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**Divine Victory:  
Uses of the 2006 War in Hezbollah *Muqawama* Rhetoric**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

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Yoav Di-Capua

---

Barbara Harlow

**Divine Victory:  
Uses of the 2006 War in Hezbollah *Muqawama* Rhetoric**

**by**

**Patrick Donovan Higgins, B.A.**

**Report**

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## **Dedication**

To the bad side, ever making history by providing struggles.

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This work provides me with a firm grounding on which to build a larger project, which will hopefully traverse the realms of both life and work. It would have been impossible without the assistance and support of the following people.

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## **Abstract**

### **Divine Victory: Uses of the 2006 War in Hezbollah *Muqawama* Rhetoric**

Patrick Donovan Higgins, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2015

Supervisor: Yoav Di-Capua

For countless commentators on contemporary Middle East affairs, the 33-day war in 2006 between the State of Israel and the Lebanese paramilitary organization Hezbollah represented a turning point in modern military affairs. For Hezbollah in particular, the war presented unique challenges. While on the one hand the organization demonstrated unprecedented military prowess for an Arab military outfit against Israel, the effects of the Israeli bombing and land invasion on civilian life in Lebanon were catastrophic. The war presented Hezbollah with a crisis and an opportunity, of which both prospects the group's leadership was well aware. In the aftermath of the war, the Secretary-General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah presented the war as a "Divine Victory" in his speeches, applying to its legacy-formulation three rhetorical registers: the theological register, which emphasizes belief in God as the route to military endurance, as well as the sacredness of martyrdom as rectification for the futility of the corporeal universe; the national register, which emphasizes the integrity of Lebanon as a coherent nation-state; and the international register, which emphasizes the importance of solidarities among the

colonized and disinherited populations of the world. All three of these registers have served as important hallmarks of Hezbollah's unique thought and resistance culture; in Nasrallah's speeches, they are assembled in new ways and incorporated into the development of a narrative around the 2006 War to demonstrate that Israel and empire itself are capable of suffering major military defeats. The employment of this rhetoric signals deeper understandings of Hezbollah thought and policy, including more recent and controversial actions such as its incursion into the Civil War in Syria.

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## Introduction

As a particularly vicious explosion of violence in a long-standing conflict between Israel and the Arab and Muslim world, the July 2006 confrontation between Israel and the Lebanese paramilitary group Hezbollah continues to be interpreted as a pivotal moment by both sides. For both parties, the war's meaning is still undergoing a process of discursive creation. While much has been written about this war for its humanitarian calamity and its military lessons, much less has been written about its cultural significance. For Hezbollah and its devotees, the memory of the war looms in ways both supremely terrible and deeply cathartic. In Hezbollah's official rhetoric, the military lessons have been marshaled towards a narrative of unprecedented military victory, puncturing a previously existing narrative among Arabs of incompetence and failure in the face of Israel's better-funded military might. The significance of the 2006 War not only for Hezbollah, but for Arab resistance in general, has not been adequately addressed in existing scholarship on Hezbollah and the larger Arab-Israeli conflict.

The primary concern of this work is with the rhetorical uses by Hezbollah of its role and performance in its 2006 war against the State of Israel. More specifically, this work is concerned with the rhetorical use of this war performance in the development of Hezbollah's unique *muqawama* culture. Such a task requires an investigation of not only Hezbollah's culture--its various modes and styles and media--but also of its core message. Inevitably, more than the culture of Hezbollah is under inspection here--its very ideology is under question. The ultimate hope of examining Hezbollah's use of this

particular war is that it will illuminate a deeper comprehension of the organization's operations and *raison d'être*--in examining the fluid uses of a single war, one that happens to be counted by the organization itself as one of its greatest accomplishments, it becomes possible to learn more about what the organization finds to be fundamental and true, and what kind of adaptations it is willing to make to changing environments.

Any general understanding of the communication methods and the messages of Hezbollah must account for the major rhetorical registers of the organization's Secretary-General and primary liaison to the public, Hassan Nasrallah. These registers are tied to the primary religious and political missions of the group, and to the diverse traditions that the organization appropriates. To meet the challenge of these registers, which are potentially contradictory, this work argues that they find a resolution in *muqawama* culture, for military resistance against Israel and imperialism unites the ideological and social tendencies to which these registers are directed: the Shi'i population of Lebanon; the Lebanese population as a whole, in all of its sectarian and multiethnic depth; and any peoples facing down colonization and imperialism. As is discussed in this introduction, this widening of appeal must be understood as the outcome of a political process, a joint enterprise between the external, objective conditions imposed upon Hezbollah and its internal, subjective handling of those conditions.

Upon initial analysis, a very basic outline of the organization's aims and beliefs can be achieved simply by quoting its own words. Hezbollah takes its name from a verse in the Quran (5:56): "And whoever takes God and His messenger and those who believe for a guardian, then surely they are the party of God that shall be triumphant."<sup>1</sup> This title

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<sup>1</sup> Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Hassan Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon: Modernism,*

gives some impression of Hezbollah's original intent and the religious component inextricable from its self-proclaimed character, regardless of its varied solidarities and support bases.

After 1985, this mission became united with a veritable structure and goal. The organization contains a Central Council, roughly 200 founders who elect a seven-member Consultative Council.<sup>2</sup> The members of the Consultative Council are elected every three years. It also contains in its political structure the Jihad Council, which is tasked with handling military affairs.

Hezbollah's *political* goal as an organization was made clear in a manifesto of sorts, published in 1985 and often translated as, An Open Letter to the Oppressed on Earth. At the top of its list of concerns was the end of American dominance of the Middle East, the removal of Maronite sectarian influence in Lebanon and the complete removal of Israel from Lebanon. In order to bring these goals about, Hezbollah proposed a cross-sect alliance, to include whoever shares with the party these hopes for Lebanon. From the letter itself:

These are Lebanon's objectives; those are its enemies. As for our friends, they are all the world's oppressed peoples. Our friends are also those who combat our enemies and who defend us from their evil. Towards these friends, individuals as well as organizations, we turn and say: Friends, wherever you are in Lebanon... we are in agreement with you on the great and necessary objectives: destroying American hegemony in our land; putting an end to the burdensome Israeli Occupation; beating back all the Phalangists' attempts to monopolize power and administration.

Even though we have, friends, quite different viewpoints as to the means of the struggle, on the levels upon which it must be carried out, we should surmount

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 129.

these tiny divergences and consolidate cooperation between us in view of the grand design.<sup>3</sup>

One can read in these words tremendous possibility for a national character and even a universalist outlook, or at least enough of a universalist outlook to allow for some level of cooperation with liberal institutions. It must be noted that these proposed alliances stand as an addition to a document that is very much openly sect-based in outlook. Moreover, the document proposes an Islamic system as a “third way” between American capitalism and Soviet communism, and it makes an appeal to Christians to consider turning to Islam. Nonetheless, despite these asides, the document is by definition of its *muqawama* logic in which resistance is prioritized above all other things, never exclusivist or xenophobic.

Hezbollah revised this manifesto in 2009, augmenting the universalist tendency of their thought and minimizing their more particularist, sect-based attitudes, but the transition from one manifesto to another must be understood as part of a military and political process in which experience informs and outright changes the theoretical outlook upon which the military and political project had been initially based. Through years of resistance, war, and politics, Hezbollah became privy to realities that had not been apparent in 1985, when the fighters’ jihad against Israel and American hegemony was declared. The key conclusion of the 2009 manifesto was that the reality of combatting Israel and America called for alliances across sects and political parties and for allowance of diverse lifestyles. In actuality, this formula is for political secularism at the level of the state, although Hezbollah does not use such a word. The secularism arrives as an extension of the core mission.

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<sup>3</sup> Hezbollah, "An Open Letter: The Hizballah Program." Council on Foreign Relations. January 1, 1988. <http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/open-letter-hizballah-program/p30967>.

The current 2009 Manifesto contains, in the most explicit expression of such principles hitherto expressed by the organization, the three registers of solidarity that are employed frequently and seamlessly by Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in his speeches: the Shi'i register, directed towards Lebanese Shia with a language of piety, martyrdom, and service to (and strength) from God; the Lebanese register, which calls for national unity, a strong government, and patriotic deference to the Lebanese Army as the defender of the country; and the international register, which calls for unity among the global disinherited, the colonized, the peoples on the receiving end of American hegemony. In the introduction of the 2009 Manifesto, these registers are acknowledged as the outcome of a political process of resistance:

Simultaneously it was doomed for the political and human status of the Resistance to evolve: it developed from being a Lebanese national value to a radiant Arab and Islamic value and it has become today an international human value; its model is being followed and its achievements are being taken into consideration by the experiences and courtesies of all those seeking freedom and liberty all around the world.<sup>4</sup>

The first section of the 2009 Manifesto dealt with American hegemony in the Middle East, and it is notable for treating American imperialism as more than a mere projection of American military power. America is condemned for its capitalism--indeed, for its "savage capitalism." Moreover, the American capitalist project--which is condemned for its finance specifically--is decried as the major reason for economic inequality in the world. Hezbollah's formulation is a simple one, and it echoes the

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<sup>4</sup> Hezbollah, "The New Hezbollah Manifesto." November 2009.  
<http://www.lebanonrenaissance.org/assets/Uploads/15-The-New-Hezbollah-Manifesto-Nov09.pdf>.

sentiments of Mao Tse-tung: the world is divided between exploiter nations and exploited nations:

According to Hizbullah's vision and approach, the criteria of divergence and conflict are based upon political- moral grounds, primarily between the arrogant and wretched, the oppressor and oppressed, the haughty occupier and a pursuer of freedom.

Hizbullah considers that the unilateral hegemony in the world overthrows the international balance and stability as well as the international peace and security.

The unlimited US support for 'Israel' and its cover for the 'Israeli' occupation of Arab lands annexed, in addition to the American domination of international institutions, the dualism in criteria of issuing and applying international policies, the American meddling in various states' affairs, the adoption of the principle of circulating wars worldwide, causing disturbance and instability all around the world puts the American administration in the position of the aggressor and holds it responsible in producing chaos in the international political system.<sup>5</sup>

This formulation allows Hezbollah to think beyond its sect in new ways, to examine the Middle East region of which it plays an increasingly significant role in terms of a systemized whole. The organization offers, therefore, holistic critiques alongside its policies, critiques that receive thorough exhibition in the speeches of Nasrallah. To chart this evolution it is necessary to consider again its original manifesto of 1985, where the party had laid down the groundwork for its localized sectarian concerns, arguing that Shi'is in Lebanon had been systematically marginalized by state institutions. By contrast, in the 2009 manifesto, the party expands the argument further beyond sect than before to describe Lebanon as an exploited nation:

Lebanon is our homeland and the homeland of our fathers and ancestors. It is also the homeland of our children, grandchildren, and the future generations. It is the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

country to which we have given our most precious sacrifices for its independence and pride, dignity and freedom.

We want a unified Lebanon for all Lebanese alike. We oppose any kind of partition or federalism, whether apparent or disguised. We want Lebanon to be sovereign, free, independent, strong and competent. We also want it to be powerful, active, and present in the geopolitics of the region. We want it also to be an influential provider in making the present and the future as it was always present in making the history.

One of the most important conditions for the establishment of a home of this type and its persistence is having a strong, capable and just state, in addition to a political system which truly represents the will of the people and their aspirations for justice and freedom, security and stability, well-being and dignity. This is what all the Lebanese people seek and work to achieve and we are a part of them.<sup>6</sup>

Following this logic, the call for national unity first emerges as a strategy of resistance, but in the process becomes an important end in itself. The call for Lebanese national resistance lends Hezbollah to solidarities based on struggles waged against national oppression, enjoining themselves in an international culture of resistance.

That international culture of resistance leads Hezbollah to solidarities that extend beyond national struggles, and into anti-capitalist struggles, on the basis that anti-capitalist struggles are necessarily national struggles under a system of international capital. The main political coalition to which Hezbollah lends its solidarity in its 2009 manifesto is the Bolivarian Revolution of Latin America--a socialist movement--for its anti-imperialist convictions, which could possibly create a more equitable inter-state system:

...we look at the experience of independence and liberation that rejects hegemony in the countries of Latin America with a lot of respect, attention, and appreciation. We see vast intersection platforms between their project and the project of resistance movements in our region, which leads to constructing a more just and

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

balanced international system.

Such an experience--that of Latin America--brings hope on the international level, in the light of a common humane identity, and a common political and moral background. In this context, the slogan "unity of the wretched" remains a major and basic pillar of our political intellect in building our relations, assents and comprehension towards international issues.<sup>7</sup>

Vocal support for socialist Latin American countries has brought Hezbollah from a position of Third Wayism between capitalism and communism during the Cold War to a support for socialist governments during a unipolar era of American dominance. The differences in these manifestos posit major challenges for scholars seeking to understand Hezbollah at its core. The kinds of solidarities expressed in them arise from the organization's varied origins, which in addition to aforementioned publics span religious convictions, such as Shi'i Islam; places, such as South Lebanon; political traditions, such as resistance, rooted in South Lebanon in labor and communist movements; states, such as the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran; and national causes, such as the national Palestinian one. The success of Hezbollah as a military resistance movement is owed in part to its skillful, syncretic appropriations of each of these categories in a manner distinct to the organization.

Out of such syncretism, there arises a question fundamental to almost all scholarship on the organization: what kind of movement is Hezbollah? Is it a religious movement, struggling tirelessly for the establishment of an Islamic society and state, perhaps even trying to link a Shi'i state in Lebanon to the existing one in Iran? Is it a proxy movement of the Syrian and Iranian states, there to do both the military and political bidding of those entities in a milieu they would otherwise not reach? Or is it

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



primarily a partner militia of the armed groups of the Palestinian cause, such as Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), fighting for a liberated Palestine from the river to the sea? In the existing literature on Hezbollah, each of these questions get treated in turn, at varying lengths, with often times one aspect given priority over the other in an attempt to cut to the real core of the party's essence.

Amal Saad-Ghorayeb insists against reduction of these aspects, calling for a comprehensive, nuanced understanding of the organization's religious and political convictions, giving Hezbollah its due as a religious outfit capable of accommodating and compromising with currents outside of its sect. She argues that among Hezbollah's main concerns are: a moral dualism between the oppressed and the oppressor;<sup>8</sup> an uncompromising support for Palestine as well as a total and existential opposition to the State of Israel that labels violence against it a moral imperative;<sup>9</sup> and content-based rejections of Judaism and "Western" lifestyles.<sup>10</sup>

She argues furthermore that Hezbollah's insistence on siding with the oppressor has led to it offering vocal support for many Third World movements as well as some others, such as the Irish resistance to England. Hezbollah deemed the plight of Irish Catholics as comparable to that of Palestine and Lebanon in their respective relations to Israel, and Ruhollah Khomeini, a guiding figure to Hezbollah, named a street in Tehran after famed Irish hunger striker Bobby Sands.<sup>11</sup> Although Hezbollah lends broad support to all occupied peoples, that support is not unconditional. For example, Hezbollah viewed

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<sup>8</sup> Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 88, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 21.

the Afghan *mujahedeen*'s embrace of Western support as a major blow to their integrity.<sup>12</sup>

Saad-Ghorayeb also argues that Hezbollah embraces the idea of “Islamic universalism.”<sup>13</sup> The party considers the liberation of Palestine the duty of Muslims, not just Palestinians. While placing the struggle to liberate Palestine at the forefront of its agenda, Hezbollah also opposes the West and Israel on deep ideological and philosophic levels. The party views its conflict with the West as cultural in nature. Saad-Ghorayeb writes that the “cornerstone of Hizb’Allah’s repudiation of Western culture is its abomination of the materialist doctrine, which underlies the West’s ‘brutal capitalism’”—a sentiment certainly expressed in the 2009 Manifesto’s support for Latin American socialist governments.<sup>14</sup> With this capitalism comes, in the party’s view, degradations to honorable existence, such as slavery to consumerism. Despite this objection, Hezbollah views its conflict with the West as a “civilizational struggle” rather than an existential one.<sup>15</sup>

From these ideals comes the question of why Hezbollah formed when and where it did. A major contributor to the rise of Hezbollah generally agreed upon is the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. For instance, Joshua L. Gleis and Benedetta Berti, writing from the “security” perspective—a popular perspective in studies on Hezbollah in the United States, a point about which Hezbollah often brags—attempt to weigh out the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 90.

influence of this invasion with that of Iran, another popular contender for the leading explanation of Hezbollah's beginnings. They insist:

Although it is possible that the Iranians would have attempted to create a group such as Hezbollah even if Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon after it entered in 1982, we will never know. What is undeniable is that the Israeli occupation was a crucial factor in explaining the emergence of Hezbollah...<sup>16</sup>

Gleis and Berti relate this alienation to the alienation of the Shi'is as a sect in Lebanon--alienated from the country's primary institutions, built as they were with French assistance to benefit the Maronite Christian sect, which the French would treat as its proxy for neo-colonial rule. Like Saad-Ghorayeb, Gleis and Berti find that the organization's religious beliefs are fundamental, and as such, the organization has remained consistent throughout the entirety of its existence. This explanation cannot, however, get to the root of the Hezbollah phenomenon's complexities, its own insistence that its primary interest is resistance and that it supports the political integrity of the Lebanese state and its armies. To deal with this reality, Gleis and Berti write, "[a]t the same time, the organization has shown a capacity to adapt its discourse to the changing security and political environment."<sup>17</sup> Hezbollah, according to Gleis and Berti, work with a theological baseline and change rhetorical registers in accordance with an evolving linguistic superstructure: its religion is unwavering, while its politics are subject to change. This formulation explains how Hezbollah has proven capable of evolution from a particular Islamic universalism to political secular universalism.

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<sup>16</sup> Joshua L Gleis and Benedetta Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

What is the nature of that religious baseline? In order to arrive at a decent answer to this question, it is necessary to distinguish between the organization's sect identity and its sincerely held theological beliefs. According to Naim Qassam, Deputy Secretary-General of Hezbollah, the organization is comprised first and foremost of *Muslims*:

Speaking of the 'order' is imperative, for it delineates the vision and goals of this Party that have sprung from a profound belief in Islam: The religion before Allah is Islam [surrender to God's will and guidance]. Hizbullah's framing of all issues emanates from such belief, and the Party's practical path is interconnected with the principles of faith it carries.<sup>18</sup>

Qassam goes on to state that there are Three Pillars of Hezbollah: 1. Belief in Islam (a category that, for Hezbollah, entails Belief in God Almighty, Self-Discipline, Concern for Politics, Jihad in the Name of God, Economics, Joint Social Responsibility, Using Reason and Refusing Subordination, Communication, Justice, and Piety); 2. Jihad, which includes both personal struggle and struggle against the occupier, both of which are not mere rights, but actual duties; and 3. the Jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian. The third pillar--known also sometimes in English as the Guardianship of Jurisprudence--is the primarily theological link (as opposed to political link) that Hezbollah holds with the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within*, trans. Dalia Khalil (London: Saqi, 2005), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: "Following the Prophet in referential supremacy are the infallible Imams (PBUT), starting with Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali bin Abi Taleb and ending with Imam al-Mahdi. Their role is to interpret and clarify the various aspects of the Message, and monitor its proper execution. In the absence of the infallible, the nation needs to master both knowledge of the Commandment to which it is assigned, and implementation of the *Shari'a* in public and private life" (51). The guardian figure therefore exists to safeguard the Islamic nature. Qassam specifies that his nationality does not matter. As head of the Iranian nation, Ayatollah Khomeini is tasked with maintaining political independence, supporting Palestine, assuming joint responsibility among the people, among other tasks. Qassam specifies that Hezbollah is in tune with these aims, which it deems to be Islamic, but that the internal political organization of the organization is "a separate matter"--in other words, independent (57).

The content of these beliefs have reached success in large part due to the span of the means through which they are propagated. That is, the political analysis that Hezbollah builds upon its conception of Islam, which also makes *evolving* use of the party's role and performance in its 2006 war against Israel, is offered through a multiplicity of media platforms. According to Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, the party contains an Information Unit, dedicated exclusively to media engagement.<sup>20</sup> Hamzeh writes that “by all standards, the size of Hizbullah’s media outlets—one television station, four radio stations, and five newspapers and journals—is far greater than that of any other political party in Lebanon.”<sup>21</sup> Hamzeh lists Hezbollah’s media outlets as including: “*The television station of the Resistance*,” *al-Manar*; and “lesser outlets,” which include “radio stations, newspapers, and journals.”<sup>22</sup> A specific example Hamzeh offers is the weekly paper *al-Intiqad*, formerly *al-Ahd*. One could add to this list Hezbollah’s Internet media operations, namely its YouTube channel, Electronic Resistance. The channel is attached to Twitter and Facebook accounts, both of which share the videos that are uploaded to the YouTube page regularly.

Atef Alshaer points out that Hezbollah’s communications tactics have even expanded into art forms, namely poetry. Alshaer writes that “though Hizbullah’s poetry interacts with various historical events and serves to mark them, it is fluid and reiterative in its inclusion of several themes and reference points of Hizbullah’s ideology and day-

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<sup>20</sup> Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

to-day political and social dynamics.”<sup>23</sup> The specific themes that Alshaer cites are “resistance, connectedness and continuity of past glories, heroism, certainty of victory, defiance and patience...”<sup>24</sup> Alshaer notes that *Al-Ahd* was a major engine for the production of this poetry. These themes undoubtedly play heavily into Hezbollah’s employment of its “Divine Victory” against Israel in 2006.

This work will address the varied uses of the 2006 war in Hezbollah rhetoric, but can only do so with having first set down adequate context. The first section deals with the origins of Hezbollah’s *muqawama* culture, which finds its roots in Palestinian history as well as the history of South Lebanon. Also crucial to this culture is the particular Shi’i tradition—the symbols and the narratives—upon which Hezbollah draws in order to inspire its supporters and its fighters to make the ultimate sacrifice for battle against the (primarily but certainly not exclusively Israeli) occupiers. *Muqawama* culture is especially important because, it is within the general directive towards resistance, its ethos and its spirit, that Hezbollah resolves its apparent contradictions between the diverse traditions it appropriates.

The second section offers a history—more like a background—of the 2006 War. “Background” is perhaps more appropriate than “history” because the 2006 War began and ended relatively quickly—it lasted 33 days—and was therefore even more subject than most wars to inconsistent reportage in the empirical events. This work seeks to synthesize information about the war from as many secondary sources as possible. The two guiding principles of this section can be traced back to the Prussian military theorist

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<sup>23</sup> Atef Alshaer, "The Poetry of Hizbullah," in *The Hizbullah Phenomenon: Politics and Communication*, ed. Lina Khatib, Dina Matar and Atef Alshaer. (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2014), 120

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 120-121.

Carl von Clausewitz; they are: 1. The “fog of war” doctrine, accepting that what we and two principal sides in a war think we know about a war (“intelligence”) is represented by some clash between actual, physical warfare and psychological warfare, carried out by both sides, to confuse or startle the enemy as well as the enemy’s publics; and 2. Wars have an underlying logic, namely a political logic. For both of these reasons, the concept of psychological warfare proves highly important to this section, to consider some idea of what Hezbollah and Israel were actually up to during this groundbreaking war, and to cast some skepticism on what we think we know about it.

The third section of this work, the body section, examines speeches by Hassan Nasrallah, treating him, in accordance with Lina Khatib’s argument, as the “central actor” of Hezbollah’s narrative formation, though simultaneously existing “within the constraints of the group’s institutional structures.”<sup>25</sup> Aurélie Daher also argues for the importance of Hassan Nasrallah for the mobilization of Hezbollah, labeling him a phenomenon in himself. She attests to his importance during the 2006 War specifically: “Et en 2006, lorsque celle-ci retrouvera à nouveau engagée dans le combat armé face à Israël, l’image de Nasrallah deviendra si puissante qu’elle fera de lui des premiers garants—sinon le premier—de la force de son organisation.”<sup>26</sup>

The chosen speeches were the yearly commemorations of the Divine Victory, so that the subject could remain the same pursuant to noticeability of the organization’s evolving use of it to meet different events, including its controversial entry into Syria.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, “Introduction,” 6.

<sup>26</sup> Aurélie Daher, *Le Hezbollah: Mobilisation Et Pouvoir*, (Paris: Proche Orient, 2014), 249.

Also important proved interviews with Hassan Nasrallah in *Al-Akhbar*, where he openly discussed Hezbollah conduct and strategy during the war. In fact, *Al-Akhbar* itself provides an excellent source for its advocacy of Hezbollah, which illuminates the powerful connections with secular leftist outfits Hezbollah maintains through its resistance role. *Al-Akhbar* is an avowed left-wing newspaper with no explicit theological affirmations, but it nonetheless applies the same criteria for martyrdom that Hezbollah does. *The New York Times* called the eclecticism of *Al-Akhbar* “a remarkable blend,” specifying its support of gay rights and feminism amid its backing of Hezbollah.<sup>27</sup> The *Times* article described, in the context of the *Al-Akhbar*’s strong support for Hezbollah, “a portrait of Imad Mughniyeh, the legendary Hezbollah commando who was assassinated in 2008,” that hung in the office of editor Ibrahim el-Amin.<sup>28</sup> *The Times* reporter quoted Amin as referring to Mughniyeh as “our Che,” as well as a personal friend. In attempting to explain these various, seemingly conflicting strands of political thoughts and priorities, the article quoted another one of *Al-Akhbar*’s employees, Khaled Saghie, as saying “our project is basically anti-imperialism,” a theme that the *Times* said ties together “muckraking exposes on the abuse of domestic workers, prison overcrowding, and other delicate subjects” and a full-hearted support for a Shi’i armed militia.<sup>29</sup> It is also broad anti-imperialism that ties a religious resistance fighter to a historically important atheistic leftist, Ernesto Che Guevara. The two figures, Mughniyeh and Guevara, have significant traits in common. In their lifetimes, both were enemies of

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<sup>27</sup> Robert F. Worth, ‘Al Akhbar, A Lebanese paper, Aims at Provoking Readers,’ *The New York Times*, December 28, 2008. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/world/middleeast/29beirut.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/world/middleeast/29beirut.html?_r=1&)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



colonialism, both joined multiple armed struggles (the PLO and Hezbollah in Mughniyeh's case, revolutions in Cuba, Congo, and Bolivia in Guevara's), and both suffered deaths at the hands of imperialists. Their martyrologies thus portrayed the same kind of enemy. Also, their communicative agents—Nasrallah in the case of Mugniyeh, Fidel Castro in the case of Che Guevara—both posit imperialism and its agents as the martyrs' chief enemies. Moreover, they share an opposition to capitalism.

Finally, helpful in tying together the major themes of this work are documentary films produced by Hezbollah media, namely a documentary for Electronic Resistance called *What If Hezbollah Was Defeated?*, a nearly 17-hour marathon treatise on the origins of Hezbollah and the extent and necessity of its sacrifice and bravery in 2006.

## The Origins of *Muqawama* Culture

Because Hezbollah's appeal extends so far beyond the Shi'i Lebanese community in which it began, and which almost exclusively peoples the organization, Hezbollah as a movement cannot be reduced to the Muslim ideals on which it was founded. Hezbollah supporters are manifold in both background and conviction. The ultimate feature that unites these supporters is an interest in the group's military resistance against Israel and its regional allies. As a result, a specific culture of resistance has developed around, and has been cultivated by, Hezbollah—this work calls this phenomenon *muqawama* culture, after the Arabic word for “resistance.”

Among those publics that support Hezbollah are Lebanese across sects with an interest in preserving the territorial integrity of the Lebanese state, including the Lebanese Army, with which Hezbollah increasingly works. This particular public also includes the Lebanese Resistance Brigades, a fairly recent secular military formation created by Hezbollah, a fighting unit open to non-Shi'i Lebanese who believe in Hezbollah's military mission and seek to lend it military support. Also among those publics are international networks, such as Arab nationalists of all stripes and colonized populations worldwide. Hezbollah often returns these solidarities, even incorporating some of these public's sensibilities into their rhetoric and messages. This work divides these sensibilities into three rhetorical registers: the Shi'i religious register; the national Lebanese register; and the global disinherited register. Each of these registers prove to be highly useful for Nasrallah's rhetorical strategy regarding the 2006 War, playing simultaneously into the collective imaginaries of Shi'ism, Arab nationalism, and Third Worldism.

This section divides the origins of *muqawama* culture into three sections, spanning place, theology, and politics: South Lebanon, a place host to a space neglected by French colonists and the nascent political states, home to many radical political traditions, including but not limited to labor strikes and armed anti-colonial groups; Shi'ism, the religion of the sect that most significantly populates South Lebanon and other areas where Hezbollah is popular such as Baalbeck and Dahiya, the southern suburbs of Beirut; and Palestine, as the vanguard struggle of regional national Arab struggle against imperialism, a struggle closely intertwined with the politics of South Lebanon and Lebanese Shia for several historical reasons.

#### **SOUTH LEBANON**

When *al-Janoub*, or “the South” in Arabic, is invoked, it is typically in reference to Bint Jbeil near the Israeli border. Shi'i Lebanon more broadly invokes Bekaa Valley and the southern suburbs of Beirut known as *al-Dahiya*, “bounded by [Beirut] to the north, Beirut International Airport to the South, the Mediterranean on the west side, and an agricultural area to the east.”<sup>30</sup> In the context of Hezbollah, it is especially important to note that the modern history of South Lebanon has been marked by two main political traits: the neglect of its communities by both the French colonists and the subsequent Lebanese state and the various forms of protest the resistance to those conditions took.

The first instance of revolt in South Lebanon—that is, one of many revolts in the history of South Lebanon—worth addressing here is the revolt against the French colonialists who carved out and established the modern Lebanese state. The sectarian

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<sup>30</sup> Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 42.

makeup of that revolt was primarily Shi'i, who had arrived there through traffic between Lebanon and Shi'i Safavid Iran, particularly in Jabal Amil, or the mountain of Amil.<sup>31</sup> There is no consensus as to who and how this Shi'i community was founded. Explanations include the story of Abu Dharr, Companion of the Prophet and supporter of Ali's claim to the caliphate, as the founder; that the Lebanese Shi'is are descended from Persia; and that the Lebanese Shi'is are descended from Yemenite tribes who migrated to what is now Lebanon "sometime before the tenth century."<sup>32</sup> These debates are fraught with identitarian implications regarding religion and politics. The revolt forced the French colonialists to draw up an entirely separate form of administration.<sup>33</sup> The desires of the Shi'i populace of the South was to ignore France's pleas for incorporation into "Grand Liban" and to instead unite with Syria under crown prince King Faysal.<sup>34</sup> The class makeup of the revolt was primarily of the peasantry, and large segments of it contained a *lumpen* element of banditry.<sup>35</sup> The harsh economic conditions facing down the Shi'i peasants included low crop yields, military conscription, diseases, and taxes.<sup>36</sup>

The revolt was also waged against the Maronite sect to which the emergent Lebanese state lent undue privileges, including schools and hospitals.<sup>37</sup> Comparatively,

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<sup>31</sup> Fouad Ajami. *The Vanished Imam: Musa Al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 29.

<sup>32</sup> Rodger Shanahan, *The Shi'a of Lebanon: Clans, Parties and Clerics* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005), 13.

<sup>33</sup> Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Hassan Abisaab, *The Shi'ites of Lebanon Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2014), xiii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

French investment into the South and other Shi'i regions in the country was small.<sup>38</sup> In fact, French attitudes towards the Shi'i regions, particularly the South, were part of a vicious, colonial, circular logic. The French failed to help administer adequate development on the South and then proceeded to issue reports about the relative retardation of the South, in the process justifying its continued neglect.<sup>39</sup> This policy, which coincided with surveillance and harsh political rule in the South, only led to more antagonism and revolt on behalf of the Shi'ite population, including the major revolt of Bint Jubayl in 1936.

This general spirit of revolt, ever percolating in fits of rises and falls, coincided with the Zionist European settlement of Palestine. The early signs of Southern solidarity with the Palestinian cause, which would eventually become a hallmark of Hezbollah *muqawama* culture, found their first major crystallized expression in the resonance of the Great Palestinian Revolt against Zionist colonizers from 1936 to 1939.<sup>40</sup> The revolt, in dual fashion, contained both the seeds that would bloom later in the century into pan-Arab solidarity and into pan-Islamic (of the *ummah*) solidarity, two strands that would find shifting representations later on in Hezbollah. The major leader of the revolt was not a Palestinian per se, but a Syrian Islamist named Izz ad-Din al-Qassam. The South of Lebanon broke out in protest against the Zionist colonizers. The protests boasted Christians, Sunnis, and Shi'is in their ranks. Palestinians came to Nabatiyya to buy guns for their anti-Zionist struggle; Nabatiyya camp would one day itself become a Palestinian refugee camp, wiped out of existence by Israeli air forces in 1974. Nabatiyya was also the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 24.

site for increased politicization of Ashura practices after Shi'is clashed with Israeli soldiers there in 1983, giving the blood shed during *haydar*—during which participants cut and thrash to foreheads in remembrance of the painful martyrdom of Imam Hussein—newfound contemporary significance.<sup>41</sup>

These intersections, of both sentiment and actual weaponry, would splinter off into an array of ideological directions. Methods were also dispersed: armed resistance coincided with protests and general strikes. Indeed, the nature of opposition to Zionism itself, and its connection to the wider social relations of the region, were up for ideological grabs. One such ideological expression of the unrest came in the form of the Lebanese Communist Party and the affiliated Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party. Together these parties formed a somewhat coherent leftist politics. In 1924, the Syrian-Lebanese Communist Party found intersections between colonialism, Zionism, and the plight of the working class. In 1931, the Lebanese Communist Party took a strong stand against debt and foreign monopolies.<sup>42</sup>

As communism increased its influence in the South, Shi'i religious scholars began to infuse Shi'i readings, stories, and teachings with a communist logic.<sup>43</sup> Among these scholars was Sayyed Ja'far Muhsin al-Amin, whom Rula Jurdi and Malek Abisaab portray as a figure who left the South to Najaf, Iraq, as a theologian and returned a man dedicated to “a life in red.”<sup>44</sup> In the 1960s, the South saw increased state violence against workers in the face of labor strikes and other forms of labor revolt. These events

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<sup>41</sup> Roschanack Eisenlohr, *Shi'ite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2008), 134.

<sup>42</sup> Abisaab and Abisaab, *Shi'ites of Lebanon*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

presented a new challenge for many traditionalist Shi'i clerics in the area: they would have to address the popular purchase of secular, rebellious ideologies among Southern youth. Such ideologies included both socialism and attendant forms of nationalism, largely Arab nationalism. Among these clerics was Mohammed Jawad Mughniyeh, who—despite maintaining a sharp criticism of Marxist materialism and its denials of the Godly and the spiritual—supported a fleet of left-wing movements and initiatives, including unions.

Another important religious figure of the era flirting heavily with left-wing thought was Hussein Mroueh, who studied materialism closely. He ended up somewhere between idealism and materialism in his mode of thought. While concluding that ideas could exist independently of material forces in society, he still found the “materialist method” useful in deciphering culture, which he accepted as a changing and dynamic phenomenon, influenced by circumstances and contexts, politics and economics.<sup>45</sup>

In the 1970s, the decade preceding the formation of Hezbollah, several trends began to shift for Shi'is in the South in terms of both class and religion. The largely peasant population of the South became a primarily working class population, due in large part to an influx of Southern Shi'is to the Southern suburbs of Beirut, a phenomenon forced by the Lebanese Civil War and the violence that preceded it. Part of that violence was the Israeli campaign waged against the Palestine Liberation Organization, which had set up training camps all over the South. Shi'i identification with the Palestinian cause—animated by Shi'i narratives martyrdom and by the Lebanese state's systematic marginalization of Shi'is—increased even more. On the religious front,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 73.

the popular cleric Musa al Sadr attempted to streamline the faith of too heavy a secular left-wing influence.

Hezbollah emerged, in some unofficial capacity, in the early 1980s. It was murky outfit, its contours ambiguous—undoubtedly an entity, carrying out militant acts, but a clique of sorts rather than the highly disciplined body into which it eventually developed. It was preceded by Amal, another Shi'i militia in the South. These organizations emerged out of a similar set of frustrations and conditions: a violent and unpredictable civil war in which sects and political bodies fought each other, joined each other, and betrayed each other with confusing regularity; the general marginalization of Shi'is within that complex conflict, ensuring that they would have to organize and rely on themselves; and finally the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.<sup>46</sup> Hezbollah would emerge as a Shi'i challenge to the local dominance of Amal. It would eventually surpass Amal in popularity and influence.

The 2006 War has in particular become a seminal event of the history of the Lebanese South. For Hezbollah, the glory of the affair shone bright, but so did the blood, and the pain continues. An estimated 1, 191 Lebanese died in those 33 days, mostly civilians. Thousands were wounded. Millions fled their homes. Unexploded Israeli small bombs containing cluster munitions are scattered, awaiting provocation, still ready to burst. In the wake of such devastation, Hezbollah had to uphold humanitarian in addition to their talents for war. Jihad al-Binaa', an NGO associate of Hezbollah, took on heavily the burdens of rebuilding, sustained largely by volunteer labor. A bulk of that labor went

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<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that Israel invaded Lebanon before 1982, in 1978.



into the near-wholesale construction of Bint Jbeil in South Lebanon and Haret Hreik in Dahiya—these spaces had been the primary targets of Israeli bombs.<sup>47</sup>

## SHI'ISM

Hezbollah draws on the imagery and narratives, most especially those surrounding the Shia's beloved Imam Hussein at the Battle of Karbala in Iraq, to develop their own unique school of Shi'ism tied to the needs of the organization's military resistance against Israel. Shi'ism, like the theology of any religious sect, is an evolving set of practices and beliefs dependent on the needs and desires of the communities propagating them. There is no fixed essence to Shi'ism. Moreover, Hezbollah can claim no monopoly on Shi'ism even in Lebanon, where the future of the religion is contested. Hezbollah can, however, claim hegemony over Shi'ism in Lebanon, placing it sometimes at odds with minority Shi'i voices and opinion.

Although Hezbollah is a religious movement, it receives vocal support from some non-religious, even non-Shi'i (in terms of sectarian identification), parties, most notably secular leftist and communist movements. These left-wing parties support Hezbollah in a limited resistance capacity, although there is some symbioses about issues of social justice between these parties that at times provides a shared logic for resistance, or joint support for a resistance project. Indeed, the history between explicitly Shi'i movements and communist ones in South Lebanon is a complex one, punctuated by both overlaps

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<sup>47</sup> Lara Deeb and Mona Harb, *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'ite South Beirut* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 42-43.

and fissures. The aforementioned Shi'i clerical figures in South Lebanese history speaks to the many contours of this history. Hezbollah can be thought of as, in part, a product of Musa al-Sadr's de-secularization of Shi'i empowerment, even as the movement garners such not-insignificant secular left-wing support. The communist resistance traditions that preceded Hezbollah should be kept in mind when examining Nasrallah's rhetoric around the 2006 War.

Writing on Shi'ism as a "religion of protest," Hamid Dabashi essentializes Shi'ism, proposing that this great negation called "resistance" is hard-wired into the DNA of Shi'ism, a hallmark of its complex and varied lineages, spanning locales in both time and space. Shi'ism is for Dabashi an extended ritual in acceptance of futility—an anguished, confident acknowledgement of, perhaps even a deep belief in, the futility of the corporeal universe.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, but not equivocally, Fouad Ajami finds that "at its core Shia history was a tale of dispossession," adding that it is "at its core martyrology: the death by poisoning or in battle of righteous Imams and leaders at the hands of cruel usurpers."<sup>49</sup> Hezbollah can be regarded as an armed, guerrilla spawn of these fateful acknowledgements. The organization's successes have consequently augmented its paradoxical nature. Hezbollah's inception and its mission are predicated at least in part upon the victimization of the Shi'is—their guilt over the martyrdom of Imam Hussein in a mythical sense and their marginalization within Lebanon in a material sense. As Hezbollah takes emancipatory initiative, it claims increasing political power, thus diminishing the victim status of the Lebanese Shi'is of which Hezbollah is such a crucial part. This persistence of this paradox indicates that Hezbollah remains close to its Shi'i

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<sup>48</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Shi'ism a Religion of Protest* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), xi.

<sup>49</sup> Ajami, *Vanished Imam*, 22.

ethos—that it regards its own suffering as cosmic, not merely political. In other words, the resistance against Zionism and imperialism continues because Imam Hussein’s martyrdom cannot be undone on this earth.

It must be stated that the conclusions reached by Dabashi are trans-cultural in scope. For this reason, they are reductive. Max Weiss complicates this picture of Shi’ism and resistance, rupturing the impression that they are bound together by either belief or history, by focusing specifically on Shi’ism in the Lebanese context, its shifting and inconsistent relationship with the Ottoman authorities, the French colonial state, and even itself as a community. Weiss eschews any effort to discover a Shi’i essence and instead focuses on a single iteration of modern Shi’i identity formed by a dialectical relationship between “sectarianism from above” and “sectarianism from below.”<sup>50</sup> “Sectarianism from above” encompasses state policy, largely state legal structures and codifications, including the recognition of Shi’i Ja’afari courts, personal status laws, and the establishment of Shi’i waqfs. “Sectarianism from below” encompasses the attempts of Lebanese Shi’is themselves to gain state recognition, including Musa al-Sadr’s “Movement of the Deprived,” which sought the empowerment of Lebanese Shi’is while formally cleansing Shi’ism of secular “leftist” influence. The point Weiss seeks to make by upholding this confluence is that, whatever the ethos of Shi’ism as a set of doctrines, it is still a moving set of doctrines tied to people and their needs, which in the case of Lebanon entailed some level of collaboration as well as resistance.<sup>51</sup>

An additional paradox lies at the heart of Shi’ism, one inherited by Hezbollah. Alternatively in Shi’i Hadiths, it is argued both that the point of Islam is to achieve the

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<sup>50</sup> Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism Law, Shi’ism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 39, 71.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 228.

sublimity of the Imams and that the example of the Imams is too perfect to be attained by the masses. Simultaneously, the Karbala Narrative, as Kamran Aghaie calls it, sanctifies and preaches revolt: Hussein's uprising against Muawiyah is one of virtue against corruption, piety against vice, righteousness against tyranny. Between these Shi'i calls exists a tension between elitism and populism. The tension can only be resolved by placing struggle (Jihad) at the center of religious experience. The struggle towards attainment takes precedence over the actual attainment.

Dabashi likewise places the emphasis of Shi'ism on waiting, and waiting in particular on the promise of the Mahdi, the Master of Time, the beloved Twelfth Imam who vanished into occultation in 941 AD. The promise of the Mahdi is his return, upon which he will embark in collaboration with Jesus Christ, and only his return can (and will) wipe out the guilt the Shi'i community of believers incurred when Imam Hussein was martyred due to their betrayal of his cause. In this single belief, the subtle parallels between Shi'ism and Christianity become pronounced.<sup>52</sup> Dabashi notices them, arguing that the Shi'i reliance upon the martyr—the belief that martyrs are the holiest people in this world—takes place “in vain” and that, as an ongoing act of funereal defiance, Shi'ism is essentially “a mourning procession.”<sup>53</sup> Because the martyr is the ultimate hero, the only hero is a tragic hero, and vice versa. Dabashi connects the passion of Hussein, the most beloved martyr of the Shia, to the passion of Christ.<sup>54</sup> Looking upon these parallels, Dabashi concludes that “justice” is a central goal of Shi'ism.

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<sup>52</sup> There is another parallel to be made, this one from a sociological standpoint. The perceived closedness of Shi'i communities in Lebanon, throughout Jabal 'Amil, has led many Orientalist travelers to compare Shi'is and their ritual mourning over historic tragedy to the Jews: that is, outside observers have taken religious meticulousness in both groups to be a sign of tribalistic exclusivity.

<sup>53</sup> Dabashi, *Religion of Protest*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

On a superficial reading, this call for justice would seem to place Shi'ism's central tenets in easy company with Marxism. But a close reading of Marx himself, as opposed to his many acolytes, reveals a conflict, for Marx did not argue for justice per se. Marx argued for reading history for what it is, not for reading the world in terms of what it should be or for what it might have been. The materialist conception of history is just that: materialist, and it is not easily compatible with any form of theism because it does not read human history in terms of morals, and it does not spend time mourning the absence of morality, either. To quote Karl Marx directly, from *The German Ideology*: "The communists do not speak of morality at all." In Marx, morality is replaced with class analysis: entities tend to act upon class interests, and this conflict—not the perpetual waiting period required in Shi'ism—drives history and progress.

How might the tension for normative calls for justice and empirical calls for communism be resolved? Historically, they were resolved in liberation theology, the dialectical monotheistic revolt of peoples who came into contact with monotheism by being conquered in its name. Liberation theology was a Christian movement, but Christ's role as redeemer is repeated in Shi'ism, along with the strong parallels between Christ and Hussein. The influential liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian Dominican priest, staged an insurrectionary intervention by laying down the philosophic foundations of liberation theology. He argued that the clerical class preceding him had pulled a kind of coup d'état by separating political questions from religious ones. In response, he argued a simple formulation: "human reason has become political reason."<sup>55</sup> If theology constitutes a material reality, it is automatically political by its nature, and

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<sup>55</sup> Gustavo Guarrez, "A Theology of Liberation," *Monthly Review* 36 (1988): 93.

therefore the challenge for theology to grapple with politics has already been thrust upon it.

To grapple with politics from a Christian view is, in Gutierrez's view, to find both virtue and sin within political systems. Upon this acknowledgement, Christianity becomes a political movement, holding human systems responsible for misery—"a sinful situation," as Gutierrez writes of destitution among the Latin American masses—where a cold, cruel universe might have held blame for a pre-political movement. Christ's justice becomes a "rejection of the whole system." Christ's justice is revolutionary.<sup>56</sup>

Hezbollah has reached a conclusion similar to that of the Latin American liberation theologians. It is not encumbered by the limits of some religious movements in that it does not simply search for religious answers to material realities, but seeks material—that is, political—answers to material realities in the language, imagery, and practice of religion. Religious ideology permeates the practice of liberation. This communion is the essence of the famous saying, "Every day is Ashura, every land is Karbala." This fusion of theory and practice contains great kinship with Marxism, which typically criticized theism as an ideological weapon of bourgeois class control, instructing the working class that it must wait until the next life to find heaven. Marx argued instead that communism is a living reality, "the real movement of society." Somewhat paradoxically, Hezbollah undertakes justice in this world on the basis that justice cannot be delivered cosmically until the return of the Mahdi. The more distant the Mahdi, the harder Hezbollah fights.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

## PALESTINE

The origins of *muqawama* culture do not technically lie with Hezbollah, but rather in Palestinian history. *Muqawama* culture dates as far back as Palestinian resistance, which technically began against the Ottoman authorities that ruled historic Palestine, but began to evolve into a modern nationalist project during the era of the British Mandate for Palestine and, subsequently, during and after the establishment of the State of Israel.

The first national uprising of the Palestinian people occurred from 1936 to 1939 against both the British authorities and the Zionist settlers. Palestinian novelist and poet Ghassan Kanafani wrote about this momentous event, quoting the British Peel Commission in order to get a sense of the class makeup and demographics of historic Palestine in the lead up to the uprising for the purposes of his Marxist analysis. In his estimation, the factors that led to the uprising were twofold. First, mass immigration from a Jewish capitalist class to Palestine from Europe, many of whom were fleeing anti-Semitic persecution. Second, the mass industrialization of Palestine's agricultural society by these capitalist immigrants, under which Jewish labor was given priority by the British authorities who saw the Zionist movement, in which Jewish immigration was vested, as favorable to their economic interests. The latter development led to a surplus of unemployed Palestinians wandering the emerging cities. Also significant in triggering an uprising—one which involved both labor strikes and armed components—were the Zionist armed groups that preferred more militant tactics to bring about their desired state.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ghassan Kanafani, *The 1936-1939 Revolt in Palestine*. Pamphlet (New York: Committee for a Democratic Palestine, 1972), accessed May 6, 2015.  
<http://www.newjerseysolidarity.org/resources/kanafani/kanafani4.html>.

On these statistics, Kanafani quotes exact numbers. On immigration: “Of the 2,562,000 that fled Nazi persecution, the U.S.A. accepted only 170, 000 (6.6%), Britain 50,000 (1.9%), while Palestine received 8.5%...” The majority of the rest went to the Soviet Union. On unemployed Palestinians: “by the end of 1935, 2,270 men and women workers were unemployed in the city of Jaffa alone, with a population of 71,000.”<sup>58</sup>

In the wake of the establishment of Israel, a new Palestinian national political consciousness emerged with several political parties boasting armed brigades, each professing to carry the torch of Arab nationalism, whose early wave had lent military support to the Palestinians in the form of the volunteer Arab Liberation Army in 1948. The first of these organizations was the Palestine National Liberation Movement, or Fatah, founded by Yasser Arafat in 1957. Other such organizations included the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), founded in 1967 by George Habash after having emerged from the Arab Nationalist Movement; and the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), founded in 1969 by Nayif Hawatmeh after having emerged from the PFLP, among many others.<sup>59</sup>

Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr proposes a connection between the popular Lebanese conception of Shi’i piety and the Palestinian national cause. This connection does not indicate that the relationship between the Shi’i community and Palestinian refugees and fighters has been problem-free in Lebanon. For instance, Musa al-Sadr expressed dismay at the loss of Shi’i lives to the violence between Palestinians and Israel, and he decried what he viewed as Fateh’s lack of discipline.<sup>60</sup> The connections between

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Palestinian Liberation Organization, “Main Resistance Groups,” in *Palestine Through Documents*, ed. Ribhi Halloum (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Belge Uluslararası Yayıncılık, 1988), 98.

<sup>60</sup> Eisenlohr, *Shi’ite Lebanon*, 99.



these communities would nonetheless endure, in both a material and an ideological sense. Many Shi'i fighters received military training from armed Palestinian groups. The deeper connection between the two communities is expressed by Shaery-Eisenlohr as one of "subaltern struggle against imperialism" and "third worldism," and one of the need to find a solution to crises of Palestinian refugee populations.<sup>61</sup>

The most prominent feature of the Palestinian national cause in Hassan Nasrallah's use of it as its place at the center Arab national consciousness. Arafat and the PLO, the authors of the Palestine National Charter, posited Palestinian identity as one component of a larger Arab identity, and Palestinian national liberation from Zionism as the vanguard of the general Arab struggle against imperialism. In the Palestine National Charter amended by the Palestine National Council in 1968, Palestine is described as "an indivisible part of the Arab homeland." The Palestinian people are described as "an integral part of the Arab nation."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the "Palestinian people believe in Arab unity order to contribute their share towards the attainment of the objective," with "Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine" as "two complementary objectives."<sup>63</sup> In fact, the charter goes even further in its expression of the inextricability of the Palestinian national cause from the Arab national cause. Article 14 states:

The destiny of the Arab nation, and indeed Arab existence itself, depend upon the destiny of the Palestine cause. From this interdependence springs the Arab

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>62</sup> Palestinian Liberation Organization, "The Palestine National Charter: As Amended by the Palestine National Council in July 1968," in *Palestine Through Documents*, ed. Ribhi Halloum (Cağaloğlu, İstanbul: Belge Uluslararası Yayıncılık, 1988), 99.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

nation's pursuit of, and striving for, the liberation of Palestine. The people of Palestine play a vanguard role in the realization of this sacred national goal.<sup>64</sup>

The next article goes on to state that “the liberation of Palestine, from an Arab point of view, is a national duty.”<sup>65</sup> Nasrallah and Hezbollah share this sentiment, combined with the early PLO belief in the necessity of armed struggle as an overall strategy for securing the right to self-determination. With Palestine as the vanguard of Arab struggle, the center arena of the regional confrontation with imperialism, Nasrallah judges Arab movements and Arab states by their stance on Palestine. To offer just one example, in a speech delivered in March of 2015 addressing war launched by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia against Yemen, Nasrallah stated:

We in Palestine, and those of us who have lived around Palestine since 1948 and are putting up with the pains of Israeli existence in Palestine, never did we see such a storm. We never dreamt of even a breeze coming. There was no storm and no operation. For decades, the Palestinians have been calling out. They still are calling out... In the last 51 day war (Operation Protective Edge of 2014) on Gaza, the homes of thousands were bombarded, their women and children were slaughtered... They were calling out for the Arab kings and emirs and princes, but you (Saudi Arabia) did not make a move or take any steps.<sup>66</sup>

Nasrallah went on to address Saudi Arabia *as Arabs*: “This means you Arabs, you Muslims, this is a new Arab confession that Israel is not just an enemy now, but never was an enemy to you to begin with, never was a threat that required a storm.”<sup>67</sup> Nasrallah argued then that Saudi Arabia's refusal to answer the Palestinian call for help, but instead

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah Saudi Aggression on Yemen Speech (English Subtitles)," YouTube video, posted by "ElectronicResistance," March 30, 2015. <https://youtu.be/IOGEW-bGokQ>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

to swiftly attack Yemen with its military power, was a failure to live up to pan-Arab (and pan-Muslim, to be certain) solidarity. This centrality of Palestine to the Arab cause proves to be highly important in Nasrallah's remarks on the 2006 War, as he draws frequently on the Arab imaginary surrounding the failures of pan-Arabism against Israel in order to establish a new Arab victory in Hezbollah's name.

## The Art of War, 2006

Nasrallah consistently makes the claim that Hezbollah achieved a “Divine Victory” against Israel in 2006. He would not be able to make this claim credibly if Hezbollah had not indeed made some serious military gains against Israel. In August of 2006, *The New York Times* reported that Hezbollah surprised Israel with its “training, tactics, and weapons.”<sup>68</sup> The article commented on Hezbollah’s use of tunnels, from which they would emerge to “fire a shoulder-held antitank missile, and then disappear again...”<sup>69</sup> It made note of Hezbollah’s patience, its close attention to the guerrilla lessons of the American Revolution, Mao, and the Viet Cong. Quoting Timur Goksel, who worked close to Hezbollah along the Lebanon-Israel border for UNIFIL, the article concluded that “Hezbollah’s long-term planning made it much different from the Soviet-trained Arab armies the Israelis defeated in 1967 and 1973, which had a command structure that was too regimented.”<sup>70</sup>

At around the same time, the American alternative press war commenter the War Nerd, who serves as a war critic of sorts, was praising Hezbollah’s performance in the war, writing:

The men who run Hezbollah attacked because they finally figured out that they literally cannot lose. The IDF can never expel Hezbollah from South Lebanon, because it's a genuine mass movement, as committed and crazy at the roots as at the top. (As opposed to Arafat's PLO, which they could and did expel from Lebanon because it was topheavy, corrupt and cowardly.) If Israel comes down

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<sup>68</sup> Steven Erlanger and Richard Ooppel, "A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel With Its Training, Tactics and Weapons," *The New York Times*. August 6, 2006, accessed January 30, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

hard on the Lebanese, another generation learns to hate the Jews down south and dream of bloody revenge. If Israel holds off, then Hezbollah becomes the one victorious Arab/Muslim force in the world, darling of every little nine-year-old Jihadi in Jakarta and Khartoum. If Israel retaliates by blasting every target of value in Lebanon, every TV tower and shopping mall and freeway...well, that's the beauty of the plan: the Shia are the poorest of the poor. They don't own any of that shit anyway. They sit back and laugh watching their neighbors' stuff that they've envied all their lives get blown away -- and it's the Israelis who get the blame.<sup>71</sup>

Based off of the available reports on the war, Hezbollah appears to have put to use several of the primary lessons of classical, sound warfare forwarded by Sun Tzu in *The War of Art*:

1. "A military operation involves deception. Even though you are competent, appear incompetent. Though effective, appear to be ineffective."<sup>72</sup>
2. "...the best of plans is the one that is unknown."<sup>73</sup>
3. "Those skilled in defense hide in the deepest depths of the earth, those skilled in attack maneuver in the highest heights of the sky."<sup>74</sup>

On the first point, Hezbollah hid for years the extent of its military capabilities and intelligence initiatives; on the second point, it struck Israel at a time of his choosing; and on the third point, it fought from beneath the ground against Israel's air force. On July 12th, 2006, Hezbollah carried out an operation on Israel's Northern border with Lebanon that killed eight Israeli Defense Force soldiers, and concluded in the abduction

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<sup>71</sup> Gary Brecher, "A Hezbollah Upon All of Thee!" *The Exile: The War Nerd Blog*, August 11, 2006, [http://www.exile.ru/articles/detail.php?ARTICLE\\_ID=8276&IBLOCK\\_ID=35](http://www.exile.ru/articles/detail.php?ARTICLE_ID=8276&IBLOCK_ID=35).

<sup>72</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas F. Cleary (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), 49.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 87.

of two more. In response, Israel chose to “unilaterally escalate” the situation with attempts to take out Hezbollah’s long and mid-range rocket capabilities, an effort that initially brought about “considerable... success.”<sup>75</sup>

By July 16th, Hezbollah had struck back with long-range missiles, reaching as far into Israeli territory as Haifa. Military analysts have chalked up these capabilities to Hezbollah’s relationship with Syria and Iran. In wake of Hezbollah’s military successes, Israeli officials allegedly admitted that they underestimated the scale of the weaponry the organization had been receiving from Syria and Iran, which included medium range 220-millimeter and 320-mm rockets from Syria, assisted by Iranian systems.<sup>76</sup>

A major reason for Hezbollah’s unexpected successes was a particular strategy it employed with its Katyusha rockets. The organization’s fighters posted themselves near the perimeter area at the Lebanon-Israel border, forcing Israel to infiltrate the perimeter space in attempts to quash the rocket launches. Every time Israeli soldiers would attempt this infiltration, the Hezbollah fighters would simply retreat, only to ambush the Israelis at a later moment.<sup>77</sup> Andrew Exum noted that the defender of the territories of South Lebanon is naturally in an enviable position on account of the land’s hilly topography.<sup>78</sup>

To expand the war effort further in response, Israel brought up 30, 000 reservists, 15, 000 of which were used in Israel’s eventual land invasion of South Lebanon.<sup>79</sup> Once

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<sup>75</sup> Anthony Cordesman, George Sullivan, and William Sullivan. "Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War." *Center for Strategic and International Studies: Significant Issues Series 29*, no. 4 (2007). [http://csis.org/files/publication/120720\\_Cordesman\\_LessonsIsraeliHezbollah.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/120720_Cordesman_LessonsIsraeliHezbollah.pdf).

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Exum, "Hizbullah at War: A Military Assessment," Policy Focus, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, DC, 2006, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Cordesman, Sullivan, and Sullivan, “Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War,” 5.

Israel had committed itself to a full-scale war, it defined its objectives: destroy Iran's "Western Command Front" before it could go nuclear; restore Israeli military credibility that was lost after it withdrew from Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005; force accountability upon Lebanon and end Hezbollah's status as a "state within a state;" damage or cripple Hezbollah's military capabilities; and bring back the two soldiers taken by Hezbollah. For its part, Hezbollah merely committed itself to the cause of survival as a military player.<sup>80</sup>

Besides rocket technology and the placement of the rockets, two other major factors played a role in Hezbollah's surprising performance: its underground bunkers and its efficient communications system. According to Mark Perry and Alastair Crooke, the bunkers were built by Hezbollah engineers, were heavily fortified, and "a few were even air conditioned."<sup>81</sup> For years, Hezbollah had been constructing bunkers out in the open, in view of both the Israeli surveillance aircrafts and the Lebanese population—but these bunkers were apparently decoys. Other bunkers had been constructed out of view of the Lebanese public. Security protocol within Hezbollah had it that "no single Hezbollah member had knowledge of the militia's entire bunker structure."<sup>82</sup> This decentralization of knowledge would also prove helpful for protecting the organization's top commanders. In Perry and Crooke's report, Nasrallah is quoted as saying, "Not even I knew where I was."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>81</sup> Alastair Crooke and Mark Perry. "How Hezbollah Defeated Israel: Part 1: Winning the Intelligence War," *Asia Times Online*, October 12, 2006, accessed February 10, 2015, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/HJ12Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HJ12Ak01.html).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

The underground bunker system would ensure that Hezbollah would not take overwhelming losses, even as the scale of Israel's bombing campaign over Lebanon grew considerably. Perry and Crooke treat the scale of Lebanese casualties inflicted by Israel as a sign of military weakness, writing that the much-publicized civilian losses at Qana were the result of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's "agreement to 'stretch the envelope.'"<sup>84</sup> They quote a U.S. official saying, "This isn't really that complicated. After the failure of the initial campaign, IAF (Israeli Air Force) planning officers went back through their target folders to see if they had missed anything. When they decided they hadn't, someone probably stood up and went into the other room and returned with a set of new envelopes of targets in densely populated areas and said, 'Hey, what about these target envelopes?' And so they did it."<sup>85</sup> Perry and Crooke specify their belief that this strategy was "the result of Israel's failure in the war--not its success."<sup>86</sup>

Meanwhile, Hezbollah's communications system had withstood the pressures of the war. Israel had come to understand the strength and efficiency of the system based on Hezbollah's swift adherence to ceasefire agreements. Again, in the words of Perry and Crooke:

The ceasefire provided the first evidence that Hezbollah had successfully withstood Israeli air attacks and was planning a sustained and prolonged defense of southern Lebanon. Hezbollah commanders honored the ceasefire at the orders of their political superiors. With one or two lone exceptions, no rockets were fired into Israel during this ceasefire period. While Hezbollah's capacity actually to 'cease fire' was otherwise ignored by Israeli and Western intelligence experts, Hezbollah's ability to enforce discipline on its field commanders came as a distinctly unwanted shock to IDF senior commanders, who concluded that

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



Hezbollah's communications capabilities had survived Israel's air onslaught, that the Hezbollah leadership was in touch with its commanders on the ground, and that those commanders were able to maintain a robust communications network despite Israeli interdiction.<sup>87</sup>

As Clausewitz argues, war is not simply a series of physical battles between two opposing militaries, but is also a contest of information. Psychological warfare, or PsyWar, between Israel and Hezbollah was acute throughout the 33-day war. Israel psychological operations, or PsyOps, were delivered through many media forms and paid mind to the internal politics of Lebanon, so as to undermine Hezbollah's and Nasrallah's credibility on Lebanese terms. Those operations included: emphasizing through various means that Hezbollah and Nasrallah are puppets of Iran and Syria (among its channels was Voice of Lebanon, a radio station historically operated by the Israel-funded South Lebanon Army); intercepting satellite transmissions from Hezbollah's television station, *al-Manar*, and filling the screens with "Hezbollah command sites and rocket launching pads" that Israel claimed to have raided; and labeling Nasrallah a hiding coward, through notes and images published to leaflets dropped from the air into population centers.<sup>88</sup>

For its own PsyOps, Hezbollah put its newspapers and television stations to use. Some of the programs it broadcasted were in Hebrew to convince Israelis of "the futility of aggression and occupation."<sup>89</sup> Among the Hebrew-language shows Hezbollah presented was "Who's Next," which during the war featured "an updated photo gallery of dead Israeli soldiers." Working for *Al-Manar* was a "Hebrew Observation Department,"

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Friedman, Herbert. "PsyWar.Org - Psychological Operations during the Israel-Lebanon War 2006," PsyWar.Org, August 14, 2006, Accessed November 2014, <http://www.psywar.org/israellebanon.php>.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

which “comprised of Hebrew speakers who monitor Israeli radio and TV broadcasts 24 hours a day.”<sup>90</sup> Among the more experimental PsyOps run by Hezbollah was a video game, playable by youth, in which the player engaged from the point of view of an “Islamic Resistance Fighter,” able to “kill Israeli soldiers and assassinate Israeli politicians.” Hezbollah allegedly claimed to have sold 100,000 copies of the game.<sup>91</sup>

By the end of the war, Israel had lost 121 soldiers in its land invasion. 34 Israeli soldiers had been killed during the last two days of the war. A major reason for this casualty count of enemy fighters was the size and reach of Hezbollah’s fighting personnel. According to Andrew Exum, Hezbollah has its elite forces, regular fighters who in 2006 numbered 1,000, but also people from various communities in South Lebanon who would come to the fighting fore when Israel attempted to invade. An example of this tactic provided by Exum was the battle of Maroun al-Ras, the “combat fatality of which” was “not from Hizballah at all, but was in fact a member of Hizbullah’s one-time rival party, Amal.”<sup>92</sup> Maroun al-Ras stands thus as an example of what Perry and Crooke insist upon when they argue that Hezbollah exhibited a lesson from the North Vietnamese Army and its fight against the Americans: “You must grab them by their belt buckles.”<sup>93</sup>

Governments and think-tanks had drawn up countless reports with the desire to analyze the failures of the war on Israel’s part. Early in his speeches commemorating the Divine Victory, Nasrallah made it a point to mention these reports. For example, in his

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Exum, “Hizbullah at War,” 5.

<sup>93</sup> Crooke and Perry, “How Hezbollah Defeated Israel.”

speech commemorating the Divine Victory made in August of 2013, he insists that Hezbollah's course during the 2006 War provided the world—that is, the entire international political framework of nation-states and non-state militias—with a military school, a theatre for study to allow future generations to enhance their understanding of the art of war.<sup>94</sup> Here Nasrallah is crediting his organization with shifting and establishing entire paradigms, a framing he employs time and again to offer Hezbollah a power beyond what its technological and financial means would otherwise suggest. If Hezbollah had not before actually established new paradigms in pure material and military terms, this self-empowerment in the media realm could serve to make it so. The achievement of Hezbollah of its goal of remaining a coherent military outfit after confrontation with Israel allowed the organization the ability to make such claims about itself. This language, of paradigm-shifting, is paramount to Hezbollah's psychological successes.

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<sup>94</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "Sayed Nasrallah Speech on Anniversary of July 2006 Victory - 1 of 5 - English - 16 08 2013," YouTube video, posted by "LittleButerfli," August 16, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRYzVlj6EX4>.

## The *Muqawama* Rhetoric of the Divine Victory

Since its inception in the 1980s, Hezbollah has evolved considerably. It has gone from expressing a particularly Islamist vision for Lebanon to a military movement boasting significant cross-sectarian ties and a self-professed stalwart on behalf of the disinherited. In just over three decades, the group has amassed an appeal that extends well beyond its own Shi'i working class community in the Southern suburbs of Beirut and in South Lebanon—an appeal that is tenuous in accordance with political developments. As fear around Hezbollah has increased internationally—the United States as well as the European Union label it a terrorist organization—so too has admiration for it grown in some quarters. This admiration contains many components—some conflicting, but ultimately reconciled through the resistance culture at the center of Hezbollah's *raison d'être*.

The support groups for Hezbollah can be broken down into three categories: local, national, and international. In Hezbollah's interactions with its desired publics, a dialectical resolution comes out of the tensions between these three categories. The religious concerns of Shia in Lebanon, after all, have little to do with the aims and desires of, say, Arab communists, who in some cases find sympathy with the organization. The crux of the group's appeal lies in its ability to market itself as a protector of Lebanese territorial integrity, and of the region more generally, against imperialist aggression.

This dialectic propelling Hezbollah's political role in the Middle East is, in other words, between religious particularism and a universal vision for the well-being of the region in which it operates. On a particular basis, Hezbollah lends credence to God as the ultimate decider of political disputes, gives earthly authority to Imams as interpreters of that authority's will, upholds martyrdom as a behavioral ideal with a particular martyr

(Imam Hussein) as an encapsulation of it, and in its rituals embraces symbolism of victimhood. On a universal basis, Hezbollah entertains notions of international law (even if it does not fully subscribe to them), views the Lebanese state's authority as legitimate, sees its international alliances with secular states such as Syria as essential, and embraces modern military imagery as symbolic of self-empowerment.

This is a paradigm—the particular versus the universal—that in some capacity drives both Hezbollah policies, or its actions in Lebanon and the Middle East, as well as its rhetoric, or the ways in which it pitches those policies to local, national, and international audiences. These policies have, in turn, evolved in response to a changing regional landscape. For instance, in distinction to Hezbollah's original purpose as an anti-Israel fighting force during the Lebanese Civil War, Hezbollah now finds itself in confrontation with Muslim armed groups in Lebanon and Syria.

Indeed, the relationship between Hezbollah and its desired audiences has also changed considerably since the identity of the party's primary enemy on the battlefield has changed. After 2006, Hezbollah found itself at the height of its regional popularity, an object of an enthusiasm cutting across sectarian and class lines. In July of that year, it engaged in a bloody and highly destructive 33-day war with the State of Israel, claiming in the wake of the war a "Divine Victory." Since 2011, regional opinion on the party has been decidedly conflicted in response to its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and its entry into the Syrian Civil War against the Syrian government's enemies.<sup>95</sup>

This section aims to understand Hezbollah's strategy for explaining its evolving role in the Middle East to its desired publics between 2006 and today. To accomplish this

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<sup>95</sup> "Dr. Youness Discussing the EU Blacklisting of Hezbollah with Dr. Saad-Grayeb & Dr. Jammoul," YouTube video, posted by Hasan Youness, August 1, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhsTvBNK6Sg>.

task, it examines speeches by Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the party's main communication agent to the public. As a site of Hezbollah's self-presentation, the July 2006 War is given particular attention. What about that war does Nasrallah use to claim Hezbollah's victory? How do these claims help him to pitch the party's policy to the public? In his presentations, how does Nasrallah bridge divides between Shi'i concerns, Lebanese national concerns, and regional Middle East concerns, and how does he relate them to Hezbollah's controversial policies?

### THE JULY WAR IN HEZBOLLAH MEMORY

The ultimate paradigm-shift formulated by Nasrallah and Hezbollah following the war was an equation forwarded in 2010: in a threat to Israel made by television broadcast, Nasrallah announced that should Israel bomb Beirut, he would bomb Tel Aviv.<sup>96</sup> In an interview conducted with *Al-Akhbar*, years later in 2014, Nasrallah made the point that the equation was not based on an empty threat, but on the actual long-distance capabilities of the party's rocket supplies.<sup>97</sup> Speaking in such a manner allows Nasrallah to formulate an anti-colonial politics inextricable from the military rationale of Hezbollah's *muqawama* culture. With a raised, highly stylized assault rifle extending from an arm attached to the Arabic inscription of "Party of God" as the party's symbol, Hezbollah has crafted a new ideological Shi'ism in which the oppressed of the earth represented by Shia's beloved martyr Imam Hussein is given modern military expression,

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<sup>96</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. "If You Bomb Dahiyeh - We Will Bomb Tel Aviv 2010 Sayed Nasrallah English Subtitle." YouTube video posted by "Islamic Channel," February 19, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mE43621u48E>.

<sup>97</sup> "Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah: The Resistance in Gaza Is on Quest for Tangible Victory." *Al-Akhbar English*, August 14, 2014, accessed September, 2014, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/21138>.

the basis of a blood pact forwarded by the gun and the rocket. Thus, Hezbollah draws its political strength from its military strength, and vice versa. The equation of an Arab city, Beirut, with an Israeli city, Tel Aviv, upends in this worldview the injustice of a colonial situation with military technology serving as the great equalizer.

Forcing Israel to self-criticize in public is one part of that shifting dynamic. Among the most prominent reports to air military criticism of Israel and therefore provide a chink in its media armor was the Winograd Committee Report, which had declared that the war was a “missed opportunity.” Because Israel had initiated the long war, its failure to achieve an explicit military victory increased its own weaknesses and made more glaring the strengths of Hezbollah, as it had appeared to the world that “a few thousand men resisted, for a few weeks, the strongest military in the Middle East, which enjoyed full air superiority and size and technology advantages.” Israel’s magnified weaknesses included: the IDF’s inability to put an effective stop to Hezbollah rocket fire into Israel while the war effort was underway; the resultant disruption of Israeli civilian life; and a ground invasion aborted for the sake of a United Nations-decreed ceasefire, to be monitored by UN troops along the Lebanese-Israeli border.<sup>98</sup>

Nasrallah has been merciless in exploiting these attempts at self-criticism. In his 2012 speech, he quoted the former head of Mossad, Meir Dagan, as saying to former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that the war was a “national catastrophe.” He went on to claim that, when a ceasefire deal was being hammered out in the last days of the war, the Arab delegates in New York said that Israel had abandoned all of its preconditions for a ceasefire. He quoted former Israeli President Shimon Peres as saying that any venture three kilometers into Lebanese territory is stupid on account of Hezbollah’s presence. He

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<sup>98</sup> "Winograd Commission Final Report," Council on Foreign Relations, January 30, 2008. <http://www.cfr.org/israel/winograd-commission-final-report/p15385>.

specified that Peres also said that F-16 warplanes cannot possibly hunt down every sixteen year old—Nasrallah added here that Peres was referring to “the Resistance”—and that eventually Hezbollah will possess warplanes.<sup>99</sup>

## SHI’ISM IN CONTEXT

In developing the Hezbollah narrative about the 2006 War, Nasrallah has been able to accomplish in dual fashion the task of developing a martyr in the figure of al-Hajj Radwan, or Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in Damascus by Israeli Mossad, with alleged assistance from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, in 2008.<sup>100</sup> Martyrdom provides communication agents such as Nasrallah with a tool for recruitment by placing the highest ideals of his local public—in this case, Lebanese Shia—in a single individual, in the process demonstrating that the ideal is nearly attainable. Nasrallah was thus able to claim that the war was an unprecedented triumph against the Israeli enemy, and that this triumph was attributable, in both thought and deed, to a single individual, a Hezbollah *mujahid* and mastermind of modern warfare. In his 2012 anniversary speech, Nasrallah told a specific story about Mughniyeh in order to bolster his image and reputation; he constructed the telling in such a way to provide his audience with the impression that he was releasing previously sensitive information. He explained that at one moment during the war Israel had discovered the precise location of some of Hezbollah’s long and mid-

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<sup>99</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "Sayed Nasrallah Speech on the Anniversary of the July 2006 Victory - 18/7/2012 - \*English Dub\* - 1/6." YouTube video, posted by LitleButerfly, July 18, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7kkpKh\\_Qe8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7kkpKh_Qe8).

<sup>100</sup> Adam Goldman and Ellen Nakashima, “CIA and Mossad killed senior Hezbollah figure in car bombing,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2015, accessed January 30, 2015, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-and-mossad-killed-senior-hezbollah-figure-in-car-bombing/2015/01/30/ebb88682-968a-11e4-8005-1924ede3e54a\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-and-mossad-killed-senior-hezbollah-figure-in-car-bombing/2015/01/30/ebb88682-968a-11e4-8005-1924ede3e54a_story.html).



range rockets' launching pads, and had planned a strike to take them out. According to Nasrallah, Mughniyeh played a crucial role in discovering Israel's plans to strike these sites, and because of his superior intelligence capabilities, the pads were removed before Israel could bomb them. In this telling, the brilliance of Mughniyeh reflects on the brilliance of Hezbollah, and vice versa, bestowing Hezbollah with the gifts and abilities of a formal military, including a sophisticated intelligence network.

As a martyr figure of specially elevated status, Mughniyeh plays a crucial role in Hezbollah's interaction with its local Shi'i public for reasons that extend beyond his war process: he is presented as one who was dedicated totally, perhaps even obsessively, to the task of unpending the corrupt usurpers, an obsession that achieved highest expression in his martyrdom at the hands of the enemy. Mughniyeh is especially instructive in this regard for having become a figure of cross-political appeal, earning also the respect of leftists for his bravery and talents for guerrilla warfare, making him a key component for the sustenance of the vast political network Hezbollah must attempt to hold together. In media, this connection spans in Lebanon from Hezbollah outlets to the leftist newspaper *Al-Akhbar*. It is a connection that in some of its elements extends beyond trappings, beyond the superficial.

This connection was anticipated by 20<sup>th</sup> century Shi'i thinkers. A key figure in this regard, who presaged in his own philosophy the commonalities between Shi'ism and the secular left, was 20th century Iranian philosopher, sociologist, and historian Ali Shariati. His writings would foreground the aspects of Mughniyeh's martyrdom mutually latched onto by both Shi'is and secular leftists. He embraced Marxist concepts of

underclass liberation even as he repudiated Marxism as a “Western fallacy,” presenting Islam as the truth path to liberation and enlightenment.<sup>101</sup>

Shariati regarded what would be Mughniyeh’s chief achievement of *shahadat*, or martyrdom, as an ultimately ineffable concept, “a refined love and a deep, complex wisdom” that “weakens speech.”<sup>102</sup> As Mughniyeh is, in the Lebanese context, the modern Hussein figure par excellence, Imam Hussein was, in Shariati’s observation, the manifestation of *shahadat* par excellence. Shariati offered a vision of a world divided morally, a worldview later taken up by Hezbollah: there is a ruling class pitted against an underclass, “the mass of the people.”<sup>103</sup> Shariati’s explanation of *shahadat* was predicated on his own particular telling of Imam Hussein’s martyrdom. Hussein’s rebellion against Yazid and the Ummayed forces marked a “revolutionary period” in Islamic history, an epic fight against “oppressors.”<sup>104</sup> The political dynamics that Shariati described are not at all different from the contemporary landscape that Mughniyeh’s supporters describe. They exist in a world of conspiracy, of “turncoats and Umayyad spies” and “an underground organization,” “a clandestine resistance movement in opposition to the regime.”<sup>105</sup>

Shariati, acting as Hussein’s communicative agent, gave the martyr his own words: “Death, for the sons of Adam, is as beautiful as a necklace around the neck of a

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<sup>101</sup> Ali Shariati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique* (North Haledon, Mizan Press, 1980).

<sup>102</sup> Ali Shariati, *Jihad and Shahadat*, Edited by Mehdi Abedi and Gary Legenhausen (North Haledon, Islamic Publications International, 1986), 154.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 159.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 159.

young and beautiful girl. Death is an ornament for mankind.” This is true to the very purpose of martyrdom, the creation of meaning in death. Hussein, in accepting his death, is “the highest example of being alive, loving and aware of humanity.” Shariati goes on: “Shahadat is not war—it is mission. It is not a weapon—it is a message. It is a word pronounced in blood.”<sup>106</sup> Martyrdom is not any of these things in vain, in nihilism, or pain without purpose; it is, rather, a political project with explicit reference to everyday life and lived experience.

To give such sentiment life, Nasrallah appeared days after Mugniyeh’s death via video link in a speech to memorialize the mastermind, referring to him by his al-Hajj Radwan and declaring him “beloved” and a “martyr.”<sup>107</sup> He noted in the speech that the martyrs are the resistance, are the homeland, and are the *umma*, or the motherland. Before launching into Mugniyeh’s honorable record as a husband and a father, Nasrallah praised him for his dedication to *jihad*. At one point, he vowed revenge for the death of Imad Mugniyeh, warning Israel of the consequences of the line it had stepped in assassinating this important *mujahid*. In announcing this, Nasrallah forwarded an interpretation of the Karbala narrative differing from others, particularly that of Va’iz Kashifi, who posited that “taking revenge for the tragedy of Karbala was the exclusive right and responsibility of the *mahdi*.”<sup>108</sup> In distinction, Nasrallah used a modern Hussein figure to stir vengeful fervor against a modern political enemy.

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 162, 165, 177, 209.

<sup>107</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "خطاب السيد حسن نصر الله بعد استشهاد القائد عماد مغنية - 1," YouTube video, posted by "Fuad Alsultan," February 18, 2008. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcAfvajzeo>.

<sup>108</sup> Kamran Scot Aghaie, "The Karbala Narrative in Shi'i Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s-1970s," *The Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies*. (2001) 12:2.

As is typical for the rituals surrounding public appearances of Nasrallah, Hezbollah supporters gather in Dahiya, the southern suburb of Beirut from which Hezbollah first arose, to cheer Nasrallah, the party, and the cause (the fight against Israel). During this particular speech, supporters gathered in the streets under a gray sky, a soft rain, and a field of mostly black umbrellas—black being the color traditionally worn by Shi'is during Ashura, the yearly commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein. On the stage on which the video link of Nasrallah's speech was presented, before the audience and beside a grouplet of armed Hezbollah guards, the coffin of Imad Mughniyeh was hauled out, its wood topped with yellow flowers to match the yellow Hezbollah flag draping over its entirety.

*Al-Manar*, the official media outlet of Hezbollah, memorialized Mughniyeh on television with the following words:

Tomorrow, with the memory of children and the memory of countries of the glorious legend of July [the 2006 War], Imad will be the letter and the word and the title. Oh, nation of martyrs, the wound is deep. But tomorrow is near for those who wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow, the nation will go out in the streets to celebrate the martyred leader... and repeat the message that resistance is the strongest... that a nation will not die with victory, victory of God, in it.<sup>109</sup>

Hezbollah did not make such claims about Mughniyeh when he was alive. In fact, the party publicly distanced himself from him for the reputation he had garnered—the association of his name with airplane hijackings, the kidnapping of Western journalists, the bombing the U.S. embassy and, in one instance following an airplane hijacking, the tossing of a brutalized corpse out onto a tarmac. All of these events represented an era of

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<sup>109</sup> "اعلان استشهاد عماد مغنية" YouTube video, posted by "almnartv," January 2, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyaFqlcz9mg>.

Lebanese resistance that Hezbollah was attempting to move beyond. Until his death, Hezbollah had gone as far as to deny Mughniyeh's existence. After his death, his mysteriousness was used as the raw material out of which a Hussein figure par excellence was crafted. According to Lina Khatib, on November 11th, 2008, Mughniyeh's photo was placed alongside those of Ahmad Kassir, Sheikh Ragheb Harb, and Abbas al-Musawi—all Hezbollah martyrs—in commemoration of Martyr's Day.<sup>110</sup>

Mughniyeh's placement among those martyrs remains solid today. On the most recent Martyr's Day, dated November 12th, 2013, *Al-Manar* described Mughniyeh as a notable martyr among those other comparable figures. It named Kassir the first Hezbollah martyr, as on "November 11, 1982, the operation of the self-sacrifice [of] Martyr Ahmad Qassir paved the way to similar resisting actions against the Israeli enemy."<sup>111</sup> Then Mughniyeh was mentioned: "Hezbollah leaders topped the list of martyrs. Sheikh Ragheb Harb, Sayyad Abbas al-Mousawi, and Haj Imad Mughniyeh are the martyr leaders who disturbed the Zionist enemy for the role model they presented."<sup>112</sup> This text presented Mughniyeh as the standard bearer of right conduct. The article went on to state that Martyr's Day is recognized by rose garlands that are placed on "monuments of a large number of martyrs in the South and Beqaa."<sup>113</sup>

Khatib, in her study on the political uses of images in the modern Middle East, writes that Mughniyeh's onetime ultra-mystery, the kind that allowed a wide range of

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<sup>110</sup> Lina, Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in Political Struggle* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2012), 61.

<sup>111</sup> "Hezbollah's Martyr's Day: Celebrations, Rose Garlands," *Al-Manar*, November 12, 2013, <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?eid=120371&cid=23&fromval=1>.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

quasi-mythical narratives to develop around him, was crucial to Hezbollah's use of him as the ideal martyr figure. It was this mysteriousness that allowed him to become the ideal martyr overnight. Exhibitions were assembled that liberally displayed his image—gray, scruffy beard, wire-framed glasses, a baseball cap upon his weighty head. His onetime possessions were displayed: “his rifle, his clothes, shoes, prayer rug, cap and beads, hairbrush, eyeglasses case, torch and office chair and desk, upon which his now-trademark baseball cap was laid.” Khatib emphasized that these objects are, as per the observations of Laleh Khalili, “quotidian ‘non-heroic’ objects” intended “to lend the martyr familiarity in the eyes of the viewer.” Because Mughniyeh was an enigmatic figure, these objects also served to “ground the myth in material reality.”<sup>114</sup>

For its contribution to the Mughniyeh narrative, the Lebanese leftist newspaper *Al-Akhbar* reported that Nasrallah has kept his vow for avenging Mughniyeh's death alive down the years. Four years after Mughniyeh's death—just after Hezbollah was accused of bombings targeting Israeli civilians in India, Georgia, and Thailand—the newspaper emphasized that Nasrallah reiterated the promise. His reasoning as to why his party could not have been behind the bombings in those locales was that avenging Mughniyeh, the event for which they would have reason to attack Israel, is much too important a task to be wasted on Israeli civilians. “It is insulting for Hezbollah to avenge its great leader by killing ordinary Israelis,” the newspaper quoted Nasrallah as saying. “As for those who are our target, they know who they are and they are taking measures,

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<sup>114</sup> Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East*, 62.

and I tell them to remain doing so because we shall avenge Imad Mughniyeh in an honorable way.”<sup>115</sup>

In one article, the leftist Lebanese newspaper called Mughniyeh in its headline “the stuff of legends.” The content of the article was about Mughniyeh’s special and unusual relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran; the article proposed that Mughniyeh’s keen military insights and extraordinary talents with the Persian language earned him preferential treatment in the political corridors of Tehran. “Iran’s relationship with ‘Hajj Imad’ was no brief affair,” the article insisted. “The Islamic Republic had denied that until the day he was martyred where it paid tribute to the fallen leader at his funeral.” At the funeral, the newspaper said, representatives of Iran’s most important politicians—Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad—were present, and “a symbolic tombstone was also erected at Behesht-e-Zahra, graveyard of Iran’s own martyrs in Tehran.”<sup>116</sup>

The editor of *Al-Akhbar*, Ibrahim al-Amin, considers Mughniyeh such an exemplar of resistance against Israel and such a ferocious standard bearer for the Palestinian cause that he posthumously wrote to Mughniyeh to express an array of disappointments, dissatisfactions, and disillusionment with the current state of Arab resistance. His logic was that the betrayal of the Palestinian was tantamount to a betrayal of Mughniyeh and the sacrifices he made for it. He provided Mughniyeh with a melancholy reflection on the state of play:

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<sup>115</sup> “Nasrallah: Our Enemy Knows How We Avenge Mughniyeh,” *Al-Akhbar English*, February 16, 2012, accessed October 14, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/nasrallah-our-enemy-knows-how-we-avenge-mughniyeh>.

<sup>116</sup> Elie Chalhoub, “Imad Mughniyeh in Iran: The Stuff of Legends,” *Al-Akhbar English*, February 14, 2012, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/imad-mughniyeh-iran-stuff-legends>

The country you left one night has plunged into darkness and under an insane assault from outsiders still determined to recolonize us. Backwardness, hatred, and the hard life have turned into an ongoing process of killing. Perhaps your wish was fulfilled, that you did not live to see the countries of the Levant in their condition today.<sup>117</sup>

As dedication to Palestine is among the most important points in a Hezbollah martyr, it is worth noting that *Al-Akhbar*'s reported history of Imad Mughniyeh finds him not merely promoting the cause from within his own, more personal, more localized cause; rather, it finds him directly involved with armed Palestinian resistance groups. His joining was also a manifestation of Hezbollah's Islamic universalism, a cross-sect effort to liberate fellow Muslims from the imperial yoke. One article detailed the history of Khalil al-Wazir, better known as Abu Jihad; he was described as a pioneer of Palestinian armed struggle whose insurrectionary activities dated back to the 1950s, when "he was the twentysomething leader of the Palestinian al-Haq Brigade in Gaza."<sup>118</sup>

Abu Jihad went on to forward the idea that armed struggle was "the only path to liberate Palestine." By the 1960s, Abu Jihad was such a formidable force that Israel considered him, along with a young Yasser Arafat (who then went by the name of Abu Ammar), to be among its chief targets. Several Israeli assassination attempts followed. In 1988, in an operation penetrating Tunis, then the center of Palestine Liberation Organization activity and the location of Abu Jihad's home, Mossad assassinated Abu Jihad. The article ended with a description of a "special relationship" between Abu Jihad and a young Imad Mughniyeh. The year was 1978 and Mughniyeh was 16-years-old,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibrahim al-Amin, "To Imad Mughniyeh: Eyes Turned Toward Palestine," *Al-Akhbar English*, February 14, 2012, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/imad-mughniyeh-eyes-turned-toward-palestine>

<sup>118</sup> Mohamad Bdeir, "Khalil al-Wazir: Paving the Way of Armed Struggle," *Al-Akhbar English*, April 17 2012, accessed March 11, 2015, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/khalil-al-wazir-paving-way-armed-struggle>



ever eager to work with the Fatah cell he had joined: “The newcomer [Mughniyeh] caught the attention of the higher command of the Palestinian revolution, specifically Abu Jihad, due to his skill in planning ambushes in the area between Tayouneh and Asaad al-Asaad Street (South of Beirut).”<sup>119</sup>

One source was quoted as saying that Mughniyeh was the only one who could “provide the cell with the weapons they needed.” The newspaper gave Mughniyeh an enigmatic aura when quoting the same source as saying he left the cell because he was “summoned by the leadership” so that he could work “in a secret security unit” and, after that, the cell “never saw him again.” This is a fairly typical impression among Mughniyeh’s supporters: a man who slipped across borders and between states in a manner clandestine and undetected, defying maps and radars while duly performing his revolutionary duties.<sup>120</sup>

In cases such as the public reception of the Imad Mughniyeh’s *shahadat*, Shi’ism provides a basis for limited common ground with left-wing movements. Islamic universalism, however, still provides the movement with its sense of purpose and ties together its local community. In his 2009 anniversary speech, Nasrallah offered up two sets of salutes. In the first, he paid tribute to the martyrs of Hezbollah, the civilians of Lebanon, the Lebanese Army, the Lebanese security services, and the Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian people. In the second, he paid tribute to Arab peoples, Islamic

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

peoples, peoples of the world, and finally—with emphasis that this tribute is the most important of all—to God.<sup>121</sup>

No matter the legitimacy Nasrallah grants to the pillars of modernity, including sovereignty and its guardian in the nation-state form, as well as parliamentary democracy as a political system, he maintains a special place in all of his public rhetoric for God—by both implication and specification, the God of the Shia. Whatever motions Nasrallah makes towards the political authorities derived from liberal thought, he cites God as the ultimate authority, placing him seamlessly into Hezbollah’s military framework by naming faith in him as the variable that elevates a resistance fighter above enemies with superior technological capabilities. In his 2009 anniversary speech, he denounced Israel’s “psychological war,” waged for the sake of creating in the Middle East region a constant state of anxiety so that the ideology and the will of the people would break. Nasrallah went on to say that this war has failed because the people believe in God—their faith is the power their enemies lack, and it is the power that will catapult them to conquest.

## LEBANON

The Lebanese register of Hezbollah has allowed the party to pitch its mission as an act of national liberation. It has also proved increasingly useful as the party seeks to gain a stronger foothold in domestic Lebanese politics and as it finds itself fighting Muslim movements, composed partially of Arabs, on the battlefield.

In deference to the territorial integrity of Lebanon as a nation-state—acknowledging by necessity the political authority of the state as a protector of a society’s

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<sup>121</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "[Arabic] Sayed Hassan Nasrallah 3rd Year Anniversary of July 2006 War Speech | 08.14.2009," YouTube video posted by “Stand for Truth!” August 17, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5K9FiLPL20>.

self-determination and that society's fundamental right to independence—Nasrallah connects Hezbollah's defense of Lebanon to wider regional reverberations. In his 2009 speech, he cited Lebanon in conjunction with Palestine and Syria as a target of an "American plot"—that is, the plot to destroy the Axis of Resistance. He went as far as to draw a parallel with the resistance Palestine represents by identifying Israel's withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000 as a twin victory alongside Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Additionally, he asked the question: what would have happened if the Resistance had lost the war in 2006?

All of these remarks imply some degree of respect for the idea of a state army as an extension of the state. Nasrallah after all called for a national unity government for Lebanon in his 2009 speech, adding that Lebanese unity harms Israeli prospects for its designs. In his 2013 speech, Nasrallah included the Lebanese Army as part of a "Golden Equation," alongside the categories of "the People" and "the Resistance."<sup>122</sup> In his 2012 speech, he cited Syria's strong army, formed independent from the Americans, as the reason the United States wishes to destroy Syria. For this very reason, he said, the Americans disbanded the Iraqi Army. The Americans do not wish to see any actual army in the region, he added—it wants, at most, glorified police or security services, for sufficient weaponry in the hands of a skilled army might spell misfortune for Israel. He noted this while maintaining that the Lebanese Army must be defended, for its role in ensuring "civil peace," politically and morally. This task requires defending the Army

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<sup>122</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "[Arabic] Sayed Nasrallah Speech on Anniversary of July 2006 Victory - 1 of 5 - English - 16 08 2013," YouTube video posted by "LittleButerfli" August 16, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRYzVlj6EX4>.

from accusations of sectarianism, or any doubts about its neutrality and nationalism. Here again, Lebanese unity was enshrined as an ideal.<sup>123</sup>

### **“PEOPLE OF THE WORLD”**

The broadest rhetorical register Hezbollah casts, one that places the party somewhere in the lineage of pan-Arabism and Nasserism and Third Worldism, is solidarity with the masses of the world, specifically the colonized and downtrodden. Under this register, the 2006 War could be presented as a victory of the disinherited against the disinheritors, the victims over the victimizers, the weak over the strong.

In 2010, Ha’aretz reported on the studies of Colonel Ronen, a chief intelligence officer for the Central Command of the Israel Defense Forces, who stated to the newspaper that Nasrallah “was the first Arab leader to affect Israeli public opinion since Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt in the 1960s.”<sup>124</sup> The newspaper report added that,

Col. Ronen writes that the speeches were the only means by which Nasrallah could deliver his message to various audiences. In fact, he argues, apart from the rockets it lobbed into Israel the speeches were the only offensive weapon that Hezbollah used in the war. Fearing of an extensive Israeli ground offensive, the organization took a mainly defensive posture.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "Sayed Nasrallah Speech on the Anniversary of the July 2006 Victory - 18/7/2012 - \*English Dub\* - 1/6," YouTube video posted by “LittleButerfli” July 18, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7kkpKh\\_Qe8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7kkpKh_Qe8).

<sup>124</sup> Amos Harel, "Hezbollah Chief's Speeches Sway Israeli Opinion More than Any Arab Leader." *Haaretz*, July 12, 2010, accessed December 17, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/hezbollah-chief-s-speeches-sway-israeli-opinion-more-than-any-arab-leader-1.301347>.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

By saying this, Ronen was in some respect contributing to Hezbollah's narrative about the 2006 War, which was built upon the ruins of another narrative affecting Arab societies on a long-term basis—that of the 1967 Six-Day War. Out of 1967 emerged a “psychological myth among the Arabs of an indisputably, superiorly armed Israeli nation.”<sup>126</sup> Nasrallah picked up on exactly this strand in his 2009 speech when he challenged the “belief” of 1967 that Israel could not be militarily defeated and must therefore be recognized through peace accords. The justification for this challenge could be found in the 2006 War, which Nasrallah has used to replace a narrative of defeat with one of triumph.

The replacement of the image and figure of Nasser—the Egyptian President and leader of pan-Arabism throughout the 1967 war—would lay a foundation for the confluence of an emergent Islamism with the state-led socialist Arab ideologies of the past. In this nexus, contradictions become convergences—the would-be conflicts of diametrically-opposed political currents find life in the language of anti-colonial revolt, a wellspring from which identities emerge and events take course. In the words of Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz: “For Hezbollah, the 2006 summertime war was more than a battle against a mortal enemy; it was a crucial battle in a broader, ongoing war, linking religious fundamentalism to Arab nationalism.”<sup>127</sup> Any debate over what constitutes “fundamentalism” aside, this formulation indeed speaks to Hezbollah's multifaceted appropriations of traditions past.

The confluence of ideology and identity emanating from the Arab and Muslim side of the 2006 War ethos does not end with Arab nationalism. There is a logic

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<sup>126</sup> Cordesman, Sullivan, and Sullivan, “Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War,” 24.

<sup>127</sup> Marvin Kalb and Carol Saivetz, “The Israeli--Hezbollah War Of 2006: The Media As A Weapon In Asymmetrical Conflict,” *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* (2007): 43-66.

employed by Nasrallah that overlaps with diverse anti-imperialist movements of the past—more than that, the logic answers the call of past anti-imperialist movements for sameness of aim despite differences. For example, Nasrallah shared a logic with Mao Tse-Tung when, in his 2009 speech, he declared that more important than intelligence and technology is the human, the type of soldier into whose hand weaponry is placed. The people, he proclaimed, have teeth and fingernails, and so will prevail. In this assuredness of the superiority of his soldiers, Nasrallah was invoking a class position—that of the disinherited and oppressed—that shall provide his people with duration. He was saying something similar when he infamously professed that “this Israel, which owns nuclear weapons and the strongest airforce in the region, by God, it is weaker than a spider web.”<sup>128</sup>

Similarly, in a speech at the Wuchang Meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China as saying the following:

In past history, before they won state power and for some time afterwards, the slave-owning class, the feudal landlord class and the bourgeoisie were vigorous, revolutionary, and progressive; they were real tigers. But with the lapse of time, because their opposites--the slave class, the peasant class, and the proletariat--grew in strength step by step, struggled against them more and more fiercely, these ruling classes changed step by step into the reverse, changed into reactionaries, changed into backwards people, changed into paper tigers. And eventually they were overthrown, or will be overthrown, by the people.<sup>129</sup>

The promise Nasrallah makes to his people of eventual military success over Israel—delivered somewhat like a prophecy—is dependent upon an Israel-free Lebanon,

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<sup>128</sup> Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, "Nasrallah Infuriates Israel: 'Israel Weaker than a Spider Web' - English Subtitles," YouTube video, posted by "TheKeystoEternity," March 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFIQWgHyNIQ>.

<sup>129</sup> Mao Tseung, *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tsetung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), 73.

a concept that places Nasrallah's rhetoric in league with that of past anti-colonial figures. The 1805 Constitution of Haiti, for instance, states that "no whiteman of whatever nation he may be, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor, neither shall he in future acquire any property therein."<sup>130</sup> Nasrallah sought to make a kindred guarantee in his 2013 anniversary speech when he announced that no Israeli soldier will step foot onto Lebanese soil without getting his throat cut—a raw expression of Hezbollah's self-appointed task.

In order to circulate these registers, Hezbollah must promote, in its *muqawama* culture, a culture in the fullest sense. It must develop an iconography. An important subset of iconography is celebrity.

## **2006 AND THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR**

The 2006 continues to prove important for Hezbollah's rhetorical strategy, particularly as it expands its military operations in the Middle East and confronts new enemies. How has Nasrallah used the 2006 War, and the mythos that had developed around it due to his words and others', to explain his party's intervention in the Syrian Civil War?

One way has been to assert that Hezbollah's experience on the battlefield in Syria has been hardening and training it for any future confrontation with Israel. From an interview with *Al-Akhbar* in 2014:

What has been prepared for Israel differs naturally from the battle we are fighting against the armed groups. I do not see that anything Hezbollah had prepared or hidden for the battle with Israel has been exposed. On the contrary, and this is one

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<sup>130</sup> "The 1805 Constitution of Haiti," Haiti. 2007, accessed January 4, 2015. <http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/earlyhaiti/1805-const.htm>.

of the positive upshots – but not the reason to go to Syria naturally – this battle has imparted on us further experience, knowledge, and broader horizons that can be put to use in a better way in any future confrontation with the enemy, both in attack and defense. Israel is watching Hezbollah’s experience in Syria. A lot has been said in Israeli discussions, that Hezbollah, after the experience of Qusayr and Qalamoun, can implement lessons from those two experiences in a battle in the Galilee. The battle in Syria gives us an edge in any battle with the Israeli enemy, and nothing has been lost from our hands that would have been beneficial in the battle with the enemy.<sup>131</sup>

Framing the Syria intervention in terms of military improvement and its relationship to Hezbollah’s existential, perpetual war with Israel allows Nasrallah to make a claim of logical consistency. The connection between Hezbollah’s cause in Syria and its cause against Israel—a cause that Nasrallah has variously described as a defense of Palestine—falls in line with the party’s military-bound politics, and is given a material basis, by the weapons supply lines from Iran, through Syria, into the hands of Hezbollah. These weapons circuits are in fact the bloodlines of the “Resistance Axis,” tying together these entities in one coherent anti-imperialist form. These weapons circuits also serve as the material connection between Syria’s cementation as a nation-state and the very existence of Hezbollah, damage to which would result in Israeli advances, regardless of whether Israel is the party directly inflicting the damage.

### **Conclusion: An Unfinished Story for an Unfinished War**

The 2006 War would prove to be among the most significant wars of the 21st century for its military dimensions alone. When these dimensions are combined with the human aspect—the endless, ongoing process of self-creation and creation through which

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<sup>131</sup> "Hezbollah Leader Claims Battles Would Have Reached Beirut If Party Had Not Intervened in Syria." *Al-Akhbar English*, August 15, 2014, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/21151>.



the war's story is being written—it becomes clear that the significance of this bloody affair have barely begun to be comprehended.

The war's story evolves rapidly on Internet *muqawama* culture, where unapologetic supporters of the Resistance Axis support their favored militaries and paramilitaries through the rapid consumption of YouTube videos in which these entities' military accomplishments are gleefully glorified. The *muqawama* exploits have begun to embrace new military bodies against new opponents, in keeping with the changing and increasingly complicated webs of alliances and oppositions forming in the Middle East. As it stands now, *muqawama* devotees ecstatically cheer Hezbollah, the Syrian Arab Army, and Iranian military commanders against the Free Syrian Army, the Islamic State, al Qaeda affiliates, and Israel; they watch and share widely footage of various military operations, sniper shots and machine gun fire and crackling bombs, highlighting the fiery operations their favored entities carry out against the enemies of the Resistance Axis.

The 2006 War receives especially extensive treatment in a nearly 17-hour documentary published on YouTube by Electronic Resistance. The documentary repeats and reframes many of the themes and tropes of Hezbollah's telling of the 2006 War. Beginning with a telling of the history of Palestine that analogizes the fate of the Palestinians to that of Native Americans, this telling of the war seeks to ground the event in the moral imperative pressed upon the entire region by the Israeli settlement of historic Palestine before expanding into a number of directions involving political, societal, and military components.<sup>132</sup> The “non-ending revolutions” of the early Palestinian uprisings against the British Empire and the Zionist settlers is connected to the militaries of the

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<sup>132</sup> “If Hezbollah Was Defeated – Ep-01 English Subs” YouTube video posted by “Electronic Resistance,” April 29, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDF8UqfDzSI>.

colonized countries as military marches and training sessions from China and North Korea flit across the screen.<sup>133</sup> The term “guerrilla warfare” is tied to its Eastern description of “the people’s resistance,” invoking the legacy of Mao.<sup>134</sup> Military philosophies are espoused in the documentary. An ideal soldier is theorized (boasting three dimensions of military strength, the physical, the mental, and the moral) and U.S. military reports from Fort Leavenworth College and other centers of U.S. military power are celebrated by name as they posit that Hezbollah has thwarted with its fighting style the classical styles of conventional and irregular warfare, terrorism, and criminality (“a hybrid style,” Hezbollah’s style is labeled).<sup>135</sup> Footage from Imad Mughniyeh’s funeral is displayed, the voice over narration calling him, without ambiguity, a “hero” soon before his Jihad Mughniyeh delivers the eulogy under the gray rain.<sup>136</sup> An entire episode is dedicated to the history of Hezbollah’s military arsenal—the Katyusha from the Red Army, the V-2 rocket, and so on.<sup>137</sup>

The scope, detail, and repetitions within the video point to a subculture revolving around the war in itself, one in which its key moments are replayed for the sake of invigoration and catharsis. The documentary points to two more things: 1. Hezbollah has

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<sup>133</sup> “If Hezbollah Was Defeated Ep-03 English Subs” YouTube video posted by “Electronic Resistance,” May 13, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIuiJFBpK9M>.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> “If Hezbollah Was Defeated Ep-06 English Subs” YouTube video posted by “Electronic Resistance,” June 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIuiJFBpK9M>.

<sup>137</sup> “If Hezbollah Was Defeated Ep-08 English Subs” YouTube video posted by “Electronic Resistance,” June 15, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35LxyjI\\_-U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35LxyjI_-U).

decided upon a basic model, or set of themes and images, with which the story of the 2006 War will be told, and 2. There is an abundant future in store in *muqawama* culture for the re-telling of this war. If it is indeed the case that this re-telling of the war has just begun to take form, so too has the attendant scholarship.

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## **Vita**

Patrick Donovan Higgins was born in Detroit, Michigan on September 7, 1988. He graduated from Wayne State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Honors Journalism in 2012, during which period he worked as a journalist in Detroit. He studied Arabic at the American University of Beirut in 2012 and at the University of Jordan in 2013 before entering the graduate program at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in 2013.

Permanent email address: [higginspat1804@gmail.com](mailto:higginspat1804@gmail.com)

This report was typed by the author.