

Lebanon: The Role of Hizbullah

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Featured image: Approaching The Israeli/ Lebanon Border

"This is not good!" cautions a new Lebanese friend in a stern tone of warning, clutching this reporter's arm for emphasis. "This, where you are going.. it is their neighbourhood... Hizbullah's neighbourhood. They control this completely!"

Protesting that this quest is well-intentioned, no secret and no threat, this friend provides probably the most important council, and most accurate statement, in properly understanding today's modern Hizbullah.

"You do not understand well about Hizbullah," he says, the seriousness of his face indicating his sincerity. "You do not see Hizbullah... they see you!"

His caution and commentary prove to be a very accurate description of today's Hizbullah. The western media would have those reading about today's Lebanon from a distance believe that Hizbullah is only a fighting force and therefore easily identifiable in a uniform such as with their invited presence in Syria. The reality is that today within Lebanon, Hizbullah is an army of the people, by the people, and for the people. These people are doctors, teachers, accountants, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, manual labourers and all other professions, but their common denominator is their love of their homeland. And defend it again they will, leaving their clinics, desks, chalkboards, cars, shops or shovels behind the moment Lebanon is attacked again.

Almost exclusively western media minimizes the complete reality by reporting only on Hizbullah's military wing, [Al Moqawama al Islamia](#) (The Islamic Resistance). Since the 2006 war, when Hizbullah (phonetically spelled 'Hezbollah' in the west) successfully defended the country from a third Israeli invasion of its southern border, much about the rise of this deliberately managed organization, now firmly entrenched in Lebanese society, has changed dramatically.

[Information that belies the usual narrative](#) about this Lebanese nationalist political, social and military group, Hizbullah, is as hard to obtain as is an interview with one of their soldiers. The western press, of course, routinely demonizes this organization's defensive and socially important new political philosophy- one that in a post-war decade has increasingly provided much-needed benefits- beyond defence- to most of Lebanon and its people.

"Hello?" suddenly came the cryptic one-word text, suddenly appearing on this reporter's phone after returning from a very long day gaining access to the highly militarized Lebanese/ Israeli border.

"May I help you?" was typed back in cautious reply.

One minute...two, three. then, *"We have mutual friends. Would you like to meet? 10:30 tomorrow? Electricite du Liban building."*

There are rare moments that one lives for when reporting on-scene in other countries, and... opportunity rarely knocks twice. Taking an educated guess at the origin of these texts- after a week of trying to meet with Hizbullah officials- and realizing the likely value of this offer, the unknown appointment is confirmed with a simple, "OK."

Hizbullah was born of a need for a defence against invasion by foreign armies, its roots steeped in the social uprising of the Lebanese Shi'a community in the late 1960's and early 70's. This fight against internal turmoil in Lebanon was the inspiration for the religious cleric, [Imam Musa Sadr](#), who *"disappeared"* under mysterious circumstances in Libya in 1978. Sadr accurately called his fledgeling resistance the Movement of the Deprived (Harakat al-Mahrumin). Divisive Lebanese politics and a [15-year \(1975-1990\) civil war](#) spawned by the Israelis who pitted the Christian militias and the Syrians against the Muslim Lebanese created, as intended, a fractured country fighting each other in the streets for more than a decade. During this incursion, the Israeli invasion of 1982 provided a catalyst for further Shiite radicalism manifesting in the form of a return to pure Lebanese nationalism. Thus, Hizbullah emerged with the aim of expelling the foreign combatants and alleviating the continued social sufferings of the Shi'a community.

These goals have greatly expanded since.

Hizbullah revealed: Of wars past...and future?

It's 10:28 AM. The Electricite du Liban building takes up a whole city block, ringed by a ten-foot-tall yellow steel fence with military guards posted, standing armed on either side of their squad car blocking the one entrance. Approaching quickly down Gouraud street, apparently now having been recognized, a nearby car waves from the window. How I am recognized is a mystery. Waving back, I round the back end of a late model white Toyota SUV. Getting in I shake hands, identify myself with the driver who immediately pulls out and heads for a coffee shop by the bay just south of Beirut harbour. *"See that spot?"* asks the driver, pointing out the window as we pass a rather smallish pristine mosque that sits on the edge of the bay, *"That is the where [\[former Prime Minister, Rafic\] Hariri](#) was killed in a car bombing in 2004."* The mosque, not surprisingly, is called the Hariri Mosque.

Twenty long minutes later, now sitting in the quiet back corner, sipping a coffee and a mocha respectively, I get to know the man who has asked me here to his company. He introduces himself as Hadi. Polished bald head, thick black drooping mustache over a cropped greying goatee and probing eyes inspect me as Hadi does all the talking. He has many points that he wants to make clear. I am listening ... and scribbling furiously.



The Hizbullah Flag Line The Hi-ways Heading North into Sidon

Indeed the military wing is now far more organized and prepared for defence than before the 2006 war, however, Hizbullah's persona under the direction of their spiritual and political leader, [Sheikh Sa'id Hassan Nasrallah](#) has also dramatically changed. There is a moral, disciplined side to the militia that comes from the overlying Shi'a religious doctrine espoused by Nasrallah, that now accepts all religions, but with a firm grasp on professional, ethical performance of its military duties...only when necessary.

Hadi fought in the 2006 war and has the scars to prove it. He points to an eight-inch semi-circular line on the right side of his head just above the ear. *"An Israeli rocket...it barely missed. I was blown into some big trees over fifty feet away,"* he explains. *"I was unconscious for two weeks... in the hospital for two months."*

Like many involved with modern Hizbullah, Hadi is a businessman who is daily in the tourism business. He has a family. He wants peace. He wanted peace in 2006. He wants peace now. But, he is emphatic that war has been brought to Lebanon despite the peaceful desire of the nation. Hadi does not think Israel will attack again, which is a strange comment considering our discussion. He feels that a new generation of Israelis will reject new war and that Israel is slowly changing away from a focus on Lebanon. However, he is just as adamant that Lebanon and Hizbullah are ready to defend Lebanon once again.

Comparisons to ISIS/ Daesh are ridiculous, which is almost exclusively a radical fringe element of the Sunni Muslims. Hizbullah is predominantly Shi'a but far more inclusive. Extrajudicial executions are forbidden and proper military protocol and respect for the authority of its commanders are mandated. Here, within a religion that values education and tolerance this developing defensive militia wishes to showcase itself to all Lebanese, and a jaundiced western press, as an example worthy of additional participation and worldwide support. In a postwar decade, it has developed the tools to do so.

Hadi was living in a small town within 500 meters of the fenced-off Lebanon/ Israeli border

when the 2006 fighting started. Like every house in the area, his was completely destroyed as were those of his neighbours. Here he dispels the narrative that Hizbullah, as a separate Lebanese defensive force, was doing all the fighting.

“We fought. I fought. Everybody fought! Children took up weapons... what choice did we have then?” Here, Hadi puts down his coffee, moving to the front of his chair to emphasize his point. “You must understand,” and now he lowers his voice... “...within days we had lost everything. We were literally fighting only for country... our country... and our own lives!”

Hadi is direct and chooses his words carefully in perfect English. He repeats that the 2006 war could have been avoided. He expands on the July 12, 2006, [kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev](#) who were taken to effect a pre-negotiated prisoner swap to secure the release of 1050 Hizbullah soldiers and political prisoners from Israeli jails. Of particular interest to Hizbollah was Samim Al Kintar who had been arrested and in an Israeli prison since 1975. Hadi insists that in the many months before the war the Israeli Government of Ehud Olmert had approved the prisoner swap negotiations... and then stalled repeatedly. Hizbullah obviously had every reason to follow through with the agreement.

“They stalled because the Olmert government was getting strong resistance [to the agreement] in the Knesset,” Hadi commented. “Hizbullah was ready for many months. The kidnapping was a result of these delays that violated a finalized agreement. The media ignored the agreement completely to blame Hizbullah without revealing this connection. This was not true!”

In 2006 Hizbullah was an amalgam of area citizens using any weapon available and trained fighters using prepared defensive tactics and advanced weapons. Hadi talks about their [only countering against military targets within Lebanon](#), particularly tanks. Not civilian targets. Using the Russian made 9M 133 Kornet anti-tank rocket to fight back, the Israelis lost 43 tanks the first day and 65 on the second; a reversal of fortune not anticipated by the IDF. By day twenty, Israel had no heavy armour operational north of their own border. This is when the Israeli tactics were changed to openly destroying as much of southern Lebanon’s public infrastructure as possible. And this they did, resulting in a huge loss of civilian life particularly women and children.

Then, the fortunes of war suddenly changed.

As the border clash continued, without the cover of their tanks the IDF infantry was reduced to a ground firefight on unfamiliar territory in the steep southern hills and the going was slow and rough... and deadly. Although casualty figures are highly propagandized, correctly Hadi notes that Israel lost approx. 400 IDF soldiers but few civilians because Hizbullah did not specifically target Israeli citizens. However, on the Lebanese side over 1300 were killed- mostly civilian primarily due to the IDF shifting tactics to civilian targets once bogged down and taking heavy fire at the border.

Then the unthinkable happened... [Israel began to run out of ammo](#).

Although Hizbullah does not reveal troop strength in numbers it is [universally considered to be the largest non-state military in the world](#) and considerably stronger than the Lebanese

army. Estimates indicate at least 20,000 professionally trained soldiers and 25,000 civilian militia fighters are maintained, however, this is a very low-ball estimate considering that US military estimates for the Syrian based Hizbullah units are currently 60,000 and that, with western Syria back under Assad's control, most of these battle-hardened troops will be returning home soon. Whatever Hizbullah's military may have been before the Syrian war, it is unquestionable that it is currently far better manned, armed, supplied, and trained than ever before.

Regarding new weapons, Hizbullah did not previously have heavy armour, tanks, anti-aircraft or anti-ship missiles, however, [because of Syria being littered with American, British, Russian and Israeli made armaments](#), their current arsenal is projected to be extremely large and diverse. Although weapons depots are kept well stocked in many highly secret locations across Lebanon, intelligence sources say that other re-supply depots sit just across the Syrian border under joint protection with the Syrian army that, due to Hizbullah's help in fighting the US-inspired invasion there, is firmly supportive. Further, the Assad government owes Hizbullah a debt of gratitude for helping turn the tide in Syria west of the Euphrates River. In doing this, it not only aided Assad but also created a defensive barrier in Syria that defends Lebanon to the east as well.

"Did you know that Assad was given three choices before the war started seven years ago?" asked Hadi, knowing that this is news. "First, he was offered \$15 billion to leave Syria unconditionally. Second, he was offered \$15 billion to stay if he would support the upcoming pipeline and release control of the one Russian navy base and two airports. But third was the threat...take either option or \$15 billion will be spent to defeat you."

This info. has been difficult to confirm, but has the strong ring of truth applied to the US-backed overthrow of the Ukrainian gov't and its [publicly stated assurance of \\$5 billion for that particular overthrow](#). Obviously, Assad did not choose the first two options. The results of that decision are indisputable and a now matter of history.

Hadi correctly notes that, with Israel low on ammo, new supplies were flown in from the US using Qatar as an intermediary, thus providing the Americans cover for their resupply effort and the semblance of neutrality. At the same time, the IDF was taking a beating on the ground and in the press. The cost to date of the war on the Israeli side was also released: [\\$3.5 billion, including losses in Gross Domestic Product](#), and in tourism and, a quarter of the businesses in northern Israel were at risk of bankruptcy. The Israeli Chamber of Commerce said their lost revenues totalled an additional \$1.4 billion dollars.

At the same time, Israel had put in place a complete [blockade of the Lebanese coastline and harbours and airspace to any airport thus taking away all resupply of the Lebanese resistance](#). Unlike the military arrogance of the IDF, Hizbullah had marshalled its resources wisely. The main problem being a lack of medical supplies that were banned from delivery by the US allies and contributed directly to the rising death toll as doctor's also fought just as valiantly to save lives with what little they had to work with.

Three weeks in and the IDF was still mired less than twenty miles from the original border. The cost-benefit ratio was rising directly proportionally to the Israeli public and world outrage at Olmert's blunder and his IDF general's poor planning.

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Author's Note: This concludes Part Four of this series from Istanbul and Lebanon. Please see Part One, Part Two, and Part Three for background info. not repeated here. Next Up, Part Four: "Hizbullah Today: Of Power, Money, and... the People."

Brett Redmayne-Titley has published over 150 in-depth articles over the past seven years for news agencies worldwide. Many have been translated. On-scene reporting from important current events has been an emphasis that has led to multi-part exposes on such topics as the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, NATO summit, KXL Pipeline, Porter Ranch Methane blow-out and many more. He can be reached at: live-on-scene((at))gmx.com. Prior articles can be viewed at his archive: www.watchingromeburn.uk

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