

How Lebanon Organized the Resistance against Israeli Aggression in the 2006 War

An interview with Franklin Lamb

By [Mike Whitney](#)

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Mike Whitney— Are the Lebanese people grateful to Hezbollah for forcing Israel to retreat in the war of 2006?

Franklin Lamb—I think in their hearts most Lebanese are indeed grateful and even proud that for the first time since the founding of the State of Israel Lebanon has been able to effectively resist its numerous aggressions. Certainly Hezbollah has plenty of detractors particularly among the American and to a lesser extent French supported right wing Phalangist Christian factions and some Sunni communities fearful of the rise of the long discriminated against Lebanese Shia. But when Lebanon is threatened by Israel they tend to unite behind the National Lebanese Resistance. Expelling Israel on May 24, 2000 earned Hezbollah general respect in Lebanon and the region.

MW—Why was the Lebanese army never deployed to fight the advancing IDF?

Franklin Lamb—On July 13, 2006 when it became obvious that Israel was trying to launch a deep penetration into Lebanon both the US and the French vetoed any participation by the Lebanese army in the conflict. Both expected Hezbollah to take a real beating by Israeli forces while being blamed by the Lebanese for the destruction of Lebanon's infrastructure.

MW— In a recent article, you cite a "Policy Declaration" that was issued on November 26, 2009 by the Lebanese government which states: "It is the right of the Lebanese people, Army and the (Hezbollah led—ed.) Resistance to liberate the Shebaa Farms, the Kfar Shuba Hills and the northern part of the village of Ghajar as well as to defend Lebanon and its territorial waters in the face of any enemy by all available and legal means."

This is a stunning development. Doesn't this basically "legitimize" Hezbollah (armed resistance) and leave US/Israeli policy in ruins?

Franklin Lamb—The Lebanese government "Policy Declaration" affixes Lebanon's imprimatur to what has been a fact for many years and that is the arms of the Hezbollah led National Lebanese resistance will remain and dramatically increase until Lebanon is no longer occupied or threatened and until Palestine is fully liberated or the Palestinians themselves agree on how much of their land they will agree to accept. Some here don't like to speak publicly about the second point but its clear in my view. The 'peace process' in a cruel hoax perpetrated on the Palestinian people and only by an international Resistance

led by Hezbollah will the Zionist colonial enterprise be expelled and the full Right of Return realized. My personal view is that history shows clearly that only Resistance, in its hundreds of forms, in its persistence in uniting the many to defeat the few, will achieve Liberation and Return.

You are quite correct in my view that the “Policy Declaration” legitimizes the arms of the National Lebanese Resistance. But the United States and Israel will continue to employ their projects and arsenals to achieve a “New Middle East”. Their intervention in Lebanon and the region teaches us that they will fail but will likely shed much blood in the process. As Israel continues to weaken and fracture, America may well be able to normalize relations with the Middle East countries based on mutual respect and fair dealing among sovereign states.

MW—Israel has attacked or invaded Lebanon 6 times in the last 60 years. Why hasn’t the Lebanese government developed a credible deterrent to Israeli aggression? Weapons systems, larger army, special forces etc?

Franklin Lamb—The 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war, which in some ways continues today in a ‘cold war’ phase was a factor in preventing a national identity forming or enough unity to support a national force. Frankly this situation obtains still.

In addition, the US has not allowed effective weapons to be given to the Lebanese Armed Forces without Israeli agreement and because 60% of command structure of the Lebanese Army, which historically has been overwhelming Maronite and Phalange Christian is believed now to be Shia or supportive of Hezbollah. You will recall that in 1975 and in 1983-84 the army split deeply along sectarian lines. The US believes this might happen again or, worse from their point of view, the arms would be used to defend Lebanon against Israeli attacks or conceivably to help liberate Palestine. American ‘military’ aid is limited to shoring up the internal Lebanese policing agencies to ‘fight terrorism’ as the EU Embassy regularly declares. I do not believe the LAF is in danger of fracturing currently and when the next war comes they will likely fight Israel to the best of their limited ability, alongside Hezbollah, Palestinians, regional volunteers and others.

MW—You recently reprinted part of the Hezbollah Manifesto which stated:

“We want a government that works for its citizens and provides the appropriate services in their education and medical care and housing to secure a decent life and to address the problem of poverty and provide employment opportunities...” “We want a government that works to strengthen the role of women in society and enhance their participation in all fields”...and that “guarantees public liberties, ensures national unity and protects its sovereignty and independence with a strong and capable army.”

Is Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah sincerely committed to democracy or is this some kind of public relations scam?

Franklin Lamb—Well, Mike certainly he works, as does the Party’s numerous institutions of education, medical services, women’s and youth groups to broaden Hezbollah’s appeal among the Lebanese population. I think Hezbollah’s New Manifesto reflects this and reveals their evolution over the past quarter century.

Nasrallah is not a small D democrat in the sense that you or I might think we are. He accepts the authority of Iran’s Supreme leader, Ali Khomeini as Hezbollah’s Wali al Faqui

(jurisconsult). He believes there is a major role for religious authorities in achieving a fair and just society and that they are more qualified than the masses to make religious and many political decisions. The Wali al Fiqi, for example, has life and death authority over all subjects civil and religious based on an 11th century Shia interpretation of the Koran used by Grand Ayatollah Khomeini during the Iran Revolution. Both Khomeini and Khomeini have nearly complete power. Nasrallah agrees with this but does declare from time to time that it is not suitable for Lebanon and Hezbollah has rejected the idea of an Islamic Republic for Lebanon which was in their first "open letter" of 1985. That is far too much power in one leader to be democratic. Some have said that it's like giving the religious powers of the Pope, who claims infallibility in all matters of Church and combining them with infallibility in all matters of politics. The Wali was not elected and many, if not the majority of Shia, reject this recent innovation.

Having said that, it appears incongruous but Hezbollah is considered the most secular sect in Lebanon with the exception of the Palestinians. Hezbollah supporting Shia women wear shorts or Hijab depending on their personal preferences. The Party no longer enforces dress codes nor does it bar women from any aspect of its work except armed combat. In many ways women and youth run Hezbollah's institutions.

Shia Islam has a long history of seeking justice for the downtrodden and this is reflected in its modern views as noted in its recent Manifesto. It offers its political platform during elections and is now the most active party in Parliament working for what we in the west would call a progressive liberal agenda. Nasrallah and Hezbollah want universal health care, universal affordable education and state sponsored jobs programs. It is why in 1992 Hezbollah decided to enter into Lebanese electoral contests. It felt it could achieve a better quality of life for all Lebanese and it has been doing that.

MW—Why is Nasrallah demonized as a terrorist and a religious fanatic in the western media?

Franklin Lamb—He is demonized because he is a threat of US-Israeli plans to dominate the Middle East, obtain its oil resources and exercise hegemony. His appeal is too broad and it is growing across sectarian lines.

It has been easy, without proof, for Israel and its US lobby and the American government to cite the 1980's and the resistance to US forces in Lebanon that joined Lebanon's civil war against the majority of the population as terrorism. It was not terrorism for the Lebanese resistance to attacks those who were killing Lebanese civilians and aiding one faction. When US forces ceded their peacekeeping missions to joining one side they became legitimate military targets under the laws of armed conflicts.

One reason Hezbollah has so much support is that it has done much for the Shia population and others living in its areas. Their schools, hospitals, social services, are considered among the best in Lebanon and the Middle East. Their social programs benefit them politically and socially.

Repeated charges of Terrorism and religious fanaticism in the pro Israel main stream media obviously affect the popular western view of Hezbollah but they are not credited much in this region. Lebanon's population tends to believe that such charges are politically motivated and they are not taken seriously.

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