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# HIZBALLAH: A Discussion of Its Early Formation

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The Global War on Terrorism demands that we focus on what Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage called the “A-Team of Terrorism.” Hizballah, which means the Party of God, is a political and social movement that arose among Lebanon’s Shi’a’s in response to the Islamic revolution in Iran. It was formed in 1982 after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and went from a small terrorist group capable of minor skirmishes to becoming one of the world’s most dynamic militant groups in the region.

Over the years, Hizballah created a quasi-state in southern Lebanon and jumped into mainstream Lebanese politics. Today, Hizballah has modern healthcare centers, a satellite channel (Al-Manar), extensive social welfare services, construction engineering groups, and efficient light infantry units — all under the spiritual leadership of Shiite clerics who are backed by an annual budget of approximately \$200 million, which primarily comes from Iran, and supported by Syria. This organization has its enemies and detractors within Lebanon and in the Arab world. Assessing direct Arabic sources will introduce U.S. military planners to the complexity of Hizballah and highlight its friends and foe.

“The Wahabis are filth from the manufacture of Satan; we shall take revenge upon the Wahabis, (and) this crime shall not pass without punishment!” This was part of the slogans carried by Shiite crowds in Southern Lebanon after the Taif Accords brokered in Saudi Arabia that ended the Lebanese civil war. In Hizballah lore, the Taif Accords are an example of how a segment of the organization views the Saudi plan as a way to further Sunni hegemony in Lebanon. The interesting part of Hizballah is its ability today to use Syria and Iran to maintain its control of southern Lebanon while expanding its terrorist network throughout the world.

## 1970s: The Early Seeds of Hizballah

The foundations of Hizballah were laid years before the Iranian revolution, in the ties that bound the Shi’i ulama (religious scholars) of Iran and Lebanon. Many of these ulama were schooled together in the Shi’i theological academies in Iraq, especially in the shrine city of Najaf (the center of Shiite learning and training of clerics). During the late 1950s and 1960s, these academies became active in formulating an Islamic response to nationalism and secularism. Prominent ulama lectured and wrote on Islamic



government, Islamic economics, and the ideal Islamic state. In Najaf, the Iraqi ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and the exiled Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi Khomeini both subjected the existing political order to an Islamic critique. Lebanese ulama and theological students overheard and joined in these debates.

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, the future mentor of Hizballah, was an exemplary product of Najaf’s mix of scholasticism and radicalism. Fadlallah was born and schooled in Najaf, where his father, a scholar from south Lebanon, had come to study. Fadlallah imbibed the ideas then current in Najaf and went to Lebanon in 1966, where he made his Beirut

husayniyah (a Shi’i congregation house) into a center of Islamic activism. Sayyid Musa al-Sadr dominated the Shi’i scene at the time, and Fadlallah had a modest following. But in the 1970s, Fadlallah received an important reinforcement: Iraqi authorities expelled about a hundred Lebanese theological students as part of a crackdown on Shi’i activism in the shrine cities. The expelled students became disciples of Fadlallah on their return to Lebanon, and later formed the core of Hizballah.

To go a bit deeper in understanding the origins of Hizballah, one must study and learn about Ayatollah Al-Sadr who was expelled from Iraq and returned to Lebanon from Najaf like many of his peers. This in and of itself is revealing since many prominent Shiite like Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Al-Sistani, Ayatollah Fadlallah all received their theological education in Najaf, Iraq, and not in Iran. Iraq is the holiest place for Shiite Islam. Najaf is akin to the Vatican and Karballah akin to Calvary. In the early ’70s, Ayatollah Al-Sadr preached a combination of religious discipline and Shiite self-sufficiency. He created a group dedicated to aiding Shiite communities and channeling the efforts of young Shiite males. By 1975 military camps for the defense of Shiite villages in southern Lebanon appeared; that year 400 youths were given military training. It is a reverse case of turning plowshares into rifles.

In the late ’60s and early ’70s, Lebanese Shi’a lived mainly in the poorest neighborhoods of southern Lebanon and the Bekaa valley. After the Lebanese civil war started in 1975, many of them migrated to the suburbs of Beirut while others traveled to West African countries like Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire in search of a better life. The imbalance of Sunni Muslims across Lebanon drove the Shiites to support the Christian Maronites in the beginning of the war. Yasser Arafat’s desire to pull them to his side succeeded

when through negotiation he co-opted Ayatollah Musa Sadr by convincing him that armed fronts are the only way to protect Shiite interests and channel efforts to fight both the Lebanese Christians and the Israelis. These discussions led to the creation of Afwaj Muqawamah Al-Libnaneeah/The Lebanese Resistance Brigade (Amal or hope in Arabic). Amal would receive weapons, training and tactics from the PLO but Sadr refused to join Arafat's cause. As the war raged across Lebanon, Amal's popularity began to wane because of Sadr's stance. Many of the hard-liner Shi'a joined the PLO alliance and by the late '80s Amal began to fracture. Southern Lebanon also became a haven for anti-Shah clerics bent on undertaking the Iranian revolution. Between 1975 and 1979 (The Iranian Revolution) southern Lebanon did the following for the Iranian Islamic Revolutionaries:

- Militarily trained Khomeini's sons Mustafa and Ahmed.
- Trained 700 members of the Dawa Party in guerilla tactics (the Dawa remains active in Iraq today).
- Arafat and Khomeini are known to have met one another in Najaf to plan strategy.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran's first Defense Minister Mustafa Shamran received with Fatah, as well as the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) minister Mohsen Rafiq Dust.

These revelations are highly significant and represent the importance of Lebanon in the early stages of the Iranian Islamic revolution. It also demonstrates the importance of Iran's support of Shiites in Lebanon not only as a matter of policy, but also as a means of repaying the debt for the safe-haven granted the anti-Shah Ayatollah's and militias in Lebanon prior to the 1979 Iranian coup.

From 1976 to 1986, Amal and later Hizballah began a campaign of purchasing blocks of Beirut and settling it with Shiites at the expense of Sunnis and Maronites. Clerics used tithes at first and also Shiites' remittances from the U.S, Europe, Gulf States, and Africa; it then received outright donations from the Islamic Republic of Iran. It's important to note that when Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 under the leadership of Ariel Sharon, Amal saw an opportunity to get rid of the PLO from the southern areas and initially welcomed the Israelis. This was a different story in Beirut where Amal militias were fighting along side the leftist allies against the Maronite Christians. During this time, an Amal officer by the name of Hussein Mussawi broke away from the mainstream Amal and established a splitter faction called Islamic Amal. The group was later supported and trained by Iran and began to slowly resist the new Israeli occupation by carrying out attacks against them and their allies the South Lebanese Army (SLA).

Musa Sadr laid the ground work for what would become Hizballah, but he never survived to see the organization create the quasi-state in southern Lebanon that it is today. In August



1978 he arrived in Libya and disappeared; to Hizballah he went into occultation and attained mythic status in the lore of Shiites Imams who have disappeared to return again and usher in a just society. The accounting of Ayatollah Musa Sadr remains a focal point in Qadhafi's relations with the Lebanese. Sadr's occultation and mythology did much to encourage the concept of martyrdom and self-sacrifice. With the disappearance of Musa Sadr and the toppling of Iran's pro-American monarchy, the late '70s marked the turning point for Amal. Today, Amal's leader is a Lebanese born Shi'a from Sierra Leone, West Africa, by the name of Nabih Berri.

### Hizballah Overtakes Amal

In Lebanon, both Hizballah and Amal represent Shiite interests but because of Amal's 1975 charter which states that: "Amal is not a religious movement" Hizballah dismisses the organization as one not truly representing the people. On the surface, relations between Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and Nabih Berri, the head of Amal and Speaker of the Lebanese parliament, appear to be quite cordial. However, tensions between the two militias repeatedly boiled over into bloodletting. In June 2000 both groups rushed into south Lebanon to establish their presence in the former Israeli-occupied zone. On June 5 of that year, Ahmad Haidar Alyane, 18, was seriously injured in a clash with Hizballah

militiamen that erupted when he and other Amal partisans attempted to remove a yellow Hezbollah flag in the Kalawiya district of south Lebanon. In mid-June, five people in Bint Jbeil were injured when the car they were riding in came under fire and two people were reportedly hurt during the course of another clash between the two groups in Jebbain. On June 18, Ghalib Hammadi, 35 years old, was wounded during a fight that broke out between members of the two militias who were hanging pictures of Nasrallah and Berri. The fight lasted all night until a Lebanese army unit intervened. A similar clash broke out in the village of Tura on the same day, but there were no casualties. Because of Amal's corruption and lack of discipline, Syria sided with Hezbollah and continues to support it today.

Although Hezbollah honors the founder of Amal, Imam Musa Sadr, and revels in his disappearance in Libya, it talks about the organization in contemptuous terms. Sadr, although a Shiite cleric, seems to believe his organization has to work in the defense of those he calls *Tabaqa Al-Mahrouma* (the deprived class), irrespective of religious affiliation. This is not what Iran and many other clerics in Lebanon had in mind supporting Amal. What changed the landscape and began the ascendance of Hezbollah was the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

It was time to return the favor of supporting Iran's Islamist opposition to the Shah and the group declared the intent of liberating the Mostadafeen (the dispossessed) and a direct reference to the Muslim victims of the world. Teheran's earliest experiment at Shiite liberation was the infusion of cash, military advisors and militant clerics into Lebanon. Amal and its more secular outlook could not withstand the cash flow of the petro-economy of the new Iranian Islamic Republic. This is a key point: for policymakers of the free world, does a nation endowed with natural resources, who then uses its massive earnings to support terrorism, pursues nuclear weapons, and radicalizes a region be allowed to continue unmolested by the United Nations and the world's democracies? Iran dismembered Amal through a variety of means, but the split

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over the doctrine of secular versus Shiite poor classes was most fervent among Nabih Berri, who represented a more inclusive Amal, and Mahdi Shams-al-Deen, who saw a more radical exclusivist vision of Amal. Another aspect that was crucial to control included:

- Voice of Lebanon Battalions, a radio station controlled by Amal hard-liners, the ancestor of Al-Manar (Hezbollah Satellite TV).

- Al-Mahena School that was a core area of training militant brigades and gunmen. This was a key area that the Iranian Republican Guard Corps infiltrated for the benefit of hard-liners.

To say that the Iranians and the Amal hard-liners would splinter into Hezbollah and eradicate moderates would be a tactical oversimplification. Arabic sources reveal that the hard-liners needed the moderates in order to interact with the central government in Beirut and to negotiate with other militias and groups like the PLO, the Christian Militias, the Druze, and the Syrians. Many were co-opted or today serve in Amal's emasculated organization as a minority party in Lebanese politics. It is not always dog eats dog, but subtler, with alliances and tangled webs that feed guerilla movements and unconventional warfare. The hard-liner Shiites also wanted to lessen their dependence on Yasser Arafat and Fatah, they turned more and more to Iran and by default, geography and logistics to Syria. During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (the 1982 Operation Peace for Galilee), the Lebanese President Elias Sarkiss called for a Council of National Reconciliation. Nabih Berri represented Amal and the Shiites; however, Amal's deep divisions fractured that year into Amal

Al-Islamiyah (Islamic Amal) what would be Hezbollah in 1982. Iran and Amal Shiite militants did not want reconciliation but to thrive on chaos, until they controlled more of southern Lebanon.

During this political struggle the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) trained a cadre of 2,000 fighters for the more radicalist Shiite agenda in the Bekaa Valley. It is important to note that in the early stages of forming Hezbollah, the IRGC used the Iranian embassies in Beirut and Damascus as forward staging areas and command and control centers. This may make planners wonder if Iranian diplomatic missions in Iraq are being used to foment instability against coalition forces. In 1982, radical Shiite strategy in Lebanon focused not on Israeli forces but on ensuring the destabilization of Lebanon's central government. Their strategy was simple — out of the chaos Shiite rejectionists and militants would use a combination of force and co-optation to supplant the quasi-secularist Amal organization as the dominant Shiite party in Lebanon. During this time the Iranian ambassador Ali Akbar Mohtashami, a hard-liner, would be active in supporting Hezbollah and IRGC operations in Lebanon. His reward would be promotion to Interior Minister. This focus on destabilizing Lebanon would eventually lead to a clash between Iran and Hezbollah against the multinational peacekeeping forces. Their plan of engagement was methodical and can be broken down into the following phases:

I. Summer 1982 to October 1983: Creating the jihadist climate to fight internal foes like Amal, PLO (which allied with Amal), Druze militia as well as Lebanese Christian and Sunni factions.

II. October 1983 to autumn 1987: Concentrate on attacking U.S. (Bombing of the Marine barracks) and French forces, and then limit encroachment of Syrian forces in Shiite enclaves and the Bekaa Valley.

III. Autumn 1987 to May 2000: Use southern Lebanon, Iranian support, and Syrian containment and cooperation to fight a proxy war against Israeli forces in Lebanon.

When the Israeli Defense Force wore down the PLO, Yasser Arafat fled to Tunisia in 1987 with the bulk of his fighters. This

occurred after the U.S. brokered cease fire which weakened the Amal-PLO alliance and set the stage for Hizballah to dominate Amal. The infusion of Iranian funds as the world withdrew from Lebanon's civil war made a difference in Hizballah's power and ability to create a quasi-state in South Lebanon. Strategically, the creation and strengthening of a Shiite enclave in Lebanon served many purposes for the Islamic Republic Of Iran:

- Allowed the export of Khomeini's Islamist revolutionary ideals in the heart of the Arab world.

- Gave Iran a chance to counter U.S. and French forces in Lebanon as part of its grand strategy of frustrating western policy in the region.

- Lebanon could be a launching pad and base for the support of Islamists wanting to topple despotic and un-elected regimes in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

### Discussions on the Role of the Mosque

A key component in Hizballah's control of society can be traced to the manipulation and politicization of mosques and religious schools towards their own radical agenda. Mahdi Shams Al-Deen, a Hizballah clerical leader discusses this concept in an interview in Al-Nahar newspaper in 1987. To Hizballah the mosque serves as a means to isolate members of the flock from the wickedness of society, a mini-migration of sorts from the ills of society. Hizballah argues that the mosque is not only for prayers, but has an educational, social, political and military role. In early Islam in the town of Medina, mosques were used as a rallying point for war against the Meccans, as well as a place to meet and take political decisions as a group and elect leaders. They were schools in addition to being places of prayer. This made sense in Prophet Muhammad's time as the mosque with its minaret was the central location in which society convened. This is how many Arab universities were established like Al-Azhar in Cairo that today teaches medicine, law, and engineering in addition to religious studies. The difference is that Hizballah and other jihadist organizations emphasize the warfare aspects of the use of the mosque as Prophet Muhammad did to fight the early Meccans. What they do not tell their congregation is that Muhammad indeed used the mosque to rally troops, but projected military power predominately outside Medina. Of Prophet Muhammad's 27 battles, only the Battle of the Ditch in which the Meccans laid siege to Medina and his battles against Jewish tribes within Medina, involved fighting internally in the city. This is significant as there is no precedence in Prophet Muhammad's time for engaging in actual fighting or firing of weapons from the mosque itself. It is also important to emphasize that Muslims from the seventh to the tenth century evolved the mosque into great centers of learning, emphasizing the communal and constructive education aspects of the institution, not the counter-productive warfare aspect of the building that Al-Qaeda and Hizballah advocate.

The mosque was also used for early Muslims to express their feelings over governance, discuss ideas, and seek redress of wrongs. This meant not only were leaders engaged in solving problems but members of the entire community; today, the mosque's debates

are dominated by the clerics who control the microphone. Hizballah argues that when mosques ceased to be a focal point for society the Islamic Ummah (community) was lost. This was one way to simplify and bring in the masses to the mosques they control to imbue society with such radical ideas as Khomeini's revolutionary zeal and not a real discussion of Islamic history and texts that allow for a robust analytical discussion of religion. It just propagates a radical and jihadist agenda.

### How Hizballah Exercised Societal Control through its Mosques

In the late 1970s, Shiite groups were a clandestine grassroots organization, and four main mosques served as headquarters for their activities. It began when Palestinian militants took over the Rawsha District (Shiite) in West Beirut, terrorizing merchants, hotels, and restaurants:

- ① The Imam Bakr Mosque served as a rallying point for Shiite youths wanting to form vigilante groups to protect Shiite businesses from Palestinian and Maronite Christian exploitation. From there these vigilante groups began enforcing morality in their districts, closing bars and forbidding the sale of alcohol in Ramadan. It is interesting to note that in the Rawsha District pitched battles occurred between Maronite Christian militia and Fatah fighters; not tolerating a third militia, they demolished three apartment buildings that contained many Shiite fighters.

- ② Imam Al-Sadek Mosque in Beirut's Hamra district. Note that each mosque is influenced by its neighborhood. What distinguishes the Al-Sadek mosque is its location in the heart of Beirut's business district. This particular institution specialized in laundering and distributing funds from Iran, with an initial focus of shielding the Shiite community from hyperinflation brought on by the civil war. It also arranged for foreign currency transfers for the Shiite community, ran a printing press and as a secondary mission began a program of depleting this neighborhood of Armenians, Maronites and Sunni Muslims.

- ③ Imam Hussein Mosque in the Qantari District near Burj-Al-Murr; and

- ④ Mustafa Mosque at Ain Al-Marissa both used Iranian funding to find housing for Shiite families and settle Druze, Sunni and Christian areas with Shiites.

These mosques organized major Shiite events (Ashoora, Palestine Day, Birth of the Mahdi); they printed and distributed posters with pictures of Shiite martyrs of the Lebanese civil war. Most importantly, from these mosques a good portion of Beirut would be purchased, divided, and controlled by Shiite clerics using Iranian funding. In the Shiite stronghold of Baalbeck in southern Lebanon, the Iranians established a Hawzah (A religious clerical hierarchy that is similar in concept to the apostolate setting up a diocese in a city). There are Hawzah's in Najaf in Iraq, Qom in Iran, and in Baalbeck, Lebanon. Understanding the hierarchy of the Hawzah and the mosques they control is important to gain a sense of how the society is structured and where radicals can seek asylum, thrive or hold a Hawza hostage, like Muqtada Al-Sadr did with the Najaf Hawza and his

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Mahdi Army in Iraq. The Hawza is a Shiite concept of Islam and Sunni militant radicals like the Zarqawi group in Iraq and Usama Bin Laden do not have such a strict religious hierarchy to rely on; although this is changing with the Muslim Ulema Council in Iraq and Zarqawi militants coming together on items of common interest in Iraq. Usama Bin Laden has sought religious endorsements from such radical Wahabi clerics like Safar Al-Hawali.

### Creating a Quasi-state through Militant Jihad

The problem of the Hizballah State in Lebanon today is that it is built around militant jihad. This does not mean necessarily that violence created the quasi-state in south Lebanon but that initially the militant formations were created and around this a social support system that today caters to many civilians in south Lebanon. The early '60s saw Amal focusing on social projects for the welfare of Shiites including the establishment of a sewing school, nursing school, technical school and a major hospital in the impoverished south between 1963 and 1969. But during the Lebanese civil war, the focus was the survival of the Shiites in Lebanon. This birthed the following organizations to support Hizballah's irregular forces:

■ **Shaheed (martyrs) Foundation:** Establishes funds, education and benefits for the families of those dying for Hizballah's objectives. This includes maintaining a \$2,500 stipend for families of suicide bombers and martyrs of Hizballah.

■ **Medical Establishment:** Was created in 1987, through the financing of the Martyrs Foundation, the first hospital was in Al-Hamra, and it is now expanded to nine medical centers, 21 clinics, 13 mobile clinics and employs 360 medical workers and 119 ambulances by 1998. It provides social and medical services to tens of thousands of Shiite Lebanese.

■ **Jihad Al-Binaa (Jihad Construction Foundation):** This is a novel organization among Islamic radical organizations formed in 1988. It is dedicated for civil engineering projects and construction for the Bekaa Valley and southern Shiite Lebanese villages. This organization digs wells, aids farmers and constructs homes demolished by military action (either by Israelis or other factions). It is important to also think of this Hizballah section as a ready resource for combat engineers that support the military wing of the organization.

**Hizballah Media Section:** Most of the focus of books on Hizballah has been on their satellite TV channel Al-Manar which

the U.S. State Department placed on the Terrorism Exclusion List in December 2004. For its anti-Semitic and anti-American program that feeds conspiracy theories and hatred in the region. Aside from Al-Manar, Hizballah operates three radio stations:

- Voice of the Mustadafeen (Oppressed);
- Voice of Iman (Piety); and
- Voice of Islam.

Hizballah also has several book publishing arms like Dar Al-Ilami Printing, also called Ahl-Al-Bait (Community of the Faithful) Printing as well as Dar Al-Adwaa (House of Dawn) Publishing, which prints the latest in Shiite religious, social, and political theory. It also has not neglected the internet with three known websites called Al-Manar, Al-Muqawama (Resistance), and Hizballah. This along with newspapers shows the extent of the information campaign directed against the United States and coalition partners in Iraq.

### Conclusion

This discussion of Hizballah has articulated the complex and multifaceted capabilities of this organization. In many ways one can argue that among Islamic radical organizations Hizballah is in a class of its own. In addition, the organization is deeply rooted with Iran's hard-line clergy and counts among its founding fathers a former Iranian Defense Minister, an Iranian Interior Minister and a cadre of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and diplomats. U.S. military planners from many vantage points (kinetic, information operations and civil affairs), see that the services this organization provides have become entrenched in more than 45 villages, town, and hamlets in southern Lebanon, and that removing this would cause a humanitarian crisis. Yet, it continues to be an antagonist of the United States and U.S. policy objectives for the region.

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Both authors are fluent in multiple dialects of Arabic, and the reading of Arabic sources represents their understanding of the material; any errors or omissions are their own. A complete list of references for this article is on file and available through *Infantry Magazine*.

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