DIIS REPORT

THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN IRAN, SYRIA AND HIZBOLLAH
AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN LEBANON AND THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

The strategic alliance between Iran, Syria and Hizbollah plays a significant part in the political situation in the Middle East and relates to a number of political questions of diplomatic interest for Denmark. This report explains the historical background for the alliance, the changes it has undergone since the appearance of Hizbollah in 1982, and its significance in the current situation, after the war between Hizbollah and Israel in 2006.

Resumé på dansk
Den strategiske alliance mellem Iran, Syrien og Hizbollah er af central betydning for den politiske situation i Mellemøsten og berører en række politiske spørgsmål af stor diplomatisk interesse for Danmark. Denne rapport gør rede for den historiske baggrund for alliancen, dens forandringer siden Hizbollahs tilblivelse i 1982, og dens betydning i den nuværende situation efter krigen mellem Hizbollah og Israel i 2006.

Introduction: Situating the Iran-Syria-Hizbollah Alliance in Middle East Politics

This report examines the alliance between the Lebanese Shiite organisation Hizbollah and its regional allies Syria and Iran. Its main conceptual contention is that the alliance, while persisting since 1982, has been subject to internal political changes in Syria, Lebanon and Iran. The alliance is at once a marriage of convenience and an ideologically based partnership, the endurance of which should be understood in the light of the ongoing ideological stand-off between supporters and opponents of American influence in the region. The first chapter analyses the historical foundations of the alliance and its development through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s to the current critical situation in 2006. The second chapter focuses on Hizbollah's role in the Lebanese political system and debates the negotiation of regional and national policies. The third chapter examines the reasons and outcomes of the 2006 War and the changes it may have wrought to Hizbollah's alliance with Syria and Iran. The conclusion draws out the main points of the report and evaluates the importance of the partnership to current developments in the Middle East.

From the suicide bombings against French and American Marines in 1983 to the kidnapping of foreigners in the late 1980s, Hizbollah's entry on the scene of world politics was dramatic and heavily associated with the rise of fundamentalist Islamic movements. Despite the fact that the group has undergone several transformations both in organisational structure and ideology, the tag of fundamentalism and terrorism has stayed with it to this day. In Arab and Muslim countries, Hizbollah has gained credibility for its armed resistance against Israel and its successful social policies in lieu of the Lebanese state in southern Lebanon. Beyond perceptions, Hizbollah is a highly organised military and political organisation with a large social foundation and a central role in Lebanese and regional affairs. It currently boasts a political bloc of 12 MPs (nine Hizbollah MPs and three allies), the fourth largest group in the Lebanese parliament, and plays a key role in the democratic process. The aim of this report is to clarify how Hizbollah's triangular relationship with its political, military and financial sponsors in Iran and Syria influences its political decision making, and how Hizbollah is likely to influence the development in Lebanon and the Middle East in the foreseeable future.

Hizbollah sees itself as a regional player as much as an actor on the Lebanese stage. This claim is given credence by the fact that southern Lebanon since the 1973 "Yum Kipur" War has been the primary scene of confrontations between Israel and the surrounding Arab and Muslim countries. Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Arab countries had been united in supporting the Palestinian people in its quest for liberation and repatriation. The Arab disillusion in the aftermath of the two regional wars in 1967 and 1973 changed this constellation. First Egypt and later Jordan, Saudi Arabia and a number of other Arab countries have moved gradually towards normalisation with Israel. At the same time, an internationally sponsored peace process between Israel and the Palestinians brokered principally by the U.S. has largely failed to bring about a solution to the Palestinian problem. In response, a number of political forces have been persistently reluctant to endorse the American role as overseer of peace in the Middle East. Since the 1990s, this "alliance of resistance" has been minimised to an Axis the backbone of which consists of Iran, Syria, Hizbollah and Hamas and whose other components count popular Islamist opposition groups in various Arab countries. It is in this regard that analysts often describe Hizbollah's role in regional politics as that of a battering ram or a proxy in the confrontation with Israel.

Despite this seemingly clear dichotomy between pro- and anti-American powers in the Middle East, the Axis is far from uniform in terms of political goals, ideology and strategies. Iran is governed by a Shiite fundamentalist regime which has little ideological concurrence with Syria's secular Baath Party. The young Syrian president Bashar al-Asad favours the alliance with Tehran as a bulwark against American pressure on Syria, but is wary of Iran's policy of exporting the Islamic Revolution and what effect it may have on Syria's ascendant domestic Islamist opposition. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime in Shiite-majority Iraq in 2003, there has been widespread concern in Arab countries and particular among Arab leaders about the rise of what Jordan's King Abdullah has called a "Shiite Crescent" of political power in the Middle East. Syria must exert efforts to convince other Arab countries that is has not fallen out of the "Sunni fold," particularly since Asad and his Baath leadership hail from the Alawite sect and are therefore already circumspect in the eyes of Syria's vast Sunni majority. Hizbollah, for its part, is forced to balance close ideological allegiance to its fellow Islamist Shiites in Iran with an emphasis on Arab nationalism and Palestine. Adding to the complexity of Hizbollah's decision making is the fact that the negotiation of regional policies never happens without concern for the internal Lebanese

context, in which Syria plays a central role. We will return to this precarious negotiation between regional and Lebanese agendas. For now it is worth noting that Hizbollah is centrally placed in the ongoing struggle between political forces that resist and support a *Pax Americana* in the Middle East.

Chapter 1: Iran-Syria-Hizbollah. An Uneasy Regional Alliance

1982-1992: Foundation of a triangular relationship

This section describes the formative period of Hizbollah and the foundation of its relationship with Iran and Syria. It sets out the interests of each party and clarifies their differences and convergences. Hizbollah emerged out of the context of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) as a splinter-group from the Lebanese Shiite Movement Amal. Amal was founded in the 1960s by the Iraqi-born cleric Musa as-Sadr, who was the first leader to organise Lebanon's deprived Shiite population politically. This social dimension of Shiite politics has stayed with both Amal and Hizbollah to this day, and is as important for understanding Hizbollah as the resistance against Israel. When the civil war broke out, Amal joined the secular-Muslim alliance in support of the Palestinians in Lebanon against Lebanese Christian militias. In 1978 Musa as-Sadr disappeared in Libya, and the more secular Nabih Berri took over the party. During the same period, a group of Lebanese Shiite scholars, including several of Hizbollah's later leaders, reacted against the secular turn of Amal. They had received their training in the religious seminaries of Najaf in Iraq under influence of radical preachers from Iran and Iraq and believed that Lebanon should adhere to Islamic law. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Israeli invasion in 1982 gave further impetus to the fervour of fundamentalist Shiism.

The name Hizbollah (Party of God) was first used at a suicide attack against Israeli troops in 1982. At this time, Iran had begun to see the group of highly religious and militant Shiites in Lebanon as an auxiliary arm for their revolutionary creed of Islamism. At the same time, Tehran was involved in a dramatic rapprochement with Damascus which saw the two countries sign a trade-pact and agreeing on mutual support in the struggle against Iraq and Israel. Common enemies thus provided for a marriage of convenience between two powers with few common ideological features. Lebanon provided another area of cooperation. The Israeli invasion in 1982 was a direct threat to Syria's grip on Lebanon, and Iran could therefore help shore up Israeli and American influence in the region by supporting local resistance. During the next years, Iran sent several hundreds of Revolutionary Guards to train Lebanese Shiites in the Bekaa Valley under Syrian supervision. The support also extended to military equipment and intelligence. First and foremost, Iran kept a close connection with Hizbollah's

leadership and influenced its decisions.

Despite these close connections, it would be facile and overstated to see Hizbollah simply as an Iranian tool. Iranian agents did and still do participate on the highest level of decision-making. But as Hizbollah has grown stronger, it has also grown more independent from Iran, despite its reverence for the Iranian Ayatollah Khamenei (see chapter 2). The original financial and logistical backing from Iranian sources and NGOs has enabled Shiites to further integrate into Lebanese society and politics and empowered Hizbollah's ability to be independent. Today, Hizbollah clearly draws lines between what it considers the religious and political influence of Iran and resists the desire of Iranian conservatives to dominate the party. Hizbollah simply does not take direct orders from Iranian leaders, as is often imagined in the United States and Israel.[1]

The Syrian President Hafez al-Asad was not directly involved in the creation of Hizbollah, nor did he direct its resistance against Israel. However, once Hizbollah had established itself as a power to be reckoned with in Lebanon, Asad allied himself with the Shiite movement. This alliance coincided with an entente between Damascus and Tehran based on common interests. Syria had two overarching goals in the Lebanese Civil War. First, they fought to establish hegemony over Lebanon and repel Israeli attempts to the same effect. Secondly, Asad, who realised that Syria's army was no match for the Israeli Defence Forces and hence avoided a direct confrontation, wanted to force Israel to negotiate the return of the Golan Heights. The loss of Golan to Israel in the 1967 war remained a deep trauma to the Syrian nation. After the departure of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 and the creation of the Israeli sponsored South Lebanese Army, Asad hoped that by arming Hizbollah and helping them to establish a formidable military presence on the border with Israel, he could create a replacement for the PLO as a deterrent power in southern Lebanon through which Syria could pressurise Israel and eventually negotiate a peace agreement that would include a return of the Golan Heights. Today, this strategy remains Syria's primary reason for its partnership with Hizbollah.

In conclusion, Hizbollah was created around the pivot of three different but interrelated strategies: Iran's revolutionary creed, Syria's regional ambitions, and the Lebanese Shiites' own struggle to improve their standing within the Lebanese confessional system.

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[1] Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Iran, the Vatican of Shi'Ism?," no. 223 (2004).

Hizbollah's leadership differed over how to reconcile regional and Lebanese ambitions. The urgency of the Lebanese Civil War contained these internal disagreements. But towards the end of the war a power struggle broke out in Hizbollah's leadership as a result of the changing domestic and regional situation which necessitated a military and political reorientation. On one hand, a group of leaders including Hassan Nasrallah vied for maintaining the notion of an Islamic state in Lebanon, which figured in Hizbollah's original charter. But a more powerful group backed by Iran's new leader Rafsanjani sought to create a more moderate face for Iran and political Islam more generally, a strategy which necessitated an ideological sea change in Hizbollah. The most unrelentingly fundamentalist elements in Hizbollah's leadership were purged. Nasrallah was sent on an involuntary sojourn in Tehran, where he was convinced to join the moderate trend and eventually became its principal champion as secretary-general of Hizbollah in 1992.

1992-2001: Consolidation

The 1990s were a period characterised by Syrian control over Lebanon and continued military confrontation between Hizbollah and Israel in southern Lebanon, where Israel maintained control over a "security zone" stretching from the border to the Litani River. The Ta'if Accord which ended the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 allowed Hizbollah, as the only Lebanese militia, to retain its arms in order to counter Israel's presence in the south. Hizbollah had now become a "liberation army." Hizbollah also had to convince the Lebanese public, who remained largely sceptical about the group's intentions. This transformation from an Islamic militia known for terrorist operations in Lebanon and abroad (see chapter 2) to a national liberation group condoned by the Lebanese state could also be seen in the political activities of the party. Hizbollah participated in national elections in 1992 and generally sought to integrate itself into the Lebanese political system. Throughout the 1990s, Hizbollah grew in organisation and personnel, buoyed by military success in Southern Lebanon and by financial support from Iran, estimated at around one billion U.S. dollars a year in addition to military support.[2] Syria mainly provided logistical support by facilitating the transportation of Iranian weapons and partnering Hizbollah in Lebanese affairs. In 1996, the Hizbollah militia had grown to an "army" of around 3000 professional soldiers who received full time training and good salaries.

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[2] Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 63.

On a strategic level, Syria was hoping that steadfast resistance in southern Lebanon eventually would force the Israelis to accept a joint peace settlement involving Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and the Golan Heights in return for full normalisation. From a Syrian point of view, Hizbollah's role was to act as a means of exerting pressure on Israel and making the Israelis feel that they could not achieve peace without returning occupied land. The close relationship between the Lebanese and Syrian governments was institutionalised in a series of "brotherhood and cooperation agreements" in the early 1990s, which in effect meant that Lebanese foreign policy from then on was determined by Damascus. The new relationship, summed up in the phrase *talazum al-masarayn* or *wahdat al-masarayn* (coordination/unity of the two tracks), coupled the Lebanese-Israeli and Lebanese-Syrian tracks in the peace negotiations between Israel and the Arab countries initiated by Europe and the U.S. in 1992. This implied that UN Resolution 242 (passed in 1967 and calling for full Israeli withdrawal from Golan) would supersede Resolution 425 (passed in 1978 and calling for full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon). From the peace talks in Madrid in 1993, where Lebanon was "represented" by Syria, it became Lebanon's official policy to demand full Israeli withdrawal from the South as well as from the Syrian Golan Heights as a prerequisite for peace with Israel.

As long as Lebanon was committed, or perhaps subjected, to this joint strategy of "land for peace," Hizbollah remained sanctioned as a proven national liberation force. Legality and compliance with the United Nations were pillars in Syria's regional strategy to regain the Golan Heights. As a result, Hizbollah did everything it could to stay within the "legal" rules of engagement in its confrontations with Israel, according to which attacks should be confined to occupied territory. Apart from a few instances related to larger conflations in the fighting in 1993 and 1996, Hizbollah did restrict its activities to Lebanese territory, and with great success. From 1982 to 2000, Israel lost 1200 soldiers, approximately the same number that Hizbollah lost during the same period, and for the war-weary Israeli public far too many. In 2000, Ehud Barak was elected Prime Minister in Israel, largely by promising a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon. By doing so Barak hoped to separate the Lebanese and Syrian tracks and impose a deal on Syria which would return parts of the Golan but keep strategically important land close to Lake Nazareth on Israeli hands. In a meeting in Geneva in March 2000, Asad came close to accepting such a deal but eventually backed down.

While Barak's plan was popular with Israeli reservists and their families, others deeply mistrusted Hizbollah. In many Israeli strategists' view, the "Lebanoni-

sation" of Hizbollah during the 1990s was nothing more than a cloak for the essentially jihadist anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli zeal at the heart of the group's ideology. In terms of Hizbollah's regional affiliation, the ideological linkage with Iran which had been downplayed during the 1990s in favour of a real-political alliance with Lebanon's Syrian masters would prove stronger. Therefore, they feared, a unilateral withdrawal might bring peace to Israel in the short run but would eventually empower Hizbollah and Iran and prepare them for a more comprehensive confrontation. Adding to these fears was Hizbollah's arsenal of short and long range rockets imported from Iran. Despite such concerns, Israel did withdraw. The withdrawal coincided with the death of Hafez al-Asad in June 2000 and the beginning of a new situation for Hizbollah and its regional backers.

2001-2006: Changing relations in the shadow of "the War on Terror"
In the last five years, the rupture from the relative stable world of diplomatic deadlock and Syrian hegemony in the 1990s has been marked by a series of events in the region and the world with dramatic effects on the relationship between Hizbollah, Syria and Iran. First, Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon left Hizbollah with a crisis of legitimacy. The Party of God attempted to create a new justification of its arms, based on the fact that a small area called the Shebaa Farms was still occupied by Israel, without convincing the Lebanese public and without convincing the UN, who specified that the area was part of Syrian, not Lebanese, territory. Secondly, the new Syrian president Bashar al-Asad did not manage to fill the shoes of his father, with detrimental results for Syria's standing in the region. Third, the war in Iraq and the new constellation of power in the region has strengthened Iranian influence but at the same time intensified fears in the U.S. and its Arab allies of Iran's regional ambitions. The erratic behaviour of new Iranian President Ahmedinejad, including provocative remarks about the Holocaust and a defiant refusal to halt nuclear tests, has further exacerbated fears of Iran's intentions.

Most importantly, all three actors have been forced to change their strategic out-look as a result of America's "War on Terror" following the suicide bombings in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. Since that fateful event, the new profile for the terrorist enemy became any irregular force with global reach that threatens America's interests or those of its allies. As an irregular force fight-ing Israel, Hizbollah therefore received further certification as a long-standing terrorist enemy of America. But also Syria and Iran have been in the American

limelight. In 2002, George Bush included Iran and Syria in the "Axis of Evil." Months later, following an exchange of shelling in the Shebaa Farms, US Deputy Secretary of State John Armitage proclaimed that Hizbollah had become more dangerous than Osama bin Laden; that it had "made the A team of terrorists," and that "maybe al-Qaeda is actually the B team."[3]

Ranking Hizbollah higher than al-Qaeda on the list of terrorist organisations reflects the deep antipathy for the Lebanese organisation among many officials in the Bush administration, some of whom served under President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and harbour bitter memories of the Marine barracks bombing in Beirut in 1983 that killed 241 Americans. Yet the labelling of Hizbollah as a terrorist movement on par with al-Qaeda is misleading. While there may have been some contacts, even cooperation, in the past, there are strong ideological differences between Hizbollah and al-Qaeda that preclude a long-term partnership. Although Hizbollah cooperates with some Sunni organisations, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the strict Salafi creed of al-Qaeda, which treats Shiites as apostates, is anathema to Hizbollah. Nasrallah has publicly opposed the mass suicide bombings and videotaped executions of hostages perpetrated by extremist Sunni militants in Iraq.

Although Hizbollah has a general ideological aversion to the cultural dominance of the Judeo-Christian West, its anti-American rhetoric is primarily a product of Washington's consistent and long-standing support for Israel. Hizbollah does possess "global reach" in the form of sympathisers and supporters found among Lebanese Shiite communities around the world. For the most part these groups, or cells, generate funds for Hizbollah through the collection of religious donations or from private businesses, some of them illegal as shown by the 2003 conviction of four Lebanese-Americans from North Carolina for interstate cigarette smuggling. The cells also conduct surveillance of US and Israeli embassies and facilities, according to the FBI and other U.S. intelligence sources, although the FBI found no evidence that these surveillances posed any real danger.

While Hizbollah was vilified, Syria, for its part, was subjected to a "carrot and stick" approach by the U.S., who promised Damascus economic aid and recognition if it complied with American demands, and the threat of military interven-

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[3] Quoted in Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah – the Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 201.

tion and sanctions if not. After considering his options, Bashar al-Asad decided that the Americans were unlikely to help Syria regain the Golan Heights – still the ultimate political goal for Syria. In November 2003, the American congress passed the "Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act," calling for Syrian troops to retreat from Lebanon and opened the possibility for economic sanctions against Syria. This Act was followed by the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 in 2004 (see chapter 2). Since then, the U.S. administration has applied diplomatic pressure on Iran and Syria over their alleged "export" of terror, defined as the intentional harm of civilians to further political means. This allegation is ideologically and politically motivated and should therefore be qualified in terms of actual behaviour in order to understand its full implications for our topic here.

Iran's status as a "pariah state" goes back to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The main allegation against the Iranian leadership is that it uses terror as a political means through proxy groups, which are not directly traceable to Iran. Between 1979 and 2001, its detractors claimed, Iran have coordinated a number of terrorist attacks using this strategy of cover-up by proxy, including Hamas and Hizbollah operations against Israel as well as failed operations in Belgium, Africa and South America.[4] After September 11, 2001 Iran came under actual pressure as a result of these strategies. The U.S. and a range of other Western states added Hamas and Hizbollah to their official lists of terrorist organisations. By default, Iran's more or less covert support for these groups assumed the shape of a direct confrontation in the War on Terror. Adding to this development was the Israeli Government's success in presenting its own conflict with the Palestinian people as a part of the War on Terror.

On the Syrian front, the War on Terror meant intensified American pressure for Syria to halt its alleged assistance to "resistance" groups in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. While the Syrian government claimed to be cooperating, it was effectively ostracised by America. Even France, who initially championed Bashar al-Asad as a reformist leader, ultimately became frustrated with the lack of democratic reform and withdrew diplomatic support for Damascus. Lebanese groups who had long been adverse to Syria's hold on Lebanon saw this situation as a golden opportunity to end the presence of Syrian troops with international assistance.

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[4] Shaul Shay, *Iran, Hizballah, and the Palestinian Terror* (New Brunswick; London: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 39-80.

The anti-Syrian impetus initially came from Christian lobby groups in America, who were behind the passing of the Syria Accountability Act in 2003. But more importantly, Lebanese leaders who had long been in the Syrian fold now reconsidered their allegiance, including Druze leader Walid Jumblatt and Sunni leader and Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Matters came to a head in September 2004 when Syria forced through an amendment to the Lebanese constitution, allowing pro-Syrian President Emile Lahoud to renew his mandate for two more years. Shortly after, UN Resolution 1559, calling for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon and for all militias in Lebanon to disarm, was passed. There have been strong suggestions that this resolution was drafted with the consent of Hariri, who saw it as a discrete means to change the political status quo in Lebanon. In any case, the extension of Lahoud's term in combination with UN Resolution 1559 initiated a political crisis which saw Hariri resign as Prime Minister in November, 2004, the formation of a broad national coalition against Syria, and eventually the murder of Hariri on February 13, 2005 (see chapter 2 for a longer analysis of the Independence Intifada).

The death of Hariri and the ensuing mass demonstrations in Beirut represented a severe test for the relationship between Hizbollah and Syria. While both parties were threatened by Resolution 1559 – Syria by the prospect of losing its financially and politically lucrative control over Lebanon, and Hizbollah by the prospect of disarmament – Hizbollah also had to consider its popularity and relations within Lebanon. The Party attempted to toe a political line between outright support for either Syria or the new anti-Syrian opposition in Lebanon. In effect, it came to lead a "rejection front" along with Amal and smaller pro-Syrian groups, which could not prevent a Syrian withdrawal, but which did prevent a complete regime change. In April 2005, Syria withdrew its troops from Lebanon, ending almost thirty years of armed presence and fifteen years of political domination. Hizbollah responded by allying itself with new partners in Lebanon. In what has been described as the "gridlock" of post-Syria Lebanon between the end of the Independence Intifada and the July War in 2006, Hizbollah sought to garner guarantees from Lebanese partners, most notably the Christian leader Michel Aoun, that it would not be disarmed as part of Resolution 1559.

After Syria's withdrawal, the balance in the triangular relationship between Iran, Syria and Hizbollah has tipped towards the Iran-Hizbollah partnership. Iran has always been closer to Hizbollah than Syria, because of ideological differences. But also politically, the relationship between Iran and Syria has at times

been strained, not least because Hizbollah's principal rival for representation of Lebanon's Shiites, Amal, remained Syria's closest allies in Lebanon. The confluence of Amal-Hizbollah rivalry has in itself been a scene of Syrian-Iranian rivalry, in 1988-90, but also throughout the post-war period.[5] With no Syrian master to answer to in Lebanon, Hizbollah has instead strengthened its ties to the regime in Iran since 2005. Meanwhile, Syria has also moved closer to Iran in what appears as an attempt to secure political protection outside the Arab countries sponsored by America. This development towards a triangular strategic alliance with Iran at the helm has effectively tied both Syria and Hizbollah to the fate of the Iranian regime in its ongoing confrontation with the U.S.

In conclusion, chapter 1 has shown that the strategic alliance between Syria, Iran and Hizbollah has undergone several changes from 1982 to 2006. In the 1980s, Syria perceived Hizbollah as a convenient deterrent force to contain and challenge Israeli influence in Lebanon, while Iran saw Hizbollah as a means to further the Islamic revolution. Hizbollah itself shared ideology with its financial and political mentors but also vied to defend and represent Lebanon's Shiites. In the 1990s, Hizbollah integrated itself into the political system under the guise of Syria, whilst continuing the fight against Israel in southern Lebanon. In the last five years, all three powers have been cast as enemies in America's international War on Terror, resulting in defensive yet ultimately confrontational policies. After the end of Syrian rule in Lebanon, Iran has emerged as the focal point in the partnership whose fate is likely to determine the short-term regional strategies of both Hizbollah and Syria. The next chapter moves from the regional focus to a narrower analysis of the strictly Lebanese context.

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[5] Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), 110-133.

Chapter 2: Hizbollah in a Lebanese Context

Political Strategy and Ideology

This section analyses how Hizbollah's military and political strategy in Lebanon has changed from the early days of revolutionary Islamism, the Lebanese civil war and subsequent moderation in post-war Lebanon, to the current dilemmas of post-Syrian Lebanese politics. From the beginning in 1982, Hizbollah's leadership has been dominated by "robed men," religious scholars with long training in Shiite tradition and jurisprudence. As a result, there is very little distinction between religious and political authority in the movement. The key to understanding this correlation between religious and political power is the concept of *wilayat al-faqih*, which can be translated as "rule of the enlightened" and refers to a theory of Islamic rule championed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini believed that it was imperative for the world's Shiites to break with a centuries-old tradition of withdrawal from the world in awaiting the return of the Shiite Messiah, the *Mahdi*, and instead forge an active Islam that seeks to establish God's rule on Earth. The enlightened Islamic scholars (*faqih*) should guide the *umma* (the world's Muslims) towards the establishment of the perfect society. Each community of Shiites establish one or more *marja´ at-taqlid*, (source of emulation) whose pronouncements and *fatwas* (religious provisions), under the hierarchical system within Shia Islam, become the main signposts offering guidance for correct behaviour. The Iranian Ayatollah of today, Ayatollah Khamanei, remain the most revered *marja´ at-taqlid* for Hizbollah.[6]

It should be noted that these ideas are far from uncontested among Lebanese Shiites. Amal consequently rejects Iranian rulings on religious affairs. And even the highest Lebanese *marja´ at-taqlid*, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah who is known as Hizbollah's "spiritual leader" refuses to follow Iranian decrees. Since 1996, relations between Fadlallah and Iran have deteriorated due to differences in opinion over theology and the extent of Iranian influence over Lebanese Shiite affairs. Fadlallah has actively built a reputation as an authentically Arab *marja´* in recent years, claiming that Iranians dominate the institution of the *marja´iyya* and suggesting that Iranians indirectly try to fill *marja´* positions on a "racial" basis. "The Iranian theologians believe that Iran is the only Shiite Islamic authority," he has said, "because they consider Iran as the headquarters of Shiite influence. The

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[6] Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah – Politics & Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 59-68.

Iranians believe that all decisions regarding Shia Islam must come from Iran."[7]

The ideas of modern fundamentalist Shiism were transplanted to Hizbollah's first group of leaders in Najaf in the 1970s, where figures like Hassan Nasrallah and Abbas Mussawi came under the influence of Iranian scholars, who were arguing for a more activist, political Islam. The resurgence of political Islam in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon was a reaction to disillusion with secular ideology across the region, resulting from political mismanagement of the ruling regimes, military failure vis-à-vis Israel and rapid urbanisation. In Lebanon, the underprivileged Shiite community, many of whom migrated to the shanty towns surrounding Beirut in the 1950s and 1960s, were particularly prone "casualties of modernisation," and Shiite preachers had since the 1960s emerged as catalysts for social and political mobilisation. The ascendance of religious Shiite politics culminated in the split between Amal and Hizbollah in 1982.

While it is true that Hizbollah has moderated its stances over time, particularly regarding the Lebanese state and coexistence with non-Islamic Lebanese sects, there remains a streak of unmistakable fundamentalist ideology at the core of the group's political thinking. To this day, adherence to *wilayat al-faqih* remains a prerequisite for membership of Hizbollah. Adherence to and reverence for the Iranian Ayatollah remains strong, albeit much less pronounced than during the reign of Ayatollah Khomeini. Other than securing a close link to Iran, the religious fervour has two effects on Hizbollah's decision making. First, it makes it prone to thinking in terms of a global revolutionary logic, which pits Israel, the U.S. and, more distantly, the West in general against the Islamic world as ultimate ideological enemies. This global approach is undoubtedly a prime reason for its continued struggle against Israel, despite much rhetoric about liberating Lebanese land. Second, the religious basis for Hizbollah's ideology and in particularly the concepts of *wilayat al-faqih* and *marja't at-taqlid* confines political authority with a small group of religious leaders.

On the other hand, Hizbollah has shown abundant moderation and pragmatism, and its actual political praxis is miles away from the caricatures of sword-waving mad mullahs sometimes found in Western media. Like any extreme group, Hizbollah has had to adapt to its surroundings and downscale its utopian ideals over time. The complicated alliances of the Lebanese Civil War made it practically

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[7] Quoted in Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Iran, the Vatican of Shi'Ism?."

impossible to act strictly according to religious ideology. The alliance with Syria is perhaps the best example of how Hizbollah, like any actor in the war, had to choose its allies prudently. Under the political leadership of Hassan Nasrallah, pragmatism and respect for international law have, as we have seen, become paramount guiding principles of Hizbollah's political strategy. At the same time, Hizbollah has had to legitimise its existence within the terms of Lebanon's confessional system. In conclusion, Hizbollah's surroundings have forced it to adopt a two-faced political strategy between principles and pragmatism. Most importantly, this dilemma has necessitated a constant negotiation between Lebanese and regional agendas, which will be discussed in the following section.

Lebanese vs. Regional Agendas

Iran, Syria and Hizbollah share opposition to Israel and to American influence in the region. But Hizbollah is also an independent actor with independent strategies, in particular with regard to its relations with other Lebanese groups. These relations have at times been strained and at other times eased by the perceived "national victories" over Israel. During the civil war, Hizbollah allied itself with Syria against Christian groups. However, the latter part of the war also saw Hizbollah fight a vicious war with their fellow Shiites in Amal, as well as being involved in skirmishes with Syria. These fights were related to a general strain in the Iranian-Syrian relationship over Iran's secret arms-for-hostages dealings with the U.S. and disagreements over Hizbollah's priorities.[8] Nonetheless, the principal part of its military operations was always aimed against Israel. The anti-Israeli struggle provided Hizbollah with national legitimacy. At the same time, many Lebanese remained deeply mistrustful about the party's actual intentions. The biggest sceptics of Hizbollah can probably be found in Lebanon's Christian community, many of whom carry an almost primordial fear of being reduced to *dhimmi* (non-Muslim minority) status in an Islamic state. One of Nasrallah's priorities has therefore been to reach out to other groups and reduce that mistrust, partly through participation in various Christian-Muslim dialogue meetings and committees, of which post-war Lebanon has had plenty; and partly through the crafting of a policy of legitimacy that aligned it closely with Lebanon's government and army, as well as with their Syrian backers. In September 2004, shortly after the passing of UN Resolution 1559, Nasrallah was quoted as saying:

[8] Ranstorp, *Hizb'allah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis*, 119-130.

> Today, in Lebanon there is an official Lebanese institution called the Lebanese army and a popular resistance organisation called the resistance. Within one strategy, these two complement each other. They cooperate and share the roles in protecting and forming a fence around the homeland.[9]

As long as Syria controlled Lebanon, this policy of national defence primarily produced conflict of interest with those – principally Maronite Christian – groups that opposed Syrian control of Lebanon. But others too were sceptical of the war with Israel. Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (1992-98 and 2000-04) often aired his dissatisfaction with Hizbollah's irreconcilable approach to Israel. He and others felt that Hizbollah's war deterred Lebanon's prospects of tourism and economic growth. After Israel's withdrawal in 2000, this scepticism on the part of Beirut's business community that Hariri represented was to grow into a more organised political pressure for Hizbollah to disarm. There is little doubt that the formulation of UN resolution 1559 in 2004 was welcomed, if not even actively promoted, by those who wanted to see an end to Hizbollah's and hence Lebanon's involvement in the Middle East crisis.

For Hizbollah, the pressure to disarm was unwelcome but did not pose any immediate threat. Hassan Nasrallah, who since 2000 emerged as an Arab and Muslim iconic figure very much in his own right, felt sure enough of his local and regional backing to continue the build-up of Hizbollah's arsenal with the support of Iran. At the same time, uneasy relations with Iran persisted. The military prowess against Israel deepened Hizbollah's self-identification as an actor in the interest of Arab nationalism, an ideology that does not necessarily comport with the type of pan-Shiite solidarity propagated by Iran. Seeking to justify their involvement in Lebanese Shiite affairs, Iranian government officials often highlight what they see as the central role of Iran and Shiism in Islamic civilisation in general. This strategy goes against Arab nationalism's argument according to which ethnic solidarity among people defined as Arabs, regardless of sectarian affiliation, should take precedence over religious ties with non-Arabs. As previously mentioned, tensions also periodically arise over Iranian attempts to overrule Lebanese religious authorities such as Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah and present Iran as a "Shiite Vatican" which must be followed stringently.[10]

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[9] Quoted in Nicholas Blandford, "Hizballah and Syria's "Lebanese Card"," *MERIP Online* September 2004 (2004).

[10] Shaery-Eisenlohr, "Iran, the Vatican of Shi'Ism?."

Iran and Syria may have perceived Hizbollah's defiant stance as their own strategic weapons, and both powers played significant roles in providing military and logistical support for Hizbollah's massive build-up of weapons between 2000 and 2006. But the choice to continue on the path of confrontation after Israel's withdrawal in 2000 cannot just be explained as an Iranian or Syrian decision, although both countries undoubtedly welcomed and supported it. Just as much, it was a result of Hizbollah's own ideological and strategic considerations. The group was not ready to shed its role as national defender and defender of the Shiite population in the South. Since its birth as a political party, Hizbollah had been armed, and the fight had become part and parcel of its political identity. According to this logic, disarmament would mean the loss of political authority, identity and influence. Secondly, the "victory" over Israel in 2000 harnessed the belief that they could challenge the Jewish state, and rhetoric about "liberating Jerusalem" reached new levels in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal.

Such rhetoric is an integral part of Hizbollah's ideology and political agenda. Many observers, particularly in Israel and the U.S., see Hizbollah's propaganda and in particular their popular satellite channel *al-Manar* as a pure form of anti-Semitism. In 2004, *al-Manar* was banned from broadcasting in France because of shows involving conspiracy theories about an international Jewish lobby and portrayals bordering on racial demonisation. A more precise description of Hizbollah's portrayal of Jews would be anti-Zionism, tending towards anti-Judaism. Hizbollah deny allegation of anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism, claiming that they are strictly against the state of Israel and not the Jewish people who they regard as "People of the Book" on par with Christians. Effectively, however, anti-Zionism is hard to distinguish from anti-Judaism since most Israelis and many Jews are Zionists. According to the party line, Hizbollah considers that there are "no Jews in Israel, rather only Zionists." 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." Nevertheless, Hizbollah stresses that the formula of equating civilians to the military applies *only* to Israel, not outside its borders.[11]

Some of the reason for the violent disdain for Jews can be found in an Islamic tradition of anti-Judaic creeds and writings. But most of all, anti-Judaism and

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[11] Hizbollah spokesmen, quoted in Reinoud Leenders, "How the Rebel Regained His Cause: Hizbullah & the Sixth Arab-Israeli War," *MITEJMES* 6, no. 2 (2006).

anti-Zionism is the direct result of an unbroken history of violent conflict with Israel since the birth of Hizbollah in 1982.[12] Along with Iran, Syria, the Palestinians and pan-Arabists new and old, Hizbollah views the history of the region as a perpetuation of Western colonialism and sees the creation of Israel as a historical injustice to the Arab and Muslim nation. The suffering incurred from Israeli military by Hizbollah's members, Lebanon's Shiites and Lebanon in general has exacerbated this historical vision and rendered its ideological expression ever shriller.

The 2005 Independence Intifada

In the period between late summer 2004 and spring 2005, Syrian power in Lebanon was unhinged by a series of widely reported events that culminated in the murder of Rafiq al-Hariri, the subsequent mass demonstrations in Beirut and the departure of Syrian troops on April 26, 2005. As described in chapter 1, the crisis can be related to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad's failure to realise the intent of France and America. The passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1559 on September 2 was the result of a rare collusion of French and American interests in the Levant. The French had ambitions of creating a foothold in the Middle East through a reconstituted independent Lebanon, while the Americans had long looked for a way to disarm Hizbollah and neutralise the Syrian regime. 1559 called for "all remaining forces" to withdraw from Lebanon and "the disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias." Following the passing of the resolution, a train of events ensued in Lebanon. On October 1, MP Marwan Hamade, a leading member of the opposition, narrowly escaped assassination when his car was targeted by a bomb in Beirut in what was widely seen as a message to the opposition to back down on its claims. On October 20, Hariri stepped down as Prime Minister, supposedly because he found it impossible to form a government to face the pressure from Resolution 1559. And on December 12, the Druze-Christian-Sunni alliance was formalised at a meeting in Beirut.[13] The emergence of a broad opposition left Hizbollah and Amal as the only significant Syrian allies in Lebanon.

The killing of Hariri on February 13, 2005 and the ensuing showings of popular support for the opposition through mass demonstrations in February, March

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[12] Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah – Politics & Religion*, 134-186.
[13] Reinoud Leenders, "Syria after Lebanon, Lebanon after Syria," in *Crisis Group Middle East Reports* (International Crisis Group, 2005).

and April forced Hizbollah on the defensive and prompted a change in alliances within Lebanon. To many other Lebanese the party increasingly appeared as a crude apologist for Syria's attempt to infringe on Lebanon's sovereignty. Hizbollah feared that the opposition would win the parliamentary elections in June 2005, form a majority government and force them to comply with Resolution 1559. As demonstrated in chapter 1, they attempted to split the opposition by offering support to Michel Aoun, a Christian war-time leader who returned after fifteen years of exile in May 2005, in his bid to become president. This attempt proved very successful, in that Aoun's party separated itself from the rest of the opposition, diminishing the effect of its electoral victory. As a result, incoming Prime Minister Fuad Siniora felt compelled to include Hizbollah in his government in order to keep a semblance of national unity in the difficult period after Syria's retreat.

Since taking office, Siniora's line has been consistent: Lebanon must solve the issue of Hizbollah's disarmament within the parameters of Lebanese politics and society and without international involvement. Still, Hizbollah did not feel that it could rely on the protection of the pro-American Sunni, Druze and Christian politicians in the new government. The wording of Resolution 1559 hangs like a Damocles' Sword over Hizbollah, and its leaders are well aware of Siniora's close ties to the Americans. As a result of this uneasy new climate in post-Syria Lebanon, the party has opted to move closer to Iran. Likewise, Asad's rapprochement with Iran can be seen as an attempt to protect his regime from possible indictment of Resolution 1559. Whether or not this general uneasiness prompted Iran and Syria to encourage Hizbollah to stage the attack against Israel that provoked the war in July 2006 is contested and will be discussed in the following section. In any event, the Independence Intifada stands out as a major turning point in Hizbollah's political life. In a Lebanese context, it forced the movement to change its policy of adhering to Syrian decrees as any other pro-Syrian party in Lebanon. In a certain sense, the departure of Syria set Hizbollah's policy making free. This may explain why, on July 12, 2006, they breached their own record of adherence to international legality and staged a cross-border attack on Israel which triggered what the satellite channel al-Jazeera has dubbed "The Sixth War" between Arabs and Israelis.

Chapter 3: The 2006 War. Reasons, Results and Perspectives

Reasons for the timing of the 2006 War

In the July 12 attack, which Hizbollah named "Operation Truthful Promise," fighters killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others. Within 24 hours, Israel responded by launching an attack designed to "eradicate" Hizbollah. The timing and intention of Hizbollah's operation has been the subject of intense speculation. Initially, many observers saw Hizbollah's provocation as a pure miscalculation that threatened to lead to its total destruction. As the war progressed and Hizbollah retained its ability to launch rocket attacks into Israel and defended itself well on the ground, the same observers began to wonder whether the attack had in fact been a planned manoeuvre designed to ignite a full-scale confrontation, and whether Iran or Syria had played any role in the decision making. In this section I suggest that while it is clear that the war has strengthened Hizbollah and therefore also Iran and Syria politically, there is little to suggest that the scope of the Israeli response had been foreseen and calculated. Any real or perceived advantages gained by the war may result as much from chance or good political manoeuvring on the part of Hizbollah as from prior regional strategising. Although Hizbollah's perceived victory in the war has certainly created political opportunities for Iran and Syria, there are no indications that any other power than Hizbollah played a role in the decision to stage an attack. In fact, the domestic Lebanese context provides a much better frame of explanation than the regional context.

As we have seen, the prolonged deadlock in Lebanese politics between June 2005 and July 2006 was a direct result of Hizbollah's refusal to budge on the question of disarmament, and from the pressure from Lebanese and international powers to link the UN investigation into the murder of Hariri to Hizbollah's disarmament. The Lebanese Government, led by PM Siniora, maintained that the question of Hizbollah's weapons should be resolved within the Lebanese system and without Western or any other interference. One of the mechanisms for resolving the issue was through a trumpeted "National Dialogue," a series of meetings between Lebanon's sectarian leaders conducted between February and May 2006. The rather ambitious, and as it turned out, rather impossible agenda of those meetings was to solve all of Lebanon's tense problems through round-table dialogues. For our purpose, the most interesting result of the talks was a proposal for a new

"National Defence Strategy" supported by most of Lebanon's leaders, which outlined a plan towards nationalisation of the defence of Lebanon's borders. In strategic terms, this document represented a direct assault on Hizbollah's strategy of deterrence. Some, like Maronite Cardinal Nasrallah Sfeir, made no secret of their intentions: "Hizbollah has become a pawn in the hands of Syria and Iran," he said in a speech immediately prior to the war, and Lebanon needs to regain control of its national territory. This outspokenness showed just how weakened Hizbollah's position had become after Syria's withdrawal.[14]

Around the same time, at the end of May, Israel staged a major attack on Hizbollah positions in response to a relatively minor incident. Hizbollah officials saw this attack as a sign that Israel was seeking to exhibit Hizbollah's inability to act as an efficient deterrent force. The only credible answer was to hit back, and that is probably why plans were made, or accelerated, to take Israeli prisoners. According to the logic of tit for tat, or balance of terror, that had ruled the game in South Lebanon since the early 1990s, Israel would allow Hizbollah to retaliate; they would hit back within South Lebanon only and let Hizbollah get away with a politically gratifying prisoner swap like the kidnapping of Israeli citizen Elhanan Tannenbaum in 2000, whom Hizbollah successfully swapped with a large group of Lebanese prisoners in January 2004.

Of course, this reasoning was a miscalculation. In Israel, new Prime Minister Ehud Olmert needed to show strength and resolve to convince those who doubted his lacking military credentials. Israel was already stressed by the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in Gaza. Furthermore, the rules of the game in the South had changed and no one in the Israeli military establishment was in any mood to allow Hizbollah to pull an easy political victory that would make Israel look vulnerable. Finally, there are suggestions that plans for a large-scale attack had already been drawn up and that Israel was only waiting for a chance to attempt to eliminate Hizbollah.

This miscalculation of Israel's intentions, without any sound assessment of Israel's situation following the crisis in Gaza and Olmert's predicament, can be explained by the fact that the mission was kept secret. It appears to have been Nasrallah's plan, and neither Syria nor Iran is likely to have known about it. Tehran is even said to have expressed regret about the timing of the war, which, if it is true,

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[14] Leenders, "How the Rebel Regained His Cause: Hizbullah & the Sixth Arab-Israeli War."

seems to confirm the theory – launched by Seymour Hersh of *The New Yorker* – that the war was meant as a "trial run" for a later American attack on Iranian nuclear capabilities, designed to weaken Hizbollah's military capability.[15] From an Iranian perspective, a later confrontation would have been preferable. As it were, Israel had been given an excuse to clip the wings of Iran's Lebanese proxy, leaving Tehran with limited means to respond directly in case of an American attack.

It was therefore a leap into the unknown when Israel on July 13 escalated and forced Hizbollah into an open, all-engulfing confrontation. With regards to military planning, Hizbollah had spent most of the last six years preparing for a show-down. But the political consequences had not been thought out. The course of the war reflected Hizbollah's meticulous military planning and organisation. The range of new weapons employed by Hizbollah surprised Israel. Israeli and Western observers seem to have generally underestimated Hizbollah's strength, whereas Hizbollah's intelligence units seem to have applied very accurate estimates of Israeli strategies. Their fighters dug themselves into bunkers and tunnels prepared since 2000 and managed to avoid most of Israel's air power, whilst hitting back with a barrage of rockets on northern Israel. Hizbollah's arsenal of artillery rockets before the war in 2006 comprised mainly standard 122mm Katyusha rockets with a range of 12 miles, but also hundreds of longer-range rockets, 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 kilometres.[16] During the course of the war, it is thought that Hizbollah fired all these varieties, to great psychological effect.

While Hizbollah did lose a large number of their long-range rockets and a significant number of fighters were killed – Israel claims around 500, while Hizbollah sets the number at 150[17] – these losses eventually meant little compared to the

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[15] Seymour M. Hersh, "Watching Lebanon," in *The New Yorker,* 21/8 2006.

[16] Nicholas Blandford, "Hizbullah and the IDF: Accepting New Realities Along the Blue Line," *MITEJMES* 6, no. 2 (2006).

[17] It is difficult to determine the number of Hizbollah casualties. Estimates vary widely: from a ratio of 1 Israeli soldier to 4 Hizbollah militiamen (Israeli intelligence) to a ratio of 1:1.5 (Hizbollah claim).The truth may be somewhere in the middle. Augustus Norton and others have evaluated the Hezbollah death toll by counting the number of public funerals held for Hizbollah "martyrs." This method may not be reliable either, since Hizbollah has a clear interest in publicising a lower death toll for domestic and strategic reasons. http://bostonuniversity.blogspot.com/.

political victory of simply surviving.[18] Furthermore, they scored a political point in international media for each Lebanese civilian who died. Olmert from the outset set himself high goals: he wanted to eradicate Hizbollah and free the two kidnapped soldiers. Nasrallah could be content with merely retaining his firing power. In that sense, when the war finished on August 14, Hizbollah appeared as the winners of the symbolic war by a far margin. Although large parts of southern Lebanon lay in ruins and more than a thousand Lebanese had lost their lives, the "Truthful Promise" had delivered a "Divine Victory," in Hizbollah's own lingo, a victory which was duly celebrated in a large parade in Beirut on 22 September. The question is, as Lebanese politician Walid Jumblatt remarked, what will Hizbollah do with their victory? How is it likely to transform Lebanon, and what will it mean for the Iran-Syria-Hizbollah axis? These questions will be treated in the last chapter of this report.

Results of Hizbollah's perceived victory

In a Lebanese context, the war has gifted Hizbollah with the legitimacy that it had been frantically searching for since the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. The war presented a chance to move away from the passive and largely undermined strategy of "deterrence" to the much more suitable strategy of "resistance" on which the party's identity is built (Hizbollah's full name being "The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon"). In this militaristic self-perception, deterrence threatened to render Hizbollah sluggish. When the war started, Nasrallah therefore welcomed Israeli incursions. A land battle, like in the "good old days" of the Israeli occupation, would enable Hizbollah to regain its lost honour and raison d'être. The "balance of terror" that Nasrallah had tried to create after the withdrawal of Syria in 2005 could now be abandoned in favour of actual resistance.

Of course, this shift of paradigms only made sense as long as the war was still ongoing. After the war, in the aftermath, there are those in Lebanon who question how efficient Hizbollah's resistance actually was, given the large number of casualties and the incredible amount of destruction, and certainly how efficient the deterrence was. They – principally Walid Jumblatt and Christian leader

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[18] According to official sources, Israeli loses amounted to 119 soldiers and 43 civilians, while 1,147 Lebanese were killed. In addition, hundreds of thousands were displaced on both sides. Numbers from The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 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.
The Lebanese Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Higher Relief Council, http://www.lebanonunder-siege.gov.lb.

Samir Ja'ja' – claim that Hizbollah's strategy failed and must be replaced with a national army.

These critical voices aside, Hizbollah's ability to stave off Israel's military machinery has left a sense of pride in wide parts of the population that has given Hizbollah various political advantages. A poll conducted two weeks into the war suggested that 87% of the Lebanese regard Hizbollah as a legitimate resistance force.[19] Hassan Nasrallah, for his part, has made it clear that all talk about disarming must be shelved completely. At the same time, Hizbollah has launched a propaganda campaign designed to cash in on the perceived victory. The elements of this campaign spell out that Hizbollah has defended Lebanon as well as the wider Arab world against American and Israeli attempts to dominate and subjugate the Arabs. The American plan for a "New Middle East" is being ridiculed and so are the pro-American leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi-Arabia and the Gulf countries, whom Nasrallah accused of providing an "Arab Cover" for Israel during the war.

More importantly, Hizbollah have used their newfound popularity and self esteem to start putting pressure on the Lebanese Government to resign. Since September 2006, the accusations being traded in the Lebanese media resemble the ferocity of the climate in Lebanon just prior to Hariri's death in February 2005. On one hand, the government, Hariri's family and the "March 14" movement in general are being labelled "Zionists" and accused of being in the pocket of America. On the other hand, pro-government media and politicians accuse Michel Aoun, Amal and Hizbollah of being "Syrian and Iranian pawns."

The urgency of Hizbollah's bid to bring Siniora's government down can partly be explained as an attempt to cash in on the victory. However, it may also be linked to new developments in the ongoing UN investigation into the murder of Rafiq Hariri. Since taking over the job as chief investigator from his predecessor Detlev Mehlis, who made no secret of his belief that Syria was behind the killing, the current investigator Serge Brammertz' strategy has been to keep the evidence close to his body until a substantial amount has been found to form the basis of legal allegations and trials. Like his previous reports, the latest Brammerz report, issued on September 29, 2006, did not reveal any conclusive evidence against

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[19] The poll was conducted by the Beirut Center for Research and Information and publicised in the Lebanese press.

Syria's leadership or anyone else. However, the report suggested that evidence had been found of "horizontal links" between the people involved with the murder in Lebanon and abroad. These suggestions appear to have unnerved Syria and may also explain Asad's sudden attempt to reopen peace negotiations with Israel.[20] Many observers now expect that Brammertz' final report will be issued around January 2007, and that it will present conclusive evidence against a number of high-ranking Lebanese officials. A list of those names has been leaked in the generally unreliable Kuwaiti newspaper *as-Siyassa*. As a result of this threat, Syria's Lebanese allies have strong incentives to prevent the current Government from passing of a bill that will allow the establishment of a tribunal, by bringing the government down here and now. Hizbollah's attack on Siniora and his entourage should also be seen in this perspective.

On a regional level, the war has buttressed Hizbollah's renown as a defender of Arab causes, and that of Nasrallah as an Islamist Che Guevara – fighting for ordinary people against imperialist powers – across the region. The Party has embraced this role with virulent populism. In their propaganda, their make it clear that the war was also a victory over America's allies in the region, not least over Saudi Arabia. In Lebanon, Hizbollah uses its perceived victory to argue that it, and not the "March 14" forces and their pro-American Arab backers in the region, represent the majority. In a speech made during the war, Nasrallah pointed out that Syria and Iran's support has benefited Lebanon. He was raging against America's "New Middle East" and accused Arab leaders of providing an "Arab Cover" for Israel. These arguments seem to have struck a chord with Arabs audiences, cementing the notion that Hizbollah, Iran and Syria won a political victory in the 2006 War.

Prospects for peace in southern Lebanon
The prospects for peace on the Lebanese-Israeli border will depend on how Israel, Hizbollah, Lebanon, Syria and Iran choose to react to the changed situation. Although Hizbollah is currently acting defiantly towards the Lebanese state, the Shiite party is likely to revert to cooperation. Hizbollah's new populist self-image is not a realistic reflection of its actual support in Lebanon. Although a majority of Lebanese see Hizbollah as a legitimate resistance force, many also blame Hizbollah for having provoked so much destruction from Israel. Nasrallah has offered an apology to the Lebanese people and assured them that had he known

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[20] In an interview with BBC on 9/10 2006, Asad welcomed new negotiations over the Golan Heights.

of the level of Israel's response, he would not have conducted the operation. But this *ex post facto* explanation will fail to sway most Christian Lebanese as well as many Druze and Sunnis. Despite its claims to national representation, Hizbollah will remain a Shiite movement constrained by the context of Lebanese politics.

In the medium term, Hassan Nasrallah is therefore likely to eventually revert to his political realism. He knows the limits of Hizbollah's influence in Lebanon and that he, like all other Lebanese leaders, must adapt himself to the logic of power-sharing and not domination. He may be buoyed by his victory, but at the end of the day Hizbollah needs the Lebanese state and cannot continue to act defiantly as a "state in the state." It has no interest in seeing a seriously destabilised Lebanon, both because it would be easy for Israel to manage and because it would be against the interest of Hizbollah's constituency. Hizbollah's regional populism is not viable in the long run and will have to be changed back to some sort of accommodation with the other Lebanese actors. Most notably, the schism between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon has shown signs of escalating into open conflict and is in dire need of mediation. It is therefore likely that Hizbollah will eventually scale down its attacks on the "March 14" group and return to the Lebanese game of consensus making. However, dramatic findings in Brammertz' conclusive report could hinder a return to political realism.

The moderation of Hizbollah will also largely depend on Israel's approach to the new situation. Despite the setbacks on the ground during the war, Israel can still emerge from the conflict in a strategically stronger position. But they will have to learn the lessons of the war and cease any provocative acts against Lebanon and Hizbollah. It is in the Israeli government's own interest to withdraw from the Shebaa Farms and hand the territory over to the UN until sovereignty is legally resolved. It should also cease all overflights and enter into negotiations with Hizbollah via a third party to secure the release of all remaining detainees and hostages. Such an act would be in compliance with UNSC Resolution 1701, passed on August 11, 2006, and would benefit both Israel and Lebanon. Resolution 1701 calls upon the UN Secretary-General to devise proposals for a lasting ceasefire along the Lebanon-Israel border which would take into account the outstanding issues between the two countries, including the Shebaa Farms, Lebanese and Israeli prisoners held by both sides, and 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 neutralising Hizbollah's ability

and incentive to employ its military against Israel. The deployment of UN troops in the South and the renewed domestic political pressures on Hizbollah 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.

The policies of Iran and Syria will be equally decisive in determining regional stability. An escalation of Iran's stand-off with the U.S. will have direct implications for Lebanon. Hizbollah is likely to see itself as destined to partake in a military confrontation, which would reignite the war with Israel and is likely to seriously alienate Hizbollah in a Lebanese context. As for Syrian president Bashar al-Asad, he appears eager to present an accommodative face to the world and has recently proposed to assist with the implementation of Resolution 1701 and invited Israel to restart peace negotiations. But the Syrian leadership will watch the ongoing UN investigation of Hariri's murder closely. In case the process indicts one or several of its top officials, Syria may have an interest in directing attention from a potential trial by encouraging Hizbollah to engage in renewed skirmishes along the Israeli border. However, the final decision on such actions will remain with Hizbollah's leadership and most crucially Hassan Nasrallah. He, more than anyone, has a choice to make over the future direction of Hizbollah and the feasibility of continuing the armed struggle against Israel.

Chapter 4: Conclusion. Regional Implications of the Alliance and Policy Recommendations

This report has examined the alliance between Iran, Syria and Hizbollah from its inception in 1982 to the 2006 War. It concluded that the ideological foundation of the alliance rests on a common zeal to confront American and Israeli policies in the region. This convergence of interests has created a steady stream of military, financial and logistical support from Tehran and Damascus to Hizbollah. Although both Iran and Syria perceive Hizbollah as a partner and a tool in their conflict with Israel and America, Hizbollah is by and large an independent actor. First, its policies are determined by its role in Lebanon as a representative for the Shiite population. Second, elements of its political ideology clash with both Syria and Iran, although Hizbollah is markedly closer to Iran than to Syria due to the religious deference it pays to Iran's Grand Ayatollah. The partnership between Iran and Syria is even more fraud with structural discrepancies. Syria has to consider its relations to other Arab countries who are extremely wary of Iran's influence. In addition, Iran's policy of supporting Islamism sits very uneasily with Syria's longstanding conflict with its own Islamist movements.

The regional implications of this uneasy partnership must be determined in relation to American attempts to create a strategic alliance across the Middle East that sets the terms for settling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and a lasting peace in the region. Iran, Syria, Hizbollah, in addition to Hamas and other Islamist groups, flatly reject the right or ability of America to asses the situation objectively and justly. Their political partnership derives pertinence from this common vision, which is shared by the majority of the population in the Middle East. While the U.S. and Europe must protect their interests in the region, they would also be well advised to realise the contradictions inherent in their current approach. Supporting unpopular and undemocratic regimes whilst demonising popular groups with a firm social base cannot be a viable route to democratisation and durable partnership between Arab countries and the West. Some sort of engagement with moderate Islamist groups is high overdue.

Lebanon certainly represents one of the most contradictory cases of American policy in the region. Over the last year and a half, America have been seeking to strengthen Siniora's government whilst undermining Hizbollah's claims right to remain armed. However, America's blanket rejection of Hizbollah as a "terrorist

group" has only served to give Hizbollah legitimacy and cemented its own conviction of the need to counter Western influence in the region. Hizbollah's radical anti-Judaism should not be condoned or defended. But nor should the context in which its struggle takes place be ignored. Hizbollah is a democratically elected representative for a sectarian group and a political viewpoint, and its resistance to Israel has, for most parts, been a result of the conduct of the Israeli military in south Lebanon and the unresolved Palestinian issue. Without engaging with these issues, any diplomatic intervention is bound to fail and carries the risk of leading to fruitless confrontations, as witnessed in the recent war in Lebanon.

It has been the policy of Denmark and the EU to support PM Fuad Siniora's economic and political reform program in Lebanon. A conclusion and policy recommendation for those who wish to see the Lebanese state regain control over the South would suggest:

1) That outside mediators adopt a realistic approach to Hizbollah and the situation in South Lebanon that takes into account Hizbollah's reasons for continuing its military confrontation with Israel. Hizbollah is not an endemic problem, but it is also not an issue that can be isolated. It is tied up with the other crises in the region and any attempt to solve it must, ambitiously, address the circumstances from which the armed resistance derives its pertinence.

2) That relentless international pressure cannot persuade Hizbollah to disarm and will only perpetuate the crisis in Lebanon. As stated by Siniora, a lasting solution to the problem must be negotiated between Lebanese leaders. The prospects for such a solution have been complicated by the recent war.

3) That Hizbollah be treated as a political group and not a terrorist movement. There is nothing in Hizbollah's ideology or recent operations to back the claims that it posses the ability or intention to carry out armed operations beyond Israel. The insistence on viewing Hizbollah through the optics of the "War on Terror" obfuscates its actual role in Lebanon and vis-à-vis Israel.

4) That the exclusion or elimination of Hizbollah from the political process in Lebanon and the Middle East is unrealistic and counter-productive.

Instead, a policy that undermines the reasons for Hizbollah's military presence by meeting some its reasonable and popular demands should be encouraged.

5) That Israel's bombing campaign has been counter-productive, just like its approach in Palestine and that of the U.S. in Iraq. The Iran-Syria- Hizbollah axis cannot be broken or separated by military means as it rests on real political and human grievances.

6) That the tensions in the relationship between pro- and anti-American forces in the region can be eased by reviving the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis and facilitating renewed negotiations between Syria and Israel over the Golan Heights. Syria's use for Hizbollah is essentially linked to the fate of the Golan Heights. Israel must therefore be convinced of the advantages for itself and the region in helping to implement UNSC Resolution 1701. These crucial steps will not fully remove the threat posed by Hizbollah to Israel – only the conclusion of the Middle East peace process will achieve that – but it could herald a period of relative stability in southern Lebanon, which is crucial for the stability of the whole region.

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