

## *Review Article*

Dominique Avon and Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian. *Hezbollah: A History of the “Party of God.”* Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012. Pp. 244. ISBN 9780674066519. Price: \$24.95

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### **Abstract**

*Hezbollah: A History of the “Party of God” aspired to become a leading reference work on the party. On close scrutiny, it turned out to be a mundane book based on a selective reading of secondary sources. Although the authors boast a privileged access to Hezbollah, hardly any empirical fieldwork has been done; not a single interview with Hezbollah’s rank and file is reported. The book is marred by factual errors as well as mistakes in principle and wrong analyses, which eventually lead to wrong conclusions. The book also claims to be up-to-date, even dealing with the Syrian crisis that erupted in 2012. It is true that the book was published in 2012; however, the most up-to-date piece of data is dated May 2009. The overall argument of the book is speculative in nature, lacking any substantial humanities’ or social science theory; rather, name-dropping seems to be the norm. Even in documentation and historiography the book is marred by numerous mistakes, as such an inadequate reference. The clandestine handbooks—the so-called “Training Manuals for Hezbollah Militants” the authors are proud to provide—turn out to be open access ideological pamphlets published by sympathetic audiences to the party’s cause, as such poorly referenced open source secondary sources in Arabic. Because of the deceiving nature of the book, its over ambitious unrealised project, and its gross inadequacies, it should be avoided at all costs since it gives an erroneous reading of the party that might result in wrong policy implications.*

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### **Synopsis of the Book/Contents**

The book begins with a “List of Figures and Tables” (p. ix), “Acknowledgements” (p. xi), an “Introduction” (pp. 1–7), and two parts. The

first part contains the main text of the book and ends on page 100. The second part is dedicated to Hizbullah's [Hizb Allāh] documents (pp. 101–162).

“Part I: The “Party of God”: An Itinerary (1982–2009)” contains the main text and the main argument of the book, i.e., the line of reasoning the book makes. It is divided chronologically into three sections. Section one covers the time span from 1982 to 1991, when Hizbullah was portrayed as “a militia of professional revolutionaries for the disinherited fringe” (pp. 11–38). It contains ten footnotes/references. Section two dubs Hizbullah between the years 1992–2000 as “a state within state, the Vietcong<sup>1</sup> in the heart of Singapore” (pp. 39–68). It contains eleven footnotes/references. The last section (pp. 69–100) characterizes Hizbullah as “A Model of Recovered Pride, a Contested National Party” and covers the period from 2000 to 2009. It contains three footnotes/references.

“Part II: Documents of Hezbollāh” contains the 1985 “Open Letter” (pp. 103–129), the 2009 “Political Charter” (pp. 130–162), a ten-page “Conclusion” (pp. 163–174), “Appendixes” (pp. 175–216), “Maps”<sup>2</sup> (pp. 217–219), “Sources” (pp. 220–222), “Bibliography” (pp. 223–226), and an “Index” (pp. 227–244).

The authors seem to follow no clear chronological order or thematic course. In some instances, their unclear diction, or manner of writing, results in eclectic-speculative arguments. The authors' method appears to be the least systematic and intuitional. They seem to apply no conscious principle of data gathering before writing their theory(ies) (as exemplified by the introduction), nor a self-conscious conceptual framework in their analysis (as exemplified by the main text of the book).

Although *Hezbollah: A History of the “Party of God”* might be a good introductory book for beginners and those unfamiliar with the party, it contains no new insights, as such. It is a run-off-the-mill book, which is coupled with weaknesses in presentation and analysis (see p. 72) and often unrelated narrations. It is a disappointment to scholarship that is based on unfounded allegations and unsubstantiated fabrications. The book, which promises to be a reliable reference work, is poorly referenced and documented, is littered with many factual errors, and stops short of supplying the necessary background information and contextual arguments. Disputed sources resulted in a disputed book, which is written in poetic, charismatic language. An interesting concession is that “the authors assume responsibility for the errors and infelicities that remain” (p. 103, n. 2), and these are a lot, as I will indicate below. The book contains around 100 pages of wrongly

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<sup>1</sup> Such analogies and overgeneralisations are sometimes confusing.

<sup>2</sup> Not mentioned in the table of contents. I added it.

translated and annotated documents and biographies; alleged Hizbullah manuals; wrong lists of the party's cadres, MPs, and ministers; as well as erring figures, tables, illustrations, and maps.

Only the "Introduction" (pp. 1–7) is relatively well-referenced (12 footnotes), but it suffers from name dropping—Foucault (pp. 1–2), Franz Fanon (p. 2), Edward Said (p. 2), etc.—and a pretentious style of writing, where those scholars and their theories are neither followed through nor referred to in the body of the book, in a rambling, condensed, and eclectic style of writing. The authors shift grounds and move from one topic to another, even in the same paragraph sometimes. This speculative book is entirely based on discourse analysis, with no personal interviews, no reference to primary sources; rather, heavy reliance on secondary sources. What appears to be, on first impression, as an elegantly written book, turns out, on close scrutiny, to be a disappointment to scholarship since it hardly delivers on its promises. Further, it contains no list of abbreviations<sup>3</sup> and no glossary. The book is dated<sup>4</sup> and has a short shelf-life. On p. 221, the authors concede that they last consulted the listed websites in May 2009, most of which ceased to be or are simply non-existent. The "Jacket" portrays the book as up-to-date, state of the art, and objective offering "a nonpartisan account," but "witnesses the collapse of its [Hizbullah's] close ally Syria." This dogmatic language amounts to nothing but a pretentious statement and an anachronism since the original French edition of the book was published in 2010 documenting events till May 2009, while the so-called "Arab Spring" was triggered on December 17, 2010 with Buazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia. The book cannot make claims over the uprising in Syria when it does not mention the Arab Spring, as such anachronistic. Thus, the seemingly outstanding contribution in the Jacket is dated. With these flaws, how could *Hezbollah: A History of the "Party of God"* aspire to acquire the status of a reference work?

## PART I

### THE "PARTY OF GOD": AN ITINERARY (1982–2009)

#### **Inaccuracies/Speculations/Weaknesses in Presentation**

Speculations are abound and are usually coupled with dogmatic language. The authors claim "the ambush that thwarted an Israeli nocturnal operation around the village of Ansariye [*sic*, Ansariyyeh] (1997), which proved that the mujahideen [Hizbullah] had informers in Israel" (p. 53). Actually, in

<sup>3</sup> For instance, the first use of the acronym MNF (Multinational Forces) on p. 27 is neither explained, nor referred to or mentioned in the index.

<sup>4</sup> The data stops at February 9, 2009 (p. 100) and the most up-to-date reference is to May 2009!

subsequent press conferences, Hizbullah's Secretary General, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah [Ḥasan Naṣr Allāh] repeatedly stated and confirmed that the party followed the path of the Israeli drone, and thus was able to anticipate the Ansariyyeh operation and prepare an ambush for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) elite commandos.

Although no researcher has access to the expenditures and receipts of Hizbullah, yet the authors venture numbers without any bibliographical substantiation. They write, "Norton estimates (Iran's direct aid) at \$100 million a year" (p. 59). This is coupled with vague references such as "an institute for spreading the culture of martyrdom" (p. 60), without specifying any name.

The authors fall into labeling, reductionism, and over simplification when they claim that "the Gathering of Shiite and Sunni Ulema Who Agree to Follow Imam Khomeini" (pp. 25–26). Well, not necessary. This is the least to say. It was the same Lebanese "Gathering" who on October 19, 2012 overtly blamed Syria, and covertly blamed Hizbullah for the assassination of the head of information branch of Internal Security Forces (ISF) Wissam al-Hassan [Wisām al-Ḥasan] (1985–2012).

Obscure references coupled with weaknesses and non-clarity in presentation and analysis frequently appear. The authors allude, in an obscure way to Hizbullah's kidnapping of Israeli soldiers and the alleged capturing of a colonel in Beirut without giving dates or further information. The authors write that Hizbullah "launched an operation, which led to Israeli reprisals." A few lines below we learn that it led to the exchange of the "bodies of three soldiers and a lieutenant colonel captured in Beirut" (p. 72). Actually, "on October 2001, Hizbullah captured three Israeli soldiers from the Lebanese *Shib'a* Farms. On 15 October 2001, Hizbullah lured and apprehended Elhanan Tannenbaum, a retired Israeli Mossad colonel. . . . On 29–30 January 2004, Hizbullah and Israel conducted the first phase of a watershed prisoner exchange deal after four years of negotiations by Germany. Hizbullah released the Israeli colonel and the bodies of three Israeli soldiers captured in October 2000 in return for 400 Palestinians, 23 Lebanese and Arabs."<sup>5</sup>

While offering a website with no access date, the authors allege that on September 16, 2001, ex-Secretary of State Colin Powell said, "Hezbollah is a threat to the region, just al-Qaida is a threat to the world" (pp. 70–71). Surprisingly, the authors do not mention a more famous statement, namely, that on September 5, 2002, Richard Armitage, the ex-US deputy secretary of

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring* (New Delhi: University of Calcutta Press and Knowledge World Publishers, 2013), 241–42.

state, labeled Hizbullah as the “A-Team of terrorists, and al-Qaida as the B-team.”<sup>6</sup>

An alleged reference work does not offer accurate dates. Here are two examples for the sake of illustration: “Just before the beginning of the summer, Samir Geagea was released.” In fact, the Lebanese state put Geagea in jail on April 21, 1994 and banned his party, the “Lebanese Forces.” On July 18, 2005, 100 MPs out of 128 voted for his release.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the authors mention no date when they write, “Syrian troops left most of Lebanese territory” (p. 75). Actually, Syria withdrew its military on April 26, 2005 after a presence of 29 years.<sup>8</sup>

In an attempt to portray their wide scope of knowledge, the authors do not hesitate to make reductionist, abrupt, and unexplained statements ignoring the different circumstances and contexts, “It [March 14] belonged to the same context as Egypt’s Kefaya (Enough) Movement” (p. 75). While Kefaya [al-Kifāyah] was a moderate/centralist (*wasatiyyah*) movement in Egypt challenging the excesses and the corruption of the Mubarak [Mubārak] regime, March 14 is one of the main poles of the political struggle in Lebanon (the other pole is March 8). Thus, March 14 has nothing to do with *wasatiyyah*.

In the similar vein of showing off or portraying outstanding knowledge, the authors venture hasty, unsubstantiated generalizations and speculations about the Wahhābī tenor of Sunni Islamists in the Arab world, “Arab World, where the majority Sunnis were pervaded by a Wahhabism linked to the discourses of two major doctrinaire figures of the twentieth century: Sayyid Qutb and Abu-l ‘Ala’ Mawdudi [*sic*]” (p. 79). I think that this wrong terminology and intervening digression defeats the purpose since they cut short the concentration of the reader, as such being counterproductive.

Other cases in point are unsubstantiated, unreferenced controversial statistics about the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: “The UN claimed there were 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon, but according to the *most serious estimates*, there were only 250, 000” (p. 78).<sup>9</sup> Likewise, the claim that “Hezbollah was providing light arms to Hamas, the chief Palestinian movement opposing the Oslo Accords” (p. 80). No source is provided for these unsubstantiated allegations although the latter statement is contrary to Hizbullah’s official policy and the public discourse of its leaders.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 83. See also Daniel Byman, “Should Hezbollah Be Next?” *Foreign Affairs* 82 (November-December 2003), 55. Interestingly, Armitage is also missing from the “Index.”

<sup>7</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 238, 246.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>9</sup> Emphasis added.

There is no clarity on the rudimentary formation of STL (Special Tribunal for Lebanon). The authors write, “A month later, under Franco-American pressure, an international inquiry into the assassination of the prime minister opened” (p. 75). Belatedly, on p. 77, note 2 is the first mention of “Special Tribunal,” albeit incomplete. We read, “At the request of the special tribunal, they [the four Lebanese security high officials] were released on April 30, 2009.” Interestingly, in the “Index” on p. 242, there is no mention of the STL on these pages, but only on pp. “86–88, 172.” This is coupled with inaccurate statements, as the one mentioned on p. 77: “Among the issues left hanging were, first, the establishment of a special international tribunal, and, second, a national defense strategy.” It seems the authors are not conversant with the fact that Hizbullah’s 2005 election programme, which was outlined as early as April 2005, called for the establishment of the STL.<sup>10</sup> This amounts to a weakness in presentation, not to say to a messy, abrupt presentation. This further confirms, that the authors write by inspirations, like Rousseau, the philosopher of will and sentiment.

The authors repeat the fabricated myth and speculation that Nayef Krayem [Nāyif Karīm] fell out of favour because he was emulating the late Ayatullah Fadlallah [Āyat Allāh Faḍl Allāh]:<sup>11</sup> “The polemic with Nayif Krayem, who was forced to resign his post as director of al-Manar because of a suspected allegiance to Fadlallah, left its mark” (p. 72). The authors do not clarify that due to Hizbullah’s rotation policy, no cadre remains in his place for a long time. This explains why Krayem moved from being the head of “Educational Mobilization” in 1997 to becoming the director of al-Manar [al-Manār] TV. It turns out that the unfounded allegation of emulating Fadlallah was not the cause for vacating the latter position, but rather bypassing promulgated party bylaws and publishing confidential stuff. As Sayyid Ibrahim al-Musawi [Ibrāhīm al-Mūsawī], the head of Media Relations, told me, “Disciplinary action was taken against Krayem for not abiding by certain laws and organizational regulations (*takhaṭṭā ba’d al-ḍawābiṭ al-tanzīmiyyah*) when he published, without permission, controversial material on the party.”<sup>12</sup> In spite of that, Krayem did not fall completely out of favour and remained to be loyal to Hizbullah in furthering its propaganda machine. In 2012, a joint venture between Nayef Krayem and former al-Jazeera icon Ghassan Ben Jeddo

<sup>10</sup> See Joseph Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah’s Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology and Political Ideology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 60, 269, 371.

<sup>11</sup> The late Sayyid Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah [Muḥammad Ḥusayn Faḍl Allāh] (1935–2010) was the highest ranking Shi’ite religious authority (*marja’*) in Lebanon.

<sup>12</sup> Sayyid Ibrahim al-Musawi (head of Media Relations, Hizbullah, Beirut), interview by Joseph Alagha, April 26, 2013. Al-Musawi holds a Ph.D. in Islamic Studies from the University of Birmingham.

[Ghassān b. Jiddū] gave birth to al-Mayadeen [al-Mayādīn],<sup>13</sup> Hizbullah's second affiliated satellite TV station. Noteworthy, MP Hasan Fadlallah [Ḥasan Faḍl Allāh], who is a close relative of the late Ayatullah Fadlallah, had regular contact and has repeatedly visited Ayatullah Fadlallah and consulted with him without falling out of favour or without being tarnished by the same "fabricated" accusation. On the contrary, Hasan Fadlallah was promoted and he became a member of the Political Council (Politburo) and later on an MP on Hizbullah's parliamentary bloc entitled "Loyalty to the Resistance."

On the same page, the authors continue their condensed and unsubstantiated writing, "The reasons that Mohammad Raad and Mohammad Fneish were obliged to resign from the Consultative Council in 2001 have not been clarified (there is now only one noncleric on the council: Khalil Hajj Hassan) [*sic*, Hajj Husayn Khalil [al-Ḥājḡ Ḥusayn Khalīl], the political advisor/aide of Nasrallah]" (p. 72). Actually "now" there are two: Husayn Khalil and Mohammad Raad [Muḥammad Ra'd]. As mentioned above, the reasons have to do with rotation policy and the dictum of no concentration of authority, i.e., a cadre cannot hold multiple functions at the same time, for the sake of efficiency. Mohammad Raad was re-elected to the Council in November 2009, while Mohammad Fneish [Muḥammed Faniyyish] was MP and the Minister of Administrative Reform.

The authors refer to the late ex-PM Rafic Hariri's [Rafiq al-Ḥarīrī] ambitious modernisation programme of making Lebanon the "Singapore of the Near East" (p. 46) or "an Arab Singapore or Hong Kong" (p. 47), albeit without situating the argument in context or giving the necessary background information. Simply stated, they do not situate themselves in the literature: they neither refer to the argument of the veteran politician MP Walid Jumblatt [Walid Janbulāt] nor to how A. R. Norton resonates Jumblatt's remark. In two of my articles, I clarify this point: "Norton contends that Lebanon cannot have both economic recovery and continue the resistance. . . . Norton's remark resonates that of Walid Jumblat who argued that Lebanon chose Hanoi (the Resistance) to Hong Kong (economic development and recovery)."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.almayadeen.net/>. Founded in Beirut on June 11, 2012, while al-Manar was established on June 3, 1991. The name al-Mayadeen ("The Squares") might be reminiscent/influenced of Fouad Ajami's "Public Square" argument although his ideological leanings are diametrically opposed to those of al-Mayadeen.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Alagha, "Hizbullah's Gradual Integration in the Lebanese Public Sphere," *Sharqiyyat: Journal of the Dutch Association for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 13:1 (2001), 53; Alagha, "Successen Hezbollah bij 'kleine oorlog' om Shib'a [Hizbullah's successes in the small war in Shib'a]," *Soera: Midden-Oosten Tijdschrift* 9:2 (2001), 37.

## Factual Mistakes

The book is characterized by many factual blunders/mishaps, just to name a few.

The authors' figures on the Lebanese public debt are dated and erroneous. They claim that the public debt reached \$38 billion in 2004 (p. 47), which might be true. I hasten to add that in 2011 it reached \$55 billion, and when the book was published in 2012, the public debt reached \$56.5, and is expected to go up to around \$60 billion by the end of 2013 (by March 2013 it reached \$58.1 billion).<sup>15</sup> The authors continue their diction by making reductionist, general impromptu statements: "With a debt estimated at \$40 billion (the largest debt per capita in the world), Lebanon could not afford . . ." (p. 92). According to the statistics of March 2013, Lebanon is the fifth. Well, what about the Greek debt, where debt as a percentage of GDP is 168.2 percent, and the Japanese debt where debt as a percentage of GDP is 233.1 percent?<sup>16</sup>

Another factual blunder is the authors' contention, "But on February 14, 2005, Rafic Hariri and MP Bassel Fleihane [*sic*, Fleihan] were assassinated" (p. 74). Actually, Bassel Fleihan [Bāsil Falayḥān], succumbed to his wounds in April 2005, after suffering from severe burns in the February 14 attack.

The book is replete with mistakes such as the contention that Imam Musa al-Sadr [Mūsā 'l-Ṣadr] "created [*sic*, founded] the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council (SISC) of Lebanon in 1967" (p. 15). Actually, "This council was officially established in 1969, and al-Sadr became its leader on May 22, 1969. In his inauguration ceremony on May 23, 1969 he presented his political program."<sup>17</sup>

Another factual error is that the authors contend that "on September 24, Nasrallah, before an extraordinary large crowd, celebrated 'divine victory'" (p. 83). Actually, the celebration occurred on September 22, 2006.

### *Hizbullah's 22 September "Divine Victory" Parade*<sup>18</sup>

Nasrallah's speech was attended by Lebanese MPs, cabinet members, politicians, clergy, many Arab dignitaries, and an audience of around 800,000,

<sup>15</sup> Statistic provided by the Lebanese Central Bank: <http://www.bdl.gov.lb/>.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/15/countries-in-debt\\_n\\_1278711.html#slide=698316](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/15/countries-in-debt_n_1278711.html#slide=698316); <http://www.indexmundi.com/lebanon/#Economy>, accessed April 15, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> See *al-Intiqad* (Beirut) September 23, 2006 and Lebanese daily newspapers. The front page of *al-Intiqad* (Beirut) August 18, 2006 showed a red page, symbolizing the blood of the martyrs, with on the right side, the words "Divine Victory," the word "victory" in green, the colour of Islam. On the left side, it portrayed Khamenei [Khāmīnā'i] letter addressed to Nasrallah and entitled: "Your Victory is an Apodictic Proof [*Hujjah*]."



who guaranteed a perfect human shield, and barred Israel from executing its threat of killing Nasrallah as soon as the opportunity loomed.<sup>19</sup>

Factual mistakes coupled with misinformation and dogmatic language are also common: “It [Hizbullah] *never* calls for bids, and in autumn 2006, when European cities offered their skills and financial support to rebuild Haret Hreik neighborhood, the offer was declined” (pp. 99–100).<sup>20</sup> According to Hizbullah’s discourse and scenario this is not the case. The party repeatedly stated that due to political pressure from their own governments, foreign companies withdrew from the bid to construct Dahiyeh or were forced out of the bid by the threat of sanctions.

The “Organizational Chart” on p. 67 contains many mistakes and omissions, just to name a few: Under “Cultural Mobilization,” the “Lebanese Association for Arts” was not founded in 2004, as the authors claim, rather in 2003; the “Central Information Unit” is dated. It is now called Media Relations Office; the Association of “*Qiyam* [Values]” founded in October 2009 is not listed; etc.

The authors claim that the May 17, 1983 accord with Israel “was ratified by the Lebanese parliament but was not promulgated by Gemayel, who officially renounced it on March 5, 1984” (p. 30). Actually, the Lebanese parliament abrogated the agreement, not president Amin Gemayel [Amīn al-Jamīl].

On p. 27, no sources are listed for the 1980s attacks against the US Embassy, Marines, and French paratroopers. This leads to mistakes, confusions, and fabrications. For instance, the authors claim that 239 Marines died, while according to the State Department 241 had died. I wrote,

Hizbullah’s reputation as an Islamic resistance movement has been marred by the West’s accusation of ‘terrorist’ operations of global reach; the majority of which were claimed by the Islamic Jihad.<sup>21</sup> Some of the attacks which made Hizbullah gain global attention were the US embassy suicide attacks on 18 April 1983<sup>22</sup> and

<sup>19</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 122. Although Hizbullah already took precautions and dug elaborate dungeons, it would have sufficed if Israeli planes caused a sonic boom, which would have resulted in stampede and chaos. Fearing the worst the party cancelled its annual show of force on “Jerusalem Day,” the last Friday of Ramaḍān.

<sup>20</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> The now defunct “Islamic Jihad” was at the time the spearhead of radical Shi‘ite military factions mobilized on the ideology of fighting Israel, the US, and the West. This Shi‘ite “Islamic Jihad” should not be conflated with the Sunni Islamic Jihad, a Palestinian organization founded by Fathi al-Shaqaqi [Fathī ‘l-Shaqāqī] and Abd al-Aziz ‘Awda [Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Awdah] in Syria during the 1970s.

<sup>22</sup> According to US political analysts, this incident served as a blueprint for the Marines’ bombing six months later. On this basis, it ought to have served as an omen to the CIA to try

20 September 1984; the 23 October 1983 twin-suicide attacks that led to the death of 241 US marines<sup>23</sup> and 58 French paratroopers; the Buenos Aires bombing of the Israeli embassy on 17 March 1992<sup>24</sup>; and the holding of Western hostages. The Israeli government and the US Administration claim that Hizbullah's Islamic Resistance constitutes a semi-clandestine organization and that Islamic Jihad is its clandestine wing.<sup>25</sup> In an endeavour to ward off the charges of terrorism, Hizbullah's ideologues, leaders, cadres and intellectuals voice a consensus that has systematically and constantly denied any connection or link to Islamic Jihad or acts it has claimed as its own.<sup>26</sup>

### Contradictory Statements

On the one hand the authors "assume responsibility for the resulting distortions"; on the other, they claim total objectivity and a balanced perspective: "we refuse to be recruited by one camp against the other" (p. 3).

How does this statement "Where these [Hizbullah] leaders afraid that they would be unable to control all aspects of monitored communication" (p. 6) comport with "The practice of self-censorship is strong. . . . Al-Manar TV has been more successful than others in treating the news as something other than propaganda"? (p. 100). How could Hizbullah's al-Manar satellite TV, the beacon of propaganda, treat "news as something other than propaganda," when the authors claimed that the party is unable to "control all aspects of monitored communication"? It seems the authors distort facts and events and emphasise others when it serves their interest and purpose. If one looks at the context, things become clearer: the first statement was made at the beginning of the book to make up for the authors' failure in obtaining

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to prevent the Marines' bombing (Brent Sadler, *CNN, 11 GMT News*, October 23, 2003). The death toll of the US Embassy in West Beirut was 63 people, out of whom 17 were Americans, including the entire Middle East contingent of the CIA (Ann Byers, *Lebanon's Hezbollah: Inside the World's Most Infamous Terrorist Organizations* (London: Rosen Publishing Group, 2003), 26–35).

<sup>23</sup> The same sources claim that the 12,000 ton explosion was the largest non-nuclear device that resulted, in one instance, in the largest number of US casualties since World War II. Till now, the US holds Iran and Hizbullah responsible for the incident (Byers, *Lebanon's Hezbollah*, 28–33).

<sup>24</sup> In retaliation to Israel's assassination of Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi [Sayyid 'Abbās al-Mūsawī], Hizbullah's second Secretary General, on February 16, 1992.

<sup>25</sup> Shaul Shay, *The Axis of Evil: Iran, Hizbullah, and the Palestinian Terror* (London: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 89–100; Byers, *Lebanon's Hezbollah*, 36–49; Ely Karmon, *Fight on all Fronts: Hizbullah, the War on Terror, and the War on Iraq*, Policy Focus, no. 46 (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2003), 1–29.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 20–21.

primary sources and conducting fieldwork and interviews.<sup>27</sup> The last sentence was made at the end of their 100-page exposition in order to advertise Hizbullah's position and make their book more acceptable and agreeable to the party. In a similar vein, the authors do not hesitate to extol the party, "The Hezbollah remains a very popular movement within the Shi'ite community. . . . The increasing efficiency seems to have been made possible only by the professionalization and the outsourcing of services" (p. 99). This runs contrary to their overall claim of objectivity at the beginning of the book.

### **Qur'ānic References**

The authors render significant Qur'ānic concepts incorrectly or inconsistently, a practice made more frustrating by their failure to cite the translation of the Qur'ān from which they are working. For example, the term *mustaḍ'afīn*, which is derived from phrases found in verses 28: 4–5 and 34: 31–33, should, in the context of Hizbullah's discourse, always be rendered as the "oppressed" or the "downtrodden," and not as "disinherited/disenfranchised" (*maḥrūmīn*), which has an entirely different connotation. For instance, on p. 31, the authors confuse the discourse of the two Shi'ites parties. They conflate Amal's usage of *maḥrūmīn* with Hizbullah's employment of *mustaḍ'afīn*. Noteworthy, instead of the Cold War distinction between East and West, Imām Khomeini [Khumaynī] classified the world as a struggle between the "oppressors" and the "oppressed."

At the end of 2009 Manifesto, the authors employ a literal reference to Hizbullah's discourse when they refer to "victory or martyrdom" without the Qur'ānic substantiation of *ḥusnawayn*, thus distorting the meaning: "You [God] promised us one of two blessings: either victory or the honor of meeting you adorned in blood" (p. 169). I clarify that the word *ḥusnawayn* in verse 9: 52 is taken to refer to martyrdom (of the self) and victory (for the *ummah*): "Say: 'Do you expect from us anything other than one of the two fairest outcomes [*ḥusnawayn*] (martyrdom and victory); while we await that Allah will smite you with punishment, either from Him, or at our hands?' So wait and watch, we are waiting and watching you."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Although the authors have the capacity to subject statements to critical analysis, they did not conduct a single interview with any party cadre or any rank and file.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 137, 208.

### A Critique of the Book's Overall Conclusions

I am contesting the book's overall conclusions. The authors write, "The reason is clear: the horizon of its [Hizbullah] action is a jihad to liberate Jerusalem" (p. 97). I beg to differ with this unsubstantiated, emphatic conclusion, which conflates semantics with reality. I will deconstruct the authors' reading of history. This is a dated reading of the discourse that was prevalent in the 1980s. At that time, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani [Hāshimī Rafsanjānī], said that the road to Jerusalem passes through Karbala [Karbālā'] and Lebanon.<sup>29</sup> Nowadays, Hizbullah seems to care less about its regional ambitions such as the "destruction of the state of Israel and the liberation of Jerusalem," as its 1985 Open Letter or first Manifesto affirmed.<sup>30</sup> "Hizbullah made it clear in more than one occasion that it does not want to "liberate Jerusalem." These are only slogans, rhetoric; likewise, the terms "Great Satan" [US] and "Little Satan" [Israel]."<sup>31</sup> "However, this enmity is only in rhetoric and semantics since Hizbullah is a Lebanese patriotic resistance movement and does not operate in the US or Israel; rather it leaves it to the Palestinians to liberate their land."<sup>32</sup>

The authors contend that "the party exerts its control over geographical space and over the media, where any form of critique elicits a reply" (p. 100). This is not true, or is at least not always the case, as the interview with Rami Ollaik [Rāmī 'Ullayāq] (below) demonstrates. In order to counter accusations that Hizbullah stifles freedom of thought, expression, and free speech, Hizbullah not only did not respond to Ollaik, but seems to have ignored him. Further, the authors continue to make speculative, unsubstantiated statements: "Rami Ollaik, a former Hezbollah militant who may have converted to Christianity . . . has trouble gaining access to the airwaves" (p. 100). This is also a fabrication and an overstatement. Ollaik is a media star and he is constantly interviewed. He appeared in a relatively recent coverage/appearance on March 20, 2013 by Paula Yacoubian on the Lebanese Future TV, which is owned by the Western allied ex-PM Saad Hariri [Sa'd al-Ḥarīrī]. The interview received coverage from Facebook, Twitter, and many Internet sites, not to mention print media such as Lebanese and Arab newspapers and magazines.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA*, 20.

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

<sup>31</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity*, 184.

<sup>32</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, 36.

<sup>33</sup> "Rami Ollaik will Discuss with Paula Yacoubian His New Book *Under the Green Waters* Tonight on Future TV," Rami Ollaik's Facebook page, accessed April 15, 2013, <http://ar-ar.facebook.com/RamiOllaik/posts/443147425768055>. See also Paula Yacoubian's Facebook

Here is an excerpt from one of the Internet sites, posted on March 22, 2013, at 2: 22 am, and entitled, “Ollaik: Hezbollah always acts on orders from Iran”:

Rami Ollaik, a Lebanese writer who split from Hezbollah told Paula Yacoubian at Future TV on [March 20, 2013] that he and his family received so many letters criticizing him for appearing on Future “as if I am appearing on an Israeli TV station.”

Ollaik stressed during the interview that he has absolutely no relations with any intelligence operations despite the attractive offers he received from the CIA and FBI and said he is banned from entering the United States.

He criticized Hezbollah’s behavior and accused it of creating a Sunni-Shiite strife in Lebanon.

“Where is my advantage as a Shiite to go to Syria and make the rest of the Lebanese people paying a hefty price and destroy our country?” He added: “Some of the messages that I received indicated that my appearance on Israeli television is a lot easier and more acceptable than my appearance on Future TV, and here I wonder who the real enemy is and how long we will continue to distrust each other?”

He revealed that he has discovered a lot of corruption within the Hezbollah organization back in 1996 when he finally decided to quit. He also revealed that Hezbollah chief Sayyed Nasrallah gets all his orders from Iran and he has personally met the top Iranian official who told him so.

Ollaik stressed that Hezbollah is strictly a security and intelligence group and is not fit to be a political organization.

Ollaik who was born in Khiam in south Lebanon in 1972 was recruited by Hezbollah at the age of 14.

Ollaik founded Lebanon Ahead, a movement aimed at improving the country and changing it into a peaceful and democratic nation by creating a platform for communication and understanding among citizens. Through it, he founded a coalition of independent democratic civic forces “Takadom.”

Ollaik is an attorney, a professor of beekeeping at the American University of Beirut, a legal and economic consultant, and a writer.<sup>34</sup>

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Page, accessed April 15, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/PaulaYacoubian>; Yacoubian’s Twitter page, accessed April 15, 2013, <https://twitter.com/PaulaYacoubian>; <https://twitter.com/mmmajdalany/statuses/314377762385321984>; <https://twitter.com/search?q=Rami%20Ollaik%20&src=typd>, accessed April 15, 2013.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.yalibnan.com/2013/03/22/ollaik-hezbollah-always-acts-on-orders-from-iran/>, accessed April 15, 2013. See also <http://sawte.com/vb/showthread.php?t=13526&p=171192>, accessed April 15, 2013.

## PART II

### DOCUMENTS OF HEZBOLLAH

The translation of the text of Hizbullah's 1985 founding document the "Open Letter" and the 2009 Manifesto or the "Political Charter" are both based on a French translation of the Arabic original, thus a "replica in miniature" or a second order imitation of the original, as such inaccurate, not to say distorted at certain places. The authors contend, "This is an original and complete translation," (p. 103) yet they concede that their translation is "from French" (p. 103) or is "based on the French version" (p. 130). Many inaccuracies and distortions can be spotted. Here are just a few.

For instance, this translation is inaccurate and does not offer the necessary background information for understanding it in context/albeit with no background information (while in my *Documents* book I do):

The guide Imam Khomeini has insisted on several occasions on the need for the skills of the learned Muslim and has directed his attention toward purifying himself before asking the same of others. He has said this in several of his statements: if the people knew that the owner of a shop was not honorable, they would say that such-and-such is not honorable; if they knew that a merchant is swindling people, they would say that such-and-such is an imposter; if they knew—God forbid—that a man of religion was not honorable, then they would say that the religion would not be good. (p. 127)

In my *Hizbullah's Documents* book, I try to rectify these weaknesses and inconsistencies. A more accurate translation is the following:

Imam Khumayni repeatedly stressed the need to rectify, reform, and refine the self, before rectifying, reforming, and refining others and the world at large. He said on more than one occasion that if people knew that a shopkeeper is dishonest and immoral, then they say that Mr. X is dishonest and immoral; if they found out that a merchant is cheating them, then they say that Mr. X is a cheater; however, if they knew that a Muslim religious scholar (*'alim*), God forbid, is not upright, then they would generalize and say that all religious scholars are not upright (tainted) and the religion (Islam) as a whole is not upright.<sup>35</sup>

Actually, Hizbullah appropriated this section of the Open Letter, almost word by word, from the section entitled, "The Grave Responsibilities of the

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<sup>35</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, 54.

Muslim ‘*Ulama*,’ in Imām Khomeini’s *al-Jihād al-Akbar* [*Greater Jihad*].<sup>36</sup> The same statement of refining the self before refining others is repeated and borne out in the article entitled, “The Spiritual-Dynamic Force of the Islamic Revolution—Second Episode: The Ideological and Social Change . . . a New Conception of Jihad.”<sup>37</sup>

Dogmatic language and emphatically stating without qualification is another weakness in portraying Hizbullah’s documents. The authors unequivocally stress that “‘national questions’ must be understood as questions relating to the ‘Arab nation’” (p. 150, n. 9). Well, not necessary, since sometimes Pan-Islamism overrides Pan-Arabism.

### Ten-page Conclusion

The ten-page conclusion is littered with dogmatic, over generalized statements, such as the one on p.172. The authors contend, “For a long time, France was the only [super] power to take Lebanon’s existence seriously.” Well, what about the US, whose role was clearly visible in Lebanon via its military invasions in 1958 and 1982, when the Marines landed to shore off the Lebanese government? In addition, it is no secret that from the heyday of the civil war till the Syrian withdrawal in 2005—with a few exceptions<sup>38</sup>—most Lebanese presidents were chosen by an American-Syrian consensus/brokership? The quote below illustrates the US’s involvement in Lebanese affairs:

What do these Lebanese think? Do they think that the US would have cared for their problems if they were secluded from the problems of the Middle East and did not affect the region in one way or another? If we [the US] could totally isolate Lebanon and its problems from the Middle East, then we would not move our little finger even if the Lebanese slaughtered one another with old saving razors.<sup>39</sup>

Other inaccuracies remain. The “cult of charismatic leader” (p. 163) is an overdone, overused cliché. Moreover, the authors’ claim that Hizbullah’s

<sup>36</sup> Translated by Husayn Kurani (Tehran: Islamian Grand Library, 1980), 9–10.

<sup>37</sup> In *al-‘Abd* (Beirut), Shawwāl 10, 1405/June 28, 1985, page no. 9 (Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, 202).

<sup>38</sup> In 1988, a deadlock occurred over two presidential candidates: MP Michel al-Dahir and Army commander Michel Aoun (Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 234–5).

<sup>39</sup> This statement was made in 1976 by President Gerald Ford’s special envoy to Lebanon, Talcott Seelye, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (see Joseph Alagha, “Hizbullah, Terrorism, and Sept. 11” *ORIENT: Deutsche Zeitschrift für Wirtschaft und Kultur des Orients* 44:3 (2003), 406).

doctrine is “homogenous” (p. 163) amounts to an over simplification. I argue that “in conformity with its policy to change as circumstances themselves change, it is important to keep in mind that Hizbullah is not monolithic. The party’s internal structure allows it to operate on a number of levels. Hizbullah is a sophisticated, complex, multifaceted, multilayered organization, composed of at least four main divisions: 1) the “military wing”: the *jihādī* and “terrorist” branch; 2) the social services, NGOs, and civil institutions branch; 3) the “political wing;” and 4) the cultural politics branch or “resistance art.”<sup>40</sup>

Overgeneralising from one incident—namely the May 2008 show of force—the authors employ dogmatic, emphatic language: “There is without a doubt . . . divided between these two loyalties, the leaders have always privileged the party’s ideological line over national entente” (p. 170). Since the authors argue with no qualification, it suffices to give one counter example as a rebuttal to their contention. On various occasions, Hizbullah has refused Iranian orders to open the Lebanese front with Israel in order to help the Palestinians.<sup>41</sup> The reason for this precept of practice or course of action that Hizbullah’s leadership gave is that such an ideological behaviour is detrimental to Lebanese national interest.

Two cases in point that illustrate this trend are Sharon’s April 2002 West Bank counterterrorism offensive and Barak’s December 2008-January 2009 ‘Operation Cast Lead’ in Gaza. [In spite of all the rhetoric of the foreign ministry], Iran strongly urged Hizbullah to open the northern front across the Lebanese-Israeli border in order to release pressure on the Palestinians, but Hizbullah adamantly refused because such a move was considered detrimental to its national interest.<sup>42</sup>

The icing on the cake of their ten-page conclusion is that the authors erroneously anticipated a leading role for two dead people i.e., the Syrian president’s brother-in-law Assef Shawkat [Āṣif Shawkat] who was killed/assassinated on July 18, 2012 by a bomb explosion planted by the Syrian rebels, and the Egyptian ex-head of intelligence and Mubarak’s vice-President and successor Omar Suleiman<sup>43</sup> [‘Umar Sulaymān] who died while receiving treatment in the US on July 19, 2012 (p. 171).

The “Lexicon” (pp. 175–193) is highly selective and badly referenced. It is based on a few unrepresentative sources and heavily relies on two recurrent sources i.e., *al-Ma‘ārif al-Islāmiyyah*—which is an associated cultural centre or

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<sup>40</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Identity*, 185.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> The authors have here erroneously mentioned Omar Suleiman as Ibrahim Suleiman.



affiliated institution with the party—and the Deputy Secretary General, Na‘im Qāsim’s open source book, *Hizb Allāh: Al-Manhaj, al-Tajribah, al-Mustaqbal*.<sup>44</sup>

On pp. 179–182, the authors portray a non-exhaustive discussion of *jihād*, often carbon-copying, without understanding the significance of what they are presenting, which simply amounts to distortions of the original doctrine. For instance, *jihād al-naḥs* refers to *al-jihād al-akbar* (greater *jihād*) and not to military *jihād* or “the act of war,” as they call it. As mentioned above, the authors repeat this mistake in their analysis of the “Open Letter” on p. 127. The authors ought to have given an accurate description of the various kinds of *jihād* as employed by Hizbullah.<sup>45</sup>

### ***Exoteric and Esoteric Jihad: Smaller and Greater Jihād***

The Qur’ān portrays both exoteric and esoteric *jihād*. The former is warranted in: “fight [*qtl*] the polytheists all together just as they fight you all together; and know that Allah is on the side of the righteous.”<sup>46</sup> The latter is merited as follows: “And those who strive [*jāhadū*] in Our cause We shall guide in our ways, and Allah is with the beneficent.”<sup>47</sup> The Prophet is reported to have said when he returned from some battles (*ghazawāt*, plural of *ghazwah*): “We returned from the smaller *jihad* (*al-jihād al-asghar*) and we still have [to conduct] the greater *jihad* (*al-jihād al-akbar*).” When the Prophet was asked, what is the greater *jihād*? He replied: “the struggle with the self (*jihād al-naḥs*).”<sup>48</sup> God has sanctioned the smaller *jihād* in order to consolidate His religion, uphold His word, disseminate His mercy to whomever he wishes from his faithful servants, and to “cause the Truth to triumph and nullify falsehood, even though the wicked sinners dislike it.”<sup>49</sup> God has enjoined the greater *jihād* in order to save and lift up the souls of righteous people to heaven, and rid them from living according to the flesh and its material desires in women and wealth: “Attractive to mankind is made the love of the pleasures of women, children, heaps upon heaps of gold and silver, thoroughbred horses, cattle and cultivable land. Such is the pleasure of this worldly life, but unto Allah is the fairest return.” “Say, ‘Shall I tell you about something better than that?’ For those who are God-fearing, from their Lord are gardens beneath which rivers flow, and in which they abide forever [along

<sup>44</sup> Na‘im Qāsim, *Hizb Allāh: al-Manhaj, al-Tajribah, al-Mustaqbal* [Hizbullah: The curriculum, the experience, the future] (Beirut: Dār al-Hādī, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 45-47; 50.

<sup>46</sup> Qur’ān 9:36.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 29:79.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Shaykh Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *Wasā’il al-Shī‘ah* [Shī‘ite rituals] (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Ḥulūl, Bayt Iḥyā’ al-Turāth, 1993), 553. Al-Ḥurr Al-‘Āmilī died in 1104/1692.

<sup>49</sup> Qur’ān 8:8.

with] purified spouses and Allah's good pleasure. Allah sees His servants well!"<sup>50</sup>

### ***Smaller Jihād: Initiative (Iqdāmī) Offensive Jihād and Defensive (Difāʿī) Jihād***

The classical distinction of smaller *jihād*, as offensive and defensive *jihād*, is well known in Shiʿite literature and interpretations. It is adequately discussed in the Shiʿite "manual" of *jihād* and martyrdom.<sup>51</sup> The jurists divide military *jihād* (smaller *jihād*) into the following two categories: (1) initiative offensive *jihād*, and (2) defensive *jihād*. Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) conducted offensive *jihād* in order to get rid of the infidels and build the foundations of the requisite social milieu for propagating Islam and disseminating its teachings. The following Qurʾānic verses testify (justify) to that: "But if they break their oaths after their pledge [is made] and abuse your religion, then fight the leaders of unbelief; for they have no regard for oaths, and that perchance they may desist." Will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and intended to drive the Apostle out, seeing that they attacked first? Do you fear them? Surely, you ought to fear Allah more, if you are real believers." "And fight them, so that sedition might end and the only religion will be that of Allah. Then if they desist, Allah is fully aware of what they do."<sup>52</sup>

### ***Summary of the General Shiʿite Understanding of Jihād***

The major distinction is between the smaller *jihād* (exoteric, external *jihād*) and greater *jihād* (esoteric, inner *jihād*). In addition, the following types of smaller *jihād* have been discussed: (1) Initiative *jihād* or offensive *jihād*, which cannot be practiced anymore after the death of the Prophet and the Eleven Imāms and the occultation of Imām al-Mahdī. Therefore, only Imām al-Mahdī can exercise offensive *jihād* upon his return. (2) Defensive *jihād*, which in turn branches into military *jihād* (fighting the enemy in the battlefield including martyrdom) and non-military *jihād* (persuasive *jihād*, such as by the tongue and heart, for instance). The distinction between greater *jihād* and smaller non-

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3:14-15. See the "Secrets of Jihād" in al-ʿĀrif al-Qāḍī Saʿīd al-Qummī, *Asrār al-ʿIbādah* [The secrets of worship] (Beirut: Markaz Baqiyyat Allāh, 1999), 137-150.

<sup>51</sup> *Al-Jihād wa Khīṣāl al-Mujāhidīn* [Jihād and the martyrs' traits] (Beirut: Markaz Baqiyyat Allāh, 1999), 31-46. This book bases itself on a host of authoritative Shiʿite sources including: al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī's *Wasāʾil al-Shiʿah*; Khomeini's *Tahrīr al-Wasīlah* among other books; Imām ʿAlī's *Nahj al-Balāghah* among other books; the four prominent Shiʿite collections of *ḥadīth* books (Al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfī*; al-Ṭūsī's *al-Tabdhīb* and *al-Istibṣār*; and Ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī's *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*), etc.

<sup>52</sup> Qurʾān 9:12:13; 8:39. See also *al-Jihād wa Khīṣāl al-Mujāhidīn*, 31-32.

military *jihād* is meticulous. Greater *jihād* is transcendental-metaphysical, spiritual, and inner *jihād*; while non-military smaller *jihād* has to do with this world, with the here and now. Although non-military smaller *jihād* is mainly concerned with material things, however, it could also have a spiritual dimension, but not to the extent of the transcendental-spiritual dimensions of greater *jihād*.

“Appendix B PORTRAITS” (pp. 195–214) is dated, non-exhaustive, incomplete, and unimpressive. As an illustration, I refer to some examples; the most visible is the first entry.

Sayyid ‘Ali al-Amin [Sayyid ‘Alī ‘l-Amīn] is still portrayed as “Mufti of Tyre and Jabal ‘Amil” (p. 195) although the Islamic Shi‘ite Higher Council sacked him and stripped him of his position on May 16, 2008 after he vehemently criticized Amal Movement (Ḥarakat al-Amal) and Hizbullah. He was replaced by Shaykh Hasan Abdallah [Ḥasan ‘Abd Allāh]. Although this development occurred within the time frame of the book (i.e., before 2009), the authors ignore to mention it. They also make reductionist statements such as their contention that “he came to prominence through his refusal to consider the 2006 war a ‘divine victory’” (p. 195).

In my books, I have argued that he was by far “prominent” before this development. Sayyid ‘Ali al-Amin—a graduate of the Najaf seminary who descends from an influential family of religious scholars (‘ulamā)—was one of the main wielders of authority in Jabal ‘Āmil, the historical den of Shi‘ism in Lebanon. Most importantly, when Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine [Muḥammad Mahdī Shams al-Dīn], the head of the Islamic Shi‘ite Higher Council, died in 2001, al-Amin was a serious contender to succeed him, but for political reasons he was not chosen. Al-Amin’s elder son is finalising an 11-year study in Qom to become a *mujtahid*. His cousin Muhammad Hasan al-Amin [Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Amīn] is the chief judge in the southern city of Sidon; his nephew is also establishing a seminary, etc. Thus, his family constitutes a main pillar of Jabal ‘Āmil, as such he is prominent.<sup>53</sup>

The profile of “Ruhani, Fakhr” (p. 211) amounts to pretentious-journalistic statements and unreferenced quotes, which is one of the main ills of this book. We still know nothing about his biography, which is the main aim of the so-called “Portraits.” This serves as another illustration of the pretentious-haughty character of the book.

Lebanon today resembles Iran in 1977, and if we observe more closely, it will fall into our hands with the aid of God. Because of its [geographical]<sup>54</sup> position at the

<sup>53</sup> For instance, see Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 127–128.

<sup>54</sup> *Sic*, geopolitical.

heart of the region, [and as one] of the most international centers, when Lebanon falls into the hands of the Islamic republic, the others will follow. (p. 211)

This is taken out of context since “today” turns out to be in 1984, the year Ruhani [Rūḥānī] gave the interview. It seems self-evident that this forecasted scenario proved to be a fiasco as Iran was unsuccessful in exporting its revolution to the (majority Shi‘ite) Iraq and other (minority Sunni) Gulf countries even though the export of the revolution achieved partial success in Lebanon. Moreover, even nowadays with Hizbullah’s contested hegemony over the political system in Lebanon, Iran failed to have a firm grip on the country; it can only do so if Lebanon becomes a failing state. In that scenario, Iran and Hizbullah will have hard times combating al-Qā‘idah’s influence, not only in ideology, but also in operational terms.

“The following list is incomplete” (p. 215) is a good concession that illustrates the state of affairs of this book. Like the rest of this book, “incomplete” is the best way to describe it. In fact, the following names are missing from the list of the *Shūrā* (Consultative) Council: Sayyid Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid [Sayyid Ibrāhīm Amīn al-Sayyid], the head of the Political Council (Politburo) and MP Hajj Muhammad Raad, head of the Loyalty to Resistance Bloc.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, the list of Hizbullah’s MPs from 2005 to 2009 is non-exhaustive and contains wrong names (p. 213). For instance, “Hassan Hussein Hajj” ought to be Hussein al-Hajj Hasan [Ḥusayn al-Ḥājḡ Ḥasan]. Some of the missing names are the following: Muhammad Haydar [Muḥammad Ḥaydar], Jamal al-Taḡsh [Jamāl al-Ṭaḡsh], and Mohammad Fneish. Likewise, the election table on page 45 is not precise and erroneous. The authors venture numbers, but they do not supply any names, while in all my books I do. Below, I confine myself to Hizbullah’s MPs.<sup>56</sup> Besides, the authors contend

<sup>55</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 160. Revealed after the Eighth Conclave ended in November 2009.

<sup>56</sup> In 1992, Hizbullah won all of the twelve seats on its election list: eight were reserved for party members, and four for non-party affiliated sympathizers (who are always Sunni and Christian): two for Sunnis and two for Christians (a Greek Catholic and a Maronite). Ali Ammar [‘Alī ‘Ammār], Ibrahim Bayan [Ibrāhīm Bayān] (Sunni), Mohammad Berjawi [Muḥammad Birjāwī], Mohammad Fneish, Munir al-Hujayyri [Munīr al-Ḥujayrī] (Sunni), Rabi‘ah Keiruz [Rabī‘ah Kayrūz] (Maronite), Mohammad Raad, Sa‘ud Rufayyel [Sa‘ūd Rūfāyil] (Greek Catholic), Sayyid Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, ‘Ali Taha [‘Alī Ṭāhā], Khudur Tulays [Khaḡīr Ṭulays], Muhammad Yaghi [Muḥammad Yāḡhī] (Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, 237).

The following is the list of the 1996 MPs with (O) and (N) beside the names to denote old [i.e. previously elected] and new: Abdallah Qasir [‘Abd Allāh Qaṣīr] (N), Ammar al-Musawi [‘Ammār al-Mūsawī] (N), Nazih Mansur [Nazih Manṣūr] (N), Husayn al-Hajj Hasan [Ḥusayn al-Ḥājḡ Ḥasan] (N), Ibrahim Bayan, Sunni (O), Mohammad Fneish (O), Isma‘il Sukariyyeh

that “since the 1992 elections . . . the Hezbollah could count on the support of only 3 or 4 allied legislators (generally a Maronite and two Sunnis)” (p. 45). This is not true, not accurate and is an overgeneralisation. As mentioned in the footnote above, in the 1992 elections Sa‘ud Rufayyel is Greek Catholic. Further, this alleged formula was shattered after the 2006 Understanding with the Free Patriotic Movement [al-Tayyār al-Waṭanī al-Ḥurr] (FPM). Thus, since 2009, Hizbullah’s legislative electoral lists were void of any Christian because the FPM monopolized that representation.

### Mistakes of Principle

Mistakes of principle are abounding. For example, “Trad Hamadeh, minister of labor” was not, and is still not, a Hizbullah member as the authors claim (pp. 167 and 216). Rather, he is a Hizbullah affiliated sympathizer (non-official ally), who was, in his capacity as minister of Labour and Agriculture, representing Hizbullah in the fourteen-member cabinet that was sworn in on April 19, 2005, and was reassigned to the helm of Ministry of Labour on July 19, 2005, in the first cabinet formed after the Syrian withdrawal.<sup>57</sup> Another mistake of principle, but of less serious consequences, occurs on page 40 where the authors contend that the Lebanese civil war lasted for 17 years: “seventeen-year war.” In fact, it began on April 13, 1975 and ended on October 13, 1990. Thus, it ought to be the “sixteen-year war.”

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[Ismā‘il Sukariyyah], Sunni (N), Rabi‘ah Keiruz, Maronite (O), Mohammad Raad (O), Sayyid Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid (O) (ibid., 239).

Here is the list of the 2000 MPs: Ali Ammar (O), Mohammad Berjawi (O), Abdallah Qasir (O), Mohammad Fneish (O), Nazih Mansur (O), Mohammad Raad (O), Husayn al-Hajj Hasan (O), Ammar al-Musawi (O), Husayn Yaghi [Husayn Yāghī] (N), George Najm, Maronite (N), Ibrahim Bayan, Sunni (O), Mas‘ud al-Hujayyri [Mas‘ūd al-Ḥujayrī], Sunni (N) (Ibid., 241).

Here is the list of the 2005 MPs: Mohammad Raad (O), Mohammad Fneish (O), Muhammad Haydar (N), Hasan Fadlallah (N), Hasan Huballah [Ḥasan Ḥibb Allāh] (N), Amin Shirri [Amīn Sharri] (N), Ali Ammar (O), Pierre Serhal, Maronite [Biyār Sirḥāl] (N), Isma‘il Sukariyyeh, Sunni (N), Kamel al-Rifa‘i [Kāmil Rifā‘ī], Sunni (N), Ali al-Miqdad [‘Alī ‘l-Miqdād] (N), Husayn al-Hajj Hasan (O), Jamal al-Taqsh (N), Nawwar al-Sahili [Nawwār al-Sāḥilī] (N) (ibid., 245–6).

The authors claim that in 2009 nine Hizbullah MPs were elected, which is wrong since they are ten. Hizbullah won twelve seats: ten for party members and two for Sunni allies. Due to Hizbullah’s alliance with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), this time Hizbullah had no Christians on its election list. Here is a list of the twelve names: Muhammad Raad (O), Muhammad Fneish (O), Husayn al-Musawi (N), Hasan Fadlallah (O), Ali Ammar (O), Walid Sukariyyeh [Walid Sukariyyah], Sunni (N), Kamel al-Rifa‘i, Sunni (O), Ali al-Miqdad (O), Husayn al-Hajj Hasan (O), Ali Fayyad [‘Alī Fayyād] (N), Nawwaf Al-Musawi [Nawwāf al-Mūsawī] (N), Nawwar al-Sahili (O) (ibid., 259–60).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 176, 245–246.

Another mistake of principle is that the authors contend that “the war that erupted in 1957 pitted Palestinian forces linked to Arafat’s PLO against Gemayel’s Lebanese Phalanges” (p. 17). This is wrong on at least two counts. First, it is an anachronism since the PLO was not founded till May 1964; it promulgated its charter on May 28, 1964. Second, the Lebanese civil war “erupted” on April 13, 1975.

Along the same lines, another mistake of principle emerges as a fatal factual error and distortion of facts. The authors make it appear that Hizbullah’s killing of 8 IDF soldiers and the kidnapping of two others on July 12, 2006 coincided with the kidnapping of Shalit in Gaza by Hamas. As such, Hizbullah came to the support of the Palestinians under Iranian pressure. This assumption is based on an erroneous circumstantial evidence since Shalit was kidnapped on June 25, 2006, and is also reductionalist because the authors seem to imply that the July 2006 war erupted because Hizbullah wanted to support the Palestinians, when the party was aiming at releasing its prisoners in Israeli jails. The authors write,

The war of summer 2006 was directly linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. . . . On July 12, Hamas faced an offensive of Israeli troops after taking a non-commissioned officer [Shalit] hostage. In support of its ally [Hamas], the Hezbollah attacked an Israeli patrol, killing eight and taking two hostages. (p. 82)

Actually, on June 25, 2006, in a cross-border raid near the Gaza strip, Hamas abducted the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who would spend the next five years in captivity until a prisoner exchange deal resulted in his freedom on October 18, 2011, in exchange for the release of 1027 Palestinian prisoners (serving sentences in Israeli jails) as well as the return of 91 bodies of fallen Palestinian fighters.<sup>58</sup>

Another mistake of principle is that the authors claim that Hizbullah “called for abandoning confessionism” (p. 85). In Lebanon, confessionism refers to pluralism (*al-ta’addudiyyah*) and implies power sharing, and thus cannot be abolished or abandoned. While sectarianism, loyalty to religious sect (*al-tā’ifiyyah*), can be abolished or abandoned. Hizbullah has repeatedly called for the abolishment of political sectarianism in conformity with the new Lebanese constitution of 1990, which is based on the Taif Agreement of 1989. Elsewhere I have argued that Hizbullah’s 2009 Manifesto states,

The main ill in the Lebanese political system is political sectarianism. . . . Consensual democracy represents a proper political formula to assure true

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 247.

partnership and contributes in opening the doors for everyone to join the phase of state building. . . . The state that we are looking forward to taking part in is the one that upholds public freedoms and is concerned for national unity.<sup>59</sup>

I add that Hizbullah's 2009 Manifesto called for the establishment of the "National Body for the Abolition of Political Sectarianism" since sectarianism is perceived as a threat to consensual democracy and national coexistence.<sup>60</sup> Although Nasrallah deemed the sectarian system a tribal system, he clarified

Let us be realistic. The abolition of political sectarianism is one of the most difficult issues and cannot be accomplished overnight . . . nobody can dictate how to abolish it in a sentence or two. Rather, if after years of debate, ranging from five to thirty years, we find out that political sectarianism cannot be abolished, then let us be bold enough to say that what we agreed upon in the Ta'if Agreement cannot be realized. However, till then, the Lebanese need to found the "National Body for the Abolishment of Political Sectarianism" in order to initiate the debate in a constructive manner.<sup>61</sup>

### **Speculations and Unsubstantiated Allegations**

As mentioned above, the book is littered with speculations and unsubstantiated allegations, which diminish its academic value and render it a run-of-the-mill book. Cases in point are pretentious statements about Hizbullah's so-called "Categories," which amount to speculations since no source(s) is listed. I think it is better not to venture into these speculations in which one does not have hard evidence to substantiate these controversial claims. The irony is that the authors do not even have circumstantial evidence to support these allegations, which seem to originate out of the blues. As such what the authors write below amounts to nothing:

Combatants (six hundred full-time, three thousand to five thousand mobilizable, ten thousand "reservists"?) Militants Sympathizers (two hundred thousand?) the

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<sup>59</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> *Hizbullah's Political Manifesto*, Chapter II: "Lebanon," Section 3: "The State and the Political System," 1st ed. (Beirut: Media Relations Office, 2009), 38–39 (a 71-page polished short book, elegantly printed on expensive paper). The translation is as available in three languages: English, French, and Spanish (59 pages each and all published in 2009). It is worth mentioning that Hizbullah distributed among the audience of Nasrallah's November 30, 2009 press conference a 32-page preliminary document of the Manifesto. A few weeks later, the party published the Manifesto.

<sup>61</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, 140; Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA*, 180; Nasrallah's press conference, November 30, 2009.

party may have five thousand to six thousand people on its payroll, in addition to its full-time combatants. (p. 216)

These untenable exaggerations/hyperboles are repeated throughout without being subject to critical analysis. For instance, “The Hezbollah thus trained, directly or indirectly, more than 100, 000 volunteer forces” (p. 24).

Speculations, showing off, and unsubstantiated claims with no evidence are the norm. The authors write, “The first two years are based on these manuals. According to our sources, the third-year courses are based exclusively on selected texts) (p. 6, n. 8).

How can they use such pretentious language if they conducted no interviews and failed to obtain access to party cadres and primary sources? Throughout my numerous interviews with both party cadres, rank and file, I have noticed that diversity is richness. Not always have I heard uniform party statements. Many times my interviewees harboured diverse points of views, especially on contentious issues.

To cover up their failures, the authors resort to conspiracy theory speculations: “Where these leaders afraid that they would be unable to control all aspects of monitored communication?” (p. 6). As a case in point, “It is remarkable to note that although Hizbullah knew about Avi Jorisch, they gave him free access trusting that he would portray their own point of view. It is ironic to note that Jorisch’s book *The Beacon of Hatred* is one of the main reasons the US Administration branded al-Manar as a ‘terrorist organization.’”<sup>62</sup> According to the head of Media Relations Sayyid Ibrahim al-Musawi, although Hizbullah anticipated that Jorisch will use what he has collected against Hizbullah, the party still gave him access, since they thought that he will end up doing them a favour by immortalizing the ideological productions, both in text and animation.<sup>63</sup> The authors refer to an alleged primary source (from a Hizbullah affiliated institution) with no date, to make the following exaggerations: “The party’s internal history, available only to militants, alludes to the obscure circumstances surrounding its origins” (p. 23, n. 7). Again, how can they judge if they have no access whatsoever?

As desperate acts in an attempt to acquire the stance of a reference work, the authors resort to fabrications, speculations, and a wild imagination. The so-called “Training Manuals for Hezbollah Militants” (p. 221) are actually open source secondary sources in Arabic, which are poorly referenced, as usual. Thus, the audience of these books is fabricated; this is the least to say.

<sup>62</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Identity*, 257, note 40.

<sup>63</sup> Sayyid Ibrahim al-Musawi (head of Media Relations, Hizbullah, Beirut), interview by Joseph Alagha, April 12, 2013.



Earlier, the authors make the same claim, “The writers of Hezbollah manuals explain . . .” (p. 183). There is simply no proof to substantiate their allegations. In addition, I question the presumed narrow audience of these publications. They add, “To our knowledge these sources have never been put to use” (p. 6). How can the authors judge and make pretentious, emphatic statements if they have no access to the party!

Overstatements, or too strongly worded, unsubstantiated exaggerations are common. The authors claim that in 1984 “from Baalbek, under the authority of Subhi al-Tufayli, the Hezbollah proclaimed the Islamic Republic of Lebanon” (p. 31). I argue,

In the 1980s Hizbullah became a closed sectarian social movement. Through heavy reliance on a strict application of Imam Khumayni’s *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship by the jurisprudent), ‘Hizbullah—The Islamic Revolution in Lebanon’ emerged as an internally strong organization with limited following. Al-Tufayli repeatedly stressed Hizbullah’s aim of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon as part of an all-encompassing regional Islamic state, headed by Iran. This unprecedented commitment to the Islamic state in Lebanese political discourse backfired domestically alienating Hizbullah from other political and social movements, and from an effective position within the Lebanese political sphere. Thus, Hizbullah’s policies were counterproductive, leading to the failure of its integration into Lebanese political life.<sup>64</sup>

Other inaccuracies remain. Concerning the map on page 218 at the end of the book, it is true that more than one religious group inhabit most of the areas in Lebanon. That is why, an absolutely accurate map that shows the exact distribution of the eighteen religious groups recognized by the state is almost impossible to draw. However, this does not give the authors license to swap Greek Orthodox representation, in al-Kūrah region below Tripoli, with Greek Catholic, when al-Kūrah is represented in the legislature by three Greek Orthodox MPs, which unequivocally implies that the region is predominantly Greek Orthodox. In fact, figures in light of the June 2009 elections reveal the composition of al-Kūrah population as 60 percent Greek Orthodox, 17 percent Maronite, 21 percent Sunni, and 2 percent Shi‘ites. So where did the overwhelming majority of Greek Catholics come from? Thus, the map remains deeply flawed.

The “Bibliography” (pp. 223–226) contains very selective literature. It is plagued by distorted names and spelling; the publishing dates of some books are wrong. Here are some examples: “Ghoraïeb” should be Ghorayeb, and the book’s date of publication should be 2002 not 2001; “Hamze” should be

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<sup>64</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah’s DNA*, xxiv.

“Hamzeh”; and Harik’s book was published in 2004 not 2005. After making allegations about Hizbullah’s presumed “teaching manuals,” the authors content themselves with poor references to four secondary Arabic books (p. 226). Even quotes are not documented. The authors do not hesitate to quote authoritative figures (such as Hizbullah’s deputy Secretary General Na‘īm Qāsim), albeit without references (p. 49) and secondary sources like Judith Harik (p. 54) without page references. This is not to mention the habit of supplying no date of access of many websites such as the one on p. 55.

Likewise, inconsistent transliteration plagues the book. For instance, “Husayn” (p. 187) and “Hussein” (p. 215). Similarly, as an indication of sloppy writing, typos are abound. Here are just a few: “Georges Hawi” (p. 77). The “s” should be removed. His name is George Hawi. “Abu Qumati” (p. 78), should be Muhammad Qmati, who with Ghalib bu Zaynab, Hizbullah’s officer for Christian-Muslim understanding, signed the “Memorandum of Understanding” with the Free Patriotic Movement on February 6, 2006. “Abu-l ‘Ala’ Mawdudi” (p. 79) should be Abū al-A‘lā al-Mawdūdī. “Ayatollah Mohammad Mahdi al-Din” (p. 15) should be Shams al-Dīn, i.e., “Shams” is missing. Kamal Jumblatt’s “National Lebanese Movement” (p. 17) is an inaccurate, distorted translation of (*Jabhat al-Niḍāl*), better rendered as “The Struggle Front.”

## Conclusion

Despite its initial academic appearance, the book contains numerous errors and contradictions, ranging from very basic factual errors, to errors in scholarly judgments, to errors of attribution. As such, the book amounts to undocumented historiography; thus, its endeavour to become a reference work ends in a fiasco. A book that is written in poetic, charismatic language with a pretentious-haughty character ought to be shunned in all respects since it offers a distorted picture of Hizbullah, which is based on a specific and selective reading of a few dated secondary sources.

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