



The “Lebanonization” of Hezbollah Has Not Altered Its Commitment to Israel’s Destruction

By Dr. Yusri Khizran

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Hezbollah began in 1982 as an Islamist organization founded and shaped according to the ideological model of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The organization was founded to establish an Islamist regime in Lebanon and conduct a jihadist war against the enemies of Islam: the West and Israel. Hezbollah gradually “Lebanonized”, meaning it claimed to be limiting the military struggle to Lebanese territory, integrated into the Lebanese political system, and established an extensive civil infrastructure. This transformation was accompanied by a new discourse stressing its role as defender of Lebanon. But Hezbollah’s Lebanonization has not in any way diluted or moderated its conception of Israel, with which it believes itself to be in a doomsday war. Hezbollah’s military empowerment since the withdrawal of the IDF in 2000 does not correspond with its discourse about defending Lebanon. Hezbollah’s involvement in the fighting since October 8 is not mere lip service but a demonstration of its total commitment to what it perceives as its deterministic conflict with Israel.

Hezbollah’s enduring enmity towards Israel reflects the ideological concepts on which it was founded. The organization was established by the Islamic Republic of Iran’s Revolutionary Guards, and its establishment might be considered Iran’s only successful exporting of its revolution. The establishment of Hezbollah would also not have been possible had it not been for Baathist Syria, which allowed Iran

to operate in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Hafez Assad's Syria enabled this as part of the "extensions" strategy it adopted after Operation Peace for Galilee, with the clear aim of exhausting the IDF and bringing about its withdrawal from Lebanon.

Iranian patronage has always been a pillar of strength for Hezbollah, but the most significant patronage it enjoyed was that of Syria. Damascus extended its protection to Hezbollah and guaranteed its continued existence as a military organization within the framework of the Taif Agreement of 1989, which brought an end to the second Lebanese civil war. Syria has served for decades as a conduit for the supply of weapons to Hezbollah.

Since the 1980s, as the alliance with Syria tightened, Hezbollah underwent the process of "Lebanonization". This process had three main elements. The first was the purported limiting of the armed struggle to within Lebanon's geography, especially against the IDF's continued presence in southern Lebanon. The second was the establishment of an extensive civilian arm that focused on providing for the needs of Lebanon's Shiite community. The third was politicization, meaning the establishment of a political branch and integration into Lebanon's parliamentary system.

Lebanonization did not, however, cause Hezbollah to forget its dual mission, anchored in its Islamist political and religious worldview: the establishment of an Islamist regime according to the model of the Islamic Republic in Iran on the one hand, and the continuation of the armed struggle against Israel on the other.

Hezbollah's adherence to Islamist ideology, which in this case is distinctly anti-establishment, means striving to replace the sectarian regime with an Islamist one and perpetually bolstering its weapons supplies to support the armed struggle against Israel. Hezbollah made sure to present the IDF's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon as a military achievement of the "Islamic resistance in Lebanon" and not as the result of internal considerations by Israeli society. Following the withdrawal, Hezbollah had to place greater emphasis on the Lebanese dimension of its military struggle, and its discourse changed accordingly.

Until the IDF withdrawal, Hezbollah claimed that its military existence was in the name of liberating the soil of an occupied homeland. After the withdrawal, the

organization began to stress the doctrine of defense of the homeland against “Israeli aggression,” with its military power aimed at creating a balance of terror between it and Israel.

As a result, Hezbollah engaged in a Lebanese political-national discourse that ostensibly placed its military existence at the heart of the Lebanese national consensus. This was summed up in three words: people, army and resistance. The concept reflected the deepening of the Lebanonization trend and a real attempt on Hezbollah’s part to endear itself to Lebanese nationals under the pretense that its weapons were intended solely for defense of the Lebanese homeland.

Since May 2000, the doctrine of defense of the Lebanese homeland has been the common discourse among Hezbollah and its supporters in Lebanon. The adoption of this doctrine coincided with a political reorganization and a more prominent integration within the Lebanese political and public spheres. This was reflected in political alliances with Lebanese political parties and movements, especially among Maronite Christians, and the publication of a second political document in 2009 that for the first time declared Hezbollah’s renunciation of its mission to establish an Islamist regime in Lebanon.

As a military organization and a political movement, Hezbollah represents a totalitarian ideological-religious movement whose worldview is the bedrock of its existence. Whatever it may have said during the Lebanonization process, it is still as committed as it ever was to its two overarching original goals: the establishment of an Islamist regime in Lebanon and the continuation of an endless struggle against Israel. Giving up these goals would mean erasing its ideology, which would amount to destroying its existential essence as a totalitarian movement.

By claiming to have renounced its desire for the establishment of an Islamist regime in Lebanon and redefining its formidable arsenal of weapons as intended for defensive purposes, Hezbollah is conducting a sophisticated pragmatic campaign. Its object is first and foremost to neutralize internal opponents who fear a theocracy and to justify the continued possession of a vast store of weapons outside the state’s authority.

The strategy of balance that has characterized Hezbollah since the end of the second civil war remains a powerful statement of the movement’s adherence to its

goals. The balance between maintaining the existence of the Lebanese state and continuing to possess an enormous supply of weapons is a practical formula that produces chronic crisis but does not constitute a renunciation of the struggle against Israel. Similarly, the omission of the demand for the establishment of an Islamist regime in Lebanon in no way implies that Hezbollah has renounced its Islamist ideology, as such a move would contradict its very soul.

Hezbollah joined the Israel-Hamas war one day after the Black Sabbath of October 7. Its participation, even on a local scale, so soon after the barbaric attack by the Hamas criminal terrorist organization on Israel, an attack that was conducted primarily against Israeli civilians and without any provocation on Israel's part, puts Hezbollah's doctrine of homeland defense into question. Its limited participation in the current fighting against Israel that proves that Hezbollah remains faithful to its worldview and the indoctrination that has accompanied it for four decades. Its support of Hamas in its war against Israel shows that the amendment of a founding document or political-pragmatic discourse that takes circumstances into account does not reflect moderation or a fundamental change.

Indeed, Hezbollah's joining of the fighting proves its adherence to its primary ideology of eternal struggle against Israel. Hezbollah's secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, said in his first speech after October 7 that while the time is not yet ripe for an all-out confrontation, he is convinced that that day will come. It is highly doubtful that the huge arsenal of weapons Hezbollah has amassed over the past two decades is intended solely for defensive purposes. While it has adapted its discourse to the needs of time and circumstance, no one should be deceived into believing it has lost sight of its ideological totalitarianism.

Hezbollah retains a conviction that it is capable of delivering a crushing blow to Israel. Following the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the scenes of Afghan citizens being crushed under the wheels of airplanes, Nasrallah assured his supporters that such scenes would be repeated at Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. Hezbollah is preparing, as it always has, for the doomsday battle with Israel. Its involvement in the fighting right now, however limited, proves that it remains committed to fulfilling its messianic mission to inflict a decisive defeat on Israel.

The process of Lebanonization has created a deceptive smokescreen of moderation that is entirely lacking in Hezbollah. Instead of trusting in false interpretations of Lebanonization, Israel should focus on Hezbollah's obsession with military power and [unwavering determination](#) to destroy the Jewish State.

Dr. Yusri Khaizran is senior lecturer in the Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Shalem College and a research fellow at the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University. He received his Ph.D. from Hebrew University, after which he was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship at Harvard University. Dr. Hazran is the author of The Druze Community and the Lebanese State: Between Resistance and Reconciliation (Routledge, 2014).