicated that "Israel had devised a plan for attacking Hizbullah- and shared it with Bush Administration officials- well before the July 12<sup>th</sup> kidnappings."<sup>25</sup>

At issue for Washington was the connection between Hizbullah and Iran, the commitment to eliminate the former as a prerequisite to confronting Iran. In that guise, the conflict that exploded in Lebanon, risking the very existence of state and society, was but a convenient rehearsal for a more drastic exercise.

In conjunction with the catastrophic results of its policies in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S.-supported Israeli invasion of Lebanon merits high-level inquiry and investigation as well as official denunciation and mourning. The increasing attention paid to the consequences of official deception in the manufacture of the rationale for war on Iraq, deserved to be applied to the US- Israel war on Lebanon and Gaza. In early September 2006 no such plans were in evidence, but internal opposition to Washington's claims had long been heard from a minority of intellectual critics and scholars prepared to challenge official claims, as did defense analysts and generals who disputed the view that Hizbullah was nothing more than a terrorist group and an Iranian dependency.

It remains for the non-generals, the non-politicians, the vast majority of others, the non-important people, the rest of us, in sum, to ask, as did Amira Hass in her eloquent address to Israelis and their studied indifference to the destruction of Palestinian society, "Can you really not see?"<sup>26</sup>

The question is ours, as well.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> 26 October 1983, Memorandum For the Honorable Lawrence S. Eagleburger, Chairman, International Political Committee. Prepared for the Honorable Robert C. McFarlane, Chairman, Special Planning Group. U.S. Department of State, Office of FOI, Privacy and Classification Review. U.S. Propaganda Action in the Middle East, National Security Archive.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway, "War in Lebanon," *The Village Voice*, Vol. XXV11, no.25, 22 June 1982.

<sup>3</sup> Steven V. Roberts, Support Waning for Beirut Role," *The New York Times*, 4 January 1984, p. A10.

<sup>4</sup> Fawwaz Trabulsi, "Beirut-Guernica: A City and a Painting," *Middle East Report*, September-October 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Eleanor Randolph, "Reagan Suspends Indefinitely Sale of Cluster Bombs to Israel," *The Boston Globe*, 28 July 1982, p. 8.

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- <sup>6</sup> This and the following paragraphs are taken from the Preface to the 2006 edition of Irene L. Gendzier [1997], *Notes From the Minefield, United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945-1958* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2006). I wish to express my thanks to the editors of this work for allowing me to cite from its pages. Developments in Lebanon and Iraq in 1958 are discussed at greater length in the 2006 Preface. For the above quote, see Preface, p. xxiv.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. xxv-xxvi.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. xxvi-xxvii. Further discussion of U.S. Senate hearings on the 1958 crisis will find them in ch.13 of *Notes From the Minefield*. (2006).
- <sup>9</sup> Gendzier, Preface, pp. xxvii.
- <sup>10</sup> "Oil Fields as Military Objectives: a Feasibility Study," Prepared for the Special Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on International Relations by the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. 21 August, 1975, US Government Printing Office, Washington, 1975.
- <sup>11</sup> John Cushman, Jr., "Reagan Consulted in Midst of Battle," *The New York Times*, 22 April, 1988, p. A8.
- <sup>12</sup> *Newsweek*, 14 July, 1980, cited in Joe Stork, "The Carter Doctrine and U.S. Bases in the Middle East," *MERIP Report*, September 1980, p.10.
- <sup>13</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Pirates and Emperors*, (Cambridge, MA, South End Press, 1986). See also Israeli sources cited on p.113-114; and in Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle*, (South End Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1999), pp. 23-27; 457 -458, and notes on each page that are marked by asterisks.
- <sup>14</sup> Department of State Bulletin, "United States Reaffirms Commitment to Integrity and Unity of Lebanon," 11 October 1976, p.459.
- <sup>15</sup> United States Department of Defense, Security Assistance Program, 1978, 1979.
- <sup>16</sup> James Ron, "The Next Step for Israel," *The Boston Globe*, 25 May 2000, p. A 25.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview by Alex Fishman with General (reserves). Mordechai Gur, Al Hamishmar, 10 May 1978 (trans. by I. Shahak)
- <sup>18</sup> Julian Borger, "US Investigates Whether Israel Violated Deal on Cluster Bombs," *The Guardian*, 26 August 2006.
- <sup>19</sup> "United States Emergency Aid to Lebanon to Clear Explosive Remnants of War," Media Note, Office of the Spokesman, US Department of State, Washington, D.C., released 23 August 2006.
- <sup>20</sup> The following par is taken from Irene L. Gendzier, "The Secretary of State Prefers Brahms," *ZNet*, 31 July 2006.
- <sup>21</sup> As cited in 'Thalif Deen, "Israel Violates U.S. Law With Attack on Lebanon," *Antiwar.com*, 18 July 2006.
- <sup>22</sup> Frida Berrigan and William D. Hartung, with Leslie Heffel, *U.S. Weapons at War 2005: Promoting Freedom or Fueling Conflict: U.S. Military Aid and Arms Transfers Since September 11*, Arms Trade Resource Center, June 2005, p. 34.
- <sup>23</sup> Zeev Maoz, "The War of Double Standards," *Ha'aretz*, 24 July 2006.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.,
- <sup>25</sup> Seymour M. Hersh: "Watching Lebanon," *The New Yorker*, 21 August 2006.
- <sup>26</sup> Amira Hass, "Can you really not see?" *Ha'aretz*, 30 August 2006.

## BOOK REVIEWS

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### LEBANON'S POLITICAL ECONOMY AFTER SYRIA, AN ECONOMIC TA'IF?

Toufic K. Gaspard, *A Political Economy of Lebanon, 1948-2002, The Limits of Laissez-faire*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2004.

Samir Makdisi, *The Lessons of Lebanon. The Economics of War and Development*, I.B. Tauris, London-New York, 2004.

#### Reviewed by Reinoud Leenders\*

On the waves of Lebanon's dazzling pace of political events in the spring of 2005, an unusual call was made for a serious and all-embracing "national dialogue" on reforming the Lebanese economy. Najib Miqati, who then headed the interim cabinet that organized the parliamentary elections following Syria's troops withdrawal in April 2005, argued that the Lebanese should first find a consensus among themselves on what it would take to lift the country out of a decade-long recession.<sup>1</sup> Only then, he suggested, could Lebanon once more approach foreign donors with a request to come to the country's assistance. In the words of a World Bank official who applauded the idea, a "Paris III", or a sequel to the international donor conferences held in November 2002 and in February 2001, ought to be preceded by a "Beirut I" spelling out Lebanon's economic and institutional challenges, priorities and an internal consensus on a broad reform package.<sup>2</sup> Yet nearly a year has passed

and nothing of the sort has taken place. Nor has the much trumpeted international donor conference been held after it was deferred without further notice in November 2005, ostensibly because, as one Lebanese economist put it, the current government's internal "political bickering is stalling the economic reform that is supposed to salvage us all."<sup>3</sup> But the political energy unleashed during Beirut's spring also failed to translate into a vivacious public debate notwithstanding a few proposals for reforms. Such appears to contrast the electorate's shared expectation toward the newly elected government last year that it ought to design radically new policies in order to boost the economy.<sup>4</sup> It is in this atmosphere of economic urgency and apparent political lethargy that two recent studies on Lebanon's political economy, written by two renowned Lebanese economists, offer a welcome starting point for some uncomfortable but constructive soul searching regarding Lebanon's economic quandary.

### EXPLAINING ECONOMIC UNDER-PERFORMANCE

For Samir Makdisi, a veteran economics professor at the American University in Beirut and a former Lebanese minister for the Economy, the gravity of Lebanon's current economic crisis can hardly be overstated. In his well documented *The Lessons of Lebanon: The Economics of War and Development* the contours of the country's current economic slump are captured in reference to a series of indicators showing that "the economy [is] relatively stagnant, fiscal deficits [are] running high, the public debt burden [is] rapidly mounting, the pound [is] under pressure, and the Central Bank's foreign exchange reserves [are] under pressure." (Makdisi, p. 107) Following the

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cessation of armed hostilities in 1991, annual growth in GDP peaked in 1994 with 8 percent but has since declined sharply, to 3 percent in 1998 and then to a mere 1 percent in the beginning of the current decade.<sup>5</sup> Such disappointing figures are even more striking in the light of the vast amounts spent on postwar reconstruction since 1992 and up to the latest war in July 2006 – exceeding US\$ 7 billion (or on average nearly US\$ 1750 for each Lebanese) in state capital investments<sup>6</sup>— which, in turn, fuelled a total public debt now topping 180 percent of GDP and an overall budget deficit averaging since 1993 around 20 percent of GDP – problems that are steadily taking on even more alarming proportions.<sup>7</sup> By all accounts, Makdisi argues, Lebanon’s postwar economic performance greatly lagged behind the ambitious growth targets identified in government plans for reconstruction drawn up in the early and mid-1990s, it disappointed most ordinary Lebanese’s hopes for improved living standards after the war, and, we may add, it equally contrasted with widely held optimism among international observers in the mid-1990s about chances for Beirut to regain its pre-war status as a thriving financial center.

Makdisi’s multifaceted explanation for this unfortunate state of affairs is not easily summarized. The main thread of his argument appears to build on a consensus among most students of Lebanon’s economy that point at Lebanon’s impressive pre-war growth figures and relative financial stability associated with conservative monetary policies, few or virtually no government restrictions and state interventions in the economy and a high degree of openness in terms of a free movement of goods and capital. Makdisi laments the fact that this “liberal environment” so characteristic of the pre-war era was accompanied with a series of socio-economic imbalances, including a seriously lopsided

distribution of income whether measured per capita or per region; all of which may indeed have “played a role in helping create a crisis situation” with political and, witnessing the outbreak of the Lebanese war in 1975, violent repercussions. (Makdisi, p. 28, 40) Yet despite these flaws, Lebanon’s pre-war economic performance excelled those of most Arab non-oil-producing countries following, in contrast, heavily inward-looking and public-sector-oriented economic policies. The virtues of Lebanese economic liberalism, Makdisi maintains, came to be overshadowed by, first, the massive destruction of material and human capital during the war and, more importantly, in the 1990s, by an expanding regulatory and interventionist role of the government unmatched by improved institutional capacities to meet the state’s expanding tasks pertaining reconstruction. (Makdisi pp. 163, 169) In short, in Makdisi’s view, “the dynamism of Lebanon’s private sector” came to be suffocated by incompetent and corrupt governments that not only failed to correct socio-economic inequities but that burdened the entire national economy with ill-advised debt and fiscal policies eating into the country’s overall growth figures.

Toufic Gaspard, an economist trained at the left-leaning Institute of Development Studies at Sussex University and formerly employed with the IMF, would not dispute Makdisi’s description of Lebanon’s alarming economic predicament. Nor, for that matter, would he quarrel with the notion that Lebanon’s economic performance may have benefited some but brought little prosperity to most. Yet in his thoughtful and perceptive study *A Political Economy of Lebanon, 1948-2002* Gaspard offers an analysis of these subjects that can be viewed as a critique of the very virtues Makdisi ascribes to economic liberalism and its alleged glory days in pre-war Lebanon. For Gaspard, unwieldy laissez-faire policies no longer form Lebanon’s squandered treasure

from the past but they lie at the root of its development failure, both in terms of equity and growth. Central to this argument are some key notions borrowed from post-Keynesian and Marxist economic thought whereby for “sustained development”, conceived as the transformation of non-capitalist economies into large-scale productive activity characterized by extensive waged labour, industrialization is viewed as essential. Accordingly, Gaspard’s diagnosis for the Lebanese economy is even more hard-hitting than that of Makdisi. Unlike in any sustainable capitalist economy, around half of the Lebanese workforce has remained outside the regularly waged sectors since the 1950s, both because of insufficient jobs and because alternative sources of income, mainly derived from characteristically large flows of remittances and predominant petty activity in agriculture and services, proved to be more easily available. (Gaspard, p. 86-99) In Gaspard’s view, the main reason for this is that Lebanon’s industrial sector, ideally employing “a core capitalist labor category” associated with high skills and productivity, failed to emerge to the extent it could function as an engine for sustained growth. (Gaspard, p. 87) Accordingly, Gaspard is not impressed by Lebanon’s pre-war economic performance. Between 1950 and 1974, real GDP per capita increased at an average annual rate of some 3 percent; about equal to the average and mediocre performance of less developed countries in general and less than the average growth rate per capita in any of the other Arab, non-oil economies in the Middle East except Egypt. (Gaspard, pp. 72-73) Gone too is what Makdisi described as Lebanon’s “dynamic” and “enterprising private sector” (Makdisi, p. 21) as, for Gaspard, high private consumption rates and entrepreneurs’ incessant risk aversion caused them to persistently fail in saving their profits

and channel them into productive investments. (Gaspard, p.150)

### MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

While for Makdisi liberal economic policies failed to be complemented by measures to address the socio-economic downsides of an otherwise strong performance, Gaspard blames Lebanon’s laissez-faire policies for the failure to transform Lebanon into a sustainable capitalist economy both in terms of equity and growth. This was not for a lack of opportunity. By looking back at Lebanon’s economic history, Gaspard views especially the period between 1920 and World War II as having constituted a set of conditions that were favorable to industrial expansion, including relatively high per capita incomes, low rates of illiteracy, the best developed infrastructure in the region and the largest share of manufacturing within national income. (Gaspard, p. 66) These favourable conditions were reinforced by expenditures and tariff protection by the Allied Forces then occupying Lebanon. Subsequently, regional political developments --including the destruction of Palestine as a regional trade hub, and political instability and etatist economic regimes in Arab neighboring countries—resulted in the inflow of abundant Arab capital. Yet as Lebanon shifted to its laissez-faire policies, exemplified by the lifting of all exchange rate restrictions and protectionist measures between 1948 and 1952, it failed to capitalize on these favorable conditions, and even undermined the level of industrial progress already made.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, laissez-faire remained the conservative force that, as long as external conditions allowed, kept Lebanon at best confined to its role as a conduit for foreign capital but which failed to become a tool for development. To use Polanyi’s famous coining of the industrial revolution in

Europe, Lebanon's "great transformation" failed to evolve because the Lebanese state foundered on its tasks to help it happen.<sup>9</sup>

For two authors who both deplore Lebanon's faltering "development" and who share many critical views on key periods and core notions of Lebanon's economic history,<sup>10</sup> their extent of disagreement is remarkable and, indeed, telling for the polarization of the general debate on this country's political economy. Not all divergences between Makdisi's and Gaspard's work originate in the paradigmatic disagreement touched on above. For instance, varying political inclinations appear to be at play when they assess the impact of the Palestinian question on Lebanon in having a largely positive effect for Gaspard, as it eliminated a commercial rival in Palestine and because it caused an inflow of Palestinian capital (Gaspard, p. 59), but a predominantly negative one for Makdisi as it settled Lebanon with a refugee burden that, in turn, encouraged a thriving (and presumably undesirable) informal sector while the PLO's political and military stance weighed heavily on Lebanon's domestic political scene. (Makdisi, p. 5) Varying use of statistical data may account for the different conclusions reached by the two authors on the performance of Lebanon's education system: under-performing for Gaspard as he measures the *relative decline* of Lebanon's advantage in this respect vis-à-vis the region over the years (Gaspard, pp. 83, 223); Encouraging, if precarious, for Makdisi as he highlights this country's educational levels in *absolute terms*, which are still superior to most countries in the region.<sup>11</sup> (Makdisi, p. 143) Differences in their broader views on the world economy also affect the two authors' analyses on the Lebanese economy, with Gaspard concentrating on Lebanon's national economy while Makdisi places Lebanon's economic predicament firmly in the context of globalization.

Accordingly, for Gaspard Lebanon has remained a case of stalled capitalist development, inter alia because of its reliance on remittances generated by Lebanese involved in capitalist production *outside* its borders. Coming from a leftist economist such an argument remains somewhat peculiar because it precludes the notion of a global distribution of production and labour as part and parcel of one --and a highly unequal-- global capitalist economy.<sup>12</sup> On a less theoretically informed and perhaps more pragmatic note, Makdisi praises Lebanon's "openness" to the outside world as a necessary condition for a good economic performance even if globalization entails the risk of losing autonomy over economic policy. (Makdisi, p. 171)

### DIRIGISM WITHOUT ETATISM

Regardless of the question whether laissez-faire may be viewed as being part of Lebanon's problem of underdevelopment or one of its solutions, two themes stand out that could shed light on some of Lebanon's unresolved issues in political economy. Firstly, both Gaspard and Makdisi fail to question their assumption that minimal state interference in Lebanon implies that economic activity is characterized by unbridled and free market exchange. The state may not overtly restrict or regulate the movement of goods and capital as in the neighbouring etatist regimes of the 1970s but there is a possibility that other agents or factors do. Listening to complaints by Lebanese businessmen and foreign investors reveals that they are much less troubled by typical market factors such as "domestic or foreign competition", "costs of labour" and "lack of domestic demand". Instead, many of these businessmen cite factors like "corruption", "government procedures" and "informal competition" as the biggest obstacles to doing business in

Lebanon.<sup>13</sup> What can be argued in this context is that highly selective state interventions, for example in the form of seemingly haphazard license procedures, combined with a heavy reliance on non-formal contacts or *wasta* among businessmen and between the latter and state officials facilitate access to economic opportunities for some and restrict it for others, thereby, among other factors, accounting for sluggish overall economic performance.<sup>14</sup> Against this background, Gaspard's unbridled market forces, which he characterizes as being unable to generate innovation and growth when left on their own devices, may be as much part of his imagination as that of the ideological free marketeers whom he criticizes. By the same token, Makdisi's dynamic private sector may be much less benign in what he describes as the repressed party in a binary struggle between energetic businessmen and the suffocating grip of Lebanon's post-war state. As Makdisi acknowledges in reference to the post-war era the boundary between the public realm and the private sector has been habitually crossed, manipulated and, in the process, become blurred. (Makdisi, p. 129) But while Makdisi views this phenomenon primarily in normative terms –by denouncing politicians for their abuse of public office and corruption<sup>15</sup>-- its far-reaching implications are left unsaid: Leading exponents of Lebanon's private sector appear to be not so much the victims of the state's expanding debt policies and red tape but they seem to have merged with the public sector when and where this suited them, and become its main beneficiaries. The particularistic social networks responsible for this state of affairs have proven to be vital in determining business opportunities, such as lucrative and weakly monitored reconstruction contracts, and in excluding contenders from accessing them, even or perhaps especially in the context of otherwise minimalist

economic state policies.<sup>16</sup> To exaggerate somewhat, post-war Lebanon's economic *dirigisme* appears not to have originated from the etatism so common in many other developing countries but rather from the social networks interconnecting public office and highly concentrated private capital.

### **“LAISSEZ-FAIRE” AS POLICY OR AS POLITICAL FAILURE?**

One may find some clues as to why social networks came to heavily regulate economic transactions by questioning the nature of Lebanon's “laissez-faire” in being an ideology translated into purposeful state policies. For Gaspard, the “economic liberalism” adhered to by Lebanon's political and economic elites closely resembles the neo-classical economic thought associated with ultra-liberal ideologists like Friedrich von Hayek who found his Lebanese counterpart in Michel Chiha (1891-1954). (Gaspard, p. 58) Accordingly, and throughout Lebanon's contemporary economic history, a relatively strong consensus on the “moral program” of non-interventionism caused Lebanese governments to opt for the “choice of the laissez-faire regime”. (Gaspard, pp. 58, 180) However, one may counter that Gaspard's views in this context appear excessively framed by his agenda aimed at using the Lebanese experience as a case-study in order to challenge neo-classical economic thought and the associated “Washington consensus” – dominant streams of thought advocating laissez-faire as the appropriate policy for growth anywhere. In contrast, Makdisi hints at an alternative analysis of Lebanese laissez-faire as not so much resulting from ideology translated into purposeful policy but as the outcome of systematic political immobilism. (Makdisi, p. 64) Lebanon's version of consociational decision-making, reformulated in the political settlement of Ta'if in 1989, contains the ingredients

of quasi-permanent institutional gridlock epitomized by greatly inclusive governing coalitions, exclusive governing by consensus and mutual veto powers, collective responsibility of the council of ministers, and extreme dispersal of power divided between the “three presidents” (the president of the Republic, the prime minister and the speaker of parliament), each supposedly representing Lebanon’s main confessional groups and their geographical distribution.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, also the theoretical literature on consociational decision-making generally frequently noted the resultant tendency of immobilism and institutional paralysis.<sup>18</sup>

Of particular relevance is the Lebanese principle of “collegial government” (*sirat al-hukm al-jama’iyya*), which rules that cabinet decisions are to be made on the basis of a “consensus”. If that is not possible, voting is supposed to take place with “fundamental issues” requiring a two-third majority.<sup>19</sup> The issue recently gained new currency when Hizbollah suspended its participation in the government in December 2005 in protest against taking cabinet decisions by vote instead of consensus.<sup>20</sup> Hizbullah’s position appears to have been informed by the putting to vote of controversial decisions. Most importantly, Hizbullah apparently fears that its delegates and allies in the cabinet may be outvoted regarding policies affecting its armed operations in south Lebanon.

If any conclusion can be drawn from post-Ta’if political decision-making then it is this system’s sheer impracticality in terms of governance as shown by its failure to produce purposeful policies regarding virtually all domains relevant to economic activity, ranging from the state regulation of the import of oil derivatives and pharmaceutical products to initiating a state-led development program for the country’s deprived regions Ba’albek,

Hermel and ‘Akkar. Hence, institutional deadlock, not neo-liberal conviction, appears to have forestalled a more activist state role in the economy. Indeed, even the presumed liberal consensus fell victim to its debilitating effects to the extent that policies usually associated with neo-liberal ideology, such as privatization, failed to materialize because Lebanon’s political system could not produce agreement on how –and in whose favour-- these pro-market measures were to be pursued. Political bickering, primarily between late Prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri and President Emile Lahoud, paralyzed attempts to privatize state owned enterprises in accordance with Lebanon’s commitments under the Paris II accords.<sup>21</sup> Other examples of the supposed “neo-liberal consensus” failing to translate into policy include the still unresolved debate on fully privatizing the Port of Beirut and the government’s failure to amend existing legislation in order to reflect, legalize and regulate the common practice of private companies importing oil in formal contravention of the state’s legal monopoly.

Against the background of Lebanon’s fragmented political landscape, institutional stalemate encouraged the strictly unconstitutional but routinized phenomenon of the “Troika” (constant bargaining and deal-making between the three presidents bypassing formal decision-making) and the de- facto partitioning of public resources between its members and between other political dignitaries. Government policies, in other words, came to be substituted by apportionment (*mukhasassa*), resulting in the seemingly contradictory coexistence of “laissez-faire” and tough restrictions on economic freedoms imposed by the tightly woven social networks of enterprising politicians. Not only state policies but also truly competitive markets and universalist state bureaucracies became Ta’if’s collateral damage.



## THE ATYPICAL FORTUNES OF THE BANQUE DU LIBAN

Makdisi interestingly reserves some praise for the Central Bank (Banque du Liban) as generally having been a positive exception to the otherwise substandard qualities and performance of public entities in Lebanon.<sup>22</sup> (Makdisi, p. 45, 147) The exception is imperfect, as also the Central Bank fell victim to patterns of patronage imposing political appointees on its payroll.<sup>23</sup> Yet in terms of dutifully carrying out its mandate the Central Bank's general performance is noteworthy and may give us clues to what went wrong in most other state institutions. Both Makdisi and Gaspard point out in some detail that the Central Bank was instrumental in issuing treasury bills to finance government expenditure on, among other things, post-war reconstruction. Yet one may wonder how this public entity managed to preserve its institutional integrity vis-à-vis a heterogeneous and predatory elite and its tendency of *mubasassa* associated with Ta'if's debilitating rules of decision-making. An explanation may be found in data provided by both authors indicating the steep profits made by the few Lebanese private banks dominating the treasury bills market. Gaspard points at the oligopolistic structure of the Lebanese banking industry, with the largest five banks controlling an average of 45 percent of total deposits in the period 1993-2002.<sup>24</sup> (Gaspard, p. 217) He adds that "during 1993-2002, the weighted annual yield on LL [Lebanese Pounds] TBs [treasury bills] averaged 18 percent, corresponding to a high real interest rate of 11 percent over a 10-year period. We estimate that at least half the 18 percent rate on LL-TBs, amounting to about US\$ 8.5 billion, was paid in excess of what the cost would have been in a normally operating market." (Gaspard,

p. 218) In a similar vein, Makdisi illustrates the large profits made by private banks in reference to data for 1998 showing that half of their interest income (totaling US\$ 3.8 billion) accrued from treasury bills. (Makdisi, pp. 114, 204 fn 53)

Lebanon's (and indeed Syria's) political elites are no stranger to private banking in Lebanon, either by direct or indirect ownership or by placing their assets in private banks against resultantly towering interest rates.<sup>25</sup> Gaspard correctly observes that the "government has embarked on a so-called reconstruction program that effectively involved massive financial transfers to the political elites and banks." (Gaspard, p. 220) Yet what is so unusual about these transfers is that following some initial and ill-fated attempts to also subject the Central Bank to the post-Ta'if practice of *mubasassa*,<sup>26</sup> Lebanese political elites had found in treasury bills a rare indivisible good that benefited them all. In contrast, those Lebanese citizens with no large disposable capital to invest in treasury bills, such as industrialists and agriculturalists, suffered because of the crowding out effects on the credit market and associated skyrocketing interest rates on loans. Yet returning to the question regarding the Central bank's institutional integrity, it seems to have been this background that fuelled an atypical convergence of the post-Ta'if elites' interests in the Central Bank's independence. Its main task, after all, is to effectively defend the Lebanese Pound in which the treasury bills are denoted. This would only be accomplished by maintaining high levels of impartiality, solvency and professionalism that virtually no other public institution in charge of no such collective goods managed to preserve.

## NON-FORMAL ECONOMICS

The tendency to ignore or downplay non-formal or quasi-formal



modes of political and economic organization described earlier is not unique to the two studies under review.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, as some have noted, economists in general rarely look beyond formal policy-making and official economic statistics for a host of reasons.<sup>28</sup> Obviously, this has serious implications for their analyses. To Makdisi's credit, Lebanon's "informal sector" is portrayed as comprising a significant part of the Lebanese economy. (Makdisi, p. 142) Yet at the same time he appears to downplay its significance by limiting his understanding of informal economic activities to those of "small-scale firms, the self-employed and unpaid workers." (Ibid.) Moreover, neither he nor Gaspard add any disclaimer to their repeated use of formal economic statistics, let alone make an attempt to correct these figures for unregistered or "informal" activities, thereby effectively presuming the latter to be negligible. Yet available estimates, cited elsewhere by Makdisi, suggest that, for example, Lebanon's illegal war economy – comprising the illegal trade in consumer goods, arms and drugs, and pillaging, ransoms and embezzlements from banks—may have been worth up to US\$ 15 billion between 1975-1990 –by all standards, big business.<sup>29</sup> Makdisi's reason for not taking such vast amounts into account when assessing Lebanon's economic "development" appears to be normative:

[T]he notion that Palestinian and Lebanese politico-military organizations provided employment in civilian and non-civilian pursuits and hence supported the national economy is one that cannot be given credence. This presumably positive economic aspect of their presence does not begin to compare with the negative economic aspect of the conflict in which they were engaged [...] (Makdisi, p. 53)

Makdisi may have a point in highlighting the undesirability of Lebanon's illicit economy but this does

not justify playing down its significance. In reference to Makdisi's rigid periodization of Lebanon's economic history in "pre-war", "war-", and "post-war" episodes, some could counter that these vast dimensions of its illegal war economy are rather exceptional exactly because they were reached during wartime that witnessed the collapse of state authority. However, as referred to earlier, *mubasassa* and elites' social networks have rendered the restoration of state authority since Ta'if to be incomplete at best. Phenomena like widespread --and unpunished-- tax evasion, persistent violations of environmental laws, and rampant political corruption alone appear to confirm the still shaky foundations of Lebanon's "post-war" political economy. One is left wondering, then, what exactly can official economic statistics like Lebanon's GDP tell us about how this country's political economy really evolved.

To this should be added the unreliability of official data in reflecting even what is left of Lebanon's *formal* economy. In the mid-1990s Lebanese entrepreneurs and bankers complained that the Lebanese Central Bank, the World Bank and private rating companies including the Economist Intelligence Unit simply quoted each other's economic estimates while losing track of the original source of the estimate.<sup>30</sup> Only in 2004 became Lebanon a participant in the IMF's General Data Dissemination System, a framework designed for the production and dissemination of complete sets of reliable economic data, based on international methodologies. Nevertheless the IMF continues to complain about Lebanon's "remaining shortcomings in the coverage and quality of economic and social statistics".<sup>31</sup>

Yet even the fiercest skeptic of formal economic data cannot deny Lebanon's current economic dire straits. Also its non-formal economy can be

said to suffer from a serious recession, as opportunities for roaming off corrupt profit margins from state expenditure on reconstruction can be safely assumed to have declined together with the drying up of total public capital investments. Capital expenditure as part of total government spending has declined rapidly over the last few years and currently stands at around a mere 5 percent. Most government expenditure goes into debt- and interest payments and public sector salaries –spending items that are hard to exploit for purposes of grand corruption.<sup>32</sup> Other crude indicators also speak volumes about the economic slump prior to the latest war that only exacerbated it. Both authors correctly observe that ever since the collapse of the silk industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century times of recession triggered the emigration of many Lebanese to parts of the world where they were more able to make ends meet. Between 1860 and 1914 about a quarter of the population, 250,000 residents, are estimated to have emigrated to Egypt, the Americas and West Africa. (Gaspard, p. 48) Makdisi cites estimates of extensive emigration of Lebanese residents during the war years at varying between 500,000 to about 895,000. (Makdisi, p. 48) Political factors and violence, of course, constituted another major push factor for emigration. In this respect, and judging from the estimated 1.28 million émigrés for the period 1991-2000, the post-Ta’if score on most or all of these variables can be said to have been dismal at best, at least in the view of those packing their suitcases.<sup>33</sup> The pace of emigration increased sharply after 1995, the year that the economic recession is generally believed to have begun in earnest. Strikingly, the estimated number of émigrés during the 1990s is higher than that of total émigrés during the war. It is against this background that the question what can be done to boost Lebanon’s economy has become more pertinent than ever.

## AFTER SYRIA: MOMENTUM FOR CHANGE?

Immediately following the Syrian withdrawal in April 2005 many Lebanese felt a momentum for change. Najib Miqati’s call for a national dialogue on the economy, referred to in the introduction to this essay, was only one response to this perceived momentum to finally and effectively pursue drastic reforms.<sup>34</sup> One may suspect that the general optimism was at least partly derived from a reading of events in Lebanon since the Paris II donor conference in February 2001. The then agreed economic reform package, which included privatization and administrative reforms, is widely viewed as having been thwarted by a political stalemate involving late Prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri and the staunchly pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud.<sup>35</sup> The logic seems to have been that since the Syrians were now gone, the door to reforms would be wide open.

Assessing the probability for future reforms following Syria’s withdrawal calls for, *inter alia*, a balanced and detailed appraisal of the role Syria has played in Lebanon’s economy. Research on this subject is rare and mostly concentrates on the formal aspects of contemporary Lebanese-Syrian economic relations.<sup>36</sup> Yet one will not find much either on this theme in the studies by Makdisi and Gaspard. Written before the “Beirut Spring”, both books are conspicuously brief on the economic significance of the Syrian presence. Gaspard suffices by claiming a negative moral effect of “Lebanon’s loss of independence” on the quality of governance:

Since 1990, Lebanese governments have deferred, if not lost, much of their power to Syria, which effectively controls Lebanon’s political institutions and security apparatus. Indeed, development, no matter how defined, is a moral undertaking [...]. By relinquishing authority over one’s

affairs, one relinquishes responsibility and accountability, and hence the moral basis for decision-making. (Gaspard, p. 220-221)

No matter how persuasive this argument may sound to some, Gaspard does not substantiate it and fails to show what this suggested causality between foreign occupation and bad governance looked like in everyday decision-making on “development”. This is not to suggest that further study on Gaspard’s claimed causality should not be pursued. In fact, if substantiated, it may shed some light on numerous other cases of failing governance including, perhaps, in US-occupied Iraq. However, when phrased in the general terms used by Gaspard, the hypothesis that foreign occupation generally causes bad or anti-developmental governance cannot be easily maintained. For example, some observers of East Asian history make the (contested) argument that the Japanese occupation of South Korea (1910-1945), however gruesome and costly in terms of the loss of human lives, prepared the ground for this country’s economic breakthrough.<sup>37</sup>

Readers will be equally dissatisfied with Makdisi’s now unfashionable argument that Syria played the role of “influential arbiter” preventing “domestic political flare-ups as well as dormant, unresolved or partly resolved political issues [...] to totally disrupt the domestic political process, uneven as it has sometimes been.” (Makdisi, p. 91) One reason for the unpopularity of this argument, of course, is that Syrian officials turned this argument into a veiled threat to deliberately upset Lebanon’s stability if forced to withdraw.<sup>38</sup> According to the Lebanese anti-Syrian opposition these threats were put into action in 2005-2006 as shown by a series of political assassinations and bombings allegedly carried out by Syrian intelligence in Lebanon. More generally, Makdisi’s argument can be easily countered by pointing at the major internal political

fold-lines in Lebanon since the early 1990s that were *caused* by the Syrian presence even regardless of Syria’s purported intentions to act as an arbiter.

One particularly controversial aspect of Syria’s economic role in Lebanon relates to the exact magnitude and impact of a sizeable Syrian workforce employed in Lebanon mainly during the 1990s, mostly without work permits or any form of registration. Makdisi cites estimates putting their number in the mid-1990s at about 450,000, one third of the active population for 1997, but declining to 225,000 in the year 2000.<sup>39</sup> (Makdisi, p. 143) Despite these large numbers Makdisi downplays their impact on, for example, unemployment because he asserts that Lebanese workers would be unwilling to carry out their unskilled jobs anyway or be reluctant to accept the very low wages Syrian labourers received. (Makdisi, p. 144) The latter, in turn, can either be interpreted in Lebanon’s favour or at its expense, depending on what social class’ perspective one chooses. Accordingly, low wages for Syrian labour may have put down Lebanese expenditures on reconstruction works both in the public and private sector, but repressed general wage levels for unskilled Lebanese labour and, hence, have contributed to their hardships. Unsurprisingly, pro-Syrian Lebanese have propagated the first view. For example, Nasri Khury, general secretary of the joint Syrian-Lebanese Higher Council, claimed that the departure of cheap Syrian labour would cost Lebanon US\$ 2 billion a year in extra wages.<sup>40</sup> The second interpretation was not lost on Lebanese Shi’ite workers who indeed expressed resentment vis-à-vis Syrian labourers who are said to accept as little as US\$ 6 per day while Lebanese day workers charge on average US\$ 20.<sup>41</sup>

For Gaspard the issue of Syrian seasonal or day labourers appears to be of little relevance altogether as his conceptual toolkit rubricates this sort of

employment as “non-capitalist” and contributing little to “development” anyway. (Gaspard, p. 169) However formulated, both authors’ downplaying of the role of Syrian labourers stands at odds with the views of some fellow Lebanese economists and parts of the Lebanese public who do lament the alleged negative impact of unregistered Syrian labour in terms of employment, loss of tax revenues, free-riding on public hospital facilities, and causing significant capital outflows. The Lebanese-Canadian economist Kamal Dib, for example, estimated Syrian workers’ remittances from Lebanon to Syria between 1993 and 2005 at US\$ 7 billion.<sup>42</sup> That seems excessively high. Taking the higher estimate of 500,000 Syrian workers and assuming they were *permanently* employed in day jobs in Lebanon in this period (which is over-optimistic in assuming continuous employment), each Syrian worker in Lebanon would this way have managed to approach on average an income of US\$ 1,166 per year; almost the equivalent of Syria’s 2005 average national income per capita estimated at US\$ 1,200.<sup>43</sup> Against this background it can be safely assumed that low-income Syrians would have been willing to work in Lebanon against much lower wages. Also overlooked by Dib is that an estimate of Syrian capital transfers from Lebanon should be offset against the amount of Syrian deposits in Lebanese banks estimated at some US\$3-4 billion.<sup>44</sup> In the spring of 2005, and again in February-March 2006, Syrian officials warned that Syrian depositors would withdraw or were already withdrawing their assets from Lebanon in protest against anti-Syrian sentiment and policies in Beirut. But this massive withdrawal of Syrian assets does not seem to have occurred as immediate deposit outflows remained within a 5 percent range.<sup>45</sup> For the year 2005 as a whole, Lebanese banks recorded even a 2.5 percent increase in their total assets.<sup>46</sup>

Identity politics or even racist attitudes are undoubtedly at play in some of the more alarmist assessments of Lebanon’s financial losses attributed to Syria’s occupation. But simply brushing them aside as irrelevant seems equally unsatisfactory. For one, the Syrian labour issue may for long have been a motivating factor, among others, for the Syrian regime to maintain its control over Lebanon in order to ensure that a large part of its surplus labour continued to be absorbed elsewhere without upsetting socio-economic stability at home. The exact magnitude of unemployment in Syria is everybody’s guess but it is clearly high and increasing. Some reputed Syrian economists put it at more than 20 percent of the workforce.<sup>47</sup> According to a Syrian government newspaper, there are annually 300,000 new jobseekers.<sup>48</sup> Attempts to cushion the social impact of Syria’s economic dire straits may also have motivated Syria’s policies regarding official and/or unofficial (i.e. smuggled) agricultural exports to Lebanon that occurred unhindered by any tariffs or regulations and that capitalized on huge bilateral differentials in wages and other costs partly associated with Syrian state subsidies on agriculture. Again Gaspard and Makdisi say very little on the impact of this trade. Both authors register a decline in Lebanon’s agricultural sector and rightly attribute this to structural economic factors in a trend pre-dating the Syrian presence, including high production costs and unfavourable exchange rates eroding Lebanon’s terms of trade.<sup>49</sup> Yet they do not mention the high probability that Syrian imports under these unruly conditions of cross-border trade may have contributed significantly to this decline. Again hard figures are unavailable, but the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) described Lebanon as “Syria’s largest unofficial trade partner” in agricultural goods, therefore suggesting that the phenomenon will have had a significant

impact on Lebanon's agricultural sector.<sup>50</sup>

Some Lebanese political activists, mainly those belonging to the anti-Syrian opposition, dubbed the "14 March Alliance", claim that the economic costs of Syria's presence were mainly incurred by the illicit or quasi-illicit gains derived from Syria's political influence and corruption involving Syrian politicians and senior officials with links to Lebanon. Both Lebanese and Syrian observers have viewed the Bank al-Madina scandal, a dramatic bank failure allegedly caused by money laundering and sparked by rumours about a liquidity crisis in early 2003, as epiphenomenal of Syria's corrupt diversion of Lebanese public and private funds. The Lebanese daily *An-Nahar* published documents purportedly showing involvement by senior Syrian officials, including former Syrian Minister of Defense Mustafa Tlass and former head of Syrian Intelligence in Lebanon Rustum Ghazaleh, in money laundering at United Credit Bank, a subsidiary of Bank al-Madina.<sup>51</sup> The UN investigation commission into Hariri's murder even linked the Bank al-Madina scandal to the assassination by allegedly suggesting financial motives for the crime<sup>52</sup> despite denials by Riyyad Salameh, the Lebanese Central Bank governor, of such a link.<sup>53</sup> But regardless of the scandal's exact ramifications, Syria's critics in Lebanon argue that it merely formed the tip of an iceberg. The list of alleged corruption and/or economic crimes involving Syrian officials and their offspring (in Syria dubbed the affluent *amlad al-mas'uliyin* – the sons of those in power) is lengthy indeed and includes accusations of bribery, trading in stolen cars, extortion, operating illegal telephone companies, rigging tenders to obtain public infrastructure contracts, diverting custom duties at the sea- and airports of Beirut, obtaining legally sanctioned monopolies by exerting political influence, running illegal

quarries, and importing bootlegged generic drugs.<sup>54</sup> Predictably, however, and given the murky and contentious nature of the purported transactions involved, most of these accusations fail to offer much in terms of substantiation. Perhaps for this reason, Makdisi does not take such allegations very seriously. Lebanon's problems, he argues, including corruption and inefficient government, "[...] cannot be blamed on the continued and substantial Syrian influence in the political affairs of Lebanon after the war [...]" since these issues form "[...] a constant theme of Lebanon's development in the second half of the twentieth century." (Makdisi, p. 165) Again, if readers are looking for an exhaustive review of Syria's role, such sweeping statements are unlikely to persuade, regardless of what eventually their validity may turn out to be.

A more informed appraisal of Syria's involvement in corruption in Lebanon might be gained, firstly, by appreciating the importance of accessing Lebanese resources in the recent internal regime struggles in Damascus and, secondly, by drawing up detailed accounts of the use of Syrian political influence in major sectors of Lebanon's economy. As for the first issue, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his associates appear to have been convinced that their rivals in Syria itself, those generally associated with the "old guard" including recently exiled Vice-President Abdul Halim Khaddam, the late former Intelligence chief in Lebanon Ghazi Kana'an and the exiled army General Hikmet Shihabi, boosted their patronage networks against the president and his relatives by partnering with Lebanese entrepreneurs and politicians in shady but lucrative businesses in Lebanon.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, Syrian officials have had a hand in various economic activities in Lebanon furthering their personal interests. We know, for example, that in road works Syrian mixed public-private companies obtained multi-million dollar state



contracts on highly dubious terms violating fair tendering practice and against rewards that exceeded those obtained by Lebanese companies working on similar projects.<sup>56</sup> There are also strong reasons to believe that Lebanon's bill for importing refined oil derivatives (both for the public and private sectors) has been pushed up for over a decade because of Syria's strong support to Lebanese senior officials. The latter, using their discretionary powers, furthered the interests of a cartel of oil importers and thwarted rival initiatives to rehabilitate Lebanon's own refineries in an attempt to diversify import routes away from Syria's oil installations in Baniyas and Homs (and, this way, break open the monopoly on these imports).<sup>57</sup> Lebanese observers knowledgeable about this country's highly lucrative quarrying sector have pointed at Syrian ownership of mines violating environmental regulations and licensing rules.<sup>58</sup>

All in all, Syrian political influence in the Lebanese economy and its involvement in corruption can be said to have been considerable and to have paid off. The commonly held view that Syrian leaders generally respected a neatly defined division of labour – Lebanon's political and foreign affairs to the Syrians and economic policy and reconstruction to late Prime Minister Hariri<sup>59</sup>—is simply incorrect. Hariri's former advisor Nihad al-Mashnuq described in a recent interview how, already in 1992, the late prime minister sought “exceptional powers” regarding economic reconstruction policies in order to be insulated from the Lebanese Parliament stuffed with Syria's allies.<sup>60</sup> According to Al-Mashnuq, the Syrian leadership denied Hariri's request to this effect. Yet the precise extent to which Syria's economic interventions harmed the Lebanese economy and contributed to undermining its public institutions can only be assessed by a detached and balanced analysis of these and other instances of Syria's cashing in on its

presence and influence in Lebanon; an endeavor unlikely to be effectively pursued soon, given the continuing hold onto power by Syria's current and past accomplices in Lebanon. Thanks to the UN investigation into Hariri's assassination and the arrest in March 2006 of one of the alleged perpetrators of money laundering and embezzlement, Rana Quleilat, in Brazil, only the Bank al-Madina affaire can be expected to generate new and revealing data on Syria's role in corruption in Lebanon. The details of Syria's alleged involvement in most other corrupt activities will probably never be known.

### PROSPECTS FOR REFORM?

A momentum for political change may genuinely be felt—and acted upon—regardless whether its exact ramifications are real or imagined. However, Lebanese critics of Syria's past influence who expected the Syrian withdrawal to have removed all or the main obstacles to economic reform will likely be disappointed, and probably already are. Following the withdrawal, Lebanon's balance of power has changed and its social networks that determine access to economic opportunity have been adjusted. But Lebanon's post-war political settlement, being at the same time a consequence and a warped implementation of the Ta'if formula for power sharing, continues channeling these changes at the expense of state institutions' capacities to produce clearly defined and authoritative policies. Indeed, more than one year after Syria's withdrawal, and prior to the latest war, there was little sign of any economic government policy at all, with political stalemate even preventing the legally required adoption of a national budget for the years 2005 and 2006.<sup>61</sup> Lacking serious modifications to the excessively consensus-based and inclusionary approach to public decision-making, Lebanon's economy will likely continue



to be typified by the apparent paradoxes that have proven to be so detrimental to its growth and development: “Laissez-faire” without competitive markets; political pluralism without democracy; *dirigisme* without a strong state; and entrepreneurship without capitalist accumulation. Makdisi and Gaspard both suggest an array of policy reforms hardly anyone could quarrel with, including stronger and better-coordinated state measures in favour of local industry, education, regional and rural development, and against environmental degradation, income inequality and corruption. Yet what these proposals highlight is the urgent need to better document and understand the political constraints that have been at play in reaching at any sort of effective policy in post-war Lebanon. The country may need an “economic and developmental Ta’if”<sup>62</sup> but this is unlikely to produce the required reforms when reduced to a mere appendix to the Document of National Reconciliation of 1989. Ultimately, it has been this document and its reading by Lebanon’s political class that are at the root of Lebanon’s gridlocked political settlement and, indirectly, its economic malaise.

Makdisi and Gaspard have written two analytically informed studies on Lebanon’s political economy that were thus far curiously lacking. Anyone participating in the projected “national dialogue” on Lebanon’s economy will undoubtedly benefit from them while academics with an interest in Lebanon gained two major reference works. Also novel to the two authors’ approach is their attempt to place Lebanon’s economy in a comparative and theoretical perspective, thereby breaking the tradition of relatively dull and excessively descriptive monographs on Lebanon’s economy published in the past. But laudable as such, the wider ambitions of these two studies fail to be fully realized. For example, Gaspard treats his case study of Lebanon’s

“laissez-faire” regime as providing evidence for the general undesirability of pursuing the neo-classical economic thought repackaged in the “Washington consensus” and adhered to by the World Bank and the IMF. Yet some will counter with some justification that since the mid-1990s the “new” or “augmented” Washington consensus has drifted away from neo-classical economics by incorporating many of the institutional and political variables, and qualifiers to neo-classical economics, highlighted by Gaspard. And yet better results in terms of economic development are still doubtful at best.<sup>63</sup> Makdisi claims that his work contributes to the general academic debate on “economic greed versus grievance”<sup>64</sup> in explaining the causes and duration of civil wars by his exploration of the economic correlates of Lebanon’s sectarian divides as opposed to the ethnic conflicts dominating this debate. (Makdisi, chapter 5) Yet in terms of empirical investigation Makdisi’s arguments on the socio-economic causes of or contributing factors to Lebanon’s wars form the weakest and least explored part of his book. All the same, Lebanon is finally back on the map of comparative political economy.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> “The gateway to economic reform and development requires national consensus, which could be called a Ta’if for the economy and for development.” Najib Miqati cited in *Al-Hayat*, 17 June 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Author’s interview in Beirut, 19 July 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Author’s email exchange with Sami Atallah, 27 January 2006.

<sup>4</sup> In a poll held during the parliamentary elections in May and June 2005, many respondents identified economy-related issues, like “help creating job opportunities and halting emigration” and “fighting corruption”, as the most pressing priorities for the new government, respectively 28 percent and 22 percent. See Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and Statistics Lebanon, *al-Istithla’ al-Labiq*, Beirut, May-June 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Estimated and projected GDP growth rates by the International Monetary Fund for Lebanon in 2005 and 2006 are, respectively, 0 and 3 percent.

See

<http://www.imf.org/external/country/LBN/>

The latest war of July-August 2006 will, of course, have made the latter forecast too optimistic. See the article by Bassam Fattouh and Joachim Kolb elsewhere in this volume.

<sup>6</sup> This figure excludes state capital investments managed by other state institutions than the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR). See CDR, *Progress Report Report 2005*, Beirut, July 2005. For the Lebanon's population has been used a rough estimate of 4 million.

<sup>7</sup> The International credit rating agency Moody's Investors Service recently estimated Lebanon's gross public debt to have reached 727 percent of government revenues in 2005; the highest level in the world. Cited in Audi Bank, *The Lebanon Weekly Monitor*, 23-28 January 2006.

<sup>8</sup> Gaspard considers an official decree dated 6 November 1948 and authorizing a free foreign exchange market and relaxing most foreign exchange controls as the start of Lebanon's "laissez-faire regime". Gaspard, p. 143.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*, Beacon Press, 1944.

<sup>10</sup> To illustrate, both authors praise the reign of Fu'ad Shihab (1958-1964) as a welcome, "developmentalist" interlude to the prevailing government passivity in designing and implementing economic, financial and fiscal policies to spur growth and development. See Makdisi, p. 12, Gaspard, p. 143.

<sup>11</sup> See also UNDP, Lebanon, *National Human Development Report 2001-2002*, at <http://www.undp.org.lb/programme/governance/advocacy/nhdr/nhdr0102/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1979).

<sup>13</sup> See Atallah, S., *Roadblocks to Recovery. Institutional Obstacles Facing the Private Sector in Lebanon*, (Beirut, 1998, unpublished).

<sup>14</sup> I developed this argument into more detail in: Reinoud Leenders, "Nobody Having Too Much to Answer For: Laissez-Faire, Networks and Postwar Reconstruction in Lebanon", in: Steven Heydemann (ed), *Networks of Privilege in the Middle East: The Politics of Economic Reform Revisited*, (Palgrave/Macmillan, New York, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> On the relation between widespread corruption—defined as use of public office for private benefit—and eroding public-private boundaries in the context of institution-building in post-war Lebanon see also: Reinoud Leenders, "In Search of the State: The Politics of Corruption in Post-War Lebanon", (May 2004), unpublished paper available at <http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.e.c.leenders/>

<sup>16</sup> This regulative quality of social networks has also been suggested in the context of "informal markets and the shadow state" in Africa. See

William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of the stalemate producing traits of the Ta'if Accord and subsequent constitutional amendments see Joseph Maïla, *The Document of National Understanding: A Commentary*, (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, May 1992).

<sup>18</sup> See: Pierre L. van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, (New York/London: 1981), p. 189; Adriano Pappalardo, "The Conditions for Consociational Democracy: a Logical and Empirical Critique", in: *European Journal of Political Research*, 9, 1981, p. 368; Ira Scholten, "Does Consociationalism Exist? A Critique of the Dutch Experience", in: Richard Rose, (ed), *Electoral Participation, A Comparative Analysis*, (London: 1980), p. 334; Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy, Participation and Opposition*, (New Haven: 1971), p. 119.

<sup>19</sup> Ta'if Accord, I, 2D.6. For an English translation of the Ta'if Accord see *The Beirut Review*, spring 1990.

<sup>20</sup> See Hassan Nasrallah's statements cited in *Al-Balad*, 18 December 2005.

<sup>21</sup> See Yusef Estephan, *Ta'thir Mu'tamma Paris II fi Lubnan*, (Shamali & Shamali, Beirut, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the Central Bank's ability to preserve its relative independence during the war see Ghassan al-'Ayyash, *'Azma al-Maliyya al'Ama fi Lubnan, Qissat al-Inhiyar an-Naqdi*, (The Consulting Center for Studies and Documentation, Beirut: 1997), pp. 170 ff.

<sup>23</sup> According to the Economist magazine, Lebanon sustains one of the highest number of Central Bank employees in the world relative to its population size; 32 per 100,000 inhabitants compared to, for example, 3 in the United Kingdom. Cited by Louis Hobeika in *The Daily Star*, 30 January 2006.

<sup>24</sup> For corresponding data see Makdisi, p. 113.

<sup>25</sup> See Reinoud Leenders, *Divided We Rule: Institution Building and Corruption in Post-War Lebanon*, (provisional title, forthcoming at Cambridge University Press).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> I use the term "non-formal" instead of "informal" to distinguish my argument from Makdisi's understanding. See below.

<sup>28</sup> See Carolyn Nordstrom, *Shadows of War – Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (University of California Press, 2004), pp. 209-237.

<sup>29</sup> Makdisi's sources on Lebanon's war economy are taken from Michel Morqos in *An-Nabab*, 15 October 1990 and George Corm, "The War System: Militia hegemony and the Reestablishment of the State", in: Deirdre Collings (ed), *Peace for Lebanon? From War to Reconstruction*, (Rynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> Author's interviews in Beirut, July 1995.

<sup>31</sup> IMF, *Lebanon – 2005 Article IV Consultation Discussions Preliminary Conclusions*, 28 October 2005.

<sup>32</sup> See Audi Bank, *Quarterly Economic Report*, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2005, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Makdisi takes the estimated number from an unpublished paper by Boutros Labaki (2001) See Makdisi, p. 209, ftn 6.

<sup>34</sup> Noteworthy in this context is that the parliamentary elections of April-May 2005 showed one of the main contestants, the current led by Michel Aoun, issuing a rare (if widely criticized) elections program suggesting a host of general measures to deal with Lebanon's economic, political and social problems. See *Reform Program, FPM Political Program*, May 2005 printed in the *Daily Star*, 16 June 2005. Hizbullah, hitherto the only party with a written program, this time issued none. Seemingly prompted by a perception of momentum a group of students from three Lebanese universities drafted an EU-sponsored "Youth Action Plan" listing "national priorities", including economic reforms, for Lebanon's future. American University of Beirut, Université Saint Joseph, Lebanese University, *European Neighbourhood Policy, Youth Action Plan for Lebanon*, June 2005, [http://www.dellbn.ccc.eu.int/docs/Plan\\_daction\\_Etudiants.doc](http://www.dellbn.ccc.eu.int/docs/Plan_daction_Etudiants.doc).

<sup>35</sup> For an overview of the disappointing progress made on the reforms formulated in Paris II see Marwan Iskander, *The Lebanese Economy 2004-2005 and Hariri's Legacy*, (Marwan Iskander & Associates, Beirut 2005), pp. 257-280.

<sup>36</sup> A good example is Albert Dagher's otherwise well-researched *Lubnan wa Suriyya: At-Tabdiyyat al-Iqtisadiyya wa As-Siyasa al-Matluba*, (Dar An-Nahar, Beirut, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> For a brief overview see Columbia University, East Asian Curriculum Project, at [http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/webcourse/key\\_p\\_oinks/kp\\_11.htm](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/webcourse/key_p_oinks/kp_11.htm).

<sup>38</sup> See for example the arguments made by Bahjat Sulayman, a senior Syrian intelligence chief who was demoted in June 2005, in *As-Safir*, 15 May 2003.

<sup>39</sup> His source is an unpublished paper by Albert Dagher presented at a UNDP conference in January 2000. See Makdisi, p. 209, ftn 7. Dagher's estimates are slightly less than those provided by official Lebanese sources. The Lebanese Ministry of Labour recently estimated the total number at 300,000-500,000. However, the sectoral breakdown (suggesting that only 7 percent of such workers are employed in the industrial sector, which includes construction) contradicts conventional wisdom about the large concentration of Syrians in construction; it is therefore possible that this study –and Dagher's—underestimate the total number of

Syrian migrant workers. See *At-Thawra*, 28 March 2005.

<sup>40</sup> See *As-Safir*, 18 April 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Author's interviews in ad-Dhahyeh, Beirut, April-June 2005.

<sup>42</sup> See *An-Nahar*, 8 March 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Syrian income data are the World Bank's estimates at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/SYRIANARABEXTN/0,,menuPK:310553~pagePK:141159~piPK:141110~theSitePK:310548,00.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Author's interview with Lebanese banker Ghassan al-'Ayyash in Beirut, May 2005.

<sup>45</sup> IMF, *Lebanon – 2005 Article IV Consultation Discussions Preliminary Conclusions*.

<sup>46</sup> See *The Daily Star*, 21 January 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Author's interview with Nabil Sukkar in Damascus, July 2003.

<sup>48</sup> See *Tishrin*, 7 May 2003.

<sup>49</sup> For more details see Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture, *Istratijiyyah at-Tanmiyyah az-Zira'yya 2005-2009*.

<sup>50</sup> FAO, *Syrian Agriculture at the Crossroads*. Rome, 2003.

<sup>51</sup> See *An-Nahar*, 2 July 2005.

<sup>52</sup> An explicit reference to the Bank al-Madina's role in Hariri's assassination was purportedly erased from the final version of the UN Commission's second report. See Mehlis Report on the Hariri Assassination, restored unexpurgated version [sic], 21 October 2005, at [http://www.mideastweb.org/mehlis\\_report.htm](http://www.mideastweb.org/mehlis_report.htm). The Commission's third report states more ambiguously that it views the Bank al-Madina scandal as a possible lead requiring further investigation. See *Third Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission established pursuant Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005), 1636 (2005), and 1644 (2005)*, Beirut, 15 March 2006, p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> Salameh argued that the Bank al-Madina scandal was dealt with long before the plotting for the assassination started. See interview in *Al-Hayat*, 11 February 2006.

<sup>54</sup> Joe Faddoul, a Lebanese researcher, prepared a brief study on Syria's alleged extortion rackets and corrupt networks in Lebanon. He presented his report to the Foreign Relations Committee of the French Parliament. See: Joe Faddoul, *Etude sur la corruption au Liban*, 22 December 2004, available at [http://www.metransparent.com/texts/joe\\_faddoul\\_etude\\_corruption\\_au\\_liban.htm](http://www.metransparent.com/texts/joe_faddoul_etude_corruption_au_liban.htm)

<sup>55</sup> See International Crisis Group, *Syria After Lebanon, Lebanon After Syria*, 12 April 2005, pp. 28-29. Recently Khaddam retaliated by accusing Bashar's associates of their own corrupt links to Lebanon. See interview with *Al-'Arabiyah*, 30 December 2005.

<sup>56</sup> See Reinoud Leenders (forthcoming), Op. Cit.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> See for example Tom Pierre Najem, *Lebanon's Renaissance, The Political Economy of Reconstruction*, (Ithaca Press, Reading, 2000), p. 223.

<sup>60</sup> See interview in *Al-Hayat*, 12 May 2005.

<sup>61</sup> For more details see Reinoud Leenders, "How UN Pressure on Hizballah Impedes Lebanese Reform", *Middle East Report Online*, 23 May 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Najib Miqati cited in *Al-Hayat*, 17 June 2005. For an earlier proposal to this effect see André Chaïban, "Les aspects économiques de Taef: une doctrine économique?" in: *Travaux et Jours*, no. 59 Spring 1997.

<sup>63</sup> See Dani Rodrik, "Goodbye Washington Consensus, Hello Washington Confusion?", Paper prepared for the *Journal of Economic Literature*, Harvard University, January 2006, at <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~drodrik/Lessons%20of%20the%201990s%20review%20JEL.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> For an overview see Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, (Lynne Reinner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2000).

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### HIZBULLAH: IRANIAN SURROGATE OR INDEPENDENT ACTOR?

Joseph E. Alagha

*The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*

Leiden: Amsterdam University Press, 2006

Nizar A. Hamzeh

*In the Path of Hizbullah*

Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004

#### Reviewed by Rola el-Husseini\*

Public discourse in the West on the recent conflict between Hizbullah and Israel stipulates exceptionally strong ties between Iran, Syria and the Party of God. These claims demand a careful analysis. Two recently published books (Hamzeh 2004, Alagha 2006) are useful in disentangling the somewhat spurious threads connecting this triad. These two volumes are especially helpful in decoding the nature of the relations

between the Islamic Republic and Hizbullah.

In his book *In the Path of Hizbullah*, Nizar Hamzeh succinctly examines the emergence of Hizbullah, its ideology, and organizational structure. Hamzeh also looks at the Party's social service activities, its "resistance" acts since its inception, and its political role in Lebanon, especially after 1992. In contrast, Joseph Alagha's study, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology* looks at the history of the party and many related issues, especially Hizbullah's linkages with Iran and Syria; however, Alagha concentrates on the development of its ideology since its emergence and until 2005.

When it comes to Hizbullah's main doctrine, both authors have emphasized the Party's subscription to the Iranian theory of *nilayat al-faqih* or "guardianship of the jurisprudent", put forth by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. This subscription to the Guardianship of the Jurisprudent is the most substantial evidence of an ideological connection between Iran and Hizbullah.

### DOCTRINAL RELATIONS: THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE JURISPRUDENT

The modern political interpretation of the doctrine was established in the book *Islamic Government* by Ayatollah Khomeini, where he sets out his theories

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concerning the role of the clergy in government and society. It was under this doctrine that Khomeini took power in Iran as Supreme Leader. However, he did not originate the doctrine itself. Indeed, Khomeini, “generalized the early *Ousuli* arguments, which were designed to establish the legal and religious authority of the Shi’ite *mujtaheds*, to eliminate the duality of religious and temporal authority.”<sup>1</sup>

Alagha explains how the concept was pioneered by Ali Bin Husayn al-Karaki (1465-1533), was elaborated by Shahid al-Thani (1506-1558), by Muhammad Baqer Bihbahani (1706-1792) and by Ahmad Naraqī (1771-1829). The latter “was the first to recognize the faqih’s right in political authority... [and] was the first to stipulate that the political, religious, and social authority of the Hidden Imam can be transferred to and vested in the faqih.”<sup>2</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the leading *marja’* (source of emulation) in Iran, Muhammad Hussein Na’ini (1860-1936) “stressed *wilayat al-umma ala nafsiba* (the governance of the umma by itself) as a legitimate right in the period of the Greater Occultation.”<sup>3</sup> In the latter part of the twentieth century Ayatollah Khomeini then “having firmly rejected the separation of religion and Politics ... argued that in the absence of the divinely inspired Imam, sovereignty devolves upon qualified jurists or the Shi’ite religious leaders. It is, therefore, the religious leaders, as the authoritative interpreters of the Sacred Law, who are entitled to rule.”<sup>4</sup> Alagha points out that “Khumayni’s contribution to wilayat al-Faqih lies in the joining of the *Imama* (Imamate) and *Wilaya* in one person for the first time after the Greater Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, which made possible, in the absence of the Hidden Imam, the establishment of an Islamic order.”<sup>5</sup>

The importance of the doctrine of the guardianship of the jurisprudent has been dutifully noted by Nizar Hamzeh in the following statement:

“seizing upon Khomeini’s themes of obedience, Hizbullah leaders have always pledged loyalty to Khomeini’s wilayat and to that of his successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.”<sup>6</sup> This endorsement by Hizbullah of Khomeini’s concept is the main proof of the existing linkages – at least on the ideological level—between Iran and the Lebanese Hizbullah-- especially as under the charter of Hizbullah, “in case of a deadlock among members of the Shura council [governing council], matters are referred to the wali al-faqih.”<sup>7</sup> Hamzeh quotes Shaykh Naim Qassim, the Deputy Secretary General of Hizbullah, “the decisions of al-wali al-faqih are final, binding, and can’t be challenged.”<sup>8</sup> After all “the faqih, who like the Imam is infallible, is the only one who has the final say in all executive, legislative, and judicial matters.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in the case of Hizbullah’s leadership, “the wilayat al-faqih doctrine and practice generate a clerical leadership that has final say over the party’s decision making process.”<sup>10</sup>

### JIHAD IN THE PARTY’S IDEOLOGY

Alagha explains Ayatollah Khomeini’s understanding of the notion of “smaller jihad” or military jihad, and its connections with martyrdom. This notion is important in order to understand how Hizbullah legitimates or justifies their attacks on Israel. Alagha affirms “Khumayni declared that is a legitimate and religious duty to sacrifice the self and possessions in defending the land and harbors of the Muslims that are besieged by a foe who threatens the Muslim community and territory.”<sup>11</sup> Hizbullah’s religious ideology therefore emphasized jihad as “a means of defence to preclude the enemy from accomplishing its goals even though this might lead Hizbullah to pay a heavy price and a lot of sacrifices and pains, which are warranted by a competent and responsible faqih.”<sup>12</sup> The fact that jihad needs to be religiously sanctioned by the



faqih can lead us, for example, to believe that Iran is behind the recent crisis between Israel and Hizbullah. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a conservative think tank in Washington DC, has reported on its website that “recent events in the region confirm that Iran is using Hizbullah as a tool to increase its regional power and counter Western interests.”<sup>13</sup> Can this be due to the role of the faqih in sanctioning jihad? As Alagha noted “The decision to wage jihad is incumbent upon al-faqih who diagnoses if the situation falls within the narrow confines of defensive jihad. He also determines the rules of engagement and its safeguards.”<sup>14</sup>

### IRANIAN FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Further proof of the linkage between the Party of God and Iran is the acknowledgment by Hizbullah leaders of Iranian financial support. Hamzeh estimates that “the annual fund stands at one billion dollars, [and that] reportedly, this amount does not include Iran’s spending on Hizbullah’s military apparatus and the Islamic Resistance activities.”<sup>15</sup> Hamzeh also notes that most of the funding from Iran does not come from government sources and therefore “need not be approved by Iran’s president or government.”<sup>16</sup> Because of Hizbullah’s subscription to the *wilayat al-faqih*, its funding comes “from foundations and charitable organizations under the direct control of the wali al-faqih, Ali Khamenei.”<sup>17</sup> Note that according to Alagha, “In the early 1980s Imam Khomeini ordered and entrusted Khamenei to be fully responsible of the Lebanese Hizbullah. Since then, Khamenei became Hizbullah’s godfather.”<sup>18</sup>

More recently, a WINEP report has maintained that “since the early 1980s, Iran has helped Hizbullah equip itself with broadcasting, healthcare, and educational centers... Almost every Iranian government ministry, including

the Ministries of Intelligence, Education, Telecommunications, Health, Welfare, and Culture and Islamic Guidance, maintains offices in Beirut.”<sup>19</sup> Does this financial aid from Iran in conjunction with the Party’s subscription to *wilayat al-faqih* make Hizbullah an Iranian agent in Lebanon especially as the party is said to also receive military training?

### MILITARY SUPPORT TO HIZBULLAH

Nizar Hamzeh also acknowledges the importance of Iran in training members of Hizbullah:

Reportedly, Hizbullah military operational headquarters include top-ranking officers of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards. Although the guards withdrew in the early 1990s, Secretary General Nasrallah has made reference to their continued stay in some parts of Lebanon. Without disclosing [their number], the party’s military apparatus seems to rely extensively on the logistics and military trainings of the guards.<sup>20</sup>

According to Hamzeh, Hizbullah has been adopting a “gradualist-pragmatic” mode since the death of Khomeini, the elevation of Ayatollah Khamenei to the office of Supreme Leader and the election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to the Iranian presidency (1989-1997). Since then, Khamenei’s strategy has been to encourage Hizbullah to gain a foothold in the Lebanese political system. Hizbullah has been part of the political system since the first post-war elections of 1992. It has constantly had one of the biggest parliamentary blocks since-- in the 1996, 2000 and 2005 legislatures. Some observers have called this phenomenon the “Lebanonization” of Hizbullah.<sup>21</sup>



Alagha shows, through the study of Hizbullah's programs, that "all of Hizbullah's ... parliamentary and municipal election programs do not state anything about instating an Islamic order in Lebanon"<sup>22</sup> but that the party called in 2001 "for the abolition of political sectarianism in the mentality before abolishing it in the texts."<sup>23</sup> A main part of Hizbullah's "Lebanonization" has been the increase since 1992 in its "commitment to a comprehensive socio-economic program based on eradicating poverty."<sup>24</sup> Hence "in order to broaden its support base among the masses, Hizbullah built a network of infrastructure, civil institutions, NGOs, and social welfare that deals with all aspects of life."<sup>25</sup> The spokesmen of the party take pains to emphasize that "Hizbullah's social and humanitarian services are not confined to Shi'ites or Muslims; rather a lot of Christians ...benefit from these services."<sup>26</sup>

All of the above indicates that Hizbullah is a largely Lebanese actor. It is this Hizbullah that we must consider in light of recent events rather than the one considering it as Iran and Syria's puppet state within Lebanon, a notion so often invoked in the Western media.

It was the Party of God motivated by national and local interests, which, on 12 July 2006, in a cross-border raid, kidnapped two Israeli soldiers, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev and killed three other soldiers. This event came three weeks after the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit by Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip, an event that had triggered a major assault on Palestinian territories called by the Israelis, "Operation Summer Rains".

Hizbullah is said to have captured the soldiers in order to exchange them for three Lebanese prisoners in Israel.<sup>27</sup> The capture itself seems, in the mind of Hizbullah's leadership, to have been based on the model of a previous exchange of prisoners, which took place through

German mediation in January 2004. The cabinet of then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon swapped thirty Lebanese and Arab prisoners, the remains of fifty-nine Lebanese militants and civilians, and four hundred Palestinian prisoners for a kidnapped Israeli businessman, Elhanan Tenenbaum, and the remains of three soldiers captured in October 2000 in the disputed Shebaa Farms area.

According to various analysts, Hizbullah acted for a number of possible reasons<sup>28</sup>: to help besieged Palestinian militants in Gaza; to send a message to the United States and Israel on behalf of Iran and Syria; and to counter demands from Lebanese rivals that the militia be disarmed. While there has been some evidence of cooperation between Hamas and Hizbullah, the first reason is far-fetched. If we believe the declarations by their leadership that Hizbullah had miscalculated and was not expecting the unreserved Israeli reaction, then it is most probable that Hizbullah opened a second front with Israel to elevate its standing within Lebanon and to promote itself nationally.

The increasing calls for the disarmament of the party in the past year by other groups in Lebanon, who perceived Hizbullah's "resistance" mission with suspicion, might have cornered Hizbullah into acting to prove its continued relevance on the political scene. Any positive fallout for Iran and Syria from the recent crisis between Hizbullah and Israel is most likely an unexpected windfall for the two countries. They have invested in the Party of God for more than two decades and it is normal that they should occasionally receive a return on their investment. While Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hizbullah, consults with Iran and Syria on general strategic issues, it is doubtful that he checked with the two countries before launching what was supposed to be a minor operation, following the 2004 precedent.

However, some critics have alleged the recent war between Israel and Hizbullah is the work of Iran. They base their assertions on the fact that Iran has been financing Hizbullah since 1982 and training its militiamen. Even local Lebanese analysts seem to believe in the existence of this linkage. For example, the prominent Lebanese columnist Jihad al-Zein has written an open letter to Ayatollah Khamene'i in the Lebanese daily *An-Nahar*. "The crux of al-Zein's letter questioned Iran's use of Shiite groups in the Middle East to advance Tehran's political interests without regard for the consequences local Shiite groups may face."<sup>29</sup>

But do ideological, financial and tactical linkages mean that Hizbullah is an Iranian pawn in Lebanon? In other words, can the Party be locally and operationally independent? According to the New York Times, [S]everal intelligence officials said that American spy agencies had made assessments in recent weeks that despite established ties between Iran and Hizbullah and a well-documented history of Iran arming the organization, there was no credible evidence to suggest either that Iran ordered the Hizbullah raid that touched off the recent fighting or that Iran was directly controlling the attacks against Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, as Alagha had already pointed out "Hizbullah takes its decisions independently of Iran and Syria, because Iran and Syria have their own convictions and responsibilities that might not always be in agreement with Hizbullah's domestic politics."<sup>31</sup>

The question that begs to be asked in this context is: why did Hizbullah attack Israel? While one can forcibly state many reasons behind this attack, its is most certainly linked to Hizbullah's stance towards Israel:

In one of its earliest political declarations, Hizbullah affirmed its stance of the continuity of the struggle of the Islamic resistance until the obliteration of Israel, a notion upon

which Hizbullah based and erected its entire military, political intellectual and ideological resistance to the Israeli occupation. The declaration stressed that the Zionist entity's presence is illegal; it has no right to exist, no right in the land of Palestine, and no Arab or Muslim has the right to grant Israel any recognition or legitimacy.<sup>32</sup>

It is important to note that Hizbullah's "enmity is not towards Jews as a race or religion, rather towards the Zionists who have raped Palestinian land and established their Zionist entity."<sup>33</sup> However, Hizbullah "considers that there are no Jews in Israel, rather only Zionists."<sup>34</sup> The party also maintains that "Israeli society is a military society" and it "affirms that in Israel, it does not distinguish between a civilian and a military.... that in Israel there are no civilians."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, "Hizbullah stresses that the formula of equating civilians to the military applies *only* to Israel, not outside its borders."<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

While Iran was certainly able to benefit from the international community's distraction from its nuclear program by the latest war between Hizbullah and Israel, its status as the new regional "hegemon" does not originate with this particular war: The US "war on terror" removed the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, Iran's two greatest regional rivals, and thereby strengthened the Islamic Republic's regional leverage.<sup>37</sup> Iran is today the main beneficiary of the Iraq war as its influence among the Iraqi Shi'ite population-- especially groups such as SCIRI that it has cultivated since the 1980s-- gives it a great margin to maneuver. However, Israel's failure to accomplish its declared goals and militarily defeat Hizbullah has reinforced Iran's position as the region's main power broker and as the central hub for countering US plans for a new Middle East.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Said A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1988), 98-99.
- <sup>2</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 82.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 81.
- <sup>4</sup> S. A. Arjomand, *Turban for the Crown*, 98-99.
- <sup>5</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 89.
- <sup>6</sup> Hamzeh, *In the Path*, 33.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., 48.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 90.
- <sup>10</sup> Hamzeh, *In the Path*, 78.
- <sup>11</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 92.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 102.
- <sup>13</sup> Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Shadow Government in Lebanon", 19 July 2006  
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2489> (accessed 20 August 2006).
- <sup>14</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 103.
- <sup>15</sup> Hamzeh, *In the Path*, 63.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 99.
- <sup>19</sup> Khalaji, 2006 .
- <sup>20</sup> Hamzeh, *In the Path*, 71.
- <sup>21</sup> For an excellent article analyzing the "Lebanonization" of the Party of God, see Augustus Richard Norton, " Hizballah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics", Council on Foreign Relations, 1999.  
<http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Norton.pdf> (accessed 15 May 2000).
- <sup>22</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 156.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 160
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid. 166
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. , 167
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., 166
- <sup>27</sup> Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hizballah, had called 2006 "the year of retrieving prisoners", and had promised to liberate Lebanese and Arab prisoners from Israeli jails. This explains the name the Party chose for its operation on July 12<sup>th</sup> "The Sincere Promise".
- <sup>28</sup> In a recent report entitled "Israel, Palestine, Lebanon: Climbing out of the Abyss", the ICG Group says "Hizbollah launched its operation for the most banal reason of all; because it could," ICG Middle East Report, *Israel/Palestine/Lebanon: Climbing Out of the Abyss*, 25 July 2006, 10.  
[http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle\\_east\\_north\\_africa/arab\\_israeli\\_conflict/57\\_israel\\_palestine\\_lebanon\\_climbing\\_out\\_of\\_the\\_abyss.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/middle_east_north_africa/arab_israeli_conflict/57_israel_palestine_lebanon_climbing_out_of_the_abyss.pdf) (accessed 27 July, 2006).
- <sup>29</sup> Robert Rabil, "Trust Allah, Nor Nasrallah", August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006  
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2500> (accessed August 21<sup>st</sup> 2006).
- <sup>30</sup> Mark Mazzetti, "Some in GOP say Iran Threat is Played Down", *New York Times*, August 24<sup>th</sup> 2006.
- <sup>31</sup> Alagha, *Shifts*, 172.

- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., 128
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 130
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., 145
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 176
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 176
- <sup>37</sup> For more on this issue, see "Iran, its Neighbours and the Regional Crises", Chatham House Report, August 23<sup>rd</sup> 2006  
<http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/pdf/research/mep/Iran0806.pdf>

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### Making Sense of Al Qaeda

Peter L. Bergen  
*The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al Qaeda's Leader*  
Toronto, Free Press, 2005

Faisal Devji  
*Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*  
Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press, 2005

Fawaz Gerges  
*The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*  
New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Karen Greenberg  
*Al Qaeda Now: Understanding Today's Terrorists*  
Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005

John Gray  
*Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern*  
London, Faber and Faber Limited, 2003

Richard Jackson  
*Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism*  
Vancouver, BC: Manchester University Press, 2005.

Roland Jacquard  
*In the Name of Osama bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the Bin Laden Brotherhood*  
Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2002

Zachary Lockman  
*Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*  
Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004

Gilles Kepel  
*The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*

Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2004.

Olivier Roy  
*Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*  
London, Hurst & Company, 2004.

### Reviewed by John A. McCurdy\*

Karen Greenberg has recently characterized the enterprise of 'Terrorology,' in her Preface to *Al Qaeda Now*, as "the most comprehensive interdisciplinary conversation yet to take place" – as a "harvest for the global age."<sup>1</sup> As any reading of the leading literature on the Al Qaeda network reveals, Greenberg's assertions could not be more accurate. By implication, of course, they also imply that rigid conceptual and methodological approaches will likely fail to illuminate the origins, development and character of terror organizations, in particular those of a contemporary phenomenon as influential and complex as Al Qaeda. Yet, as the following critical review of the leading monographs shows, three of the four schools of thought cling ineffectively to mono-logical and mono-cultural understandings of the network.

The four schools of thought on Al Qaeda divide into two camps. The first, which sees Al Qaeda as a product of a 'clash of civilizations,' belongs to the Orientalist camp. The second, which sees the network as a product of 'a clash within a civilization' – Islam – also belongs to the Orientalist camp. For the third school the network emerges out of an ongoing 'Imperial Encounter' with the United States primarily, and with the

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Soviet Union secondarily. Lastly, the fourth school views Al Qaeda as a product of a 'Modern Encounter' between Islam and the West, one that has been unfolding since at least the late eighteenth century. Both the third and fourth schools belong to what can be called the 'Modernist' camp, or more accurately, the critics of modernity. The terms of this debate over the origins, development and contemporary character of Al Qaeda predate the events of 9/11, as Zachary Lockman demonstrates in his 2004 study *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*.

It will be argued here that Al Qaeda's central role in the 9/11 attacks has had the ironic effect of displacing the 'clash of civilizations' thesis in favour of the view, hailed by the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, that Al Qaeda is instead a product of a 'clash within a civilization' – Islam. Yet, while this latter thesis represents a vast improvement over the former, it still reads Al Qaeda too heavily as a response to factors operative in the Muslim majority Islamic world. Those who argue that Al Qaeda is a product of US foreign policy or 'imperial encounter,' though, are guilty of a similar narrowness of focus. This leaves us to side with the 'Modernists' reading of Al Qaeda, which captures – better than other approaches – the network's fully hybrid nature and constitution. Particularly important is Faisal Devji's *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* which argues that Al Qaeda's approach to Islam is ecumenical or syncretic, mixing elements of Sunni, Shiite, and Sufi traditions. These kinds of insights result, in part, from the 'Modern Encounter' school's greater interest in what Al Qaeda does, as opposed to what it writes or proclaims. That is to say, the school reads the network sociologically, anthropologically, and discursively, as opposed to fixating, as the Orientalists

do, on certain of its writings, which are then presented as policy statements rather than as the propagandistic statements they really are. In the final analysis, this review argues, Al Qaeda has helped to radically revise the geography and constitution of a globalizing Islam, and offers us both fascinating and terrifying glimpses into the future of Islam, modernity, and what might be termed the 'global sphere.'

The study of the Middle East and Islam, argues Zachary Lockman, was dominated by 'Orientalist' assumptions and methodology until the mid-1960s. Then as now, he writes, these operated on the assumption that the 'civilization' of the 'Orient' functions as an historically closed and therefore self-referential system, whose degree of 'development' could only really be gauged, in any meaningful sense, using the tools of a Eurocentric modernization theory.<sup>2</sup> Orientalists even regard recent developments in the Muslim world, like the rise of Islamism in the early 1970s, Lockman writes, as explicable in Orientalist terms. Indeed, many Orientalists, he notes, received Islamism – the belief that Islam forms a complete system of life that must ultimately subsume the realm of politics – as little more than overwhelming support for their thesis.

As their most prominent exponent Bernard Lewis remarked in response to Islamism in the mid-1970s: secular modern western man simply "could not grasp that 'an entire civilization can have religion as its primary loyalty'."<sup>3</sup> On the eve of the first Gulf War, Lewis even went so far as to diagnose "a clash of civilizations," pitting Islamism against a Judeo-Christian west.<sup>4</sup> The argument, first popularized in the 1990s, that radical Islamists were more likely to carry out acts of 'catastrophic terrorism' than other militant groups, was subsequently mobilized to buttress Lewis' extreme Orientalist thesis in the ensuing decade.<sup>5</sup> The result, Lockman notes, was a

gradual though marked attempt at integrating ‘Terrorology’ as a complimentary lense of Orientalist perception.<sup>6</sup>

The Orientalist school of thought that views Al Qaeda as a product of a ‘clash of civilizations’ – that is, as an age old conflict between a stagnant Orientalist Islam and a modern and dynamic Judeo-Christian West – tends to view the Al Qaeda network through the prism of Osama bin Laden’s biography and public statements. In the first instance, these authors assume that the origins, evolution, and current character of Al Qaeda can be safely conflated with the twists, turns and migrations that constitute Bin Laden’s life story. Leader and movement are falsely and indeed naively conflated. Peter L. Bergen has captured the essence of this position well in *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al Qaeda’s Leader*.

Just as an account of Nazism and its impact on Europe would be non-sensical without reference to the persona and worldview of Hitler, or a history of France after the Revolution of 1789 would make no sense without an understanding of the goals and personality of Napoleon, so too our understanding of al Qaeda and the ideology it has spawned would be incoherent without reference to Osama bin Laden’s personal story and his view of the world.<sup>7</sup> For Bergen, bin Laden is integral to Al Qaeda in the same sense that other ‘great men’ have been with past epoch-making historical movements.<sup>8</sup>

In the second instance these same writers tend to read his public pronouncements as statements of policy rather than as propaganda statements. These elements are often assumed to be co-equivalent. We see this tendency

most clearly in the title of Roland Jacquard’s *In the Name of Osama bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the Bin Laden Brotherhood*, and in the book’s content, when Jacquard argues that Al Qaeda’s self-entrusted mission, just like Bin Laden’s, lies in leading “the world into the apocalypse by making use of conflicts between religions and civilizations.”<sup>9</sup> Bin Laden has even made his agreement with the Orientalist ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis explicit in his October 2001 interview with *Al Jazeera*. Here he went so far as to claim that the idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’ has its origin in the *Qu’ran* itself.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, if this was not evidence enough to confirm Al Qaeda as a product of ‘a clash of civilizations,’ the Orientalist reader of bin Laden’s public statements could easily turn to his seminal December 1998 *Al Jazeera* interview, “A Muslim Bomb,” where he flatly states: “Every Muslim, from the moment they realise the distinction in their hearts, hates Americans, hates Jews, and hates Christians. This is a part of our belief and our religion.”<sup>11</sup>

Such explicit and inflammatory statements may seem like overwhelming evidence for reading Al Qaeda as a product of ‘a clash of civilizations.’ Yet the Orientalist who embraces this selective text-based methodology has no reliable means, in the end, for separating statements of policy from propaganda statements. The result is a literature that merely stabilizes bin Laden’s haphazard propaganda efforts, a literature that replicates, normalizes, and infects the West with his Manichaeon vision of the world.

Go beyond the ‘clash of civilizations’ literature, however, and a number of more persuasive accounts of the network’s origins, evolution and current character arise. Among them is the variant Orientalist view of Al Qaeda as a product of ‘a clash within a civilization,’ that is, as a product of a clash within the House of Islam. This is the argument forwarded by the National



Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States in its 2004 publication, *The 9/11 Commission Report*. In its 'War on Terrorism,' the report states, which holds Al Qaeda as its principle target, the United States "finds itself caught up in a clash within a civilization" generated by conditions indigenous to the Muslim majority world.<sup>12</sup> The "enemy is not just 'terrorism,' some generic evil," its authors insist, but rather the "catastrophic threat" posed "at this moment in history ... by Islamist terrorism – especially the al Qaeda network, its affiliates, and its ideology."<sup>13</sup>

Uncritical observers tend to cite Gilles Kepel's *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, as the standard Orientalist reading of Al Qaeda as a product of 'a clash within a civilization.' This is so, despite the work's crude conceptual structure, as when Kepel insists that "Muslim societies have been pulled between two poles that have influenced the ebb and flow of Islamic civilizations – jihad and fitna."<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, he writes, fitna "signifies sedition, war in the heart of Islam, a centrifugal force that threatens the faithful with community fragmentation, disintegration, and ruin." On the other hand, he adds, a declaration of jihad normally achieves the opposite, a restoration of harmony and unity "under the *Qu'ran's* unchanging laws." Yet a jihad declared by unqualified persons, he insists, can have the opposite effect, plunging the Muslim world into "anarchy and chaos."<sup>15</sup>

Kepel thus holds that the unqualified, and thus illegitimate jihad against the 'Jews' and 'Crusaders' declared by radical jihadists like bin Laden and Al Qaeda, has provoked an expanding civil war within Islam such that the world now finds itself "trapped in a vicious dialectic of jihad and fitna."<sup>16</sup> This, he adds, was not the intention of Al Qaeda strategists like Ayman al-Zawahiri, whose reason for backing the 9/11 attacks was outlined in

his December 2001 memoir *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*. Having failed, through a strategy of direct strikes, to overthrow the so-called 'nearby enemy' – that is, secular 'apostate' Arab regimes in states like Algeria and Egypt, al-Zawahiri reasoned that Al Qaeda might be able to revive the flagging Islamist movement by staging direct and spectacular attacks on the 'far enemy' – the United States.<sup>17</sup> In the immediate aftermath, he believed, the attack's success might combine with an anticipated disproportionate American military response to provoke a revolutionary climate in the Muslim world, through which Muslim anger and resistance could be harnessed to swell "the ranks of recruits for martyrdom."<sup>18</sup> For Kepel, therefore, the United States was little more than an indirect target of the jihad on 9/11, for the attacks were ultimately designed to transform the 'status quo' in the Middle East.

To his credit Kepel concedes that the US 'War on Terrorism,' and its invasion and occupation of Iraq in particular, have tended to virtualize or deterritorialize the jihad, increasing the significance of the Muslim minority population in Europe, for example. Yet in the end Kepel's argument grounds and then re-grounds Al Qaeda in the Middle East and in relation to traditional Islamic concepts.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Kepel's argument adheres, and stubbornly so, to the central conceptual and methodological tenets of Orientalism.

The crude conceptual structure of Kepel's *The War for Muslim Minds* is only the book's most obvious flaw, however. At a more subtle, yet fundamental level, Kepel's argument is also marred by an over-reliance on secondary sources, at the expense of conducting and integrating the results of extensive original primary research among jihadists in the Muslim world. In *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*, Fawaz A. Gerges sets out to remedy this second failing in Kepel's book, even as

Gerges makes it quite clear that he is in agreement with Kepel in his support of the Orientalist 'clash within a civilization' thesis. It is over the latter's assertion that jihadists continue to agree internally on Al Qaeda's radical and violent programme<sup>20</sup> that Gerges parts ways with Kepel. Gerges' central point, in contra-distinction, is that the civil war within Islam extends not only into radical jihadist circles, but also into the very decision making bodies of Al Qaeda itself.<sup>21</sup> Throughout his book Gerges implies that Kepel, had he also conducted literally hundreds of interviews with radical jihadists and read and analyzed the Arabic language jihadist literature like himself, would have reached the same conclusions.

Here especially Gerges is to be commended, for *The Far Enemy* is dense with suggestive and often authoritative references to data gleaned from primary research, conducted over the previous five years. As a result the reader is fed quite convincing evidence, for example, that the network is unable or unwilling to construct formal institutions to strengthen itself as an organization.<sup>22</sup> Al Qaeda consistently flounders, Gerges reports, on a diet of repressed internal dissension, structural weakness and amateurism among ground level operatives. Many of its successes, in particular with respect to the 9/11 plot, have been the result of mere luck rather than lethal cunning.<sup>23</sup> A skeletal organization, Gerges concludes, the network's future lies principally in its significance as an emerging "ideology, state of mind, and outreach program."<sup>24</sup>

Only now are journalists and academics working on Al Qaeda through the 'clash within a civilization' stream beginning to come to terms with the much less tidy narrative of the network's genesis and evolution presented by authors like Gerges. Nevertheless, while Gerges successfully revises Kepel's more limited thesis by showing that civil war was and remains rife within Al Qaeda and the radical

jihadist movement, he ultimately fails to make clear and effective use of his primary sources. The impression is of a book rushed haphazardly and half-digested to press. This may account for Gerges' retreat from academic rigour in his most recent book, *The Journey of the Jihadist*. Yet while Gerges falls short of establishing a new standard for primary research in the area of Al Qaeda studies, he has succeeded in whetting the appetite of scholars and readers alike for truly rigorous Orientalist scholarship on the network.

Today those who hold to the 'clash of civilizations' thesis have dwindled in number, as the alternate 'clash within a civilization' thesis has become the mainstream reading of Al Qaeda. This latter view is shared by the Bush administration in the U.S., as well as by most international commentators, particularly in the aftermath of the failed US-led invasion of Iraq, which has generated conditions of civil war in that country between Sunnis and Shiites. Thus, the global phenomenon of Al Qaeda has been singularly instrumental in smashing the 'clash of civilizations' thesis, in favour of the 'clash within a civilization' thesis. While the displacement of the former depends on maintaining an Orientalist reading of Al Qaeda and elements of contemporary Islam, the displacement is at the same time ironic, for while the latter thesis had always been more intellectually sound, it remained marginal throughout the 1990s, prior to 9/11.

Still, 'modernists,' or what Mahmood Mamdani has called 'Post-Culturalist' scholars<sup>25</sup> of Al Qaeda, have provided two rival and often quite radical revisionist readings of the network's origins, development, and contemporary character, which any literature review on the network must take seriously. Like their rivals, these scholars and commentators marshal certain longstanding conceptual tools and methodological approaches in their struggle to wrest the network from the

Orientalist frame that has predominated in the perceptions of most Western observers. Again, Zachary Lockman's historiographical analysis in *Contending Visions of the Middle East* provides perhaps the best means for tracing the origins of these various modernist approaches.

The first challenge to the Orientalist monopoly over Middle Eastern and Islamic studies was led, Lockman observes, by the New Left and their dependency theory allies in the mid-1960s.<sup>26</sup> For all its conceptual and methodological faults, dependency theory had arguably the most lasting impact on Middle Eastern and Islamic studies because it undermined the Orientalist notion that cultural spaces could be separated off unproblematically as discrete objects of study, apart from the larger "global system" in which cultures were embedded.<sup>27</sup> The point was reinforced by studies demonstrating that the contemporary Muslim world had, in fact, been shaped by forces active in other parts of the 'developing' world.<sup>28</sup> Also brought into question was the parallel notion that cultures were shaped temporally by 'stable traditions' or 'fixed cultural values.'<sup>29</sup> Roger Owen put the matter well in the mid-1970s, in relation to the Muslim world, when he concluded that "historians could not assume that Islamic principles shaped everything in the societies in which Islam was prevalent."<sup>30</sup>

By the early 1990s, scholars were forwarding compelling readings of Islamism as a hybrid of powerful modern and reinvented traditionalist cultural tendencies. Scholars like Sami Zubaida, Lockman writes, catalogued a widespread "appropriation and incorporation of many thoroughly modern concepts" and an equal range of "modern modes of political organization, propaganda and action" among Islamic movements and their various "thinkers, leaders and activists."<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, these same

liberal and Leftist commentators increasingly traced the so called roots of Muslim terror to the tyranny, corruption, poverty, underdevelopment, lack of opportunity, and "foreign economic and political domination" of the Muslim world.<sup>32</sup> Bad US foreign policies, they insisted, were often responsible for these conditions of life.

The catastrophic nature of the 9/11 attacks might have been expected to exercise a moderating effect on these increasingly trenchant critiques, yet the opposite would be the case, for the attacks spawned a new and relatively mainstream literature on Al Qaeda that views the network as a product of 'Imperial Encounter,' primarily with the United States, but also, to some extent, with the Soviet Union. Chalmers Johnson arguably led the way when he published *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of Empire* in 2000. In a follow-up post-9/11 article for *The Nation*, he described 'blowback' as a CIA metaphor invented to describe "the unintended consequences of the US government's international activities," in this case, the CIA's role in shaping and promoting the radical Islamist anti-Soviet jihad of the 1980s in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup>

He proceeded to read the events of 9/11 in these terms, noting how US President George W. Bush's "attempt to define [the attacks] as only a conflict over abstract values" like 'civilization' was "not only disingenuous but also a way of evading responsibility for the 'blowback' that America's imperial projects [had] generated."<sup>34</sup> Empire building, Johnson's overall analysis suggested, repeatedly demanded the formation of unsavoury alliances for the sake of larger strategic objectives. Yet these alliances run their course, leaving potentially volatile regimes or organizations in their wake. Bin Laden began as a terrorist creation of the CIA, Johnson argued, whose violence was acceptable when directed against the Soviet Union in the 1980s.<sup>35</sup> Only after

he turned against America in the 1990s, as a consequence of the stationing of US troops in Saudi Arabia, did he become 'evil' in the eyes of the West. Since the first Gulf War, the man had "been attempting to bring the things the CIA taught him home to the teachers." He achieved this goal on the morning of 9/11, Johnson concludes.<sup>36</sup>

Many authors – Peter L. Bergen among them – believe the US occupation of Iraq stands to revisit the 'blowback' phenomenon, as Iraqi insurgents and a new generation of radical jihadists master the art of urban guerrilla warfare.<sup>37</sup> Yet the chaotic confluence of factors influencing the violence in Iraq today cannot be reduced to mere 'blowback' or 'Imperial Encounter,' as a civil war between Sunni and Shiite Muslims vastly complicates the facts on the ground. More than likely, the Iraq debacle will embed what remains of the 'blowback' thesis within a newly revised 'clash within a civilization' reading of Al Qaeda.

There are also those modernist 'Imperial Encounter' scholars and commentators who regard the 'blowback' thesis as weak, for the reason that Al Qaeda seems to them a propaganda puppet propped up by western governments and their intelligence agencies. Occasionally this literature argues with Adam Curtis, in his 2004 BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares*, that the network is little more than a "phantom enemy" – an illusion, Jonathan Raban has written, "assiduously fostered by politicians who ... have cynically grasped the principle that 'those with the darkest imaginations become the most powerful'."<sup>38</sup> In a related scholarly vein, Richard Jackson has recently argued in *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism*, that Al Qaeda and its radical jihadist cousins are primarily counter-terrorist rhetorics and discourses shaped for public consumption by the Bush administration.

Finally, the 'Imperial Encounter' approach to Al Qaeda has produced a conspiratorial literature that sees the network as "integral" to the contemporary system of American Empire.<sup>39</sup> A number of works written in this genre can safely be dismissed as mere grand conspiracy theories, thought certainly by no means all of them, as any summary of the manifold analytical and evidentiary weaknesses in the official *9/11 Commission Report* attests.<sup>40</sup> In general, the conspiracy literature on Al Qaeda advances one of two theses. The first and more plausible of the two is that the US government had adequate prior knowledge of the 9/11 attacks but chose not to halt them. It did so, these authors suggest, in order to consciously exploit the ensuing conditions of panic and fear, so as to facilitate an aggressive foreign policy abroad and an equally aggressive assault on civil liberties at home.<sup>41</sup>

The second, and much less plausible thesis, contends that the 9/11 attacks were an 'Inside Job' orchestrated by a rogue element in the US government. For these authors, Al Qaeda terrorism is a 'great deception' staged by western intelligence agencies to advance and facilitate the global imperial ambitions of the United States and its allies.<sup>42</sup> To date, works that advance either of these radical theses have mostly fallen into the usual intellectual traps that plague the practice of 'conspiracy theory.' Chief among them is the desire to attribute the Al Qaeda phenomenon to the secret machinations of western governments, a view as one-dimensional as that of the 'clash of civilizations' Orientalists', who read Al Qaeda as a product solely of the Islamic world. Nevertheless, the conspiracy authors are more correct when they argue that official investigations of 9/11, and other Al Qaeda-related activity, are often more striking for what they pass over in silence as opposed to for what they actually reveal and explain.<sup>43</sup>

In general, those within the Modernist school who read Al Qaeda as a product of 'Imperial Encounter' are able to do so only by minimizing or disregarding all together forces and influences emanating from either the Muslim world itself, or what may be termed the 'global sphere,' whose control exceeds and whose character stretches far beyond the hegemony of American Empire. These pitfalls have been resolved, to some extent, by those scholars who read Al Qaeda as a product of a 'Modern Encounter' between the Muslim and the modern world – that is, as a fully modern hybrid. The nature of these more recent approaches is inherently interdisciplinary, and suggestive rather than definitive. Yet it can be confidently concluded that they are already displacing the Orientalist and 'Imperial Encounter' schools of thought on Al Qaeda.

John Gray reads Al Qaeda as a fully modern hybrid in *Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern*. He does so based on the well-established post-colonial insight that the contemporary world is home to a variety of modernities, regardless of how "monstrous" some might seem in the eyes of others.<sup>44</sup> This includes both the network's novel and violent use of technologies, as well as its ideology, whose roots – among others – lie in the writings of Sayyid Qutb, which reject reason in much the same spirit as the European Counter-Enlightenment.<sup>45</sup> As Roxanne Euben has written, we witness "not 'antimodernism' but rather 'modernities' in Qutb's "cross-cultural critiques."<sup>46</sup> Al Qaeda is also fully modern, Gray adds, for the reason that it emerges out from the contemporary socio-economic conditions of the Middle East, with its massive population growth, high unemployment levels, youthful demographic, and shrinking and unevenly distributed oil revenues. Other Al Qaeda environments, so-called "failed states," are also uniquely contemporary.<sup>47</sup> Both spaces exist,

moreover, Gray argues, within the space and time of globalization, which for Gray are also modern.

Olivier Roy has taken Gray's argument a step further in *Globalised Islam* by showing Islam as a whole, and not merely Al Qaeda, is being transformed by the multiple forces of globalization. With as many as one third of all Muslims living abroad as minorities, he points out, the old geopolitical spaces of Islam – North Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia – no longer delineate, dominate, or define the space and time of Islam.<sup>48</sup> For many, the religion now exists in a deterritorialized and thus globalized space and time.<sup>49</sup> The 'ummah' is no longer strictly territorial, but "abstract and imaginary."<sup>50</sup> As a result, he notes, mainstream Muslims seek to transform society and culture, rather than the state.<sup>51</sup>

The spirit of this globalized and globalizing Islam, Roy insists, is roughly evangelical, with membership in the new Muslim networks often being voluntary and intentional.<sup>52</sup> These latter patterns of non-traditional and individualized religiosity, account for the radicalization of the members of the 'Hamburg Cell,' the self-generated religious and political study group formed on the fringes of the diasporic Muslim community in Germany in the late 1990s. The group began as a 're-Islamization' project and only later morphed into the jihadist martyrdom cell that would supply Al Qaeda with four lead operatives for the 9/11 plot – Mohammed Atta among them. The crucial point is that the 'Hamburg Cell,' and its personalized interpretation of Islam, were less anomalies than extremist manifestations of generalized trends among diasporic Muslim communities.

Faisal Devji's *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity*, goes one step further than Roy in its characterization of the phenomenon of Al Qaeda as both global and modern, by recognizing that the jihad's effects, once



globalized, become radically divorced from the actions and original intentions of those who carry them out. Unpredictable outcomes result from jihadi actions being received, processed and assigned meanings primarily in and through the media saturated 'global sphere.' Thus, he writes, "the globalization of the jihad lies precisely in the unintended consequences of its acts."<sup>53</sup> His construction of globalization as a profoundly destabilizing force is uncontroversial; the traditional sinews of self, sect, and society do often unravel and even come undone under its influence. Al Qaeda and other jihadists attempt to close these widening gaps and mend these tears, in a sense, by staging terrorist attacks and other phenomena in a manner designed to have both a catastrophic media as well as physical impact. As Devji rightly observes, Al Qaeda seems engaged in a deeper dialogue with the "dreams and nightmares of the media" than with Islamic tradition.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, Devji notes that Al Qaeda members seem unconcerned about the network's evolving ecumenical approach to Islam. The most obvious element is its profound commitment to the Shi'ite "language and practice of the 'martyrdom operation,'" despite the fact that even terrorism experts have long assumed the network to be a rigid Sunni entity.<sup>55</sup> The most obvious source of influence is Hizballah, in particular its pioneering and influential suicide attacks on US military targets in Lebanon in the early 1980s – which bin Laden has cited repeatedly as a source of inspiration in his public statements. There was also, Devji notes, Al Qaeda's open ties with Hizballah and Iranian intelligence in the early 1990s while stationed in Sudan, a factor also highlighted by the authors of *The 9/11 Commission Report*.

Devji's Shi'ite critique of the Sunni interpretative bias that pervades the Orientalist literature on Al Qaeda is

accompanied by his examination of parallel evidence of Sufi influence on the network. The Taliban of the mid- to late 1990s, he points out, betray a widespread approval for both Shi'ite and Sufi themes, from its rank and file up to its supreme leader, Mullah Omar.<sup>56</sup> Any accurate picture of Taliban ecumenism must therefore seek to account for the influence of Al Qaeda's many nomadic jihadis, who have served in peripheral jihads, like that in Chechnya, which are heavily influenced by Sufi orders.<sup>57</sup> Certainly, Devji concludes, Al Qaeda's ecumenism signals "a democratization of authority in the Muslim world," as the network bring "populist and non-judicial elements to the center" of its own practice of Islamic religiosity.<sup>58</sup> Thus, Devji's *Landscapes of the Jihad* presents us with a challenging reading of Al Qaeda as a fully modern hybrid embracing a newly globalized Islam, even as the forces of globalization tend to introduce uncontrollable elements into the jihad. In this sense the nature of Al Qaeda and its influence on the world proves ironic once again.

In conclusion, those schools of thought which view Al Qaeda as a product of 'Imperial Encounter' or 'a clash of civilizations' can probably be discounted for the reason that both forward mono-cultural or mono-casual explanations. The same can ultimately be said for the 'clash within a civilization' school, which also draws too Islam-centric a picture of Al Qaeda, an otherwise slippery hybrid that only the 'Modern Encounter' thesis can hope to net. This latter view has the virtue of presenting the network as a product of cross-cultural encounter and global post-colonial conditions. Al Qaeda, however archaic a portion of its rhetoric may seem, is a young and youthful organization that has belonged, since its inception, to the 'global sphere.' It tells us more about the present and future individual, communal and human possibilities of this sphere, even as it also tells us something about the



potentially ecumenical future of a globalized Islam. At the very least Al Qaeda has helped disaggregate past geo-cultural and geo-political entities, including, as Roy and Devji illustrate, that colonial artefact: the Middle East.

<sup>1</sup> Karen Greenberg, *Al Qaeda Now: Understanding Today's Terrorists* (Cambridge, 2005), p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 217-218.

<sup>5</sup> John Deutch, "Terrorism: Think Again," *Foreign Policy* 108 (Fall 1997), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions*, p. 226.

<sup>7</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of Al Qaeda's Leader* (Toronto, 2005), p. xxv.

<sup>8</sup> Greenberg, *Al Qaeda Now*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Roland Jacquard, *In the Name of Osama bin Laden: Global Terrorism and the Bin Laden Brotherhood*, translated by George Holloch (Durham and London, 2002), p. 158.

<sup>10</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "Terror for Terror [21 October 2001]," in Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, translated by James Howarth (London and New York, 2005), p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> Osama bin Laden, "A Muslim Bomb [December 1998]," in Bruce Lawrence (ed.), *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, translated by James Howarth (London and New York, 2005), p. 87.

<sup>12</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Report, With reporting by The New York Times* (New York, 2004), p. 518-519.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 517.

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Kepel, *The War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, translated by Pascale Ghazaleh (Cambridge, MA, 2004), p. 288.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 292.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7-8, 292.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

<sup>21</sup> Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, "Wither Political Islam?" *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 1 (Jan/Feb 2005): <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20050101fareview/essay84113b/mahmood-mamdani/whither-political-islam.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Lockman, *Contending Visions*, p. 152.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155. Lockman,

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164-165.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>33</sup> Chalmers Johnson, "Blowback," *The Nation*, 15 October 2001:

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20011015/johnson>.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Peter L. Bergen and Alec Reynolds, "Blowback Revisited: Today's Insurgents in Iraq Are Tomorrow's Terrorists," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 6 (Nov-Dec 2005), p. 2-6.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Raban, "The Truth About Terrorism," *New York Review of Books* 52, no. 1 (13 Jan 2005):

[http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article\\_id=17676](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/article-preview?article_id=17676).

<sup>39</sup> Nafeez Mossadeq Ahmed, *The War on Truth: 9/11, Disinformation and the Anatomy of Terrorism* (Northampton, MA, 2005), p. 369.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, David Ray Griffin, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions* (Northampton, MA, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Nafeez Mossadeq Ahmed, *The War on Freedom: How and Why America Was Attacked, September 11, 2001* (Joshua Tree, CA, 2002).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Barrie Zwicker, *Towers of Deception: The Media Cover-Up of 9/11* (Gabriola Island, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, *Global Outlook: The Magazine of 9/11 Truth* 11 (Spring/Summer 2006): [www.GlobalOutlook.ca](http://www.GlobalOutlook.ca).

<sup>44</sup> John Gray, *Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern* (London, 2003), p. 2. See also Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "On Alternative Modernities," in *Alternative Modernities* (Durham & London, 2001), p. 1-23.

<sup>45</sup> Gray, *Al Qaeda and what it means to be modern*, p. 42.

<sup>46</sup> Roxanne L. Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), p. 11.

<sup>47</sup> Gray, p. 70.

<sup>48</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London, 2004), p. 113.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5, 29.

<sup>53</sup> Faisal Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad: Militancy, Morality, Modernity* (Ithaca, 2005), p. 14.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20-21.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

<sup>57</sup> See especially James Howarth, "Al-Qaida, globalization and Islam: a response to Faisal

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Devji,” *OpenDemocracy: free thinking for the world*, 20 January 2006:

[http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle-east-politics/al-qaida\\_3200.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle-east-politics/al-qaida_3200.jsp).

<sup>58</sup> Devji, *Landscapes of the Jihad*, p. 41, 51.

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**David Cook**

***Understanding Jihad***

Berkeley/Los Angeles/London:

University of California Press, 2005, 259 pages.

**Reviewed by Amir Asmar\***

David Cook's *Understanding Jihad* is an excellent, comprehensive but concise, study of the uniquely Islamic concept of jihad, more appropriate for the Middle East specialist and scholar of Islam than for the generalist. Although a short work—168 pages in the main text—it is difficult to capture the book's many facets: historical narrative, survey of the relevant religious literature, and philosophical analysis. Cook effectively combines all these to create a comprehensive work on jihad that cannot be easily summarized. In his introduction, Cook lays out the parameters of his work. He will focus on the evolving concept of jihad in Islam through a study of the religion's original sources, including the Qur'an, Hadiths (the traditions and sayings of the Prophet, as recounted by his closest companions), and other authoritative texts by Muslim philosophers and mystics, and ending with codified law.

In his first and most important chapter, "Qur'an and Conquest," Cook begins by surveying the definitions of jihad, from the literal (striving) to the simplistic (holy war) to the religious (spiritual struggle). Understanding jihad is rendered more difficult, Cook notes, because it has been at the heart of polemics against Islam and apologetics for it. In this section—and throughout the book—Cook alternates between summarizing portions of Islam's historical narrative and examining how

the evolving concept of jihad was defined or changed in those periods. He further considers how jihad helped shape Islamic society. Among the important aspects of jihad Cook addresses are its spiritual content, legal limits, rules of conduct, and objectives. Other features of jihad he notes from the literature are martyrdom, handling of prisoners, treatment of non-combatants, appropriate weaponry, human shields, the role of women, armistices and treaties, and relations with conquered peoples. He points out that, as happens in all societies, a divergence emerges between practice and theological treatise, the latter being the idealized sanctification of the first.

Jihad began as a series of defensive and pre-emptive campaigns by the nascent Muslim community against non-believing Arabs. Military campaigns not only saved the early Muslims but—as Qur'anic revelations on the conduct of jihad coincided with military actions—also helped define critical aspects of the evolving community. Cook asserts that there can be no reasonable doubt that jihad, with Qur'anic sanction, was critical to the great Muslim conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries. He further asserts that "the conquests constitute a confirmatory miracle for Islam" with the result that "jihad has remained of crucial importance in Islamic culture" ever since (p. 30). Among Cook's more interesting observations is the role of apocalyptic vision in sustaining jihad in the early decades of Islam. He posits that the sense that the end of the world was imminent helped propel the early Muslims to conquest.

To his credit, Cook also devotes appropriate attention to the concept of martyrdom—so closely connected to jihad. He observes that it evolved far differently in Islam than in other faiths because, with the founding of the first Islamic community in Medina, Islam was associated with power and "the interpretation of jihad was unabashedly

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\* **Amir Asmar**, a graduate of the University of Chicago's Center for Middle East Studies, has been a Middle East specialist for the US Department of Defense for over fifteen years. The views expressed in this review do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the US Government.

aggressive and expansive” (p. 30). Unlike their Christian or Jewish counterparts, Muslim martyrs were not victims. In fact, Muslims were expected to seek martyrdom, and the term came to be associated with death in battle. Another area where Muslim martyrs differ from their counterparts in other faiths is the rewards they can expect in paradise; these must have been instrumental in promoting jihad: women, honor, rank, and ability to intercede on judgment day, among others. Oddly, the definition of martyrdom expanded greatly over the centuries to include accidental deaths, death while protecting one’s goods and family, death by animal attack, and others, rendering the concept almost meaningless. Tradition literature would in time seek to return the definition to its original sense of dying in the cause of God.

In his second chapter, Cook takes on the issue of the greater (spiritual) versus lesser (combat) jihad, demonstrating the absence in traditional literature of any basis for the assertion that the internal struggle against corruption is the most authentic definition of jihad. Cook persuasively argues that Muslim apologists sought to re-invent jihad using this artifice to de-emphasize the more authentic violent understanding of jihad, and to defuse accusations that Islam’s expansion was the product of military aggression. In his third chapter, “The Crystallization of Jihad Theory,” Cook recounts the military setbacks Islamic states experienced during 1000-1500 CE. The Crusades, the Mongol invasions, the Christian re-conquest of Spain and others led to the development of what Cook calls “classical Muslim jihad theory.” He traces this evolution through the works of jurists too numerous to recount here. However, a salient feature of the period was that, for the first time since the prophet led the believers to Medina, Muslims were living under non-Muslim rule, requiring

a conceptual re-examination of jihad. It was during this period that the polemicist Ibn Taymiyya made the innovation of linking jihad to individual Muslims’ commitment to the faith that is defining the quality of a person’s Islam by his willingness to fight for Islam.

In his fourth chapter, “Renewal and Resistance,” Cook focuses on the jihads conducted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries on Islam’s geographic periphery. Some of these were what he dubs “purification” jihads—conducted by Muslims against other Muslims—to rid Islam of practices deemed innovative or alien; other jihads were against European encroachment, reflecting the appearance of proto-nationalist features in the Muslim world. In Arabia, Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Wahhab conducted the most ardent anti-Muslim jihad to promote an austere version of the faith that, Cook argues, is dramatically different from preceding attestations. Relying on takfiri doctrine—the practice of declaring practicing Muslims to be apostates—‘Abd al-Wahhab and his Saudi partners targeted many Muslims, with a particular focus on Shi‘is and Sufis. In West Africa, Shehu Usman Dan Fodio fought another purifying jihad, seeking with some success to protect Islamic orthodoxy against syncretism. In India, the Caucasus, Morocco, and Algeria, the jihads were against the encroachment of economically and militarily superior Europeans. The conspicuous failure in India was due to the Muslims’ inability to come to terms with the country’s Hindu majority. Hindus were just as opposed to British control as the Muslims, but were opposed to casting resistance to the British in jihadist terms. In the Sudan, the Mahdi, Muhammad Ahmad, lacked the resources to achieve his vision of a unified Muslim world, liberated from imperial rule. Cook concludes by noting that—with the possible exception of the re-emergent

Saudi-Wahhabi alliance in the early twentieth century and the beneficial impact on African Islam of Dan Fodio's jihad—all of these jihads were complete failures. He further asserts that these jihads represented a “negative assessment of the intellectual and military capacities of the Muslim world of the center” by Islam's geographic periphery (p. 90).

The declining Persian and Ottoman states also called for jihads that ultimately failed in the early nineteenth (Russo-Persian wars) and early twentieth centuries (World War I) respectively. Fatwas issued in both cases were merely repetitive of past proclamations; they failed to inspire the jihad or to develop the concept beyond what it had been.

Contemporary jihad theory, the subject of Cook's fifth chapter, arose out of the need to redefine jihad, in light of foreign domination of much of the Muslim world. Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida advanced the notion of “defensive” jihad, differentiating Islam's early conquests from the European colonialism of their era. But, as Cook notes, they seemingly blur the line between “defensive” and “offensive” jihad: “...our defense of religion is the proclamation of truth and the removal of the distortion and misrepresentation of it.” Defining jihad almost entirely as a form of proclamation allowed them to characterize as defensive what others might consider aggressive. Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, asserted that Muslims are obligated to conduct jihad in order to protect the proclamation of Islam. The south Asian Abu Ala' al-Mawdudi focused on justice—rarely stated to be the goal of jihad in traditional literature—describing jihad as the duty to confront illegitimate and tyrannical rulers (European colonials) and their supporters (locals who do the Europeans' bidding). The last of the great modernist thinkers, the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, argued that Muslim

societies of his time (the 1950s and 60s) were no longer ruled by Muslim norms and laws; rather, they had devolved into barbarism and ignorance (analogous to the pre-Islamic period of ignorance or *jahiliya*). Qutb, like al-Banna before him, therefore asserted that jihad was the means by which Muslims ensure the proclamation of the authentic message of Islam could be heard.

In his final chapter, Cook tackles radical Islam in the contemporary era crediting the Palestinian 'Abdallah 'Azzam with the intellectual transition from localized resistance movements to the current global jihad. 'Azzam taught that jihad alone would resurrect the Muslim world, and that the power of martyrdom could move and persuade people. Cook correctly points to the Afghanistan war as the incubator of the global jihad, the emergence of Usama bin Ladin and the creation of al-Qaida. Cook further notes their use of the Tradition of Thawban—a hadith where the prophet purportedly supports the belief that the entire world is united to destroy Islam—to bind the movement. Their differentiation between true and false Muslims harks back to Ibn Taymiyya. Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine, US-occupied Afghanistan and others are battlefields of the radical global jihad. Cook concludes by noting that radical global mujahidin represent a significant threat to Muslims, as well as non-Muslims.

**Fawaz A. Gerges**  
*The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global*

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005

**Reviewed by Mohamed Yousry<sup>1</sup>**

In *The Far Enemy*, Fawaz Gerges, a political scientist at Sarah Lawrence College, sets out to establish that Al-Qaeda represents a small minority within “the jihadist movement.” He wants to show that al-Qaeda’s ideas and strategies have been subjected to heavy criticism and opposed by most “nationalist jihadis” who focus on transforming their own part of the Muslim world and who eschew the idea of a global “jihad.” While he is successful in some ways, his study also suffers from a number of methodological and conceptual weaknesses.

Gerges begins by highlighting the limitations of the conceptual and methodological approach used by the U.S. commission investigating the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. The commission, Gerges argues, reduced the story of September 11<sup>th</sup> to that of “an anti-Christ-hero-bin Laden.” For them, “everything revolves around the person of bin Laden, his whims, predilections, and charisma, and nothing happens without his explicit orders and blessing.” For Gerges, the commission’s “9/11 report” wrongly stresses the role of personality and religious ideological factors over “history, politics, and foreign policy” (17). Gerges reminds his reader that “the 9/11 report is based largely on a series of interrogations conducted in secret locations by U.S. intelligence officers of two of the [9/11]

plot managers” (19). And since the commission “relied heavily” on the account of one of the two captured managers, Gerges argues that “it would not be an exaggeration to say that the plot described in the report is seen through the eyes” of one person. For Gerges, this method of research raises problems of “credibility and reliability” (20).

To avoid such limitations, Gerges chooses an alternate approach. He decides to closely examine “the internal dynamics of the jihadist movement and compares and contrasts jihadis’ ideas with their actions in order to highlight points of coherence and consistency or tensions and contradictions” (287). As for methodology, Gerges relies “mainly on two primary sources—personal interviews [he] conducted with jihadis and Islamists since 1999 and internal documents, booklets, diaries and manifestos written by them since the 1970s” (287). But, as we shall see below, Gerges’s attempt to adhere to this alternate approach was fraught with problems and contradictions.

Despite his stated objections to emphasizing the role of a single person in the 9/11 Commission report, Gerges himself seems to foreground the central and pivotal role of personality over other factors. Similarly to the 9/11 report, in a number of places he underscores how vital and fundamental the notion of personality is for jihadis. Gerges writes, “in my conversations with former jihadis, one of the critical lessons I have learned is that personalities, not ideas or organizations, are the drivers behind the [jihadi] movement. It is a personality-driven animal that devours idealistic and alienated young Muslims” (34). Later, he explains that “one point must be made clear: personalities will continue to drive the new brand [of jihadis]” (40). Thus, he claims that “this book will highlight the role of jihadist leaders within both the transnationalist and the

<sup>1</sup> **Mohamed Yousry** taught Islam, Modern Middle Eastern history, Cultural Diversity, and Cultures of the Middle East at New York University and The City University of New York.



religious-nationalist camps who served as the drivers behind their groups” (42). For these [jihadis] “remain deeply dependant on a narrow core of charismatic leaders” (41). In fact, he claims that “in the 1970s, the modern jihadist movement fragmented along strong-willed personalities whose own priorities defined its agenda and direction” (117). Ultimately, he concludes that “the cult of personality and charisma—not institutions, real consultation, or power sharing—is the decisive driver among jihadis” (127).

More often than not, *The Far Enemy* suggests that the various Muslim social movements are split into two camps, “jihadis” and something he calls the “mainstream.” Furthermore, the jihadi camp itself is divided between two trends, “nationalist” jihadis or those who oppose fighting the “far enemy” and those who advocate for this fight, whom Gerges refers to as “transnationalist” or “global” jihadis. Gerges explains this factionalization along several registers. First, he states that “jihadis could not compete on an equal footing with mainstream Islamists” (110). He proffers this conclusion after surveying Ayman al-Zawahiri’s “a theoretician of jihadism.” In it, al-Zawahiri critiques the position of “mainstream Islamists,” especially the Muslim Brotherhood, and their attitude towards jihad and other issues. Gerges concludes that al-Zawahiri’s “stand raises alarming questions about the whole jihadist enterprise” (111-112), moreover that the jihadist criticism exposes the extent of polarization of “Islamists and jihadis alike” (114). For him “modern Jihadis have reached a theoretical deadlock. The dichotomy of the near enemy and the far enemy has not taken jihadis where they want to be and has proved to be very costly” (150). In this regard *The Far Enemy*’s introduction contains two subsections and it devotes most of chapter four to discuss “the war within the jihadist movement;” the “splitting up of

jihadis;” the “religious nationalists versus transnationalists” (24-34) and the “jihadis’ civil war” (151-184).

However, there are several limitations to the framework that Gerges lays out in the pages of *The Far Enemy*. For example, he seems intent on implying that “mainstream Muslims,” such as the Muslim Brotherhood, oppose or reject jihad on principle, when this is not so. Perhaps he is impelled to make this claim in order to heighten the contrast between jihadis and mainstream Muslim movements. He also suggests that “jihadis” are engaged in an actual war. There is unmistakable ahistorical element in placing such movements in neatly constructed dichotomies or categories. For instance, can one classify an Egyptian or a Pakistani performing “jihad” in Afghanistan or Bosnia as a “transnationalist” or “global jihadist” when that person might consider himself as a “Muslim nationalist” defending his Muslim nation? Might we not call this a form of “supra-nationalism” just as easily as we might call it “trans-nationalism”? In addition, Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood abandoned its armed “jihad” against the Egyptian government several decades ago, but the organization never stopped supporting “jihad” elsewhere: in Palestine against Israel, in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, and currently in Iraq against the US. Therefore, does the Brotherhood deserve the ‘anti-jihad’ moniker “mainstream” as Gerges asserts? Or could it not also be thought of as a “transnationalist” or “globalist jihadist organization” according to Gerges’s rendering?

We can take a similarly complicated view of one of Egypt’s most well-known violent militant groups, al-Gama’ah al-Islamiyyah. Al-Gama’ah, which was actively involved in armed conflict with President Anwar Sadat’s government in the late 1970s, discarded its campaign of violence in the 1980s. Then the movement made clear

in its theological and ideological literature that as long as President Husni Mubarak's government did not impinge upon its members proselytizing and preaching their views on Islam, it would not conduct armed jihad against the regime. Yet, like the Brotherhood, al-Gama'ah supported armed jihad in Palestine, Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya. In addition, it trained and encouraged Egyptians to take up the gun in these battlefields. But then, al-Gama'ah once again entered into armed conflict with the Mubarak regime in the early and mid-1990s. However, since 1997, it has once again renounced the use of violence to achieve its aims. One might see the difficulties in trying to describing al-Gama'ah al-Islamiyyah using Gerges's framework.

Conceptual issues aside, there are some methodological problems that weaken Gerges otherwise fine work. Gerges makes use of an array of primary materials. These consist primarily of various kinds of writings and interviews (ix). The written materials consist of "documents written by jihadis" as well as memoirs and articles written by "jihadis" and Arab analysts. The "documents" were collected and published together in a two volume collection in Arabic in 1991 (287). They are fairly extensive and he drew on eight written by al-Gama'ah; five by other smaller, but significant groups some of which joined al-Gama'ah; and five written by other groups. The collection that he utilized also contained a number of fliers. Unfortunately, only two of the sixty memoirs and other articles used in *The Far Enemy* were written prior to 2001. This gap of ten years, 1991-2001, in primary materials obliged Gerges to rely heavily upon memories written by former bin Laden associates who are likely to have had reason to denounce him and/or to distance themselves from al-Qaeda and the attacks of 9/11.

The result is that, similarly to the "9/11 report" that Gerges criticized, *The Far Enemy's* methodology can be

similarly criticized for its "credibility and reliability." In several places the reader cannot even make this evaluation. For example, in the third chapter he tells the reader that he "borrows from" several documents without telling us to which documents he is referring (306). In chapter six Gerges informs the reader that he "relies on" several "primary sources" that were "grouped" together in one endnote "to avoid too many citations" (322). Again the reader cannot do justice to Gerges's argument as he does not give us the ability to fully evaluate its efficacy.

Gerges also cites a large number of interview with "jihadis" in his book. However, too often are the "jihadis" voices collapsed together. They have no specific identity, no group affiliation and personal likes and dislikes. In addition, there is little sense of the methodology utilized here. What specific questions elicited these responses? What were the interviewees group affiliation? Were all interviewees asked the same questions? To what social class did they belong? Instead, the book contains a number of passages similar to this one, "I got the impression that jihadis could have quietly tolerated Sadat's peace treaty with Israel" (46). Which "jihadis"? When? Or take for example, this passage, "in private conversations, jihadis...acknowledged the asymmetry of power between themselves and their ruling nemesis" (66). Again, which "jihadis"? In addition, Gerges often uses expressions like the following, "in my conversations with jihadis, they said that it was not in their interest to internationalize jihad" (67) or "former jihadis...present at the creation of their movement in the 1970s tell me that they were deeply suspicious of the Muslim Brothers' attempt to coopt them"(109). Obviously, the problem is not the anonymity of the sources themselves, but the lack of context in which these voices appear. As such they come across as two-dimensional and almost completely bereft of the complicated

political calculations that presumably contributed to their involvement in militancy in the first place. Are all “jihadists” similar to all other “jihadists”?

Whatever its shortcomings, *The Far Enemy* still contributes to our knowledge on a number of important questions. Perhaps most important of all in the present circumstances, Gerges does an excellent job of bring to the fore the insight that al-Qaeda’s ideas and practices are not well received by the overwhelming majority of Muslims.

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**Paul A. Silverstein**

*Algeria in France. Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004, 284 pages, including bibliography and index.

**Reviewed by Margaret A. Majumdar<sup>2</sup>**

This is an important book that takes as its theme ‘the postcolonial predicament that unites Algeria and France into a single transpolitical space’ (p.2). Its main focus is on the presence in France today of Algerian immigrants and their descendants, now spanning several generations. However, to support its main thesis of the existence of a transnational transpolitics, it also examines aspects of Algeria’s colonial and post-colonial periods including the War for Liberation. Silverstein builds a historical anthropology of this transnational, transpolitical entity, in which the two strands are inextricably intertwined.

His is a new approach in respect of much of the existing

literature. Most of the extant work either details the major factual elements of a socio-economic historical account of Algerian immigration into France or analyses the problematic relationship between the populations of immigrant origin and the various populations, institutions and ideologies constituting the French nation, along with key points of discord and tension. Silverstein eschews any unilinear narrative, preferring instead to treat the subject, by way of a thematic organisation around various categories, including those of immigration, the transnational European space, ethnicity, spatializing practices, bodily practices, generation and writing. This thematic arrangement is effective in opening up new perspectives and interesting linkages. It also presents a more subtle approach than some by transcending many of the clichés concerning identity problems, inter-generational conflict and the various issues surrounding religion and *laïcité*.

The result is a rich, multi-layered account of the political, social and cultural complexities, impinging on the life of Algerians, or those of Algerian origin, living in France today. This includes a well-documented account of the development of ‘Beur’ political and cultural activism (Chapter Five). It also includes (in Chapter Three), a wide-ranging account of spatial organisation establishing linkages across geography and history. He compares the significance of the Kabyle house (*axxam*) and village to the effects of the redevelopment of Paris under Hausmann, the resettlement villages imposed by the French colonial power in Algeria, the shanty towns of the 1950s and 1960s, to the modern *cités* of the *banlieues* around the big cities in France today.

Each chapter is headed by a potted biography of a person, or persons, of migrant origin. These contribute to the richness of the account, allowing for the inclusion of subjective discourse, liberated from the objectivity of

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<sup>2</sup> **Margaret A. Majumdar** is visiting professor of Francophone Studies at the University of Portsmouth, UK. Her recent books include *Francophone Studies: The Essential Glossary* (2002) and, jointly with Mohammed Saad, *Transition and Development in Algeria: Economic, Social and Cultural Challenges* (2005).

academic discourse. Each of these characters illustrates, in some way, the particular topic of the chapter. However, there is the danger that the experience of each of these individuals comes over-representative the generality skewing the picture presented of the Franco-Algerians as a whole. This is particularly the case with the Berberist cultural activists among those selected as representative. Indeed, there is a general tendency in the book to give greatest prominence to the Berbers, to the extent of running the risk of the part taking the place of the whole and overplaying differences between Algerian 'Berbers', on the one hand, and Algerian 'Arabs', or even 'Muslims', on the other.

This is perhaps all the more regrettable, since the detailed analysis of the role played by Berbers, or Kabyles, in French colonial ideology and subsequent Algerian nationalist discourse and policy is one of the most effective and interesting aspects of the book. Chapter two is especially strong in mapping out the diverse evolution of ideological representations of ethnic specificities and relationships, involving those between France and Algeria, between the Berbers and the Arabs, and between the Berbers and regionalist movements in metropolitan France. Silverstein explores the ideological underpinning that supported attempts by the French colonists to foster the Kabyles as allies. He shows how the French delineated them from the 'Oriental' Arabs according to a differential account of their sedentary way of life, their language and culture, their spatial organisation and their mythic origins. All this accounts for the Kabyles' putative "closeness" to Europeans. He connects this ethnographic history to contemporary positions taken by the Algerian state and the ongoing conflict around the Berber question, as well as to tensions playing themselves out between the French central state and regionalist movements.

The book is particularly effective in the way it teases out the contradictions in the French conception of the nation. It does a nice job of demonstrating how the universalising modernist view of the nation, as the political union of equal citizens, has long since been infiltrated by ethnic, territorial and cultural conceptions of the national body.

In line with the importance of the transnational, there are also interesting pages on the evolving significance of the Mediterranean. Silverstein looks at some of the various ways in which the Mediterranean has been portrayed as a factor of unity, most notably during the heyday of French colonialism (via such concepts as Latin Africa), and more recently with Euro-Med policy development. Of course, this does not preclude a more critical approach, in which conflict and opposition constitute the transnational. In this respect, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the categories of the transnational and transpolitics are not new ones, applicable only to the current political context, but entirely appropriate to characterize the relations of imperialism and colonialism.

The inclusion of a chapter on the important area of 'Beur' writing (Chapter Six) is one of the merits of the book. However, some of the author's arguments are not entirely convincing such as the notion that these writers have shifted their thematic concerns away from 'a localized discourse on multicultural hybridity ... towards various transpolitical expressions of identity more closely tied to the salient ethnic and religious categories of North Africa' (p.188). One may feel that not enough detail on the Algerian situation itself has been provided to support this position.

The category of gender, although highlighted in the introduction as one of the book's key topics, is not fully dealt with in the body of the book. This absence is magnified to some extent by

its lack of mention in the index. There is much that needs to be said about the role of women and women's organisations in struggles, both in France and Algeria. Given that Chapter Four deals with the body and bodily practices, one might have expected a deeper treatment of the important questions surrounding gender, whereas the chapter is devoted mainly to dealing with questions of religion and sport, state policy in these areas, and responses to it.

There is another notable absence from the book, and that is any reference to *Francophonie*, which constitutes a significant transnational grouping and locus of 'transnational' discourse. Given the historically problematical relationship of both France and Algeria to *Francophonie*, it would seem a rich seam to mine in this connection.

The book is flawed by a number of trivial errors. For instance, Yannick Noah can hardly pass as a 'Beur' public figure, as he is described on p.167. More bizarrely, Charles Bonn somehow appears, not as a university professor of Francophone Maghrebian literature, but as Minister of Integration alongside Kofi Yamgnane (p.204). More substantially, the comments on British immigration and citizenship policy are not entirely accurate (pp.28-29), leaving out of the account the important 1962 Immigration Act, which overturned the free right of entry of Commonwealth citizens, before the subsequent restrictions on the right of entry of non-'patrial' Commonwealth citizens, first introduced in 1968. There is also a lack of clarity over the rights afforded to all Commonwealth citizens to vote in all British elections, as well as the role of the British state in actively recruiting Commonwealth workers, notably for the National Health Service.

On the central themes of the book, however, there is likely to be a lively debate around the categories of 'transpolitics' and 'transnationalism' and

the significance that is accorded to them. Some may think there is an element of wishful thinking here, as when Silverstein details his premise of a 'transnational Berber social movement [which] has sunk roots simultaneously in urban Algeria and suburban France and has constituted new bases for interpersonal solidarity and belonging across time and space. In the process, and in in spite of a number of discontinuities, a new generation of political actors has been generated in the transnational space that links a new, multiracial France to a new post-FLN Algeria.' (p.183). Against that, there is also his more negative interpretation of transpolitics, particularly in the view that the Algerian conflict of the bloody decade of the 1990s has been imported into France, with Islamists and Berber activists taking up their respective fights.

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**Lisa Pollard**

*Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923.*

Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005. 287 pages.

**Reviewed by Omnia El Shakry<sup>3</sup>**

Lisa Pollard's *Nurturing the Nation* is the latest in a spate of recent texts in the Middle East Gender Studies field.<sup>1</sup> Her text, which analyzes the centrality of the domicile, both real and imagined, to the formation of Egyptian national identity and nationalist politics, is a stimulating addition to the literature on gender and the family in modern Egypt. In the tradition of Lynn Hunt's *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, Pollard examines the metaphorical relationship between politics and family

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structure in nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt. In particular, she addresses the "ascendance of the image of the monogamous couple, their children, and the reformed, modernized domicile as templates for discussing political transformation from the middle of the nineteenth century through the Egyptian 1919 revolution" (5). This broadened perspective in which, for example, the "woman question" no longer appears as a debate solely about women, enhances our understanding of the centrality of the family as a metaphor for and instrument of politics. Remaking women, she argues, was as much about remaking the colonized nation, as it was about gender.

Relying on a diverse and creative array of sources, including travel literature (both by Egyptians in Europe and Europeans in Egypt), British and Egyptian archives, children's textbooks, and the vibrant Egyptian press, Pollard presents several novel arguments about Egyptian nationalism and its relation to British colonialism. First, she contends that domesticity and family life were a measure of modernity both for the aspiring Egyptian state-sponsored technocratic elite, as well as British colonial officials and travelers. As such "the reformed domicile" became "symbolic of modernity and of the ascendance of the modern nation-state." (17). The translation of a burgeoning European literature on "manners and customs," pointed to domestic habits as yardsticks for progress. Monogamy, educated wives, and bourgeois family life came to simultaneously signify civility in the modern world and explicate Western progress.

Second, she explores how the image of Egypt produced by European travel literature (that of polygamous households, indolent harems and dissolute connubial behavior) influenced British colonial policy in Egypt. She argues that although political and economic considerations often served as

the pretext for colonial interventions, matters of domestic practice were equally influential in justifying British colonial rule. Homes and families, particularly of the ruling elite, thus became central to the British colonial project in Egypt.

Third, Pollard examines the state sponsored educational system and the ways in which domesticity, and the habits of modernity, were figured and reconfigured in school textbooks and curricula. Exploring missionary as well as state schools, she argues that Egyptians learned that the reason for their backwardness was cultural tradition. Their "conversion to modernity" would be accomplished through the reshaping of the domestic, and by extension public, order. The home, then, was "the bedrock of modernity" (128).

Fourth, Pollard underscores the role of the vibrant turn-of-the-century press in mobilizing metaphors of homes and families to discuss the state of the Egyptian body politic. Members of the political press, such as Yaqub Sannu' and Abdallah Nadim, effectively analogized Khedivial household politics with political governance.

Finally, Pollard reexamines the iconography and rhetoric of the revolution of 1919. She argues that the image of the reformed family displayed Egypt-as-a-nation with the *Wafd* (Egypt's foremost anticolonial nationalist political party) leadership as heads of the national family. Yet, the reformed family politics of the generation of 1919 *effendiyya* (bourgeois nationalists) enabled a newfound paternalism towards the masses. With a class base drawn predominantly from elite landowning and urban bourgeoisie interests, the *Wafd* claimed to represent, but did not draw from, the demographic mass of Egyptians. In fact, the *Wafd* had a profound ambivalence toward the masses, sometimes derisively referred to as the mob, the riffraff, and the rabble. Yet despite its elitist orientation the



*Wafd* attempted to project an image of a unified Egyptian nation in the face of colonial domination. Political caricatures depicted an independent Egypt as a modern reformed woman—in effect an ideal mother—providing a unifying image of a common heritage. Pollard concludes her text with a discussion of the political significance of the role of charity—nurturing the nation at home and in the public realm became "a powerful political act" (210), a point the British refused to recognize.

Even with several notable exceptions, family history in the Middle East field remains underdeveloped area. Lisa Pollard's text is a wonderful addition to the field. A focus on the family as a site of public discourses highlights the fact that far from a sacrosanct domain of private life, the family hinges on the interconnection between the private and the public sphere. Yet a focus on the rhetoric and iconography of the family runs the risk of examining the family solely as a metaphor for politics, governance, or the body politic. This immediately begs the question of whether, and when, the family becomes an object and/or instrument of politics. This need not necessarily lead to a social history of the family or families. Rather a discussion of discursive practices that targeted actual families could have provided a useful corrective to discussions of representations of the family in Egyptian public discourse.

That being said, this text is an important contribution to Middle East gender studies, and the broader study of the family and revolutionary movements. It is essential reading as well for scholars interested in the intersection of gender, nationalism and colonialism in the modern world.

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University of California Press, 2003); Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); and Mona Russell *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863-1922* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender and Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, London:

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