

Daniel Sobelman

# New Rules of the Game

Israel and Hizbollah  
after the Withdrawal from Lebanon



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Daniel Sobelman

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Israel and Hizbollah after the Withdrawal from Lebanon

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דניאל סובלמן

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## כללי משחק חדשים

ישראל וחזבאללה לאחר הנסיגה מלבנון

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## Preface

Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 presented the Lebanese Shiite organization Hizbollah with the most serious crisis since its founding in 1982. Concomitantly, the withdrawal signaled a new era in Israel's security and political status, since it was no longer considered, either at home or abroad, an occupation force in South Lebanon.

The idea of withdrawal from southern Lebanon generated deep reservations in Israel. Many Israeli situation assessments on the eve of the unilateral pullout from the security zone expressed the fear – and even predicted – that Israel's border settlements would become targets for terrorist activity, which could lead to a major deterioration along the entire northern front.

More than three and a half years after the withdrawal, it is clear that although Hizbollah has not ceased its activity against Israel, it is conducting itself in a manner completely different from these forecasts. In the months leading up to the American invasion of Iraq, some conjecture was voiced that Hizbollah would exploit the instability in order to operate against Israel in the north, even though Israeli military intelligence doubted, correctly, that the organization would take advantage of the campaign in Iraq to attack Israel. Indeed, Hizbollah was careful to maintain a low profile during the weeks of fighting in Iraq. Hizbollah leaders, who hid neither their opposition to the American campaign nor their hostility to Saddam Hussein's regime, remained almost completely silent. They raised their voice only to announce that Hizbollah had not sent assistance to Iraq to repel the invader, and when it was reported from Baghdad that six Hizbollah fighters had been captured on the Syrian-Iraqi border, the organization was quick to issue an official denial.

Thus, Hizbollah acted more cautiously and prudently than Syria, which permitted Syrian volunteer fighters to cross into Iraq, a move that brought Syrian-American relations to an unprecedented low point. The leadership in Damascus believed that its conduct was in line with Syria's national interests and ideology. In this same period, however, Hizbollah turned inward to Lebanese domestic affairs in order to strengthen its position. On April 8, 2003, Hizbollah Deputy Secretary-General Na'im Qasim met with Lebanon's Maronite patriarch, Nasrallah Butrus Sfeir, for the first time in four years. Qasim told the clergyman, "We are all in the same boat." As a way of grappling with the ramifications of the Iraq War, Hizbollah leaders met with representatives of

most of the Lebanese political parties and earned their public support. This effort at public political integration has continued for many months.

This study traces the path taken by Hizbollah since the May 2000 watershed – a path that in many respects determined its conduct during the Iraq War. Predicated on a brief comparison of the turn of events with the scenarios that Israel had forecast, the study includes a detailed description of the developments and stratagems that have shaped the rules of the game on both sides of the Israeli-Lebanese border. These new rules of the game have allowed the border to enjoy greater stability and quiet than it has experienced in many years, despite the Hizbollah threat that overshadows the lives of Israelis residing in the north.

The bulk of my research is based on publicly accessible material from the Lebanese media, as well as Israeli and international sources. I hope to have surveyed the majority of statements, at least the most important ones, made by senior Hizbollah figures in recent years. In addition, I received excellent assistance from academic institutions and researchers, Israeli and foreign diplomats, and officials from Israel's security establishment, to understand the factors that influenced Israel's assessment of possible developments on the northern border following its withdrawal. Most of the sources have been footnoted in detail and compiled in the bibliography at the end of this memorandum. I wish to extend my thanks to all of these people for their help, as well as to certain individuals whose names I am not at liberty to divulge. In a few cases I was unable to provide source details because of censorship.

The study that follows is based on a monograph that was first published in Hebrew in June 2003. The text that follows has been modified slightly and updated to reflect some recent developments.

It is my pleasure to thank Dr. Shai Feldman, Head of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, for the opportunity to conduct this research and publish it, both in English and Hebrew. Special thanks go to Anat Kurz from the Jaffee Center for her comments and insight. Additional gratitude is extended to Emily Landau and the staff at the Jaffee Center, particularly Moshe Grundman and English Editor Judith Rosen, who provided extensive help in editing the research and crystallizing the ideas it presents. Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, Nina and George Sobelman, as well as my wife, Lilach, for their steady and warm support.

Daniel Sobelman

Tel Aviv, December 2003



## Introduction

Israel withdrew from South Lebanon on May 24, 2000 after an extended presence of nearly two decades that began with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) invasion of Lebanon in June 1982. Military involvement between Israel and Lebanese factions had begun several years earlier and the Litani Campaign occurred in 1978, but the invasion of 1982 launched the war that was designed to protect the northern settlements from Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) attacks.

The IDF invasion and entry into Beirut attained the primary goal of the military operation, the expulsion of the PLO and its leader, Yasir Arafat, from Lebanon. This accomplishment notwithstanding, Israel became embroiled much longer and more deeply, both militarily and politically, than it had originally anticipated. Two and a half years after the invasion, on January 14, 1985, the Israeli government voted 16-6 in favor of a withdrawal within a few months, but even then the decision aroused a political storm. A few days earlier, Yitzhak Shamir, vice premier in the national unity government, had declared the IDF would not withdraw from Lebanon without security guarantees, even should those arrangements take years.<sup>1</sup> Shamir dismissed the Israeli security establishment's plan to withdraw from Lebanon as "surrender." Prime Minister Shimon Peres, however, announced "this would be the IDF's final winter in Lebanon, and I hope for peace in the Galilee."<sup>2</sup>

The government's decision, with its reference to "establishing an area in southern Lebanon where local IDF-backed forces could operate," included what later became clear was an opening for a renewed or sustained military presence in Lebanon. Moreover, political differences eventually gave way to a military-oriented conception, according to which a unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon was virtually a guarantee for intensive terrorist activity against Israel from within Lebanon. Thus, the Israeli army deployed and remained in South Lebanon in its self-proclaimed "security zone" in order to protect Israel's northern front from a new enemy, the Shiite organization Hizbollah, and by the time the issue of a unilateral withdrawal came to the fore at the end of the 1990s, it had become an idea to be discussed in military terms, not political ones.

Hizbollah, ideologically spawned by the Islamic revolution that swept through Iran in 1979, was established in 1982 in response to the invasion. The emergence of the formidable Shiite dimension to the anti-Israel military activity from Lebanon was,

according to then Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, “one of the surprises of the Peace for the Galilee War. It was as if the Shiite genie was released from the bottle, in a way that no one had foreseen. The most neglected ethnic group in Lebanon suddenly seized the opportunity to battle for its role within the Lebanese society by uniting Shiite interests with terrorism against the IDF.”<sup>3</sup>

When in 2000 Israel withdrew unilaterally from the security zone, Hizbollah, and not the Lebanese Army, positioned its fighters and weapons along the border, mounted observation posts, and engaged in “ongoing security” activity on the northern side of the fence. Hizbollah’s strengthening and its quasi-autonomous status in South Lebanon following the Israeli withdrawal, and the refusal of Damascus and Beirut to deploy the Lebanese Army along the border, catapulted the organization into the role of a key player, perhaps even a pivotal one, in the preservation of the tense stability on the border.

There are those in Israel who claim that the Hizbollah phenomenon – an organization that wields tremendous influence without the concomitant responsibility and limitations of checks and balances characteristic of a sovereign state – is *sui generis*. This image is reinforced when the organization is perceived as an instrument of Iranian and Syrian interests. Therefore, because of the view of Hizbollah as a pawn in the hands of international players whose interests do not always mesh, internal Lebanese affairs receive scant attention in traditional analyses of Hizbollah administration and decision-making. Yet in fact, the pressuring exigencies, parameters, and red lines that the Lebanese government imposes on Hizbollah are no less important than the inspiration and backing Hizbollah leaders obtain from Iranian figures who urge them to persist in the armed struggle against Israel.

Although before the IDF withdrawal Hizbollah already boasted an impressive arsenal, since the withdrawal, it has become equipped with thousands of Katyusha and long-range rockets, which has heightened the concern in Israel over the organization’s intentions. Because Hizbollah possesses the technical means to ignite the northern border with its enormous firepower potential, the tendency exists to consider Hizbollah as a perpetual threat to Israeli security. Indeed, the most common image of Hizbollah in Israel is an organization in anticipation of the opportunity to unleash its strategic capabilities. Thus, without an examination of whether this image is accurate or exaggerated, Hizbollah has been transformed into a key deterrent factor, a regional player whose response to regional developments must be taken into account by Israel. As a result, Lebanon’s position vis-à-vis Israel necessarily altered almost instantly, assuming a much more formidable and regionally important presence than before.

Given its enhanced image, it is thus no accident that Hizbollah earned a large share of the credit for the inauguration of the Wazzani River water pumping project in October 2002, although it was actually the rival Shiite movement in South Lebanon, Amal, that promoted the initiative. Israel's acknowledgement of Hizbollah's power in Lebanon essentially gave Hizbollah the opportunity to become an integral player in the affair. Were it not for Hizbollah's deterrent strength, the organization's leaders contended convincingly, the project would have been impossible to complete.

The Israeli-Palestinian violence that erupted at the end of September 2000 is without a doubt a significant factor in Hizbollah's power buildup against Israel. Ideological motives aside and from a practical point of view, Hizbollah extends assistance to the armed Palestinian struggle because this might boost its own status as well as help Lebanon. A weakened and troubled Israel, in the eyes of Hizbollah and Syria, means a less dangerous Israel. This is why Hizbollah Secretary-General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah declared in late November 2002 that even without taking the Islamic, moral, humanitarian, and pan-Arab motives into consideration, the intifada serves Lebanon's national interest. Therefore, reasoned Nasrallah, aid to the Palestinian struggle must continue. Another senior figure, Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, stated in early January 2003 that "by supporting the Palestinians we support ourselves here in Lebanon, since it is a question of the same enemy."<sup>4</sup>

The Middle East balance of tensions and hostilities since the outbreak of the current Israeli-Palestinian confrontation has contributed greatly to transforming Hizbollah into a stronger force than its actual weight implies. Consequently, conflict termination or even a lull in the Israeli-Palestinian arena would present Hizbollah with a reality it is unaccustomed to and certainly averse to. At the same time, it is unclear to what degree this scenario would in fact detract from the organization's local and regional status. Even if calm is restored to the Palestinian arena, Hizbollah would remain a dangerous enemy that if attacked could well retaliate against Israel.

In the months preceding the pullout, Israeli intelligence estimates generally focused on the dangers of unilateral withdrawal. The IDF's intelligence branch predicted that in the absence of a political arrangement, the withdrawal would lead to a significant renewal of attacks against Israel, and following the inevitable Israeli response, a wider confrontation on the border was likely to develop with Syrian involvement. Yet thus far, wise and cautious conflict management by all parties in the northern arena – Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Hizbollah, and even Iran – has prevented the "far reaching" consequences that senior Israeli figures, including the head of the intelligence branch's Research Division, Brig. Gen. Amos Gilad, and IDF Chief-of-Staff Shaul Mofaz warned of prior to the withdrawal.

The main objective of the following study, therefore, is to depict the operational limitations, imperatives, and red lines Hizbollah faces that have allowed the Israeli-Lebanese border to appear very different since May 2000 from Israel's pre-withdrawal assessments and apprehensions. This was the same set of estimates and fears that long before had crystallized into working guidelines, effectively delaying Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon for many years. The work presented here surveys the background to the IDF withdrawal from South Lebanon, and the regional and internal Lebanese developments that have influenced Hizbollah's modus operandi. Significantly, the attempt to understand the inner motives of Hizbollah decision-makers has proven a difficult challenge to many analysts in Israel and the West. The task is further complicated by the large number of inaccessible "dead spots" in all aspects of the organization's relations with the regional power players that influence its operations – factors that have undoubtedly contributed to the reality on the northern border that has not coincided with Israel's earlier assessments.

A second goal of the study is to identify the parameters Hizbollah uses in assessing whether to unleash newer, harsher capabilities against Israel. The use of these capabilities is one of the main triggers that could cause the situation in the north to deteriorate. My contention is that Hizbollah operates while taking full advantage of windows of opportunity. Contrary to the Israeli intelligence assessments of 2002, for example, that Hizbollah was setting Israel up for a "strategic ambush" that would open the northern front,<sup>5</sup> I argue that the organization's activity, within the windows of opportunity framework, is designed to reduce the danger of a massive Israeli response against Lebanon as much as possible, since it would be detrimental to Hizbollah and other parties aligned against Israel. Thus, until now, the organization has been unwilling (and politically incapable) of realizing its strategic capability. In general, the conditions in South Lebanon in the last three years since Israel's withdrawal may be described as containment and restraint, while Israel's perception of the organization as a loose cannon strengthens Hizbollah's deterrent image vis-à-vis Israel.

According to Israeli accounts at the end of 2003, Hizbollah's arsenal contains at least eleven thousand Katyusha and long-range rockets,<sup>6</sup> weapons whose use could easily spark a massive Israeli retaliation against Lebanon. Yet the organization is not deterred by the various claims, regardless of their credibility, concerning its arsenal. On the contrary, it prefers to leave Israel guessing at its capabilities, and has no interest in assuaging its neighbor's anxieties. Similarly, even as the American war in Iraq drew near and focused on the Iraqi regime's non-conventional capabilities, Hizbollah only belatedly denied reports of its own chemical weapons.<sup>7</sup>

Hizbollah's strategic weaponry detailed below is "marketed" in the domestic Lebanese arena as a force designed to protect Lebanon and enable economic growth by safeguarding the deterrence balance with Israel. This claim became of great significance once Hizbollah renewed its activity against Israel with the kidnapping of three IDF soldiers on October 7, 2000, and found itself in an ongoing and often public struggle with Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, who, through his insistence on repair of the economy and reconstruction of the tourist industry, is considered the champion of Lebanon's potential rehabilitation.

Since May 2000 senior Hizbollah figures have frequently declared that the balance of fear and deterrence it created vis-à-vis Israel has enabled a Lebanese recovery. From one perspective, this description is problematic for the organization: if Lebanon is crippled by an Israeli response following a Hizbollah operation, then the accusing finger would very likely be pointed at the organization. For this reason, the organization is careful to limit its declared activity to "the realm of deep legitimacy."<sup>8</sup> This does not imply, however, that the potential dangers and threats to Israel from Hizbollah have been reduced. One of the primary conclusions from the pattern of Hizbollah activity – at least since the collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process – is that the organization has gained a very respectable amount of clout in the Middle East's current volatile condition.

In the past the organization was capable and willing to obstruct political processes between Israel and its neighbors. A political settlement between Israel and the Arab states, especially with Syria and Lebanon, would present the organization with an unprecedented challenge, and in the current state of affairs Hizbollah's obstructionist capability has strengthened.<sup>9</sup> In the shadow of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Middle East reality can be compared to a parched field where a single spark is sufficient to ignite a conflagration. Israel's unremitting worry since the outbreak of violence with the Palestinians has been that Hizbollah might furnish the spark.

The organization's degree of willingness to use its operational capabilities to foil political settlements will apparently remain an open question, even though it seems likely that it would not sit by quietly while a peace agreement was being hammered out or a settlement being signed that would end or even only mitigate the violence in the Palestinian arena. While Hizbollah will have to use its strength cautiously and within well-defined boundaries, the experience of recent years has shown that even a solitary attack can have an influence on decision-makers. In the meantime Hizbollah has not ceased its activities nor has it been dissuaded from assisting the Palestinian struggle. On the contrary, it is proud of the aid it extends to the Palestinians in the territories in their struggle against Israel.

It is difficult to predict Hizbollah's behavior in the event of a renewal of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations and the degree to which it might seek to derail the process. This open question stems from relatively recent changes to fundamental parameters that had influenced the region's affairs for many years. In the past (most recently in February 2000) Hizbollah leadership explicitly stated that after a three-way political settlement was signed between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon, the organization would devote its energy to political life in Lebanon, while struggling against every attempt at normalization with Israel. But much has changed since then: Hafez al-Assad, who dominated Syria for three decades, died and bequeathed the government to his son Bashar, who has shown himself to be a declared supporter of Hizbollah and is perhaps even manipulated by it. Hizbollah, too, gained considerable pan-Arab acclaim<sup>10</sup> for bringing about the IDF withdrawal, and was seen as the first agent in history that succeeded in ousting Israel by force from occupied Arab land. The organization continued to exert its influence in an intra-Arab framework, repeatedly criticizing Arab rulers for their "helplessness" in the struggle against Israel. In other words, if the organization tried to obstruct the renewal of Israeli-Syrian negotiations in December 1999 on the eve of a meeting between Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara by reverting to suicide attacks against the IDF for the first time in several years, then in the future the organization might display much greater audacity.

Thus, Hizbollah has not disappeared from the region since Israel's pullback from South Lebanon. It appears that in the foreseeable future it will remain a player that sporadically clashes with Israel. In the meantime Israelis hear frequent reports of the organization's activity in the Shab'a Farms sector on the slopes of Mt. Dov. Hizbollah's name has also increasingly cropped up in connection with anti-aircraft fire on Israeli Air Force (IAF) planes along the northern border.

This research attempts to shed light on the variety of incidents of the last several years involving Hizbollah and assign them to a precise, comprehensive, and informative context. The following chapters will deal with the manner in which Hizbollah presents its role and operations both to the Lebanese people and to its own rank and file. Familiarization with the main players in the arena and their interaction forms an important layer for comprehending the general system in which the organization operates. Therefore, the main elements of power that comprise Hizbollah's "working environment" and whose interests the organization has to consider will also be described. An understanding of the exigencies and red lines that Hizbollah is subject to may explain why Israelis on the northern border have been enjoying a greater degree of quiet since May 2000 than they had for many years,

though still exposed to a potentially grave threat. The study will illustrate the organization's patterns of operation and the new "rules of the game" that have dominated along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Since the Israeli withdrawal, Hizbollah has proceeded with measured steps, while rules of engagement have developed on both sides of the border that can aid in stabilizing security conditions. In the event of a flagrant violation, however, the opposite could also transpire.





## Chapter 1

### **Historical Background of Hizbollah, “The Party of God”**

Approximately one month after the September 11 al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in Washington and New York, United States president George W. Bush published a list of the twenty-two people most wanted by the American government for terror activity against American targets. Evident immediately was that the United States was far from accepting the statute of limitations in deadly attacks that claimed the lives of hundreds of American soldiers and civilians in Beirut in the early 1980s. Heading the list was Osama Bin Laden, the founder and leader of the al-Qaeda organization, but also appearing were the names of three Lebanese: Imad Mughniyah, Hasan Izz al-Din, and Ali Atwa. According to published FBI files, the three were officially accused of hijacking a TWA passenger plane on June 14, 1985, which resulted in an attack on passengers and crew and the murder of one American citizen.

Mughniyah, identified as the leader of the Islamic Jihad<sup>1</sup> – the group responsible for Hizbollah activity outside of Lebanon – first surfaced in the 1980s in connection with showcase attacks against the American embassy and the multinational forces building in Beirut in 1983, in which 241 American marines and fifty-eight French soldiers were killed, and in connection with his central involvement in the kidnappings of American and other Western citizens in Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> When his name appeared in 2001, the heads of Hizbollah had the impression that the American administration was opening an “old file” – as the affair was termed in the Lebanese media. Various analyses of American intentions were published in the Beirut press.

Already in November 1994 Hizbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah publicly condemned the plans of Lebanese legal authorities to reopen an investigation and pursue those responsible for the blast that leveled the multinational forces building more than a decade earlier.<sup>3</sup> Nasrallah warned of the consequences of such a move, which he termed “ridiculous.” By November 2001, however, he realized the need to issue an official denial of the charge that his organization harbored a foreign security

unit to initiate global Hizbollah activity. In a speech delivered in Beirut at the end of the Ramadan fast, Nasrallah stated that the accusation of Hizbollah involvement in international terror was “scandalous and void of any basis” and that “Hizbollah is a resistance movement founded as a Lebanese response to the Zionist occupation.”<sup>4</sup> Crucial here is that this reaction reflects Hizbollah’s self-image and self-presentation as an organization that has evolved a great deal since the people identified with and linked to it – such as Mughniyah – endowed Hizbollah with a violent, revolutionary profile, which it has been laboring to shake off in recent years.<sup>5</sup>

All of Lebanon has undergone major changes since the end of the civil war that ravaged the country (1975-1989).<sup>6</sup> Thus, Hizbollah was not the only party seriously concerned over the review of the “old file.” Political sources in Beirut were taken aback at the United States decision to open “ancient notebooks in order to settle old accounts” with Lebanon.<sup>7</sup> Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, who quickly denied Mughniyah’s presence in the country, emphatically stated that Lebanon would not be held responsible for attacks and kidnappings that went on during the civil war: “First of all, for a long period Lebanon itself was a kidnapped state, a state that had no control over its own affairs – it is impossible to demand accountability from it.”<sup>8</sup> In late January 2002, even Sheikh Subhi Tufayli, who served as Hizbollah’s first secretary-general and subsequently broke from its ranks yet is still considered the leader of Hizbollah’s radical-dogmatic line, hastened to deny any connection with the manifesto circulating then in the Lebanon Valley criticizing the organization’s line of activity and calling on unity in the ranks around “the brother, the jihad warrior, the hero, Haj Imad Mughniyah.” Publicly, Mughniyah was a liability, and while he remained active behind the scenes, the speed with which various elements in Lebanon repudiated his “services,” even if only for appearance’s sake,<sup>9</sup> indicates the embarrassment felt in Hizbollah and Lebanon about confronting the stigma of its violent past.

A critical juncture in the history of Hizbollah as well as a turning point for Lebanon as a whole came in October 1989 with the signing of the Ta’if agreement that ended the Lebanese Civil War. As an agreement of national reconciliation, its central feature was the dissolution of all militias operating in the country; at the same time, it also contained a program of military reconstruction. In the end Hizbollah was not disarmed, but it was agreed that the organization’s fighters would move south and redeploy on the border with Israel. However, at this stage Hizbollah was still occupied in another arena of struggle, namely, against its main Shi’ite rival, the Amal movement. Close to the end of the civil war, Amal and Hizbollah were headed on a collision course, with violent clashes that included fatalities erupting in Beirut and Iqlim al-Tufah. Increased involvement by Iran and Syria eventually resulted in a ceasefire

imposed on the two competing organizations. The agreement was reached in late October 1990, was signed in Damascus on November 5, 1990, and took effect five days later. It determined that the two organizations would assist the Lebanese army in its deployment in the south of the country “according to the development of its ability to maintain law and order.” Section Two of the agreement stated that in the event of disputes between the two organizations, “both sides must submit to the interpretation proposed by the Syrian and Iranian representatives.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, less than two years after Hizbollah’s secretary-general Tufayli had declared in January 1989 that his people would defend themselves against Amal “to the last drop of blood,” the organization turned the brunt of its focus to the struggle against the IDF and South Lebanese Army (SLA) stationed in the security zone since 1985. Furthermore, with the disbanding of the other militias, Hizbollah began to enjoy almost complete exclusivity in raising the banner of “resistance” against Israel. Significantly, though, even today the Lebanese and Arab press includes an article every few weeks about scuffles, brawls, and sometimes even bloodier clashes between Amal and Hizbollah supporters. This is an ongoing reminder that Hizbollah will perforce have to engage in a persistent political struggle for the Shiite voter.

In recent years, the majority of researchers and commentators studying Hizbollah’s trend to join the “establishment” regard it as the organization’s “Lebanonization.” This term implies that the organization was not originally a Lebanese creation, rather a foreign one, perhaps Iranian. Nasrallah and other senior Hizbollah officials, however, go out of their way to stress that their organization’s founding was inherently “a Lebanese response.” Nasrallah totally rejects the term “Lebanonization,” common among scholars, and prefers the word “opening-up” (*infitah*) to describe the organizational trend.

A symbolic but prominent milestone in this process of opening up – and one that gained much attention in Lebanon and the international community – was Hizbollah’s secretary-general’s acceptance on October 18, 2002 of the invitation to the opening ceremony of the Beirut summit of French-speaking states. This was the first time that Nasrallah attended an important international event that was not a political meeting or a symposium devoted to the conflict with Israel. One of the reasons that Lebanese president Emile Lahud was so insistent on inviting Nasrallah to the international convention was his desire to demonstrate Lebanon’s official view that Hizbollah is not a terrorist group, but a legitimate national organization with a political and social agenda.<sup>11</sup> The Lebanese media spotlighted Nasrallah’s extraordinary meeting and handshake with the leader of the Christian Maronite community in Lebanon, Patriarch Nasrallah Butrus Sfeir,<sup>12</sup> particularly notable since Sfeir was the most prominent public

figure to demand the ouster of the Syrian forces from Lebanon and deployment of the Lebanese army in the south.

Nasrallah's presence at the opening session of the summit reawakened the debate in Lebanon over Hizbollah's orientation and evolution. At the end of October 2002, word surfaced in Lebanon that the Hizbollah leadership was working on the final touches of the organization's new political platform, its first since February 1985. Deputy Secretary-General Na'im Qasim explained that "many things have happened . . . [between] 1985 and today. Our basic principles remain the same since they are the heart of our movement, but several other positions have changed because of the circumstances developing around us." Qasim stated that the new platform would reflect Hizbollah's moderate attitude toward the Lebanese Forces Party in Lebanon, toward the West in general, and toward France in particular. "France's position toward us has changed, so we must change ours," Qasim emphasized. Regarding Israel, he noted that, "Since many positions have changed, we must be flexible to change ours too. However, opposition to Israel is the core of our faith, and this will never change."<sup>13</sup>

In her book *Hizb'ullah: Politics and Religion*,<sup>14</sup> the Lebanese scholar Amal Saad-Ghorayeb wrote that the "opening-up" or "Lebanonization" of Hizbollah stemmed from its realization that its commitment to establishing an Islamic republic in Lebanon was "unrealistic." According to Saad-Ghorayeb, the first expression of Hizbollah's flexibility was its decision to take part in parliamentary elections in 1992, a decision reached only after intense, fiery, internal debate that lasted several months. The election results gave Hizbollah twelve out of 128 seats in parliament (eight Hizbollah representatives and four delegates who joined its parliamentary faction).

In the 1996 parliamentary elections the organization suffered a slight setback. As "The Faction of Loyalty to the Resistance" (*Kutlah al-Wafaa' lil Muqawamah*), it received ten seats (seven Hizbollah and three delegates who later joined it). In the elections held after Israel's withdrawal in the autumn of 2000, the Faction regained its parliamentary strength and won twelve mandates (nine from Hizbollah, and three from other parties). These representatives serve as Hizbollah's voice in parliament on a variety of issues, and some are also members of parliamentary committees.<sup>15</sup> Other Hizbollah representatives sit on the directorates of government companies. In other words, the organization's revolutionary fervor and ideological devotion often clash with the process of establishing political legitimacy and compel Hizbollah to make ideological compromises so it can adapt to the new reality and survive in it. This does not, however, imply in any way that Hizbollah is going through an identity crisis. The organization sees itself as entirely Lebanese, and its leaders are careful to express themselves publicly on domestic socio-economic issues, such as support for

the working class and the struggle against corruption and unemployment.

On a more symbolic level of the “Lebanonization” process, Hizbollah made a minor though significant change to the organizational flag, the yellow background on which are emblazoned the organization’s name, a rifle, the Quran, an outline of the globe, and above the rifle the slogan, taken from the Quran, “Hizbollah are the victors.” At a certain stage, however, the writing at the bottom of the flag was changed from “the Islamic Revolution in Lebanon” – a slogan reflecting Hizbollah’s early platform – to “the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon.” When questioned about this, Nasrallah replied, “We told our brothers to use both expressions, but the second one [the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon – *al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyah fi Lubnan*] was the one adopted. I believe that the second expression is more precise since Hizbollah began its path as a resistance [movement], continued on this path, and has remained as such. It best expresses Hizbollah and the nature of its activity.”<sup>16</sup>

The change was not merely in the wording on the bottom of the flag; it also implied an increasingly apparent metamorphosis in the organization at the declaratory level and in the practical sphere. Participation in national elections was one aspect of the transformation. Others included Nasrallah’s statements that the organization has no goal of establishing an Islamic republic in Lebanon, recognizes the diverse historical and religious backgrounds of the Lebanese people, and is aware of the majority’s antagonism toward an Islamic republic.<sup>17</sup> Another indication of Hizbollah’s attempt to market itself to a wider Lebanese public can be observed in Nasrallah’s announcement of late 1997 regarding the establishment of the “Lebanese Resistance Battalions,”<sup>18</sup> an initiative designed to integrate fighters from as wide-ranging an ethnic background as possible. In reality the battalions’ inclusion in the armed struggle against Israel was almost negligible, but its importance lies in the fact that Hizbollah initiated it. During the same period the groundwork was also prepared for one of the defining events in Hizbollah history: the violent confrontation in late 1998 between the movement’s mainstream and the faction headed by the former secretary-general, Tufayli. Tufayli was finally ousted from Hizbollah and became a persecuted figure whose activities have been banned by the authorities.

In the months prior to the clash, Tufayli had increasingly criticized both Hizbollah and the Lebanese government for the country’s deplorable economic situation. For a long time he threatened to incite a civil revolt that he termed “the Hunger Revolution.” At one point he advised residents in the Baalbek region to stop paying state taxes, claiming that he and his supporters would be forced “to raise the level of civil insurrection . . . [because of] government steps that include tax collection, the continuous acquisition of loans, the establishment of entertainment facilities and dance

halls, [as well as] robbing the treasury and starving the destitute.”<sup>19</sup> This type of rhetoric is no longer heard from Hizbollah, which now invites government representatives to its public events and is intent on presenting itself as an integral part of the system.

Nasrallah and Hizbollah failed to divert Tufayli from his agenda, which included threats to block government ministers from entering Baalbek and “trashing the rulers’ palaces and throwing the debris into the sea.”<sup>20</sup> In a meeting with Hizbollah leaders, Tufayli was warned that Hizbollah “would not return to the state of isolation since the party is now more open [more involved in the political system] with all other parties and its political platform is clear to everyone.”<sup>21</sup> In the face of Tufayli’s relentless criticism, however, Hizbollah eventually announced his banishment from its ranks.

Tufayli quickly convened a press conference (January 25, 1998) in his hometown of Brital in the Lebanon Valley, where he accused Hizbollah of instigating moves that were tantamount to “a split from Islam.” Speaking on Hizbollah’s decision to take part in the 1992 parliamentary elections, Tufayli stated: “It hurt me greatly that there were those who turned away from Islam.” On the same occasion he derided Hizbollah’s acquiescing to President Elias al-Harawi’s remaining in office, charging that it violated the Quran and that Hizbollah “has become one of the central pillars in the corrupt Lebanese system.” Finally, Tufayli tried persuading Iran to intervene “in order to set things right.”<sup>22</sup>

Iran, however, did not rally to Tufayli’s cause to amend Hizbollah’s ways; instead, it moved against the former secretary-general. The explosion between the quarreling sides occurred on January 30, 1998, when the Lebanese army arrived in force and with the political backing of Syria and Iran.<sup>23</sup> Lebanese army units discovered in Tufayli’s headquarters large amounts of weapons, shells, explosives, and ammunition. The army’s public relations department made certain to post photographs of Tufayli’s destroyed radio station in the town of Duras. Since then, although he still retains a community of supporters, Tufayli’s voice has been heard only on rare occasions. In April 2001, for example, two rallies were held in Baalbek as the Ashuraa’ events approached – one was sponsored by Hizbollah and the other by Tufayli faithful. At the end of December 2001, Tufayli was sighted in the company of his followers as Jerusalem Day neared. In response, the Lebanese authorities announced that Tufayli was watched by national security agents and would be apprehended and brought to trial as soon as possible. In October 2002 another report surfaced that Tufayli and his supporters had decided to change the movement’s name from “the Hunger Revolution” to “Sheikh Subhi Tufayli’s Supporters,” a sign that the breakaway group was trying to soften its image. Nonetheless, in a series of interviews and public appearances in September 2003, Tufayli resumed his attack on Hizbollah and called

for renewed military activity against Israel: “Where is the resistance? [Former SLA commander Antoine] Lahd is gone, and they [Hizbollah] took his place and became a border patrol. Every few months [they shoot] one bullet.”<sup>24</sup> Accusing Hizbollah of recognizing the “Zionist entity” and restraining anti-Israel activity, Tufayli declared, “I call on my Hizbollah brothers to rise in rebellion, and to refuse orders that call on them to serve as merely a border guard.”<sup>25</sup>

This parting of ways, which included Tufayli’s final ouster from the organization that he had headed, offers an opportunity to examine the long road that Hizbollah has traveled from the time of its founding and its more recent decision to choose pragmatic integration into the Lebanese system over pure ideology. Today it no longer rejects the Lebanese government’s legitimacy nor even considers replacing it with an alternative regime. On the contrary, Hizbollah is careful to show its respect of the will of the majority in the country. As for ties between Hizbollah and Tufayli since his ouster, according to Nasrallah, they have occurred in recent years only when necessary, and only through a third party acting as intermediary.<sup>26</sup> Nasrallah also refused to respond publicly to Tufayli’s derision that Hizbollah had become a border guard, yet his associates were quoted as saying that igniting the southern border “does not serve the interests of Lebanon, Palestine, or the resistance.”<sup>27</sup>

Against this background, how is the organization’s current ideology defined? Its first political, ideological platform was published on February 16, 1985 as a forty-eight page “proclamation” that was delivered in Beirut under the title “The Open Letter Addressed by Hizbollah to the Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World.” The document states that one of Hizbollah’s goals is to establish an Islamic republic in Lebanon, yet emphasizing that “despite Hizbollah’s obligation to Islam, it would not force it on Lebanon.”<sup>28</sup> The wording of the platform, whose cover bears the portrait of Iran’s Islamic revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhallah Khomeini, underscores the organization’s Islamic dimension and its link to Iran. “We, the sons of Hizbollah’s nation, whose vanguard God has given victory in Iran and which has established the nucleus of the world’s central Islamic state, abide by the orders of a single wise and just command currently embodied in the supreme Ayatollah Ruhallah al-Musavi Khomeini.” One of the main sections in the platform discusses the need to expel the Israelis, Americans, and French from Lebanese soil. The liberation of Jerusalem and annihilation of the State of Israel are also included among Hizbollah objectives.

Today Hizbollah views the original platform as outdated. True, the organization occasionally presents Secretary-General Nasrallah as the Lebanese representative of Iran’s spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamene’i.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, it has been clearly observed in recent years that under Nasrallah’s leadership, the organization has

invested much effort in casting for itself an unequivocally Lebanese image, discarding any suggestion that the organization caters to “foreign interests” – that is, to dictates emanating from Tehran or Damascus. Thus, Hizbollah is not solely an original Iranian “product,” but is also the foremost representative of Lebanon’s Shiite community, with connections dating back hundreds of years to Shiites in Iran and Iraq.

In one of his many interviews, Nasrallah was quick to point out with pride that in April 2002 the organization had kept up its military activity on Mt. Dov – its most serious escalation since Israel’s withdrawal – “even” after Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi announced in Beirut that Hizbollah should act with restraint.<sup>30</sup> In previous years too, for example in May 1998, Nasrallah rebuffed the Iranian minister who had implied that following the Israeli pullback Hizbollah’s role would be concluded, stressing that the senior Iranian’s statements reflected the opinion of his country, not that of Hizbollah.

Hizbollah obscured its intentions by refusing to declare its objective once Israel would terminate its occupation of South Lebanon. After the withdrawal, it continued to dissemble how it would react should Israel end its presence at Shab’a Farms. It only hinted that additional demands might be made in the future. As for its vision, Hizbollah continues to adhere to its original position of the State of Israel as an illegitimate, “cancerous entity” that must be expunged from the map and returned to its “legal” owners – that is, to the Palestinian people. Muhammad Fnaysh, for example, a Hizbollah representative in parliament, declared on July 13, 2001 that “our struggle with the Zionist enemy is not a border conflict between two countries, but a confrontation with an entity whose aim is [the destruction of] our survival and future.”<sup>31</sup> This is Hizbollah’s official position.

Behind such maximalist rhetoric, does Hizbollah truly believe the liquidation of Israel is an attainable goal? When asked about this, Secretary-General Nasrallah replied that if the Palestinians continued their present struggle, “neither Sharon nor one thousand generals like Sharon will be able to preserve this entity’s existence. I am counted among those who believe that the liberation of Palestine requires neither nuclear weapons nor a strategic balance.” To judge by the organization’s rhetoric, therefore, Hizbollah believes the destruction of Israel is a realizable goal. True, in the second part of his statement Nasrallah modified his words slightly, “You can tell me this is a dream. But I say that although there may be something of a dream here, there is also something of reality.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, since anti-Zionist ideology forms an integral part of Hizbollah dogma, it is doubtful whether the organization would surrender its vision of “Greater Palestine,” even if regional peace is attained and precludes fulfillment of the vision.



## Chapter 2

### **The Withdrawal: Advance Assessments vs. Actual Developments**

For years the possibility of a unilateral withdrawal from South Lebanon was divorced from Israel's agenda, and when it finally emerged, it was considered unrealistic. A significant "upgrade" in the quality and severity of Hizbollah operations against Israel began during the 1990s, and Israel's traditional position stipulated that an IDF pullout would have to be part of a comprehensive political settlement with Lebanon. The ongoing fear was that without a security zone, nothing would stand between the resistance organizations and Israel's northern settlements.

The concept of a unilateral withdrawal began to take shape in the late 1990s. Noteworthy events in this context were the collision of two helicopters in February 1997, when seventy-three IDF soldiers were killed on their way to positions in South Lebanon, and the naval commando operation in September 1997 during a raid on the town of Ansariya, which left eleven members of the elite unit dead. By January 1998 the idea of a withdrawal was gathering increased interest, relevancy, and support in the Israeli public, particularly after certain remarks made by then defense minister Yitzhak Mordechai.

In an interview published in the Arab weekly *al-Watan al-Arabi*, Mordechai declared for the first time that Israel was willing to implement the 1978 UN Security Council Resolution 425, which called for an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory.<sup>1</sup> Mordechai conditioned the pullout upon the prevention of terrorism, an end to the cycle of violence, the cessation of attacks against Israel from Lebanese soil, the establishment of neighborly relations on both sides of the border, and cooperation between the IDF and Lebanon in the war against terrorism. In effect, there was nothing fundamentally new in Mordechai's statement: he hinged the withdrawal on a set of conditions that Lebanon would have to fulfill. "This may seem a journalistic scoop for you," he told the interviewer, "but Israel has been willing to implement Security Council Resolution 425 not merely as of today or yesterday." Nonetheless, whether

he intended to or not, Mordechai set off a kind of media and diplomatic whirlwind both among Israel's neighbors and inside Israel. From this point on, although the idea of unilateral withdrawal hovered over the Israeli public agenda with varying degrees of intensity, it was never absent from it.

### ***Reactions in Lebanon and Syria to a Possible Israeli Withdrawal***

The reactions in Syria and Lebanon indicated that Mordechai's statements were perceived not just as a media or psychological gimmick, but rather as a serious diplomatic threat. Damascus feared that this was an Israeli attempt to damage the Syrian-Lebanese "unity of tracks" – the principle of joining their positions during negotiations with Israel so as to strengthen their bargaining power. When Syrian vice president Abd al-Halim Khaddam was questioned about Mordechai's statements, he replied, "The Israeli war minister Mordechai said that he agrees with this decision, but less than one hour later the Israeli prime minister's office announced that Israel would not withdraw unconditionally." Perhaps more important, however, were the political implications. According to Khaddam, "If Israel intends to introduce changes in order to reach separate agreements, it knows that such tricks will fail."<sup>2</sup>

Similar responses were heard in Lebanon, although the immediate reaction from Beirut was entirely different. The Lebanese government strongly hinted its readiness to deploy the Lebanese army in each area from which Israel would withdraw. The Lebanese foreign minister, Faris Boueiz, stated, "One thing is essential: Israel must carry out a full withdrawal from Lebanon's internationally recognized borders to allow the Lebanese state to assert its rule according to its own capabilities."<sup>3</sup> The chairman of the parliament and leader of the Amal movement, Nabih Berri, while accusing Israel of seeking a new ploy to disrupt the unity of the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, avowed that Lebanon would remain committed to a ceasefire agreement once Israel withdrew. He further stressed that "Resolution 425 speaks of Israel's unqualified and categorical withdrawal without any security measures other than the ceasefire agreement."<sup>4</sup> The head of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, summarized the situation, "The Lebanese army, in cooperation with international forces, is capable of providing for security needs within its borders."<sup>5</sup>

Support for this position could also be found in media reports. The Lebanese commentator Ibrahim al-Amin, for example, quoted official Lebanese sources who denied the Israeli report that Beirut had informed Washington that in the event of an Israeli unilateral pullout, the Lebanese army would not take up positions in South Lebanon. The same sources recalled that three Lebanese leaders – the president, prime

minister, and chairman of the parliament – had declared that the Lebanese army was capable of defending all of Lebanon’s security needs.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, after discussions and meetings to coordinate between the Damascus and Beirut responses, the Syrian vice president announced on January 27, 1998 that all of Israel’s attempts to upset the unity of tracks had failed.

### ***How Would Hizbollah Respond?***

Was it possible to predict Hizbollah’s response following the Israeli withdrawal? It is doubtful if even Hizbollah itself could have answered this question. In the meantime, its leaders issued a series of public statements. For example, a declaration by the Iranian minister of culture, Atallah Muhajarani, that Israel’s withdrawal would be considered the culmination of Hizbollah’s objectives prompted an angry reaction from the heads of the Shiite organization. Secretary-General Nasrallah responded to the Iranian minister, “From the outset we believed that Minister Muhajarani represented his government and had the right to say what he wanted . . . What a senior Iranian official says reflects his country’s opinion but is not binding upon Hizbollah. We express our views, they theirs.”<sup>7</sup>

Already at this point Hizbollah made sure to shroud its positions in ambiguous announcements. Such dissimulation continued not only until the day Israel withdrew from the security zone, in accordance with Prime Minister Barak’s campaign pledge to pull the IDF out by July 2000,<sup>8</sup> but to a considerable degree even after the withdrawal. Hizbollah’s objective was to heighten Israel’s fear of what to expect once it withdrew without a political settlement, a tactic that enhanced the organization’s deterrence. This intentional obfuscation also created a conjunction of Hizbollah and Syrian interests. The source of Syria’s concern over a unilateral pullback was clear: Damascus had feared that American support of Mordechai’s initiative would grant Binyamin Netanyahu’s government “the opportunity to evade a comprehensive peace settlement in the region” and remove from Syria the leverage provided by Hizbollah.<sup>9</sup> Thus, through their official statements and actions, Hizbollah and Syria sought to obstruct Israel from embarking upon a unilateral withdrawal. On May 20, 1999, in a development described by Israel as highly unusual, the IDF spotted ten tanks in a training camp affiliated with the Popular Front – General Command, under the leadership of Ahmad Jibril, an organization tied to Syria and Hizbollah. The tanks, Soviet T-55s, were destroyed by eleven missiles fired by Israeli warplanes at the training facility adjacent to the Lebanese-Syrian border.

On the eve of the Israeli withdrawal, Jibril, based in Damascus, described what could be expected following Israel's unilateral step if it was undertaken without a solution to the Palestinian refugee problem: "We have three hundred thousand Palestinian refugees in Lebanon ready to march south. Women and children will storm through the barbed wire . . . [and] there are other options – explosives, rifles, and more."<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the secretary-general of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine (IJP) movement, Ramadan Shalah, declared, "If circumstances change and developments such as a unilateral Israeli withdrawal occur, then the situation would be open to all possibilities."<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, however, and in view of developments on the northern front as of December 2003, it seems that such scare tactics were not grounded in reality, and the Palestinian organizations themselves probably overestimated their freedom of activity in Lebanon after an Israeli pullout. As will be shown in detail below, following the withdrawal, Jibril's organization was not only forbidden to move tanks in Israel's direction, but was also chastised by various elements in Lebanon, including Hizbollah, after two Popular Front members were killed by IDF fire in the Shab'a Farms sector during what appeared to be an operation against Israel.

There is no denying that Hizbollah's part in delaying Israel's withdrawal was significant, especially due to its successful heightening of Israel's fears by spreading rumors about potential responses. A number of declarations were made by Hizbollah members who predicted that after the Israeli withdrawal the organization's focus would lie primarily in political involvement, but senior figures announced that they had no intention of pacifying Israel, and the party line specifically reflected ambiguity. Nasrallah pointed out that Hizbollah's goal was not limited to the liberation of Lebanese territory, but also included a solution to the Palestinian issue. "We support the Palestinian issue, but is our support limited to the political sphere? At present we cannot answer that." Regarding cessation of Hizbollah activity after the Israeli pullout, Nasrallah emphasized that "the struggle might stop, or it might not. We are not going to show our cards."<sup>12</sup> Nasrallah's deputy, Na'im Qasim, explained that the Israeli withdrawal would be the first realization of "one of our goals."<sup>13</sup>

Although Hizbollah leaders refused to specify what they intended to do after the IDF pullback, the more that signs and assessments pointed to a political settlement between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon, the more openly they spoke of being forced to end the armed struggle. Syria's spokesmen stated publicly that Hizbollah would have to sheathe its weapons if a political settlement was reached. A similar declaration had already been made in June 1999 by the Syrian ambassador to Washington, Walid Mualim, about one month after Ehud Barak became Israel's prime minister. In an interview with the journal *Middle East Insight*, Mualim made it clear that "Hizbollah

is the national resistance movement of Syria and Lebanon. Hizbollah's [leadership] understands that every agreement accepted by Syria, Israel, and Lebanon will obligate it as well."<sup>14</sup>

At the end of December 1999, then US president Bill Clinton announced the approach of renewed negotiations between Israel and Syria. From that point on until the collapse of the negotiations, highlighted by the fruitless summit in Geneva between Clinton and Hafez al-Assad in March 2000, Hizbollah seems to have been preparing itself for Walid Mualim's forecast. The same journal that published the Syrian ambassador's statements published an interview with Nasrallah in February 2000, who declared that after Israel's pullback "Hizbollah would relocate in the south, but not have any form of security force, since it is a resistance movement whose goal is the liberation of land and not an alternative to the government." South Lebanon, explained Nasrallah, "will be under the sovereignty of the Lebanese government."

In another interview<sup>15</sup> Nasrallah described the future of his organization in the event of a withdrawal: "As for Israel, in our opinion and planning it will remain an illegal entity, illegitimate, temporary, and cancerous, that is impossible to recognize. Therefore we will join with other elements opposed to normalization with this entity since the struggle against normalization will hinder Israel's transformation into a regional superpower." According to Nasrallah, "we are aware of the international efforts to obtain a settlement in the region, and we devise our policy and tactics while taking into account the possibility of such an arrangement. We are convinced that the signing of a peace agreement [*taswiyah silmiyah*] will be a victory for the resistance and the rationale of resistance." Nasrallah summed up his speech by averring, "We will be more active in the political life [of the country]," but, he argued, the Palestinians should learn from Hizbollah's experience with Israel, since they can expect to suffer a disappointment in their negotiations for a permanent settlement. On another occasion Nasrallah spoke more explicitly about the link between his organization and the Palestinian organizations: "We will remain close to the Palestinian nation in order to extend to it all the aid we can."<sup>16</sup> Even at this stage, the Hizbollah leader was unwilling to concede the principle of dissimulation, and stated that he did not reject the possibility that his organization might return to some form of military activity against Israel: "The continuation or termination of armed activity by the party [i.e. Hizbollah] – will happen when the time comes."

The end to the Israeli presence in South Lebanon, however, occurred without any form of a political arrangement, which had the potential for lessening, at least somewhat, the relevancy of these statements, made under the assumption that the withdrawal would occur in the context of a comprehensive settlement.

### *Israeli Assessments*

The forecast in Israel on the eve of the pullback was dismal: in the months leading up to the withdrawal, when it was still uncertain whether the pullback would proceed with or without a political agreement, the Israeli media frequently reported grim intelligence evaluations of the consequences of a unilateral withdrawal. Six months before the withdrawal, IDF intelligence warned that a unilateral pullout was likely to lead to a military confrontation between Israel and Syria. According to the assessment, "Syria would not begin the war, but would do everything it could to heat up Lebanon and inflame the entire sector."<sup>17</sup> Thus, it was estimated that Syria would incite massive activity via various Lebanese proxies against IDF forces defending the Israeli side of the border.<sup>18</sup>

The assessment presented by senior intelligence officers to the Cabinet several months later was of similar severity, and as of early April 2000, the majority of senior staff officers were opposed to a unilateral pullout.<sup>19</sup> On April 27, 2000 the head of IDF Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Amos Malka, and the head of the Intelligence Research Division, Brig. Gen. Amos Gilad, presented their evaluation of a unilateral withdrawal to the government. Both officers sketched the high likelihood that terror attacks would continue after the pullout, because Iran and Syria were interested in the perpetuation of fighting and the preclusion of a quiet northern border.<sup>20</sup> According to this assessment, the main organization operating against Israel would be Hizbollah, operating directly or through the cover of Palestinian organizations and attacking IDF troops as well as Israeli civilians in northern Israel. Ten days before the withdrawal, Gilad warned that although "Hizbollah would not dare to attack the Galilee directly . . . it would attempt to carry out strikes by means of Palestinians under the old-new slogan of 'the liberation of Jerusalem.'" Gilad also noted that, "Israel will eventually be forced to react. If the terror is acute, we will have to find the genuine responsible party. The genuine responsible party in Lebanon is not the Lebanese government . . . [This situation] can also have far-reaching consequences for the Syrians."<sup>21</sup>

Commenting on these assessments issued at the time he was prime minister, Ehud Barak stated:

It is incumbent on Military Intelligence to envision worst case scenarios, and more than once it has had to answer the charge, "How could you not have seen what was so plainly visible?" Never will Intelligence be castigated for overlooking potential positive outcomes. . . . Given the need for prudence, Intelligence forecast a difficult unfolding of events, as if they

[Hizbollah] would continue non-stop: “They will shoot at us, at our towns, at Metulla, at the kibbutzim, and they will forge ahead until they reach Jerusalem.” At first it sounded as if we were crazy . . . until eventually more balanced assessments appeared, since once it was clear that I was going to order a withdrawal in any event, Intelligence had to assess the situation in terms much less black and white and much more complex.<sup>22</sup>

Col. (res.) Eran Lerman, who served as Gilad’s deputy in the Research Division, acknowledged that Intelligence tempered its bleak assessment as the withdrawal approached, once it took into greater account the “environmental system” in which Hizbollah was operating. According to Lerman, Intelligence originally felt that Syria and Hizbollah might “ignite the area from a variety of reasons. Already in October 1999 the Syrians began to create the Shab’a Farms dispute – i.e., fashioning reasons and legitimacy for post-withdrawal activity. They emphasized that issue along with the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.” At the same time, continued Lerman, towards the end of 1999, “we began to understand that Lebanon too is a factor, and by no means a non-entity. There is pressure for restraint from Lebanon . . . and by early 2000 we understood that if Israel’s actions earn regional and international legitimacy, there is a strong possibility of deterrence against Hizbollah.”<sup>23</sup>

Of significance here is the debate within Military Intelligence regarding a unilateral withdrawal. Most Intelligence assessments are based on evaluations of the Research Division, which enjoys autonomy in the intelligence assessments it formulates. In the event of differences between the head of the Research Division and the head of Military Intelligence, the latter is likely to issue a position signed “assessment of the head of Intelligence,” which is a clear demarcation of the difference in opinion. Malka was convinced that Gilad had erred in drawing a black and white picture, and felt justified in circulating the “Intelligence head’s evaluation” to relevant addresses, first of all to the prime minister and defense minister. On March 7, 2000, Malka circulated an eight page document with his signature.<sup>24</sup> A review of the document shows that Malka did not ignore the ample warning signs of a withdrawal without an agreement, but his assessment was less radical and more balanced than that of the Research Division. Critical to the assessment, however, is Malka’s assumption that the political echelon would accept the IDF demand that Israel maintain military outposts in Lebanon.

“The evaluation,” the Intelligence chief’s document began, “does not deal with the ‘day after’ but with the ‘period after’ and identifies evolving trends on the time axis for the coming months.” According to Malka, “the major hostile activity will be directed against IDF targets along the security fence, especially in areas considered

Lebanese territory, and will be used as the main pretext for continuation of the armed struggle. Also, remaining SLA members and residents in the security zone who are deemed Israeli collaborators will suffer from a series of carefully directed, violent operations.” The head of Intelligence believed that various power elements acting against Israel would try to prevent an all-out escalation:

The focal point of activity against the IDF would be governed by a policy of risk management. Aimed at maximizing gains and minimizing the expected damage, adversarial power elements will not choose to direct their activity against settlements and civilians because they realize this would generate a rapid escalation and extremely vicious cycle of confrontation. Such a scenario would shatter and devastate Lebanon and hasten the entry of external pressures likely to limit freedom of activity. Neither Syria, Iran, nor Hizbollah is interested in civilian destruction in Lebanon; therefore they will try to operate without supplying Israel with too many “pretexts” for escalating and damaging the Lebanese infrastructure. This does not mean they will cease attacking settlements or civilians. Certainly such situations may recur, but they will not be the main focus [of Hizbollah]. On the other hand, the first attack against civilians would be enough to alter the security reality, and especially the public awareness of the present degree of security in the Galilee.

Regarding Syria’s role in the new reality, Malka adopted an entirely different tone from that of the senior security official who predicted that Syria “would do all it could to heat up the Lebanese field.”<sup>25</sup> Although the Intelligence chief identified Syria’s motivation to encourage the perpetuation of the armed struggle on the northern border, he wrote the following:

On the one hand, Syria understands that “chaos” in Lebanon will seriously damage Syria’s strategic interests, such as its hegemony and presence in Lebanon, or [lead to] a separation of tracks. Therefore Syria’s basic motivation will be to create armed pressure points that will demonstrate to Israel that without a return to the political process on Syria’s terms, the Galilee will not remain quiet and unilateral withdrawal will prove a bad bargain. On the other hand, these pressure points are not designed to plunge the region into “chaos.”



In the document Malka cast doubt “on the ability to create a deterrent so strong that it would correspond with the new security reality, and I expect that an attempt to create such deterrence would entail confrontation, escalation, and loss of life in order to demonstrate that behind the idea of deterrence stands the determination to realize it.” Nevertheless, the head of Intelligence emphasized:

I see a situation of mutual deterrence on both sides of the border. The ability of this balance of deterrence to prevent all-out escalation depends mostly on the way each side views “the sufficient gain.” For example, if Israel perceives injury to IDF soldiers, when one soldier is killed every few weeks, as a pretext for aggressive attack, then there is no prospect for the balance of deterrence to work at limiting the confrontation. Similarly, if Hizbollah regards the activity of SLA elements against the Lebanese population as a pretext for attacking Israeli settlements, again no chance exists for limiting the confrontation.

In the years following the withdrawal, the modus operandi that Hizbollah adopted after the pullout was the one the Intelligence Research Division accurately predicted, but the number of attacks was far less than anticipated. The gap between prognosis and developments is demonstrated by the range of operations, both by Hizbollah and its proxies. The Shiite organization did not dare attack the Galilee directly, but it did dispatch a team of Palestinians in March 2002 to carry out a deadly attack near Kibbutz Matzuva. However, according to present data, this has been the only Palestinian squad that operated in the north with Hizbollah approval (or any approval, for that matter) since the pullout.

As Amos Gilad had predicted ten days before the withdrawal, Israel has had to strike twice at the “Syrian landlords” in Lebanon (destroying Syrian radar systems, in April and June 2001). Nonetheless, due to Syria’s recognition of its military inferiority and its reluctance to confront Israel face-to-face, the region did not deteriorate as a result of these actions. The senior Syrian figure who roused Bashar al-Assad from his sleep to inform him of the radar destruction in mid-April 2001 also urged him to display restraint over the attack – advice that was accepted. Syria’s recognition of its military inferiority vis-à-vis the IDF is nothing new, and therefore it was a responsible pre-withdrawal assessment that Damascus would measure its steps prudently after the pullout. As Malka forecast on the eve of Israel’s departure, to date Syria has sought to prevent “chaos” from erupting in the Lebanese arena.

## Israel-Lebanon Border



Source: Israel – Touring Map, Israel 1:250,000 Northern Sheet, Survey of Israel, 2001.



Shab'a Farms Area



+++++ "Blue Line" – Border between Israel and Lebanon, established by the United Nations in 2000

Asked whether there was anything that the heads of Military Intelligence could have done to reverse his decision to withdraw unilaterally from South Lebanon, Ehud Barak said: "No. [But] the reports could have, had there been clear and unequivocal information, rather than conflicting [intelligence] reports. I am referring here to reports that would pass vertically through the whole system whereby you immediately see that [the other side] has a substantial and calculated operation plan, and not just reports based on people's guesses."<sup>26</sup>

In contrast to Intelligence, other voices in Israel took a more conciliatory view of Hizbollah's future intentions. Within the political arena, a key advocate was Yossi Beilin, who in 1998 authored and distributed "A Guide to an Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon" to promote the idea. Dr. Avraham Sela of the Hebrew University, who was a supporter of the unilateral withdrawal, estimated in April 1999 that Syria would be unable to permit military activity against Israel from South Lebanon after a withdrawal, even without an agreement. "Strategic imperatives and egoistical interests limit Syria's ability to act against sovereign Israel after it has left South Lebanon. Theoretically Syria could again encourage Palestinian and Lebanese organizations to operate against Israel from inside Lebanon, but the chances of this are slim in light of Syria's advantages in stabilizing the Lebanese political and economic system."<sup>27</sup> Sela also observed that "Israel ignores the significance of the rehabilitation process for the Lebanese army, economy, and government institutions over the last eight years – a rehabilitation that is also a Syrian national interest of the highest priority. Viewing the confrontation with Hizbollah and Syria as a zero sum game fails to take into account their limited goal – the ouster of Israel from Lebanon; it also fails to identify Syria's commitment to Lebanon's continued stability and prosperity and Hizbollah's concern over the welfare and security of the Shiite population in the south."<sup>28</sup> As for the danger facing the SLA troops, Sela stated, "It is necessary to find a solution to the SLA problem, but we need not exaggerate the danger facing its people after the IDF pullout. Most of the soldiers in the force are Shiites and Druze who will enjoy the support of family members serving in the Lebanese army or Hizbollah. The local population is aware of the various levels of collaboration, and does not view them all with the same severity."<sup>29</sup>

Not long after Israel's withdrawal, Anat Kurz of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies suggested that Israel's withdrawal be seen as a first step in Hizbollah's process of moderation – a process that would result in emphasizing the organization's political and social dimensions.<sup>30</sup> Kurz claimed that continued Hizbollah activity without the support of the Lebanese public was likely to hurt the organization and relegate it to the sidelines. Similarly, the American scholar Professor Augustus Richard Norton,

who has devoted much of his research to the Shiites of Lebanon, contended already in 1998 that Hizbollah would be risking a significant loss of support if, after Israel's pullout, it provoked Israel into attacking Lebanese targets.<sup>31</sup> Regarding Hizbollah and Syrian exigencies in case of a unilateral Israeli withdrawal, Norton wrote:

Should Israel withdraw independent of resuming opening negotiations with Syria, the Syrians will find themselves confronting a very disadvantageous chess game. Hizballah's social base will simply not support attacks into Israel, given the likely cost of retribution. There is no appetite for taking the fight to Israel. Syria (or any other party for that matter) could spark episodic attacks, but this is not a free option. Israeli retaliation is not a trivial possibility and Damascus would forfeit the legitimacy and international support it badly needs to face the gargantuan domestic economic challenges that lie ahead.<sup>32</sup>

Other evaluations corresponded to this moderate tenor.

Was the Israeli intelligence evaluation wrong? Maj. Gen. (res.) Uzi Dayan, who became head of the National Security Council following his position as IDF Deputy Chief of Staff, believes otherwise: "The intelligence blueprint on the eve of the withdrawal was by no means an impossible scenario. It included an analysis of all the factors, but a more apocalyptic scenario appeared in the foreground. I am not convinced that there was an intelligence miscalculation about the likely scenarios after the pullout."<sup>33</sup> At the same time, Dayan felt that "a problem exists in our general perception of our enemies when they appear, in a manner of speaking, one-dimensional – as though they all have a general, neatly structured ideology, and speak in one voice."

In a similar vein, former UNIFIL spokesperson Timur Goksel insists that Israel's intelligence estimate on the withdrawal from South Lebanon did not materialize because of a basic lack of understanding of the local rules of the game:

Over the years it turned out that Israeli intelligence knew in effect where every Hizbollah member lived in South Lebanon, including his house number. But information is one thing and understanding all the aspects of the situation is an entirely different matter. Over the years everyone, except for a few people in Israel, realized that the organization had changed and in the majority of cases was its own decision-maker. True, Hizbollah's leaders listen attentively to responses from Iran and Syria, but they also proved time after time that they made their own decisions.<sup>34</sup>

In reality, since Israel's withdrawal Hizbollah has been willing to take measured steps at initiating sporadic military operations against Israel, but overall has acted in a much more level-headed and cautious fashion than many analysts in the security establishment had predicted. The organization has obviously been compelled to take into account the various sources of power and influence surrounding it in the Lebanese arena, as well as Lebanese public opinion.

### ***Hizbollah's Approach to the SLA***

When the IDF pulled out from South Lebanon, thousands of local villagers fled to Israel because of their fear of Hizbollah. Undoubtedly this fear stemmed from Hizbollah's radical-extremist image and its escalated struggle with the SLA on the eve of the withdrawal. Ten days before the pullout, Nasrallah responded to a proposal raised by the SLA commander, Antoine Lahd, that SLA fighters should remain in South Lebanon to administer political autonomy there. The Hizbollah leader declared, "The resistance will enter every agent's home and slaughter him in his bed."<sup>35</sup>

However, after the pullout Nasrallah revealed that he had said this within the context of psychological warfare: "Our brothers were shocked by what I had said, and feared that Hizbollah's image would be tainted. However my aim was to induce psychological confusion and panic in order to scatter Lahd's militia."<sup>36</sup> On the same occasion Nasrallah clarified that "we do not even consider revenge," and that efforts were underway to return property, stolen during the Israeli withdrawal, to its owners in the south. Nasrallah asserted that when his men first arrived in South Lebanon, they were bound by a "clear guideline": "We told them that bloodshed, destruction of homes, arson, attacking, and expelling individuals are actions that will cost us the victory. . . . From the outset, all brothers were informed [in the sense of ordered] that any [SLA] agent they encounter, important or not, or even if he is accused of slaughter, may not be the target of revenge. Field courts are forbidden. Such a person is to be arrested and transferred to the Lebanese justice authorities."<sup>37</sup>

A parallel may be drawn with the events that unfolded after the SLA withdrew from the Jazzin enclave in early June 1999. Authorities attempted to quell the residents' fear of Hizbollah revenge in advance of the withdrawal: "The security of the Jazzin region and its residents is threatened by the Israeli occupation and presence of SLA troops, and not the opposite," declared President of Lebanon Emile Lahud in a statement published in the Lebanese press on May 29, 1999. The prime minister, Salim al-Hus, promised that the inhabitants of Jazzin "had nothing to fear," and the Lebanese government would fulfill its obligations to the enclave once it was evacuated. On

June 5, two days after the completion of the withdrawal from the greater part of the Christian enclave, Lahud arrived as a symbol of calm and stability. After the pullout approximately two hundred SLA members from the enclave surrendered to Lebanese authorities and received relatively light prison sentences, and significantly, there were no reported acts of violence or revenge by Hizbollah against the enclave's inhabitants and the SLA troops.

This pattern recurred when Hizbollah made certain to announce from the outset that the IDF pullout from South Lebanon was a victory for all Lebanese, and not the triumph of one sector over another. Nasrallah reassured the public that his organization had no ambitions to transform Lebanon into a Shiite republic,<sup>38</sup> and shortly afterwards Hizbollah cooperated with the Christians in parliamentary elections in September 2000. Even if in part because of Syrian pressure, the organization agreed to join forces with the right-wing Christian leader Elie Hobayqah in the election district of Baabda-Alley. Hobayqah, who was killed in a car explosion at the beginning of 2002, collaborated with Israeli forces during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and was held accountable for the massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in September 1982. Hizbollah apparently thus agreed to compromise on its principles and ideology, and to cooperate with an individual with previous blatant connections with Israel. Indeed, in the same election campaign, in the district of Baalbek-Hirmil, Hizbollah was also forced to include on its list a veteran activist of the Christian Lebanese Forces Party.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Would the Palestinians Join the Fray?***

As far as is known, Israel's intelligence assessment that Hizbollah would dispatch Palestinian squads to attack Israel occurred only once since the withdrawal – on March 12, 2002, near Kibbutz Matzuva. According to details from the security establishment, Hizbollah coordinated the strike, supplying the two Palestinians with the ladder for scaling the security fence. The abandoned ladder was the only physical evidence that led to Hizbollah's involvement in the otherwise anonymous attack that lacked any signature, Lebanese or Hizbollah. It is no accident that no organization ever took responsibility for the attack or requested the bodies of the two terrorists who were subsequently killed.

Warnings of a recurrence of this type of attack persisted. In the summer of 2002, for example, Israeli intelligence received a credible warning for an impending attack. Likewise in November a red alert was received, although in both cases nothing materialized. In addition, Israel has information pointing to cooperation and

operational coordination between Hizbollah and Palestinian groups, including Ahmad Jibril's organization and the Islamic Jihad in Palestine movement.

The gap between Israeli assessments and the reality on the ground since the withdrawal can be explained by the Lebanese government's absolute intolerance of an armed Palestinian presence in the country, an attitude that existed long before the withdrawal. In the collective Lebanese memory, the Palestinians bear a large share of the responsibility for the catastrophe that overtook the country during the civil war. There were many signs of this sentiment even prior to the IDF pullback. For example, in November 1999 the Islamic Jihad secretary-general, Ramadan Shalah, aroused great anger in Lebanon after his announcement that his organization regarded South Lebanon as an "open front" against Israel. The day after his statement Prime Minister Salim al-Hus published an exceptional announcement that called on "our Palestinian brothers to avoid armed clashes in South Lebanon." Ghasan Tuani, the editor of the influential Lebanese newspaper *al-Nahar*, reminded Shalah that the last time the Palestinians tried "to liberate Jerusalem" via South Lebanon, the fighting ended in the Jebel Sannine mountains deep inside Lebanon. A month before this incident, after a media announcement by Fatah's secretary in Lebanon, Sultan Abu al-Aynayn, that his organization had trained four hundred new fighters, a military court in Beirut tried him in absentia and sentenced him to death (Abu al-Aynayn is still wanted by state authorities). The Palestinian organizations and Hizbollah are sensitive to the Lebanese resentment of local Palestinian organizations.

On October 20, 2000, when two Palestinian activists who tried to break through the security fence near Kibbutz Dan were killed, Hizbollah and Palestinian organizations active in Lebanon quickly denied their involvement in the incident. Fatah's secretary, sought by the authorities, went so far as to say, "We will not play the southern card unless a situation is created in which all the Arab fronts are open. When this happens we will coordinate [our operations] with the Lebanese authorities."<sup>40</sup> Explicit denials were also heard from the heads of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine movement in Lebanon and from Munir al-Maqdah, a senior Fatah commander in Lebanon. Certainly these refutations do not attest to any organization's innocence in the foiled attack, but they do reflect the awareness that activity of this nature flagrantly violates the local rules of engagement as determined by the central government and Syria.

On January 26, 2001 two men from the Popular Front – General Command tried to infiltrate into Israel via the Shab'a Farms area. Both were killed by IDF fire. Lebanese criticism of the attempted infiltration by members of Ahmad Jibril's group – linked to Hizbollah and Syria, so perhaps with Hizbollah coordination – was scathing. "If



the Palestinians want to fight Israel, let them join their brethren waging the intifada," thundered Prime Minister Hariri.<sup>41</sup> The head of Hizbollah's faction in parliament, Muhammad Ra'd, declared that Palestinian activity from South Lebanon "requires strategic coordination and examination of the issue [with Hizbollah]."<sup>42</sup> Another member of Hizbollah's political council, Mahmud Qamati, contacted the editorial staff of several newspapers and denied the report published by the French news agency AFP that had quoted him as defining the operation of Ahmad Jibril's organization as "legitimate." (The journalist who wrote the article alleged that he had a tape of Qamati's statements.)<sup>43</sup> The intense reaction clearly had an effect on Jibril, who was reported as saying that "all actions of his group launched from Lebanon would be carried out in conformity with Lebanese decisions and in coordination with the Lebanese state and the resistance."<sup>44</sup>

During the Hizbollah-initiated escalation in late March-early April 2002, the Lebanese government's attitude to the activity of Palestinian operatives was made manifestly clear. On several occasions Lebanese security forces arrested Palestinian activists about to attack Israel or those who returned from an attack, all of whom, it was reported in the Beirut press, were placed on trial. Hizbollah itself has admitted that it assisted in foiling "forbidden" acts by Palestinian elements in this period,<sup>45</sup> and one source in Lebanon related an incident in which Hizbollah and the Lebanese military exchanged shots because each side thought the other was a Palestinian group preparing to attack Israel.

Furthermore, the Lebanese army began patrolling several points along the border with Israel. In September 2001 Lebanese troops and intelligence personnel started "raising their profile" on the border for the first time since Israel's withdrawal, although until April 2002 they did this only in civilian dress. This development testifies beyond any doubt to the Lebanese government's determination to challenge unauthorized activity – mainly by Palestinian elements – that could lead to deterioration along the border. Lebanon's heightened military presence along the border, not necessarily in quantitative terms but in the intensification of activity, was observed in the months prior to the American attack on Iraq as an attempt at blocking Palestinian elements from carrying out acts of identification with Iraq that could have provoked an Israeli response against Lebanon.



## Chapter 3

### **Hizbollah Motives and Exigencies**

What stimuli, restraints, and limitations are applied to Hizbollah? What are the organization's interests, parameters, and red lines? Hizbollah operates in an environment characterized by varied and even contradictory interests. Mentioned earlier was the tendency to ascribe to Syria and Iran excessive weight in the organization's decision-making process, and the description of Hizbollah as a proxy for Syrian and Iranian interests can be found even in articles appearing in the Lebanese and greater Arab press. According to this thinking, Hizbollah carries out in puppet-like fashion orders emanating from Tehran and Damascus.

More realistic, though, is that this represents an exaggerated view. Hizbollah has to maneuver between the various interests of Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, as well as its own organizational interests. In addition, it must take into account Israel's likely reaction to the moves it makes.

#### ***The Lebanese Imperative***

The principal factor influencing Hizbollah that has not received the weight it deserves in assessments of the organization is that of the internal Lebanese arena, including Lebanese public opinion. While Hizbollah is attentive to overall Arab public opinion, its ability to meet the demands of this large amorphous sector is limited. On the other hand, domestic Lebanese public opinion is an important dimension that Hizbollah has long since heeded. Apparently it is the main reason why the Shiite organization has been careful since the pullout to market itself in Lebanon as the supreme defender of national interests, and as the organization whose primary goal is to deter Israel from harming Lebanon and its economy. As part of this agenda, the organization has published a weekly update on the number of Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty.<sup>1</sup>

Hizbollah's attention to public opinion in Lebanon did not begin with the Israeli withdrawal. For example, on June 24, 1999 Israel bombed the electric facilities and bridges in Beirut in response to Hizbollah activity, an action that prompted Hizbollah to proceed much more cautiously in its operations. Two months later, on August 30, the deputy secretary-general, Na'im Qasim, warned that the organization's patience was wearing thin and that Hizbollah would not restrain itself much longer against Israeli attacks on Lebanese citizens. Significantly, his statement was interpreted in Lebanon as exceptionally poignant. *Al-Safir* commentator Ibrahim al-Amin, considered close to Hizbollah, published an article in which he claimed that Qasim's announcement contained "an internally-directed message of the greatest importance . . . that called on politicians, the media, and the economic sector to keep in mind the repeated attacks that had caused death and injury to civilians and to retain their vivid images, lest it be said that when the resistance responded by shelling [Israel's] northern settlements with Katyusha rockets it was doing so out of political [motives]."<sup>2</sup> According to al-Amin, "for the first time since the aggression of April 1996 [a reference to Israel's Operation Grapes of Wrath], it seems that Hizbollah had to sound a message like this . . . because of the genuine shock" that had taken over the Lebanese on June 24, 1999. Regarding Hizbollah's need for social acceptance, former prime minister Ehud Barak acknowledged, "Even in their behavior while they were fighting against us in South Lebanon you could see their obsession with legitimacy for each and every operation. This is why I understood that the legitimacy factor is more important than it seems."<sup>3</sup>

Over the years Hizbollah operations were not designed around Lebanese public opinion alone. While general support was certainly advantageous, it was not a *sine qua non* from the organization's point of view. According to Nasrallah, "regarding the dictum 'for the armed resistance to win and survive it needs a national consensus,' I respond that the national consensus is good; it strengthens and protects the resistance. But the resistance's existence is not conditional on it. Many resistance movements have arisen in history, even in modern history, that lacked a national consensus in their countries."<sup>4</sup> Nasrallah recalled that from the founding of Hizbollah in 1982 until 1999, the "resistance" in Lebanon did not enjoy public support.

Nevertheless, since the Israeli withdrawal, Hizbollah has been particularly attentive to domestic public opinion. Uzi Dayan believes that in the wake of the pullout the Lebanese public opinion factor has risen in importance:

Hizbollah will not operate in a way that angers the Lebanese people; that is, it will not act against public opinion and the [mood of the] street, and

will not create a situation in which it is perceived as an enemy of the Lebanese people, or act contrary to its socio-political interest in Lebanon. One of the consequences of the withdrawal is that if war comes as a result of Hizbollah provocation and Lebanon is severely hurt, the Lebanese citizen will say that he is paying the price because Hizbollah wants to liberate Jerusalem. This situation puts the moderate and positive forces in Lebanon in a stronger position. Hizbollah has the requisite ideological fervor and interest to plunge security conditions into a "limited war." However, the question of the "trigger" is critical, since the ordinary person in Lebanon would say "Look, there's no electricity in all of Lebanon because Hizbollah insists on firing Katyusha rockets onto Israeli settlements." You have to remember that the proportion factor is very important because of public opinion, which determines in the long run whether you win or not, since this is not a matter of war in the classical sense, territorial occupation, and the destruction of the enemy. This is a war with different components and agendas – political, military, economic, and legal, and the public opinion factor. Only the integration of all of them in the planning stage and in operations will produce effective fighting.<sup>5</sup>

Lebanese public opinion has considerable influence in defining Hizbollah activity against Israel, which therefore has crucial implications for cooperation between Hizbollah and the Palestinian organizations active in Lebanon. Lebanon's attitude toward the Palestinian refugees is the most disdainful of the Arab states. In the collective Lebanese narrative, the Palestinians played a main role in bringing devastation upon the country in a ruinous civil war, and Lebanon is unwilling to shoulder any additional costs for the Palestinians. Ironically, the Lebanese sector that suffered most from Palestinian military activity in South Lebanon against Israel until 1982 was the Shiite population; the misery generated by the Palestinian presence in South Lebanon was so great that when the IDF invaded in June 1982 the troops were showered with handfuls of rice.

Nonetheless, on the eve of the pullout Israel estimated that Hizbollah was likely to boost Palestinian organizations intensively following the unilateral withdrawal. This assessment was based on intelligence information that pointed to Hizbollah reconstruction of the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon. According to one Israeli source,<sup>6</sup> an "intelligence wake-up call" signaled a blatant attempt by Hizbollah to marshal Palestinian elements in Lebanon and train them for the possibility of attacking

Israel. According to the source, “as a result of this intelligence alert we became extremely interested in the subject. It turned out, however, that these were negligible fringe groups.” This intelligence information corresponded to Intelligence’s assessment of Syrian and Iranian interests in pursuing armed activity on the northern border. According to Timur Goksel, “We told everyone that the Palestinians in Lebanon will not have the freedom to act, and that things simply don’t work that way. We tried to explain that Hizbollah cannot allow itself to be alienated by the population.”<sup>7</sup>

### ***Israel: Threatening and Threatened***

Hizbollah is fully aware of the limitations of its strength, especially against Israel, even though its capability has improved since the IDF pullout. Every military operation against Israel is preceded by an assessment of Israel’s potential reaction, since Hizbollah, despite its willingness to engage in brinkmanship, is not interested in a massive Israeli response against Lebanon. Thus, Secretary-General Nasrallah stated, “We have no illusions. We are very familiar with the limitations of our power . . . We do not claim that we possess an army in the classic sense . . . or are capable of stopping the Israelis from crashing across the borders. However, I can promise that any Israeli attack against Lebanon will not be like those in 1982, 1993, and 1996. Naturally our capabilities are much stronger and better than in the past.”<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, says Timur Goksel, “at the end of the day, it is Hizbollah that has to survive in Lebanon.”<sup>9</sup>

### ***Syria: Ensuring its Interests via Proxy***

Does the frequency of attacks on the northern border since the withdrawal – one every few months, usually on Mt. Dov – serve Syrian and Iranian interests? The fact that there is no unequivocal answer to this question stems from the difficulty in discerning the interests of these two states, in part because of various power struggles inside each state. On the one hand, Syria is interested in maintaining a very low-level conflict on Israel’s northern border as a reminder that Syria has not conceded its demand for the return of the Golan Heights. On the other hand, too blatant a reminder, which would lead to casualties on the Israeli side of the border and to which Israel would be forced to respond, would be counterproductive to Syrian interests for three basic reasons.

First, Syria is aware of Israel’s absolute military superiority and is not interested in a head-on clash with its southern neighbor. Therefore, Syria limited its reaction on the two occasions since the IDF pullout when Israel destroyed its radar stations in

Lebanon in response to Hizbollah activity on Mt. Dov. Overall, Syria prefers that Hizbollah deliver the “reminder” for an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, and indeed, after the second radar facility was destroyed, in late June 2001, it was Hizbollah that responded, not Syria.

Second, the damage that Israel would inflict on Lebanon in response to a strike from across the Lebanese border is self-defeating to Syria and, it appears, to the other players in the arena as well. Syria has a strong interest in defending the Lebanese economy since hundreds of thousands of Syrians earn their living from employment in Lebanon. Syria has no desire to see these workers return home, where they would join the growing ranks of the unemployed.

Finally, since ascending to power, Syrian president Bashar al-Assad has begun a process of “correcting” Syrian-Lebanese relations. The Syrian president is aware of the need to introduce reforms into this relationship and pacify the current demand in Lebanon to terminate Syria’s military presence in the country (ongoing since 1976). For years Syria has eschewed opening an embassy in Lebanon, and President Hafez al-Assad always avoided a state visit to the Lebanese capital. But his son Bashar, while not opening a Syrian embassy in Beirut, visited the city in early 2002 – a step seen as growing Syrian recognition of Lebanese independence. Sacrificing Lebanon on the altar of Syrian interests would undermine this process and undoubtedly prompt certain circles in Lebanon to accuse Syria of ruining their country.

Hizbollah activity and its image in Lebanese and Arab public opinion as the champion of its own ideological principles and aid to the Palestinian struggle are beneficial to the Syrian president. At the same time it is difficult to determine to what degree Assad junior is pulled by pan-Arab rhetoric, and to what extent it actually serves him and Syria. For example, a senior British source revealed that during the Syrian president’s visit to London in December 2002, Prime Minister Tony Blair requested that he “tone down” his expressions of support for Hizbollah, to which Assad replied that he was incapable of doing this. The main reason can probably be found in his public admission that Syria’s positions are derived from trends in the “Arab street.”<sup>10</sup>

Against the backdrop of this complex and delicate situation, Hizbollah enjoys maneuvering space vis-à-vis Syria. An example of the way Hizbollah has exploited this potential was the attack on December 30, 1999. For the first time in several years Hizbollah sent a suicide bomber to detonate an explosives-charged vehicle next to an IDF convoy in the village of Kafr Killa in South Lebanon. The car, driven by Amar Hussein Hammud, contained one hundred kilograms of explosives. Due to the driver’s miscalculation, the car exploded while the IDF convoy was parked behind a

reinforced security barrier and none of the soldiers were killed. Nasrallah later disclosed that he had personally blessed Hammud before his departure. The significance of this event lay not only in its severity but in its timing, occurring on the eve of the renewal of high-level, bilateral Israeli-Syrian peace talks in the United States, with the participation of Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the Syrian foreign minister, Faruq al-Shara.

There can be little doubt that Hizbollah launched the strike, perhaps in the hope of sabotaging the talks. Had it “succeeded,” the attack could have escalated the northern arena and derailed the talks in Washington. The Syrians were aware of this, and according to an Israeli source, at a meeting of the Monitoring Group for the Understandings of Operation Grapes of Wrath that met in Naqura, Lebanon, the Syrian delegate, General Adnan Balul, expressed his bitterness before the delegates (including Israelis) over the Hizbollah-initiated attack.

### ***Iran: Material and Ideological Source***

Another key player in Hizbollah’s “working environment” is undoubtedly Iran. Iran drafted its Revolutionary Guards – a military force set up after the Islamic Revolution, in addition to the Iranian army, and considered more professional and loyal to the conservative religious establishment – to be the main driving force behind Hizbollah’s founding after Israel’s June 1982 invasion of Lebanon. It was the Islamic Republic of Iran that supplied the embryonic Shiite organization in Lebanon with both the logistical assistance and the ideological mantle that has characterized it throughout its existence (such as the “the downtrodden of the earth” ideology that was first adopted by the Islamic revolutionary leader Khomeini). Over the years Hizbollah’s development into a skilled force with sophisticated combat techniques made it increasingly dependent on Iran, and while in 2002 Syria began supplying Hizbollah with Katyusha rockets, Iran was and remains the main source of Hizbollah’s fighting materiel, the “tools” that transformed the organization into a deterrent force to be reckoned with. Although according to Israeli intelligence reports the long-range rockets now deployed on Lebanese soil were not handed over to Hizbollah and remain under the supervision of the Revolutionary Guards, these Katyusha rockets frame Hizbollah’s deterrence.

For many years fighting materiel has been flown to Hizbollah from Iran via Syria, an arrangement that still continues. Without Syrian and Iranian support Hizbollah would never have attained its present status, and in many ways the organization owes its very existence to Syria and Iran. On the ideological level Hizbollah is the product of Iran’s policy, adopted in 1979, of “exporting the revolution.” In Iranian



eyes the Hizbollah organization is the most successful by-product of this policy, and in many ways its only success. Militarily Hizbollah has established itself as a powerful force across Israel's northern border. Since Shiites make up the largest community in Lebanon today, Hizbollah serves as Iran's entry into this population.

It should be recalled, however, that the Shiite world is not a unified entity. The Shiites in Iran, for example, differ from those in Lebanon, with both communities having different ethnic, cultural, and political outlooks. The highest Shiite authority in Lebanon, Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, who is sometimes referred to – albeit incorrectly – as Hizbollah's official spiritual leader, has not visited Iran for several years. In a January 2003 interview, Fadlallah publicly accused both Iran and Hizbollah of attempting to impinge on his position in Lebanon, claiming that “certain circles within and outside Iran” are uncomfortable with the rise of a Shiite religious authority outside of Iran, and that Hizbollah decided to back Iran on this issue. For this reason, Fadlallah continued, elements in Lebanon were waging a “political assassination” against him by labeling him a deviator from the Shiite path.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, Tehran's ability to play Hizbollah as an Iranian pawn is limited. Iran's official policy toward Israel continues to be non-recognition of its right to exist and support for the creation of a Palestinian state in all of Israel's territory. Therefore, the establishment of political relations between Israel and its neighbors clashes with Iran's interests and could isolate Tehran's position should peace agreements be reached between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. On the other hand, would a military confrontation between Israel and its two northern neighbors be desirable from Iran's point of view? At this stage, the answer appears to be negative.

This is one of the reasons why Iran began curbing Hizbollah activity in April 2002. The Iranian foreign minister, Kamal Kharazi, arrived in Beirut and in light of Hizbollah's escalation declared that Israel should not be given pretexts to attack Syria or Lebanon. But the picture is more complex. Although Kharazi performed a restraining role on the eve of the Hizbollah-initiated escalation, it was Iran that had prodded Hizbollah to act in the first place. Furthermore, Kharazi's statements earned him both criticism in the Iranian media, as well as sympathy and support, conflicting trends that bear witness to the fact that in recent years support for Hizbollah has become entangled, at least to a certain degree, in the internal struggle between the conservative bloc in Iran and the reformists. But the ties between Hizbollah and Iran's conservative establishment continue, and Israeli officials even claim that a “direct channel” exists between Secretary-General Nasrallah and Iran's spiritual leader, Ali Khamanei.



## Chapter 4

### **Four Major Junctures since the Withdrawal**

The nature and patterns of Hizbollah activity have been influenced and perhaps even determined by certain regional political and military developments that can be seen as defining junctures. Since Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon, Hizbollah has confronted four major junctures: regime change in Syria, with the death of President Hafez al-Assad and the appointment of his son as president; the election of Rafiq al-Hariri as the new prime minister of Lebanon in October 2000; the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada in late September 2000; and the attacks of September 11, 2001. How these four events impacted on Hizbollah activity is the subject of this chapter.

#### ***Transition in Damascus***

Two weeks after Israel completed its withdrawal from Lebanon, the president of Syria, Hafez al-Assad, died at the age of seventy. He had ruled Syria firmly – sometimes with an iron fist – for three decades and succeeded in grooming his son as successor for a smooth transition of power. Bashar al-Assad was sworn in as president on July 17, 2000 after a referendum in which he won 97.26% of the vote. Given the Syrian influence on Hizbollah, Hafez al-Assad's death and the transfer of the government to his son form an important event, particularly immediately after the Israeli pullout. Since the new president would naturally require several years to establish the degree of authority his father wielded during his three decade hold on power, Hizbollah's response to Syria's regime change is especially significant.

In a memorial ceremony for Hafez al-Assad, Hizbollah Secretary-General Nasrallah said that he had never earned the honor of a meeting with the late president. In contrast, relations between Nasrallah and the younger Assad have been much closer. The two had already met on a number of occasions before Bashar's assumption of the presidency, while he managed the "Lebanese File" (which he inherited in 1999

from Vice President Khaddam). Once Bashar became president, he received Nasrallah in Damascus, and according to Israeli information, the two leaders meet a number of times each year. Nasrallah, esteemed by Bashar, is warmly received in Damascus.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, an investigation conducted by Israeli intelligence in the spring of 2002 discovered that after most of these meetings Hizbollah stepped up its operational activity.

The change of government in Syria undoubtedly influenced Hizbollah's dealings with Israel. Since assuming office, Bashar has adopted extremely virulent rhetoric against Israel – much stronger than his father's and far blunter than expected, according to the image ascribed to him in Israel and the West before his rise to power.<sup>2</sup> This fact has of course not been ignored by Hizbollah. Deputy Secretary-General Na'im Qasim affirmed:

America and Israel posited a change in Syrian policy after the death of President Hafez al-Assad, but the [new] president, Dr. Bashar al-Assad, maintains long-held principles. He has even strengthened the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance as a legitimate right, and has defended them against Zionist racism in high-level Arab and international conferences.<sup>3</sup>

Bashar's sympathetic and supportive position toward Hizbollah and the Palestinian organizations operating against Israel has been surprisingly candid. Over the years, Assad senior cultivated an image of restraint and suspicion toward his surroundings, whereas his son has acted with much greater freedom toward elements that he considers as tools for advancing Syrian interests. Hizbollah's leaders sense this, as reflected in Qasim's statement.

On another occasion, in an interview published in early June 2002 in the Beirut daily *al-Safir*, Qasim related that the president of Syria assisted his organization in diplomatic efforts with Jordan that led to the release of three Hizbollah members who had been apprehended by Jordanian intelligence officers while trying to smuggle Katyusha rockets into the West Bank. The three, who had entered Jordan from Lebanon via Syria a year before, comprised the most high-ranking Hizbollah team ever captured. Moreover, a few weeks earlier Israel had received information indicating that Syria had transferred rockets to Hizbollah for the first time.<sup>4</sup> Intelligence and security sources in Israel revealed that over the past few years Hizbollah obtained hundreds of long-range rockets, now under the direct supervision of Iranians in Lebanon. The picture that comes into focus is of unprecedented Syrian support for Hizbollah.

What, then, is the Syrian president's attitude toward Hizbollah activity at Shab'a Farms? Bashar al-Assad explicitly expressed his position in an interview several months after the IDF withdrawal.<sup>5</sup> In reply to the question whether Syria supports military moves for regaining Shab'a Farms, he answered, "One meter of land is equal to a kilometer, and is like a thousand kilometers. All of this is occupied territory . . . The land is a matter of honor and not a matter of meters." Should Shab'a Farms be returned "by diplomatic means or resistance," inquired the interviewer? "What is meant by diplomacy?" asked Assad. The interviewer explained that he implied the UN Security Council or countries of influence, to which Assad replied:

Did you see diplomacy return South Lebanon? We can leave the answer to the resistance. The resistance has determined the path, the truth, or the errors in the answers. In Syria we prefer not to discuss the answer and speak of its advantages or drawbacks. We leave this to reality. Reality has proven something definitive. We do not know what the future reality will bring. The Lebanese resistance can read this reality better than anyone else – and of course, with the added support of the Lebanese street, for without this the resistance would be unable to carry out any operations no matter how much political support it has. The Lebanese street remains the foundation. The Lebanese street supported the resistance and the proof lies in the result, and the result is that [the land has been] liberated.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, Assad supports Hizbollah's armed activity in the Shab'a Farms sector, and he permits the organization to operate according to its own discretion. At the same time, Assad is convinced that Hizbollah activity should be carried out in accordance with the feelings and interests of the Lebanese public, and this is an important component of his position.

There is no doubt that in the wake of the generational turnover in Damascus in general, and declarations such as those of Assad in particular, Hizbollah leaders have reevaluated their maneuvering space vis-à-vis the new Syrian player. Yet as in every arena, here too there are active "ancillary players" whose importance and influence rise in proportion to the weakness of the head of state. Over the last three years signs indicated that several ancillary players were displeased with the turn of events on the Damascus-Hizbollah axis. On October 20, 2001, Beirut's *Daily Star* reported tension in Syria's relations with Hizbollah because of the organization's demonstrated independence. The report, relying on a source supposedly close to Hizbollah, stated that conflicting views between members of the organization with close links to

Damascus and those with closer ties to Iran had become more pronounced.

An overt indication of a Syrian attempt at restraining Hizbollah was observed in late December 2001, when Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara announced that in its war with Israel “the resistance cannot continue interminably to foment challenges – periods of quiet and calm are also necessary.” Al-Shara assured he was not implying a “dismantling of the resistance” – a step that he considered would be “a great error” – but his declaration seems to have been directed mainly toward Hizbollah.<sup>7</sup> In any case, if the Syrian foreign minister’s intention was to assert a restraining influence on Hizbollah, then it was only partially successful. Less than a month after his statement Hizbollah struck at Mt. Dov, an operation that ended without any casualties.

In April 2002, while Hizbollah was escalating its activity at Shab’a Farms, a senior Syrian source leaked to the Lebanese press that this area of activity too had defined limits and parameters that were not to be crossed. Israeli intelligence estimated that the Syrian source was General Ghazi Kan’an, the head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon, who had been serving in this highly influential role since 1982 and wielded great influence in Lebanon for many years. Syria intervened by calling on Nasrallah to proceed cautiously in its operations against Israel so as not to incur retaliatory activities along the northern front. Hizbollah sources acknowledged that Syrian intervention convinced Nasrallah to declare that his organization would respect the Blue Line.<sup>8</sup> According to the former head of Israeli Intelligence Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Malka, “If they [Hizbollah] realize that they are now up against Syria, then they know that at the end of the day Syria will stop them, put a red light [on their activity] and perhaps also hand them a yellow card. Twice in the last two or three years Syria has given them the yellow card . . . At one point it said ‘this is far enough’ . . . in a tone of admonition.”<sup>9</sup>

Israel received explicit indications during 2002 that Kan’an and his subordinates were displeased with Hizbollah’s over-assertiveness and independence. In the past, when Damascus was interested in passing on “instructional guidelines” to Hizbollah, Kan’an and his staff would hold rounds of meetings with the relevant Lebanese parties. After Hizbollah’s escalation at Mt. Dov in April 2002, however, this arrangement was apparently no longer in place, perhaps because of a (relatively) direct line of communication link between Bashar al-Assad and Nasrallah. Whatever the case, in early October 2002 General Kan’an was suddenly recalled to Damascus and appointed chief of political security in place of Adnan Badr Hasan. On October 9, Kan’an held a series of televised parting ceremonies with the heads of the Lebanese government. Kan’an’s successor, Brig. Gen. Rustum Ghazali, will probably require a considerable period of time to acquire his predecessor’s degree of influence and authority.

Hizbollah activity has enabled it to sustain its image of relevancy once most of its military *raison d'être* in South Lebanon terminated. For Syria this is leverage against Israel to be used as a reminder that Damascus still demands a retreat from the Golan Heights. In some ways, in recent years the Hizbollah-Syrian link has turned into one of mutual dependency. Syria has had to face a relatively new phenomenon – growing demands by the Lebanese public for the withdrawal of thousands of Syrian troops stationed in the country since 1976. The call to oust the Syrian military presence emanates mainly from within the Christian camp, and in particular through the mouthpiece *al-Nahar*, considered one of the oldest and most widely circulated newspapers in the country. In March 2000, before Bashar assumed the presidency, the paper's editor, Jibrán Tuéni, took the daring step of devoting the front page to an open letter to Bashar that announced the Lebanese people's desire to see Syria leave Lebanon. Tuéni wrote that, "Some people believe that Syria is the [country's] rival and enemy," and he continued to criticize Syria in many other articles. In the past such public disparagement was impossible, and could have cost the writer his life, such as when, for example, the journalist Salim al-Louzi was kidnapped in 1980 and executed. The anti-Syrian criticism of Tuéni and other journalists increased after the Israeli pullout, which left Syria the only foreign occupation force in Lebanon and obviated one of Syria's long-held claims that its presence was a defense of Lebanon against Israeli aggression. For its part, however, Bashar's regime allowed the circulation in Syria of the pro-Syrian weekly *al-Intiqad*, the official Hizbollah mouthpiece.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the deterrent steps taken by the Lebanese government in August 2001 to silence circles opposed to Syria and the arrest of hundreds of Christian activists, most of whom were later released, the Syrian president also made conciliatory advances toward Lebanon. In early March 2002, Assad visited Beirut, the first visit of a Syrian president to Lebanon since 1975 when Hafez al-Assad met with his long-time Lebanese colleague and friend, President Suleiman Franjeh. Syrian conciliatory gestures continued after the visit.

What is Hizbollah's position regarding the Syrian presence? According to the leader of the Hizbollah faction in parliament, "We emphasize that Syria's presence in Lebanon is that of a power supporting the Lebanese position that opposes the Israeli occupation and Israeli ambitions, and this is sufficient for us to justify the Syrian presence in Lebanon."<sup>11</sup> It appears, then, that Hizbollah's backing of the Syrian presence depends on Syria's continued support of the organization's military activity. At the same time, Hizbollah's dependency on Syria is far greater than Syria's on the organization. A significant waning of Syria's presence and influence in Lebanon could force the

Lebanese army to deploy in the south and infringe upon Hizbollah's status as the near-exclusive power there.<sup>12</sup> This is only one possible ramification of a Syrian retreat. The most important, however, is Hizbollah's dependence on Syria as a conduit for weapons from Iran, and sometimes as a weapons supplier in its own right. In other words, while Hizbollah's continued support of Syrian deployment in Lebanon is important to Damascus, Syrian support of Hizbollah is crucial to the organization's survival as a resistance movement.

In the meantime, an additional dimension has enveloped Syria-Hizbollah relations: while the United States was preparing for a military campaign against Iraq, cooperation and military coordination strengthened between the Syrian and Lebanese armies and Hizbollah. One senior Israeli military figure described the three-way cooperation as exceptional in that it enabled the Syrians to alter their military deployment. The same figure pointed out that from the Israeli view, such a development was not necessarily negative.<sup>13</sup>

The Syrian military presence in Lebanon also serves as a stabilizing and deterrent influence that provides strong support to the central government in Beirut. This is one of the key factors distinguishing today's reality in Lebanon from that of the early 1970s when the central government was considered weak and lacking deterrent capability – a perception that allowed the Palestinians to relocate their base of operations from Jordan to Lebanon and operate with relative freedom against Israel from the south of the country.

### ***The Rise of Rafiq al-Hariri***

The results of Lebanon's parliamentary elections in September 2000 spelled defeat for Prime Minister Salim al-Hus. Appointed to the office in late 1998, al-Hus was voted out of parliament. At the end of October 2000, a new government was sworn in, headed by billionaire Rafiq al-Hariri. "We proclaim to the citizens in Lebanon that this government will work at solving their problems," Hariri immediately promised after returning to office for a second time (his first term lasted from 1992 to 1998). Contrary to most observers who regard the Beirut government as a Damascus puppet regime and the prime minister a Syrian marionette, the Lebanese prime minister has, in fact, important if limited influence while in the shadow of Syria.

Al-Hus, whose voice has thus essentially vanished from the Lebanese domestic arena, was blatantly pro-Syrian and openly supportive of the "resistance." He and President Emile Lahud, who was appointed to office in late 1998 after serving as commander of the Lebanese army and was also close to Damascus, granted Hizbollah



unprecedented public support. Hizbollah was naturally influenced by this, and in 1999, for the first time since its founding, began to enjoy – according to Nasrallah’s testimony – the unlimited support of the Lebanese public.

This official and popular backing was reflected by the state gestures toward Hizbollah designed to demonstrate strong, unified Lebanese support. In May 1999, Lahud dispatched the Republican Guards commander, Mustafa Hamdan, to meet with Secretary-General Nasrallah and other Hizbollah leaders as a token of appreciation for a successful operation against Israel a few days earlier. The Beirut newspapers published a picture of Hamdan distributing medals to Hizbollah fighters. *Al-Nahar* defined the gesture “an initiative the first of its kind, [and one] that reflects the state’s degree of commitment to the resistance [and] the officially backed solidarity between the army, the resistance, and the people in the struggle against the occupation.”<sup>14</sup>

During Hariri’s first term as prime minister, relations between Hizbollah and Hariri were at times turbulent. Hariri’s worldwide political connections – including with the United States, Great Britain, and France – are well-known, and he is the figure most identified with national rehabilitation and the effort to restore Lebanon to its previous status through economic improvement. His political agenda on the domestic front and in the Middle East is entirely different from if not outright opposed to the ideological ambitions of the Shiite organization. In 2002, for example, the satellite television station owned by Hariri, Mustaqbal, broadcast a film short whose main theme was “the Arabs want peace.”<sup>15</sup> While Hariri would call for peaceful relations between Israel and the Arab world, Hizbollah promulgated, via uninterrupted broadcasting on its satellite television station al-Manar, the deportation of Israeli Jews to their countries of origin and the return of Israeli territory to the Palestinians.

Although Hizbollah may clash with Hariri over his ideological and political platform, it cannot risk being cast as a hindrance to the prime minister’s efforts to improve domestic conditions, especially the economy and the tourist industry. “Hizbollah’s nature is different from mine,” Hariri acknowledged in a July 2001 interview.<sup>16</sup> “It has a political bent, and we do not differ with them over Israel at the present stage. The basic difference is that we support peace, while [Hizbollah] has a different approach; it believes that Israel has no interest whatsoever in peace and sees the solution only in resistance.” In this way Hariri rebuked Hizbollah’s activity, even if only obliquely, because of the damage it causes to the state. His criticism referred to figures who fear the state’s economic recovery, if this prosperity undermines their own political ambition. In Hariri’s words, “anyone who contributes to the failure of the government’s enterprises and objectives counters state interests.”

Although Hariri declared at the time that “at the present stage” he was in agreement with Hizbollah, since it renewed its activity on Mt. Dov, the prime minister has persistently and publicly aired his disapproval of some of the organization’s operations. On April 15, 2001, the day after an Israeli soldier, Sgt. Elad Litvak, was killed in a Hizbollah attack, Hariri’s paper published a condemnatory editorial under the bold headline, “Shab’a Farms: The Mistimed Operation.” In an article signed by the “political editor,” the author questioned whether Hizbollah had considered the political, economic, and social ramifications of the operation, and broadly hinted that the answer was negative. The writer stressed the prohibition against endangering South Lebanon’s liberation from the Israeli occupation by reckless acts of any party, and added a warning note to Hizbollah not to repeat the type of operation of the previous day. “Perhaps the government that was created by the will of the people in parliamentary elections is the foremost party interested in events in the southern arena . . . As long as [the government] rules as the representative of the Lebanese people’s trust, it cannot remain an [aloof] observer of incidents that could have negative repercussions on Lebanese interests.” The article concluded with the assertion that Hizbollah must act as a “positive element in the state’s strategy to liberate the occupied land and as a deterrent against possible Israeli aggression.”<sup>17</sup>

The *al-Mustaqbal* editorial contained essentially the same message that Hariri’s office had circulated among journalists in Lebanon approximately two months earlier on February 19 in the wake of a Hizbollah operation on Mt. Dov in which an IDF soldier, Sgt. Elad Shneor, was killed. Hariri’s announcement stated that the Lebanese government, “the representative of the will of the people, as upheld by last year’s general elections, will act to return sovereignty to the national land, including what remains under Israeli occupation at Shab’a Farms.”<sup>18</sup> Oddly, only a few hours after the announcement was made, the prime minister’s office issued a retraction. And yet while the announcement lost its official seal, the general impression was clear. Some press commentators interpreted that military operation as Hizbollah’s message to Prime Minister Hariri, who had declared a day earlier in Paris that “we agree with our brethren in Syria that there is no need to commit any act of provocation on our part that might offer Israel a pretext for revenge.” However, Hizbollah sources were quoted in Beirut saying that the operation carried out on the ninth anniversary of Israel’s assassination of the organization’s secretary-general, Abbas Musawi, was a message to Prime Minister Sharon, and not to Hariri.<sup>19</sup>

On the first anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, with Lebanon celebrating the “Liberation Holiday,” Hariri’s newspaper again published an editorial directly attacking Hizbollah.

After liberation the Lebanese might have transferred their consensus regarding resistance to other crucial issues, such as population and economic rehabilitation. What hurt them, though, was the same obstacle encountered by many countries after their liberation from colonialism . . . The leadership of the national liberation movements, which in the phase of struggling [against] the occupation had been backed by national agreement, lost this consensus, and afterwards failed at the economic construction and rehabilitation. Later they became, what is termed, “the third world,” that is, defined as one who missed the boat of global economic development.<sup>20</sup>

On the same day the journalist Ibrahim al-Amin, considered close to Hizbollah, wrote in the daily *al-Safir* that the majority of Lebanese seem to have forgotten Hizbollah’s accomplishment of May 2000. Thus, and in contrast to the prime minister’s announcements, Hizbollah leaders were intent on emphasizing that their organization had the Lebanese people’s backing.

Can the degree of popular support for Hizbollah and its operations be quantified? The question is a relative one, and needs to be addressed in context. For example, at the height of the Israeli-Lebanese crisis over Beirut’s decision to pump water from the Wazzani River, *al-Nahar* published a survey entitled “The Wazzani Crisis Returned the South to the Front,” which reported that sixty-one percent opposed the cessation of operations at Shab’a Farms until an Israel withdrawal.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the Wazzani crisis the entire spectrum of Lebanese political forces supported the decision to pump the river’s water for Lebanon’s use. Under these circumstances, and in light of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s declaration that Israel would not tolerate the diversion of water, Hizbollah was able to raise its voice and appear as the main defender of Lebanon’s highest national interest. Had Israel tried to obstruct the pumping, Hizbollah counteraction would have earned massive support among the Lebanese public.

What is certain is that the vast majority of Lebanese reject the view prevalent in much of the West that Hizbollah is a terrorist group. In early September 2002, after the United States Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage bitterly attacked Hizbollah, comparing it to Osama Bin Laden’s organization and vowing that the administration intended to attend to the Lebanese group, Salim al-Hus responded by saying that “a threat against Hizbollah is the same as a direct threat against Lebanon.”<sup>22</sup> The Lebanese foreign minister, Mahmud Hammud, immediately announced that Hizbollah is a resistance organization with parliamentary

representation in Lebanon.<sup>23</sup> These were critical statements, affirming that Beirut's official position is that Hizbollah is a resistance organization and its activity in the Shab'a Farms sector is resistance to foreign occupation on Lebanese soil.

Hariri's repeated warnings that Hizbollah's military activity impaired the economy and foreign investments in Lebanon evoked a staunch response on the part of Hizbollah leaders, who claimed that the organization's deterrent power and operations against Israel were designed to advance economic prosperity and development. Significant here is that behind the smokescreen of rhetoric, Hizbollah's freedom of military operations is limited even further – that is, damage to Lebanon as the result of the organization's initiated activity acts contrary to the organization's own interests. A blow to the Lebanese economy also hurts Syrian interests, since hundreds of thousands of Syrian citizens earn their living in Lebanon and any interference with their livelihood would naturally have a detrimental impact on Syria's faltering economy.

At all events, the number of verbal assaults between Hariri and Hizbollah dropped greatly in 2002 and 2003 from 2001. Against the background of the organization's military activity, this might be the product of "confidence building measures" between the sides or of the organization's general lessening of activity against Israel, excluding the escalation of April 2002. On the economic and social levels, divergent views still characterize the respective sides, and certainly if Hariri were ousted from power, a major obstacle would be eliminated from Hizbollah, a turn of events that would undoubtedly influence the organization's military activity.

### *The al-Aqsa Intifada*

The Palestinian intifada was the type of development that Hizbollah had long dreamed of. Hizbollah's leaders had been urging the Palestinians to abandon the route of peace talks and negotiations and adopt "resistance" measures. After Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, the Shiite organization's endorsement of this stance intensified.

The violence in the Palestinian arena, which erupted in late September 2000, and the rioting by Israeli Arabs in October 2000 cast Israel in a position of weakness and in turn induced it in several instances not to respond to Hizbollah provocation. Israel's focus was on the confrontation in the Palestinian territories and at a later stage within Israel itself. Hizbollah was adept at taking advantage of such an opportunity and assessed that Israel would avoid opening a front in the north as long as it was bogged down in a confrontation with the Palestinians.<sup>24</sup>

The Palestinian intifada afforded Hizbollah a means of advancing its operational and ideological goals. Many regarded the organization as the only entity extending genuine assistance to the Palestinians in their struggle against Israel. Hizbollah describes its deployment along Israel's northern border as a force defending not only Lebanon, but the intifada, the Arab world, and all of Islam as well.<sup>25</sup> In the organization's view – possibly an apologetic for its limited military activity<sup>26</sup> – its presence on the border compels Israel to transfer resources from the Palestinian arena to the northern front, a move that assists the Palestinians.<sup>27</sup> In a statement published in the Lebanese newspapers on the first anniversary of Israel's withdrawal, a member of Hizbollah's political council, Nawaf Musawi, was also careful to point out that "we are partners in the intifada, not only supporters." Practical assistance began in the first months of the al-Aqsa Intifada, with Hizbollah help in collecting donations for the Palestinian struggle. The organization publicized a special account number for contributions, and the following year, on November 15, 2002, Nasrallah inaugurated a support project for family members of "fallen Palestinians."

With their own endeavors on record, Hizbollah leaders allowed themselves to criticize publicly the positions of Arab countries toward Israel. The Hizbollah secretary-general denounced Jordan and Egypt in particular for not severing relations with Israel, and he was especially vituperative toward Jordan for its months-long detention of Hizbollah activists arrested in Jordan while attempting to smuggle Katyusha rockets into the West Bank. Throughout March 2002, the month with the highest number (135) of Israeli fatalities since the confrontation [intifada] erupted, and with the approach of the Arab Summit in Beirut on March 27, Nasrallah flagrantly radicalized the tone of his expressions. In the days preceding a meeting of Arab leaders that was designed to adopt the Saudi peace initiative as an official Arab position, Nasrallah reproached the Arab foreign ministers' intentions as "pitiful" and "weak." On March 17 he called on the Arab states bordering Israel to "turn a blind eye" to attempts to smuggle arms into the territories. He explained that weapons smuggling from Lebanon had become increasingly difficult "because of the geographic obstacle and other obstructions."<sup>28</sup>

In retrospect, Nasrallah's rhetorical crescendo, beginning in early March 2002, can be seen as the foreshadowing of coming events. The period from late March until mid-April saw a major intensification of Hizbollah activity, the largest since the Israeli withdrawal, at the same time that Israel's Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank cities was underway. This operation came in response to an intensification of Palestinian terrorist activity, culminating in the mass casualty suicide attack in Netanya's Park Hotel on March 27, the first night of Passover. Heightened Hizbollah

activity continued for fifteen days and included intense operations in the Shab'a Farms area, while anti-tank missiles that were fired as part of the initiated escalation landed outside the Shab'a Farms sector on the Golan Heights. Nasrallah defined the escalation as "the extension of a form of assistance to our brothers undertaking resistance 'from the inside,'" in other words, concurrent with Israel's Operation Defensive Shield. He added that Hizbollah activity ceased after all the Palestinian cities had already fallen into Israeli hands. Nasrallah also cited Hizbollah's role in forcing Israel to concentrate its reserves on the northern border, and the assistance this provided to the Palestinians during the Israeli incursion into West Bank cities.<sup>29</sup> According to Nasrallah, "the Israelis displayed a heightened degree of restraint; that is, they weathered the humiliation" because they believed that Hizbollah was setting them up for a "strategic trap." Nasrallah refused to address these alleged Israeli assessments, insisting that "we have no need either to calm the Israelis or to rattle them."

Reflecting the organizational self-identification as Islamic resistance with horizons beyond the Lebanese border, Hizbollah demanded that Israel release a large number of Palestinians in return for three IDF soldiers – Omar Sawa'ad, Adi Avitan, and Benny Avraham – and Colonel (res.) Elhanan Tannenbaum, who were abducted by the organization in early October 2000. The four kidnappings (although the circumstances of Tannenbaum's abduction are not entirely clear and in part are classified) were described by Hizbollah spokesmen as a "gift" to the intifada.

The three IDF soldiers were abducted by Hizbollah on October 7, 2000 shortly after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising. This was the organization's first operation against Israel since the IDF pullout from South Lebanon. Although it occurred in part under the cover of the Palestinian flare-up, the possibility certainly exists that the kidnapping would have taken place regardless of the events in the Palestinian arena. This estimate is based on the fact that the Shi'ite organization pledged at the time of the IDF withdrawal that it would not abandon Lebanese citizens imprisoned in Israel, and that it had been seriously training its people for an abduction operation. The Palestinian violence and Israel's embroilment with it provided Hizbollah with a convenient backdrop for the kidnapping – an act that naturally won wide-scale Lebanese and Syrian backing.

The intifada accelerated Hizbollah's media and public relations activity in several areas. Hizbollah television, al-Manar, began satellite broadcasts at full capacity, encouraging the Palestinians and advocating suicide missions against Israel. It even screened "instructional" programs on the assembly of home-made explosive devices. The secretary-general himself heads the TV station's "Supervisory and Direction

Committee,<sup>30</sup> a fact which testifies to the importance Hizbollah attributes to al-Manar as a vehicle for advancing policy and ideology.

In a film short aired repeatedly after the al-Aqsa Intifada broke out, Nasrallah is shown supporting the Palestinians through the words: "We stand behind you; we shall not abandon or forsake you." The film also includes Nasrallah telling the Palestinians that he is aware that not all of them have rifles, "but is there anyone without a knife?" Thus, even when Hizbollah does not place all its resources at the disposal of Palestinian activities, the organization's television station provides it with the widest mouthpiece possible. For example, at the onset of the al-Aqsa Intifada, al-Manar served as the center stage for various Palestinian organizations that wanted to claim responsibility for murderous attacks. Ramadan Shalah was frequently interviewed. Al-Manar was also often among the first networks – and sometimes the very first – to report breaking events in the confrontation, and it televised exclusive shots of mortar and rocket fire by Palestinian organizations.<sup>31</sup>

A definite link exists between Hizbollah's potential recourse to its strategic capability and the clash between Israelis and Palestinians. The organization's official position is that its restraint in South Lebanon will end if Israel perpetrates a slaughter of the Palestinians or a mass expulsion reminiscent of 1948.<sup>32</sup> On April 8, 2002, Nasrallah declared publicly that although some quarters were interested in seeing Hizbollah employ its Katyusha rockets against Israel, nevertheless, "the worst case scenario would be mass deportation, and as we have said, it is against this danger that that we must safeguard our arsenal." The mass expulsion of Palestinians into Lebanon would pose a strategic threat to the country, and in Hizbollah's view, is far more likely than their transfer en masse to Jordan because of Jordan's peace treaty and close cooperation with Israel and special relationship with the United States. In other words, despite Hizbollah's ideological identification and support for the Palestinians, it is Lebanon – and not necessarily the Palestinians – that leads the organization's list of priorities.

### ***September 11, 2001***

In contrast to the eruption of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, the terrorist attack on the United States seems, at least thus far, not to have had an overarching influence on Hizbollah activity in the sense of forcing it to call off all operations. However, the events of that day, and even more so the resulting American campaign against global terror, have created a new international reality that has had an impact upon Syria, Iran, and Hizbollah, forcing them to take the new environment into

consideration. The international campaign affected Lebanon as well, where the highest levels of government rushed to Hizbollah's defense in the wake of September 11, and denied charges that the organization had connections with al-Qaeda or Iraq.<sup>33</sup>

The secretary-general of Hizbollah has recognized the new reality and is undoubtedly attuned to the voices in Washington counseling the administration to confront the organization.<sup>34</sup> Nasrallah stated that "the new reality has naturally presented the resistance movements in the area with additional problems in all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. I can even say that it has presented a difficult reality for liberation movements throughout the world. It is easier today to attack any resistance movement, liberation movement, or even political opposition by accusing it of [engaging in] terror."<sup>35</sup> At the same time, Hizbollah still has a wide maneuvering range, according to its secretary-general, who added, "We believe that America is unable to do everything it wants to [even after September 11] . . . It too faces obstacles; it is not the world's omnipotent ruler."<sup>36</sup>

This may explain why, despite Washington's declaration of war on international terror, Hizbollah persists in operating beyond the borders of Lebanon, flaunting its global dimensions. This type of activity came to light in its involvement in the aborted attempt to smuggle thousands of tons of fighting equipment to the Palestinian Authority (PA) on board the *Karine-A* in January 2002. The Israeli intelligence community estimates that the shipment was planned by Imad Mughniyah with Iranian cooperation.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Nasrallah had no qualms in divulging publicly, on his own initiative, that three Hizbollah members arrested in Jordan in the summer of 2001 had been caught trying to smuggle Katyusha rockets into the West Bank. On the first anniversary of the launching of the al-Aqsa Intifada, Nasrallah told an audience of thousands in Beirut that if necessary, his organization would intervene "directly" in the intifada and that it was prepared to support the Palestinians with all its resources – weapons, money, and media.

Hizbollah can maintain such activity thanks to the Lebanese leadership's official position that only a comprehensive political settlement in the Middle East can put an end to Hizbollah operations. President Lahud, considered close to Damascus, has stated that Hizbollah activity occurs within the framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is interpreted as his de facto recognition of Hizbollah's all-inclusive Middle East dimension, that is, recognition of the organization's influence beyond the Israeli-Lebanese arena. Lahud seems to be implying that even if all the Israeli-Lebanese issues were resolved – excluding the Golan Heights and Palestinian issues – then Hizbollah would still continue its operations against Israel.



As for a Hizbollah-al-Qaeda link, the Lebanese organization has been careful to deny any connection since the events of September 11. It realizes that even a hint of such cooperation would incur world condemnation.<sup>38</sup> Nasrallah felt it necessary to refute personally the existence of a foreign security network within Hizbollah, referring to such charges as “pernicious allegations, and lacking any basis of truth.”<sup>39</sup> According to Nasrallah, “We did not travel to America and attack it like al-Qaeda did, and we have not sabotaged any American interests in the world.”<sup>40</sup> Asked in August 2003 whether connections exist between Hizbollah and al-Qaeda, the head of IDF Military Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze’evi (Farkash), replied: “Not that we know of. . . . I think that if such cooperation does exist, it is at a very low level. Usually, [they operate] in totally different territories, different populations. They differ by their ideology as well.”<sup>41</sup>

The differences between Hizbollah and Osama Bin Laden’s organization override the similarities. The most significant difference lies in the fact that Hizbollah is an organization that aims for wide international and inter-Arab recognition of its legitimacy. One of the most prominent examples of this is Hizbollah’s (and Beirut’s) handling of the Canadian government’s December 11, 2002 decision to outlaw the Lebanese organization. The organization loudly protested the Canadian decision and exerted much effort, through the media and diplomatic channels, to convince Canada to rescind the ruling. It claimed that the decision was based in part on an alleged statement by Nasrallah threatening to carry out terrorist strikes around the world. Hizbollah acted through the Lebanese government, which turned to Canadian bodies to influence the Canadian government to reverse its decision. Hizbollah handed the Canadian Embassy in Beirut a recording and translation of Nasrallah’s speech proving that the statements attributed to him stemmed from basic errors in the translation. In a similar diplomatic vein, on February 9, 2003 the organization published its own detailed initiative – albeit ultimately fruitless – to render a diplomatic solution to the American-Iraqi crisis.

Hizbollah activity did not stop after the September 11 attacks. Two days later, a senior Lebanese security figure was quoted in the Beirut *Daily Star* admonishing “Hizbollah to be more careful henceforth. In the coming five or six months the Israelis will have a free hand [to respond] if something occurs on the border.” Not long after, though, on October 3, 2001, Hizbollah struck at Mt. Dov for the first time since the attacks against the United States. The operation, coming after a three-month lull, caused no Israeli casualties. Significantly, a Hizbollah source claimed its objective was to deliver a message that the organization had no intention of changing its path because of the terrorist attack on the United States.<sup>42</sup>

The influence of September 11 on Hizbollah is best seen in the long run, and in light of measures that the United States may opt to take against the organization. Israel accuses Hizbollah of direct involvement in the attacks on the Israeli embassy in 1992 and Jewish community center in Buenos Aires in 1994. While Hizbollah rejects the accusations, it will probably be very wary from now on not to incriminate itself in the eyes of the United States by perpetrating murderous attacks in the style of al-Qaeda.<sup>43</sup>

### ***Assessment***

A subsequent change related to any of these pivotal junctures will have an impact on Hizbollah. A deviation in Syria's position toward Hizbollah – following international developments that would necessitate this, or the renewal of peace talks with Israel – could be fateful to Hizbollah's future as a resistance movement. In his book *Hizbollah: The Method, The Experience, the Future*, published in Beirut in late October 2002, Na'im Qasim, lists two scenarios that could bring about Hizbollah's demise as a resistance movement:<sup>44</sup>

- Civil war [*fitna*] with the Lebanese army or with other local forces, if the Lebanese authorities decide to revoke Hizbollah's legitimacy as a resistance movement.
- Syria's agreement to a deal that would end international pressure against it in exchange for Syria's cessation of support for Hizbollah. Since Syria provides Hizbollah with political backing, the loss of Syrian support would expose the organization to danger.

As for the future of the resistance, Qasim writes that Israel will continue to threaten Lebanon for many years, and Hizbollah's role extends beyond Lebanon to events in "Palestine." "The party's future is tied to Israel, America, the region, and the world." Qasim refers only to existential dangers and Hizbollah's military dimension, and admits that the likelihood of the two scenarios materializing is very slight.

Other challenges, less fateful for Hizbollah but that could impede the organization's military activity though not force it to desist completely, lie first of all in developments in the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation and the American war against global terror. The moderation of activity in the Palestinian arena or signing of a bilateral agreement could inhibit Hizbollah activity in both the Palestinian and Lebanese theaters. Hizbollah's awareness of this has led Nasrallah to declare that, "It is in the best interest of the resistance movement to see Israel worried all the time."<sup>45</sup>

## Chapter 5

### **The Rules of the Game**

Chapter three presented the motives and exigencies of Hizbollah activity, and chapter four described regional events and developments that defined additional parameters and limitations. This framework of exigencies has shaped Hizbollah's rules of the game since the withdrawal as it continues its stance against Israel, rules that are based on three principles:

- Recognition of the UN Blue Line, determined on the basis of UN Resolution 425, which prohibits official Hizbollah activity along its length.
- The Shab'a Farms area is considered a free-fire zone for Hizbollah since it is deemed occupied territory.
- The principle of "an eye for an eye" whereby the organization responds in kind to Israeli acts.

#### ***Acknowledging the Blue Line***

After Israel's withdrawal, when UN officials drew up the new border between Israel and Lebanon, Hizbollah refused to recognize the legitimacy of the so-called "Blue Line." In practice, however, it was forced to accede and limit its declared activity against Israel to the Shab'a Farms sector, where operations receive political backing from the Lebanese and Syrian governments.

Hizbollah's semi-official recognition of the Blue Line (with the exception of Shab'a Farms) was made in a public announcement by Nasrallah in April 2002 when he declared that his organization would respect the demarcation. The rest of Hizbollah leaders followed suit. Thus, the chairman of the Hizbollah faction in the Lebanese parliament, Muhammad Ra'd, was prompted to issue a public denial of a report that appeared in Lebanese and Arab newspapers on July 8, 2002 where he was quoted as saying that the Blue Line was an "imperialist blueprint that we do not believe in."

Ra'd claimed he had not been referring to the Blue Line at all, and had actually said that until now his organization had carried out activity against Israel on Lebanese soil only and that Hizbollah had the right to liberate Shab'a Farms.<sup>1</sup>

### *Shab'a Farms: Legitimate Theater*

After the unilateral withdrawal, Syria eyed Hizbollah's continued activity as welcome leverage to pressure Israel to return the Golan Heights. The Hizbollah-Syrian convergence of interests depended on the organization's skill in operating within defined parameters in order to minimize the danger of a head-on military clash between Israel and Syria that Syria, given its military inferiority, was loath to endure. In the months prior to the withdrawal, Israeli intelligence amassed significant evidence of Hizbollah's intention to accuse Israel of having annexed seven Lebanese villages in the 1948 War of Independence and use the claim as a pretext for continuing the armed struggle. However, these seven villages are today populated Israeli settlements, and operations against them would be problematic and fraught with risk.

It is precisely for this purpose, using an easy Hizbollah stage to advance Syrian interests, that approximately one month before the withdrawal, the Shab'a Farms issue was unsheathed, or according to Israel, invented. Shab'a Farms, located on the western slopes of Mt. Dov, is a triangular border area lying at the intersection between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. Since the withdrawal, the Shab'a Farms area has earned the status of a "disputed zone," even though there is no definitive delineation that maps the exact area.

Lebanon's first demand for an Israeli retreat from Shab'a Farms was registered on April 16, 2000, when the chairman of the parliament, Nabih Berri, asserted that "resistance" would continue as long as Israel refused to leave the fourteen farms at Shab'a Farms. Israel replied that as the area was originally Syrian, a solution to the issue should be sought within the framework of UN Resolution 242 and not Resolution 425, which had nothing to do with the Golan Heights. Lebanon rebutted that it was a question of Lebanese territory that Syria had transferred to Lebanon in 1951. On the eve of the withdrawal in early May 2000, Lebanon explicitly warned that Israel's presence in the disputed area would lead to continued military activity against it. The minister of information, Anwar al-Khalil, declared, "Our position is clear and unequivocal. Resistance will continue even if one centimeter of Lebanese soil remains occupied." Any withdrawal that does not include Shab'a Farms, asserted al-Khalil, "will be considered as a redeployment of the Israeli forces, not a withdrawal based on the essence and concept of Resolution 425."<sup>2</sup>

While Israel received full support on the matter from the UN, Lebanon, first with Syrian backing and later with approval of the entire Arab world, persisted in demanding a retreat from Shab'a Farms. To underscore the point, on May 21, 2000, three days before the completion of Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon, Hizbollah shelled Shab'a Farms for the first time in four years.<sup>3</sup> On the same day Nasrallah announced that his organization would continue operating in the sector: "From this morning, the Shab'a Farms area will be included in the field of resistance activity, exactly as other occupied areas."<sup>4</sup>

Excluding anti-aircraft firing along the border, Shab'a Farms has become the exclusive site of official Hizbollah activity. Beirut's claim to the contested area has not become the consensus in the internal Lebanese arena, probably because the issue is perceived as not worth the risk of provoking Israel, given the IDF withdrawal from South Lebanon and the entire security zone. Thus, on June 16, 2001, an editor of the Lebanese *Daily Star* stated that one of the reasons that a number of Lebanese citizens remain in Israeli custody is the activity at Shab'a Farms. The article included references to "the stale demands that Israel removes its troops from a remote mountainside that, we wager, not a single minister would have been able to pick out on a map eighteen months ago [i.e., before the withdrawal]." This editorial was written several weeks after the Druze leader Walid Junblatt, head of the Progressive Socialist Party in Lebanon, announced that "the Shab'a Farms are not Lebanese, [but] Arab lands." Junblatt, who has since revised his position and regained his Syrian protection, noted that, "All Arab land should be liberated . . . but a political path also exists on this matter."<sup>5</sup>

Who, then, has the final word on Hizbollah's military operations against Israel? There is no unequivocal answer to this question. Although Iran and Syria are certainly powerful influences in the country, Lebanon too wields considerable weight. The Lebanese minister of information, Ghazi Aridi, defined the "limits of the game" from the government's point of view, saying that South Lebanon would not become an active front as a result of initiatives from the northern side of the border, and that Lebanon remains committed to this position – excluding Shab'a Farms, which is Lebanese land.<sup>6</sup>

Timur Goksel estimates that Hizbollah would not forego its militancy even if Israel evacuated Shab'a Farms. Goksel sees Hizbollah's present strength as invested in younger members whose attraction to the organization would be weakened if Hizbollah abandoned its current ideology and renounced the path of armed struggle. Therefore, he concludes, "in order for Hizbollah to be a major party in Lebanon, it

needs a military force.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Na’im Qasim indicates in his book that in addition to Shab’a Farms, several “other border points” continue to be held by Israel.

### ***Anti-Aircraft Fire: “An Eye for an Eye”***

According to the rules of the game that have emerged between Israel and Lebanon since the IDF pullout, Hizbollah deviates from its official regular operations primarily in an “eye for an eye” type of response to Israeli activity in the Lebanese arena or a flagrant escalation in the Palestinian arena. A specific example was Hizbollah’s reaction to Israel’s bombing of the Syrian radar post in the Lebanon Valley on July 1, 2001, which came in response to the Hizbollah operations on Mt. Dov two days earlier in which two IDF soldiers were wounded. Hizbollah opened with a mortar barrage on IDF strongholds on Mt. Dov – that is, it limited its response to the Shab’a Farms arena – and reported the destruction of Israeli radar there. In other words: radar for radar.<sup>8</sup> The Israeli radar was not destroyed as Hizbollah claimed, and the damage was minor compared to the destruction of the Syrian radar by IAF planes. However, from Hizbollah’s angle, the important point, the principle of punishing Israel measure for measure, had been met, or at least presented as such. Hizbollah termed the destruction of the Syrian radar facility and its counter-response against Israel “the radar equation.”<sup>9</sup>

A visible and ongoing example of this “reciprocity” is Hizbollah’s anti-aircraft fire at IDF planes that fly over Lebanon and at times break the sound barrier over Beirut. The purpose of these sorties is to gather intelligence and to send a warning to Lebanon, and indeed, the intended warning is frequently heeded.<sup>10</sup> In response, anti-aircraft fire (S-60 57MM) occurs along the northern border. Note, however, that Israel’s violation of Lebanese airspace commenced only after the abduction of the three IDF soldiers in early October 2000, and Israel claims that anti-aircraft fire sometimes takes place when the planes are not even in the vicinity.

The kidnapping of the three soldiers in October 2000 specifically in the “disputed” Shab’a Farms sector was not coincidental. When Israel responded by renewing its flights over Lebanon, Hizbollah was caught in a dilemma and had to decide on the appropriate response within the “eye for an eye” equation. On June 12, 2001, the answer came in the form of fire at IDF planes flying over the town of Bint Jbayl. Al-Manar interrupted its telecast and reported that “an Islamic Resistance air defense unit” had opened fire on “enemy planes,” and warned, “if they return – we shall recommence [fire].”<sup>11</sup>

On June 14, the Hizbollah official responsible for South Lebanon, Sheikh Nabil Qawuq, declared that the anti-aircraft fire heralds “the beginning of a new stage

emphasizing Hizbollah and Lebanon's position of strength." Regarding the Bint Jbayl event, Qawuq stressed that Lebanon had petitioned the international community to halt the Israeli infractions of Lebanese airspace, but to no avail. Qawuq believed that Israel was trying "to create a new equation whose objective was to conceal [its] defeat at Shab'a Farms."<sup>12</sup> The chairman of the Hizbollah parliamentary faction, Muhammad Ra'd, stated that his organization employed anti-aircraft fire to establish the opposite equation: "Just as in the past we sought to establish the April equation [the Grapes of Wrath understandings] in order to turn the citizens into neutral parties, today we are working at an equation, by our continuous resistance to the enemy, that will deter it from violating Lebanon's sovereign airspace."<sup>13</sup>

Hassan Nasrallah first admitted to the anti-aircraft fire only in the beginning of 2002. Speaking before students in Beirut, he explained the background of the organization's decision to shoot at Israeli jets:

[Regarding the] aircraft and anti-aircraft guns. Now, this has become a concern. US diplomacy is now active on this matter. It is conveying messages on it. Good heavens. Since the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon up to the past few days, thousands of Israeli violations, mostly airspace violations, have taken place. Some of these violations were committed in Lebanon's territorial waters and the Lebanese territory. But, most of these violations concern airspace violations. We do not need to provide proof. The population of south Lebanon see the aircraft, and so do the residents of Beirut and Tripoli.

We are level-headed people. First, we did not fire at the aircraft. For one year [and] as a matter of fact, for over a year, we have been imitating the UN troops operating in south Lebanon; that is, we have been making statistics of the airspace violations, maritime violations and territorial violations. We circulated these statistics among the news media; and some officials were also informed of them. This pattern of behavior continued for many long months. . . . The security results of this Israeli air activity and their association with assassinations and the attempts to disturb stability in the country will be discussed later. This is because such a debate could turn into a technical discussion. This is not the time for such a discussion. This matter has been neglected.

But, when the anti-aircraft guns of the Islamic resistance in the forward areas fire at the Israeli aircraft, the boom of the anti-aircraft shells is heard

by the first-class human beings, God's chosen people, the population of the oasis of democracy whose human rights need to be safeguarded, the chosen and select group of prosperous people who are leading a comfortable life, the Jews brought to the northern settlements from around the world. That is why they were disturbed. They are not disturbed when the anti-aircraft guns of the Islamic resistance fire at the Israeli aircraft in the al-Zahrani area, in Sidon, or on the coastal line. Has anybody been killed? No. This is because the anti-aircraft fire is directed into the sky. However, they were disturbed. Because they are cowards, it is enough for them to hear the boom of the anti-aircraft fire to go to shelters, stop shopping, close stores and bring life and tourism to a standstill in the northern settlements.<sup>14</sup>

Nasrallah also mentioned that thanks to Hizbollah's anti-aircraft fire the world is now aware that Israel methodically violates Lebanon's sovereign airspace. Regarding a solution to the issue, he assured that the anti-aircraft fire would stop if the flights stopped:

There is a very simple solution, and this solution is not connected to the Middle East, to Shab'a Farms, to, quote unquote, the just and comprehensive peace, or to anything. There is a simple equation. If the Israeli warplanes do not violate Lebanese airspace, then our air defense artillery will not open fire. Why? Because there will be nothing to shoot at. They shoot at the plane. If the Israeli warplanes do not violate Lebanese sovereignty and do not encroach on Lebanon and Lebanese airspace, then the air defense artillery will not open fire. It is a very simple solution. Therefore, the solution is not here in Lebanon.<sup>15</sup>

Hizbollah's anti-aircraft fire on the northern border carries with it a certain dimension of brinkmanship: the shooting has caused ground fires and property damage, and eventually led to Israeli civilians hurt by shrapnel. Nevertheless, Hizbollah calculates this as a low-cost risk, while at the same it reaps a propaganda windfall from the shooting, strengthens its image as the protector of Lebanese sovereignty, and reinforces its deterrent presence vis-à-vis Israel on the northern border, even if the deterrence takes the form of explosion reverberations and little else. Hizbollah's objective is to repay Israel measure for measure, given that the organization lacks its own aircraft to fly over Israeli airspace. As for the strengthening of its deterrent capability and Israel's awareness of its presence, whenever Hizbollah



opens anti-aircraft fire, it is reported in the Israeli media (as well as the Lebanese media).

In general, it seems fair to state that in Israel's mind Hizbollah is still actively engaged in military operations. The anti-aircraft fire, therefore, serves as punishment against Israel along with a deterrent gain for Hizbollah. Regarding the possibility that Israeli warplanes would be hit, the IAF commander, Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz, declared in June 2002 that Hizbollah's anti-aircraft cannon were incapable of hitting IDF aircraft because of the planes' ceiling, but their goal was to scatter shrapnel on Israeli settlements. A different Israeli view was presented by the chief of the Intelligence Research Division, Brig. Gen. Yossi Kuperwasser, who claimed that anti-aircraft fire was intended "to preserve [Hizbollah's] jihad nature." He cited examples when Hizbollah opened up anti-aircraft fire several hours after the IAF planes had returned to their bases. These assessments, however, overlook the main point, that the anti-aircraft fire is a reaction to the number and nature of the IAF flights, which in later months occurred with varying frequency ("the nature of the flights" refers to the provocative manner in which they are carried out, the number of sonic booms, vapor trails, and the aircraft ceilings).

A comparison of Hizbollah's data charting Israeli violations in 2002 with IDF data of anti-aircraft fire illustrates that the anti-aircraft fire is sporadic and selective (table 1). That is, during 2002 Hizbollah often chose not to respond even when IAF planes flew over Lebanese skies, and in fact in most cases opted for restraint. The peak months of anti-aircraft fire in 2002 came in July and August in response to the increase in IAF flights across the Lebanese skies (generally dozens of violations a week). In the interludes, when only isolated cases were recorded (July 9-17, for example, with only five flights), anti-aircraft fire was halted.

In December 2002 the IAF nearly ceased flights entirely (between December 10-16 there were only two infractions of Lebanese airspace; December 17-23 – three; and December 24-30 – five). In this period Hizbollah's anti-aircraft weaponry was silent for the whole month. This was the only month in 2002 that Hizbollah did not fire at all. In early January 2003, (the thirty-eighth week of table 1) anti-aircraft fire was renewed in response to an increase (according to Hizbollah statistics) of Israeli sorties over Lebanon to eighteen. It is possible, then, to conclude that the ultimate result of the anti-aircraft fire, and not the immediate objective of the shooting itself, is to preserve Hizbollah's "jihad nature." On the other hand, if Israeli sorties cease, the organization will find it difficult to continue its anti-aircraft fire. Furthermore, while the anti-aircraft fire preserves the "jihad" appearance, even if the shooting is small-scale, it is in reaction to Israeli flights and sovereignty infractions, not the reason for

**Table 1.** IAF Violations of Lebanon's Air Sovereignty and Hizbollah Anti-Aircraft Fire (April 16, 2002 - February 26, 2003)<sup>16</sup>

Week	Date	Number of violations of Lebanese airspace	Number of days of Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire
1	April 16-22, 2002	12	0
2	April 23-29	31	1
3	April 30-May 6	55	1
4	May 7-13	104	3
5	May 14-20	22	1
6	May 21-27	21	1
7	May 28-June 3	16	1
8	June 4-10	21	1
9	June 11-17	13	1
10	June 18-24	19	3
11	June 25-July 1	14	1
12	July 2-8	18	2
13	July 9-15	5	0
14	July 16-22	13	1
15	July 23-29	22	2
16	July 30-August 5	16	2
17	August 6-12	37	2
18	August 13-19	7	2
19	August 20-26	21	2
20	August 27-September 2	41	2
21	September 3-9	13	1
22	September 10-16	12	0
23	September 17-23	14	1

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number of violations of Lebanese airspace</b>	<b>Number of days of Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire</b>
24	September 24-30	14	1
25	October 1-7	40	2
26	October 8-14	31	1
27	October 15-21	11	0
28	October 22-28	50	1
29	October 29-November 5	45	2
30	November 6-12	14	0
31	November 13-19	18	1
32	November 20-25	39	1
33	November 26-December 2	13	2
34	December 3-9	6	0
35	December 10-16	2	0
36	December 17-23	3	0
37	December 24-30	5	0
38	December 31-January 6, 2003	18	1
39	January 7-13	41	3
40	January 14-20	4	1
41	January 21-27	21	1
42	January 28-February 3	57	1
43	February 4-10	6	0
44	February 11-18	8	0
45	February 19-26	0	0

them. In other words, Hizbollah does not initiate the fire because of its jihad ideology, but as part of a calculated strategy of measured responses to Israeli moves. "The retaliations are according to the scale of the Zionist enemy's violations," explained Nasrallah's political adviser, Haj Hussein Hassan.<sup>17</sup> As it stands now, the situation plays into Hizbollah's hands: it would be more difficult for it to initiate activity in an atmosphere of total quiet than if the front with Israel remains active, even if only in theory.

Hizbollah believes that anti-aircraft fire in Israeli skies has forced the IDF to scale back its flights over Lebanon. According to the organization's published data on 2002, there were 1452 Israeli air violations, compared to 2145 in 2001. Nabil Qawuq is convinced that the anti-aircraft fire "defined an equation that made air incursions costlier, and greatly limited the scope of the attacks."<sup>18</sup> The UN has taken note of Israeli air incursions. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan is careful to present them, together with Hizbollah's violations of the Blue Line, in his biannual report (January and July) to the Security Council, with the approach of the renewal date for the UNIFIL forces mandate in South Lebanon. In the report published in January 2003, Annan referred to the provocative nature of these flights. In a previous report (July 2002), he called attention to a new procedure taken by IAF jets – the penetration of Lebanese airspace via the sea, a maneuver designed, according to the report, to evade UNIFIL observation.

In contrast to the reduced number of airspace violations, Hizbollah data shows the number of Israeli violations of Lebanese maritime sovereignty on an upward trend: in 2001 Hizbollah listed 426 such violations, while in 2002 it recorded 721 intrusions by Israeli nautical craft.<sup>19</sup> As far as is known, Hizbollah has not attempted to deter Israel at sea, but the danger of intensified Israeli maritime activity is that it could be used by Hizbollah as a pretext "for opening" a new front.

Increased Israeli violation of Lebanese airspace triggers Hizbollah's responses according to the aforementioned rules of the game. In early February 2003, the IAF escalated its sorties over Lebanese territory, augmenting them with sonic booms and "feigned attacks," some of them over snow-capped tourist sites in the Mt. Lebanon region. As a result Israel created a convergence of interests between Lebanese public opinion and Hizbollah, a conjunction that Hizbollah succeeded in exploiting fully to strengthen its position. In addition, the UN secretary-general's personal representative in Lebanon, Steffan de Mistura, published a special statement calling on Israel to halt its flights: "The United Nations is deeply concerned that air violations by Israel across the Blue Line [UN-demarcated border] are continuing to take place and, in fact, seem to have increased in the past few days."<sup>20</sup> On February 2, 2003 Hizbollah responded

to the escalation of the flights with especially intensive anti-aircraft fire on the northern border. The IDF interpreted the shooting as Hizbollah's way of trying to heat up the northern border, with the fire allowing the organization to "release steam" and demonstrate its ongoing offensive against Israel.<sup>21</sup> Israeli officers who voiced these estimates either dismissed the significance of increased IAF flights, or chose to turn a blind eye to Israel's role in boosting the anti-aircraft fire.

Yet across the border, Secretary-General Nasrallah had left no room for doubt that his organization would not allow quiet if the provocative flights persisted:

The intensified sham attacks we have witnessed lately against Lebanon and the Lebanese people are Sharon-like clear messages to all Lebanese, the nation, and the resistance in Lebanon. These are intimidating and threatening messages to Lebanon. We say, as we have always said, that the war, the shelling, the destruction, the killing, and the acts of massacre that Ariel Sharon and his predecessors have perpetrated in Lebanon will not succeed in psychologically defeating the resistance, Lebanon, and its people, in a way that undermines the will or resolve of [our] determination. The feigned attacks are of no use whatsoever, except for creating an atmosphere in Lebanon and the region that could force the resistance to consider new methods for dealing with its neighbor. Regarding such a way that will infuriate people... this is a matter on which we cannot remain silent much longer.<sup>22</sup>

A few weeks later, Nasrallah spoke in even more explicit language: "If Israel continues its policy of feigned attacks that scare [our] citizens, we will handle this as beyond a sovereignty violation; the resistance will find a way to deter it."<sup>23</sup> According to Nasrallah, this was a development "graver than sovereignty violation. It is a matter of breaking the sound barrier and terrorizing citizens, and thus, an attack. The goal of the resistance is to stand up to aggression, and it will learn how to deal with this sort of aggression." In the period that followed, Hizbollah adjusted its weapons targeting so that the shells began to hit houses across the border in Israel. This activity yielded an unprecedented escalation on August 10, 2003, when a Hizbollah shell landed in Shlomi, an Israeli town near the northwestern sector of the Israel-Lebanon border, killing a sixteen year old resident. In response, IDF helicopters destroyed the anti-aircraft position from which the attack was launched. A second Hizbollah anti-aircraft position was destroyed by Israeli planes on September 3, 2003. This change

in Israel's policy prompted Hizbollah to redeploy its anti-aircraft positions and, as of December 2003, cease its anti-aircraft fire almost entirely.

Hizbollah interpreted this sort of Israeli aggression, a direct attack on Lebanon that violated the western sector of the Blue Line, as a deviation from the rules of the game, which demanded a similarly unconventional response. In other words, IAF flights along the western sector of the border, outside of Shab'a Farms, while successful in forcing Hizbollah to curb significantly its anti-aircraft shelling, broadened Hizbollah's legitimate theater to act outside the Shab'a Farms area as well.<sup>24</sup> This change in parameters did not go unnoticed in Israel. Following the destruction of the Hizbollah anti-aircraft position, an intelligence officer from the IDF Northern Command warned that Hizbollah might respond in turn by planting roadside bombs along roads in northern Israel.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, on November 5, 2003, the army announced it had uncovered a "bombs arena," the first of its kind, along the border fence, between Kibbutz Ma'ayan Baruch and Ghajar – that is, to the west of Shab'a Farms. The bombs, which were uncovered on Israeli soil, were detonated in controlled explosions.<sup>26</sup>

The "eye for an eye" principle has characterized much Hizbollah activity since the Israeli withdrawal. The abduction of three IDF soldiers on October 7, 2000 was presented as an act designed to correct what Hizbollah considered the asymmetric balance in which Lebanese prisoners were held by Israel without the possibility of exchanging them for Israeli prisoners. Na'im Qasim stated in his book that the organization's decision to kidnap was made because even after the withdrawal Israel continued to detain Lebanese hostages, chief among them, Sheikh Abd al-Karim Obeid and Mustafa Dirani, kidnapped by Israel in 1989 and 1994, respectively, to be held as bargaining chips for the return of the missing navigator, Ron Arad. (Hizbollah divorces itself of any connection to the fate of the missing Israeli airman, captured in October 1986 by Amal. Furthermore, the heads of the organization, including Qasim in his book, claim that they did all they could to investigate the matter so as to reinforce their position vis-à-vis Israel, but failed to uncover any information.) Qasim acknowledges that Hizbollah concluded that unless Israelis were kidnapped, Israel would refuse to release the Lebanese it held.

The same pattern recurred in areas outside Shab'a Farms. On December 29, 2000 a Lebanese civilian was killed by IDF fire after he climbed the border fence. Three days later an Israeli civilian was shot and wounded by a sniper from the Lebanese side. On May 7, 2002 Hizbollah claimed responsibility for firing on an Israeli patrol in the western sector of the border. No one was injured, but Hizballah maintained that the shooting was in reaction to Israeli fire on one of its outposts in the same region. Seven

months later, on December 8, 2002, two IDF soldiers were wounded, one seriously, by a roadside device that exploded near their armored vehicle near the Israeli settlement of Zar'it in the western sector. This was the first attack of this type in the western sector since the withdrawal, and it took place two days after a Lebanese drug dealer, Ramzi Nahra, was killed along with his nephew by a powerful roadside bomb next to his car, between the villages of Ibl al-Saqi and Kawkaba in South Lebanon. Nahra, a forty-five year old Christian, had connections with Hizbollah and worked in coordination with it. The nephew, Elie Yusuf Issa, was a member of a Lebanese security agency. Though Israel refused to comment on the operation, there was little doubt in Lebanon that Israel was behind the assassination. The Shiite organization blamed Israel and promised they would avenge Nahra's death.

Nahra was a popular figure because of his contacts with Hizbollah and Lebanese security agencies, under whose auspices, in February 1996, he had succeeded in luring to Beirut Ahmad Halaq, a Lebanese accused of helping Israel in the attempted assassination of Imad Mughniyah. Halaq was later executed by Lebanon, and Nahra proudly related to journalists how he had lured Halaq and kidnapped him while he, Nahra, enjoyed the Israelis' trust. The explosive device that killed Nahra was packaged in opaque fiberglass to look like a rock, a method Hizbollah was quite familiar with from the long years of struggle with the IDF in South Lebanon. According to Timur Goksel, both Hizbollah and the IDF employed this method when they fought in South Lebanon. Yet whoever was responsible for the assassination, it took place in South Lebanon, which Hizbollah regards as "its turf."

A number of significant points emerge regarding Nahra's assassination:

- *Responsibility*: Israel was immediately fingered as the guilty party, and Hizbollah saw this as a "window of opportunity" – an umbrella of legitimacy – to extend activity against Israel beyond the Shab'a Farms dispute. After the assassination of the former Lebanese minister Elie Hubayqah (January 2002), and Jihad Ahmad Jibril, the son of the secretary-general of the Popular Front – General Command (May 2002), both in Beirut, the Lebanese accused Israel of direct involvement, and Hizbollah also ascribed responsibility to Israel.<sup>27</sup> After these two incidents, however, no follow-up operation ensued and no specific act of revenge against Israel could be identified, perhaps because Hizbollah felt the link between Israel and the two assassinations was weak.
- *Speed of response*: It took less than two days for a response against Israel. The explosion next to the Israeli patrol was intended to kill both passengers in the

vehicle. The incident took place independently of the events in the Palestinian arena (which was relatively quiet at the time).

- *Hizbollah's attitude to the victim:* Hizbollah endeavored to provide Nahra with its patronage (even if done retroactively, in a kind of posthumous upgrading), in order to prepare the public for the revenge response that would be exacted from Israel.
- *Type of reaction:* The roadside explosive used against Israel could be seen as a proportional act consistent with the principle of “an eye for an eye.” Hizbollah did not unleash Katyusha rockets on the north of Israel. Still, the measured response had an escalatory potential, though in this instance Israel would have been perceived in Lebanon as the aggressor and Hizbollah – depending of course on its reactions – as the defender.

After the explosion that nearly cost the lives of two Israeli soldiers, not a word of criticism was heard from Lebanon regarding those events in the western sector that might have led to deterioration along the border. Perhaps Hizbollah could have exercised restraint over Nahra's assassination because he was not, after all, identified with Hizbollah but was a Christian drug dealer, and just as he had cooperated with Hizbollah for many years, he was also known to have been an agent of Israel and Syria. The fact that Hizbollah decided to grant protection, retroactively, to a South Lebanese drug-trafficker is instructive regarding the organization's readiness to retaliate against Israel.

A final example of this pattern is the August 2, 2003 killing in southern Beirut of Hizbollah activist Ali Hussein Salih. To Hizbollah and many other parties in Lebanon it was clear that Israel was behind the assassination, particularly when Israeli newspapers furnished numerous details about Salih and his involvement with Palestinian terrorism.<sup>28</sup> Following the assassination, Hizbollah announced that “this crime will not go unpunished.”<sup>29</sup> Less than a week later, on August 8, Hizbollah attacked Mt. Dov, breaking the nearly seven-month long period of quiet there. Hizbollah announced that a group “named for the martyr Ali Hussein Salih attacked Zionist enemy positions.”<sup>30</sup> At the same time, Hizbollah officials cautioned that this attack at Mt. Dov was not revenge for Salih's death, and that appropriate action would follow in time.

The creation of “rules of the game” increases the chances that relative quiet will be preserved for a longer period. At the same time, a number of factors, first and foremost Hizbollah's continuous activity against Israel, mainly at Mt. Dov, could cloud the prospects of reaching “a passive agreement”<sup>31</sup> between Israel and Hizbollah and



enjoying prolonged “temporary” relative stability, because of the escalatory potential in these acts. Since the withdrawal Israel has refrained from responding to certain Hizbollah operations even when IDF soldiers were killed. However, as time passes Israel is likely to find self-restraint increasingly difficult, especially if many casualties are involved. So far Hizbollah too has not reacted to every Israeli move that it considers a violation of the rules of engagement.

For example, Hizbollah preferred not to respond when a Lebanese civilian was killed during an IDF shelling that came in reaction to Hizbollah activity on Mt. Dov on January 21, 2003. Organizational leaders, fearing that non-reprisal for the killing of a civilian could set a dangerous precedent, convened to debate the matter. On the other hand, the organization preferred sporadic operations at Shab’a Farms, that is, on-and-off combat.<sup>32</sup> The issue on the agenda therefore was whether to announce that the organization would respond to any attack on Lebanese civilians, along the lines of the Operation Grapes of Wrath understandings.<sup>33</sup> These understandings, which prohibit strikes against civilians on either side of the fence, form the framework of rules that Hizbollah has wanted to uphold since the pullout. According to Nasrallah, “as long as Hizbollah operates on Lebanese soil, it remains within the framework of April’s understandings [the Grapes Wrath of understandings].”<sup>34</sup> However, unlike Israel, Hizbollah sometimes operates from within populated areas, which increases the possibility that Lebanese civilians will be injured.

Another possibility is that Israel may decide to terminate its restraint. A violation of the status quo that has been intact along the border might result from an Israeli decision to end its restraint toward Hizbollah’s unofficial activity, including the supply of weapons to the Palestinians, subversion among Israeli Arabs, and infiltration of agents into Israel and Palestinian territories whose objective is to “upgrade” the “quality” of attacks against Israel. Under these circumstances the threat posed by Hizbollah’s arsenal of thousands of Katyusha and long-range rockets cannot be ignored and is a source of ongoing concern within the Israeli security establishment.

As 2003 approached, Hizbollah, Lebanon, and Syria all grew apprehensive that Israeli self-restraint was about to end. Following a series of leaks and media briefings by high-ranking IDF officers and statements by senior government figures against Hizbollah, the fear increased across the border that Israel was planning an aggressive move in Lebanon to coincide with the American invasion of Iraq. Hizbollah went into action on two levels: it maintained a deterrent front in order to dissuade Israel from launching an attack, and at the same time it prepared for any contingency. According to one report from Lebanon, Hizbollah made logistical arrangements in South Lebanon and dispatched activists to refresher training courses in Iran,<sup>35</sup> while

declaring that the organization had no intention of attacking Israel during the expected American assault on Iraq. In any case, in early January 2003 Nasrallah announced that his organization had no idea which scenario was more likely – an Israeli attack against Lebanon or Israeli self-restraint.

Thus, while the secretary-general of Hizbollah stated that his organization was stronger than in the past and capable of inflicting heavy casualties on Israel, at the same time he stressed that it had not come to a decision to react to Israeli “provocations” – excluding “bombings” – during American operations in Iraq.<sup>36</sup> To strengthen the organization’s diplomatic and Arab posture, senior Hizbollah figures attended diplomatic meetings with foreign ambassadors in Beirut, in Arab countries, and at the Arab League in Cairo, in order to explain the organization’s position in the event of an Israeli attack. Similarly, as part of this relatively moderate approach, Nasrallah declared that if Israel left Lebanese civilians alone, Hizbollah would not injure Israelis. Departing from his tendency to dissimulate regarding the organization’s fighting materiel, Nasrallah stepped out of character and denied that Hizbollah had received weapons from Iraq or that a huge explosion in a Hizbollah training camp had resulted from tests with a new missile. Under other circumstances Nasrallah would have refused to divulge the source of the blast, reported on December 29, 2002, and which some intelligence estimates believed was an experiment with a new type of missile.<sup>37</sup> On this occasion, however, he explained that the explosion took place during the removal of a large pile of ammunition that Israel had discarded after the withdrawal, and that the organization had reprimanded its members for destroying it in one enormous blast rather than a number of smaller ones.

## Chapter 6

### **Hizbollah's Arsenal and Means of Deterrence**

To Israeli thinking, Hizbollah's foremost activity has been its accelerated armament with thousands of rockets. In addition, in recent years the organization has succeeded in preparing agents (some of whom have been captured) to infiltrate into the territories and Israel proper. This chapter deals with various aspects of Hizbollah's arsenal buildup and presents details on its deterrent capability vis-à-vis Israel.

#### ***Arms Procurement***

In the months preceding the IDF withdrawal, Iran, through its Revolutionary Guards, accelerated arms shipments to Hizbollah to a degree that Israeli intelligence described as "massive." Beginning in early 2000 Hizbollah was increasingly supplied with new weapons such as long-range rockets, some of which, according to Israeli estimates, were tipped with heavy warheads that could significantly alter their strike effect.

In July 2001, Ze'ev Schiff of the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* wrote of a major increase in arms shipments to Hizbollah from Iran via Syria, and an Israeli assessment of more than seven thousand Katyusha rockets in the hands of the organization. Since that time, the number has grown steadily and, according to Israeli intelligence estimates, at the end of 2003 is at least eleven thousand. The figure includes hundreds of long-range rockets that were transferred to Lebanon and placed under the direct control of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. This arsenal provides the organization with "wide breathing space potential" in case of a confrontation with Israel, and serves as the main component in the deterrence balance that Hizbollah strove for and has now obtained. The organization is careful to justify its possession of Katyusha rockets as a counterweight to Israel's military superiority and alleged nuclear capability. "We have created a balance of fear by means of the Katyusha, which military science likens to a water pistol," Nasrallah stated on February 16, 2002 at a memorial ceremony in Nebi Sheet on the tenth anniversary of the assassination of his predecessor, Abbas Musawi, by Israel.

Hizbollah's mushroomed rearmament with thousands of Katyusha rockets sends an unequivocal deterrent message to Israel and other parties. The organization's newly-gained military empowerment is a key factor in preventing the banishment of Lebanon's Shiite community to the political backwaters where it had long been relegated. As such, its enormous power is also aimed at the Lebanese authorities, who would find disarming Hizbollah a formidable task, one commanding a high price for the organization's consent.

One decisive feature of Hizbollah's strategic weapons – Katyusha rockets and long-range rockets – is that their deployment could produce grave consequences. Therefore, other than a deterrent role, their actual use would be very problematic for Hizbollah, and is reserved, in the meantime, for worst case scenarios. A Hizbollah-initiated rocket attack deep into the north of Israel would be an intolerable provocation, one that would most likely invite an Israeli invasion of Lebanon or some other form of massive strike.

At present Hizbollah prefers to avoid this; therefore it defines its rocket arsenal as a deterrent safeguard against an Israeli attack, and apparently it would resort to these weapons only after a deterrence failure and Israeli offensive. Another scenario that Nasrallah outlined in a speech in 2002 that could trigger the launching of Katyusha rockets would be the mass deportation of Palestinians to neighboring countries or the beginning of a systematic killing of Palestinians. However, these scenarios are extremely radical and seem unlikely to occur in the foreseeable future.

### ***Covert Activity and Collaboration with Palestinian Groups***

The distinction between Hizbollah's official, declared activity and its covert activity is important since the organization wants to bestow an aura of legitimacy on its official activity at the local Lebanese level and the international level. At the public level Hizbollah carefully limits its military activity against Israel to the Shab'a Farms sector, which explains its official commitment to the UN Blue Line, excluding Shab'a Farms, where it operates in contempt of the UN position but with Lebanon's and Syria's backing. Concomitantly, however, Hizbollah has operated on a covert level as well and has improved its intelligence and operational ability inside Israel proper. In recent years Israel publicized the capture of three Hizbollah agents. At least another two who entered Israel managed to escape abroad.

In April 1996 Hussein Miqdad, a Lebanese citizen working for Hizbollah, infiltrated Israel while in possession of a powerful explosive device hidden in a radio receiver. Holding an El Al ticket to Europe, Miqdad spent a few days in Tel Aviv and

Jerusalem under the alias of a British citizen, Andrew Newman. Miqdad was critically wounded in a blast on April 12, 1996 while he was assembling the smuggled bomb. He was returned to Lebanon in June 1998 as part of a prisoner exchange deal.

German citizen Stephan Smyrak, who was arrested at Ben Gurion Airport in January 1998, revealed to his investigators that he had converted to Islam in 1994 and joined Hizbollah two years later. In August 1999, Smyrak was convicted of assisting an enemy at war with Israel and of intending to harm state security. On June 5, 2001, a British citizen, Jihad Shuman, was arrested on suspicion of Hizbollah affiliation. A senior security source noted several months later that it was uncertain what Shuman meant to do in Israel, but his arrest a few hundred meters from the prime minister's residence in Jerusalem hinted perhaps at plans to attack the prime minister. Overall, Hizbollah has kept silent about covert methods such as these against Israel.<sup>1</sup>

Material released in Israel has revealed that another aspect to Hizbollah's buildup was its increased cooperation with Palestinian organizations in the territories and with Israeli Arabs – activity that occurred before the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, but that has apparently accelerated since. According to Brig. Gen. (res.) Yehiam Sasson, who until the summer of 2002 served as chief of the counter-terrorism department in the prime minister's office, Hizbollah's leadership was preparing to develop and implement additional channels of action as the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon approached. For example, the arrest of IDF Lt. Col. Omar al-Hayb brought to light Hizbollah's connection with the drug smuggling operation in South Lebanon. According to Sasson, since the pullout, the exploitation of drug dealers ranks high on Hizbollah's list of priorities, with the organization maintaining close supervision over drug dealing in South Lebanon and from Lebanon into Israel. Sasson claimed that Hizbollah has successfully utilized this channel in order to advance its interests. He added:

From the moment that Hizbollah understood that it was about to lose its base of legitimate operations in Lebanon, it increased its investment in other channels, that is – low signature or no-signature operations. One channel it has invested a great deal of effort in is the infiltration of agents into Israel. Hizbollah has also increased its intelligence gathering inside Israel, smuggling in fighting materiel, and making contact with other terrorist organizations. Today Hizbollah acts more as a long-range military force than a terror organization carrying out attacks on a daily basis. Hizbollah has prepared a file of potential targets, but is not satisfied just with collecting files and preparing the intelligence infrastructure for

carrying out attacks. It is also developing the operational infrastructure for implementing them. Hizbollah works one step ahead [of events], that is, it advances its operational ability toward the actualization of these attacks. It does this by infiltrating agents who know how to consolidate the human infrastructure for executing the strike and how to obtain fighting materiel. In this way Hizbollah shortens its response time from the moment a decision is made to the moment the strike takes place. This pattern of activity is characteristic of an organization with institutionalized operational thinking.<sup>2</sup>

According to Sasson, while Hizbollah has infiltrated agents into Israel it has also stashed away fighting materiel inside the state. In his estimate, the organization is capable of realizing the potential of this armament within the State of Israel “at any given moment.”

Operational coordination between Hizbollah and the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon, for example, Islamic Jihad in Palestine and the Popular Front – General Command under Ahmad Jibril, grants Hizbollah a degree of autonomy in directing attacks against Israel outside the Shab’a Farms sector. This freedom is very limited since it runs counter to Lebanon’s opposition to Palestinian activity against Israel emanating from its territory. Hizbollah is able to manage limited Palestinian activity under these circumstances, but unless Lebanon reverses its intolerance of Palestinian organizations operating within the state, then the launching of Palestinian hit teams across the border is a risk to Hizbollah.

In all aspects of the confrontation in the Palestinian arena, Hizbollah has demonstrated its aims, ambitions, and operational ability to contribute to the creation of strategic crossroads. On October 30, 2002 Israel’s General Security Service acknowledged the June 2002 arrest of Fawzi Ayyub, a Shiite from South Lebanon who held Canadian and Lebanese citizenship, in the West Bank city of Hebron. Ayyub, an explosives expert, had flown to Israel from a European country and checked into a hotel in downtown Jerusalem. Thirty-nine years old, he was a veteran Hizbollah activist who had participated in attacks against Israel in Lebanon and abroad. During his stay in Israel, he met someone who assisted him. Ayyub’s mission was to help Palestinian organizations improve their operational capability and cultivate in the organizations a level of sophistication that Israel would be hard put to deal with.<sup>3</sup>

Ayyub is not the only Hizbollah agent who infiltrated Israel and was caught, and his case illustrates a pattern that Hizbollah has developed. Hizbollah agents captured in Israel have confessed that they were trained in bases in the Lebanon Valley in large

groups consisting of recruits with Western appearances, and then sent to Israel in order to “upgrade” the intifada. Upon arrival in Israel and the Palestinian territories they linked up with Hizbollah-connected cells.<sup>4</sup> According to Israeli intelligence, Hizbollah has set up a number of cells in the PA, in Gaza (one team which was captured) and several teams in the West Bank, especially in Nablus. These cells are composed of members of the Fatah movement who receive financing, instruction, and guidance from Hizbollah.<sup>5</sup>

An earlier example of Hizbollah’s efforts at upgrading the intifada was its involvement in initiating mortar fire from the Gaza Strip in early 2001. On February 13, 2001 Israel assassinated Mas’ud Ayyad, a colonel in the Palestinian Force 17 who, according to the IDF, was the commander of a Hizbollah team. Israel had information that Ayyad visited Lebanon in the summer of 2000 and met with Hizbollah officers who instructed him to commence mortar attacks on Netzarim, a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip. The shelling began two weeks before his assassination.<sup>6</sup>

Hizbollah’s efforts to effect a quantum leap in the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation are rooted in the organization’s interest - and in that of countries close to it, such as Iran and Syria - in perpetuating the conflict. These efforts are generally camouflaged to minimize the danger to Hizbollah or Lebanon.

The objective of Hizbollah’s “ongoing” activity on Mt. Dov is to broadcast a message of relevancy and resistance activism to the players in the region, and to preserve its deterrence vis-à-vis Israel. Hizbollah’s covert, unofficial operations – the infiltration of agents into Israel and recruitment of agents in Israel for operational and intelligence purposes – may be considered the organization’s long-range, strategic investment. Two scenarios that might draw on this strategic capability are: revenge against Israel for a massive IDF operation against the organization (for example the assassination of senior Hizbollah figures), or an attempt by the organization to sabotage political moves it considers negative. Whatever the case, Hizbollah’s policy has been to maintain absolute silence on its subversive activity inside Israel and its buildup of an operational infrastructure there.<sup>7</sup>

Within the framework of what the Israeli intelligence community believes is Hizbollah’s global activity, the organization seems to be trying to counter Israel’s “target bank” in Lebanon with its own “target bank.” Hizbollah’s “target bank” includes intelligence data on military and national infrastructures in Israel.<sup>8</sup> On the eve of the Wazzani River water pumping in South Lebanon, Secretary-General Nasrallah warned that his organization had prepared a “target bank” inside Israel in case of an attack on the Wazzani and that an attack on the site would incur a Hizbollah response “within minutes.”<sup>9</sup> The head of the Southern Council, Qablan Qablan, even

publicly revealed the Israeli target slated as retaliation: an Israeli factory located close to the border.

Facing Israel, Hizbollah has also created a balance of fear by expanding its horizons, such as the two deadly attacks in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994 that Israel attributes to the organization. The attack against the Israeli embassy in Argentina on March 17, 1992 came one month and one day after Israel's assassination of Abbas Musawi. The second attack occurred on July 18, 1994, almost six weeks after fifty Hizbollah recruits were killed in an IAF bombing raid in Lebanon.<sup>10</sup> Israel regards this action as an example of Hizbollah's "response threshold," one that could very well be applied again in the future.<sup>11</sup> According to assessments, the mastermind behind these attacks was Imad Mughniyah, whom Israeli intelligence regards as Nasrallah's right-hand man and who serves as Hizbollah's deputy secretary-general of military affairs. Information on Mughniyah's increased activity has often led to a surge of concern and sense of heightened alert in Israel.

Without doubt, if Israel wanted to it could liquidate most of the senior Hizbollah members, including the top operations figures. The fact that such actions have not occurred may indicate that in the profit and loss equation, the profit does not exceed and therefore justify the loss.



## Chapter 7

### **Hizbollah in the Lebanese Domestic Arena**

The preoccupation with Hizbollah as an organization with military and terrorist dimensions tends to overlook the economic and social dimensions to the organization within the Lebanese domestic arena, which in fact may be expected to increase in importance the longer the status quo abides between Israel and Hizbollah and a glaring deterioration does not ensue. Hizbollah's public announcement of its concern for Lebanon's economy and tourist industry is only partially representative of its interests since, as a movement with social dimensions, it is careful to champion Lebanon's economic plight. Indeed, the leader of the Hizbollah faction in parliament, Muhammad Ra'd, announced that in addition to the struggle with Israel, Hizbollah and Lebanon are waging war on the socio-economic level:

We face another confrontation and struggle in the domestic arena, namely, the economic war, the embargo, the budget deficit, recession, cash shortage, and rising unemployment . . . This is a war that requires planning and everyone's cooperation since we are struggling on two fronts simultaneously, and the loss of one means the loss of the other.<sup>1</sup>

The question raised here is to what extent Hizbollah's political strength serves its military prowess and ability to preserve the option of an armed struggle against Israel. Apparently by anchoring its roots in Lebanon's parliamentary, social, and economic arenas, Hizbollah has built itself a safety net of organizational legitimacy independent of its military dimension. The preservation of Hizbollah's legitimacy depends on its degree of success in supporting economic recovery and in providing welfare services to its constituency and to other needy publics. Hassan Nasrallah has noted that providing for the families of fallen comrades serves as "the backing and continuation of the resistance option."<sup>2</sup>

### ***Domestic and Economic Intervention***

Even before Israel's withdrawal, Hizbollah was actively engaged in providing welfare services through agencies such as the "Martyr's Agency" (*Mu'asasat al-Shahid*), "The Agency for the Injured" (*Mu'asasat al-Jarih*), and "The Jihad for Construction" (*Jihad al-Binaa*),<sup>3</sup> taking pride in these institutional endeavors. In a publication for the Martyr's Agency televised on al-Manar, one clip described how the agency supported a little boy from the time his father, a Hizbollah fighter, was killed, through the boy's university studies and training as a doctor in a hospital.<sup>4</sup> The Construction Agency has assisted poor farmers by instructing them in agricultural techniques, soil development, and livestock breeding.<sup>5</sup>

But the connection between Hizbollah and its electorate runs much deeper. Beirut's southern neighborhoods comprise one of the largest Shi'ite concentrations in Lebanon, and are both an important Hizbollah stronghold and the location of the majority of the organization's offices. The area is densely populated (500,000 inhabitants, according to Na'im Qasim), noticeably run-down – the Shi'ites settled there en masse, in part after fleeing north and abandoning their homes in the southern war zone – and for this reason has been given the name "Misery Strip." In his book, Qasim relates that since March 1991 Hizbollah has volunteered to supply drinking water daily to the residents of South Beirut using 110 water tanks that hold 300,000 liters. Also, between 1988 and 1991, Hizbollah took over South Beirut's sanitation system, "assuming responsibility for an area neglected by the state."<sup>6</sup>

After the IDF withdrawal, the organization established the Islamic Health Organization, which included nine health centers, sixteen clinics, and three mobile clinics providing health services for fifty-one villages. In 2001 the clinics treated 111,077 civilians, and supplied free medication and health services to pupils in eighty-eight schools. Hizbollah also offered free educational assistance to thousands of pupils in Lebanon.<sup>7</sup>

According to Timur Goksel, after the IDF withdrawal the organization expanded its activity in the evacuated areas. For example, it took over the hospital in Bint Jbayl, which it still runs, and set up clinics and aid centers for farmers. Goksel mentions Hizbollah's scholarship program, research grants, and financial assistance for housing for families of Hizbollah fighters who were killed, wounded, or disabled. "According to this system Hizbollah holds on to its people. It cares for them. If someone is killed in battle, the family knows it will be provided for – perhaps even better than if the man were alive. They receive full housing, scholarships, medical treatment – everything is guaranteed, and [Hizbollah] proves that it is capable of accomplishing this."<sup>8</sup>

A recent example of Hizbollah's efforts for the benefit of residents was its damage control following a severe snowstorm in late February 2003. The Lebanese described the storm as the worst in five decades. The Shiite center in the Lebanon Valley suffered severe losses, including fatalities, when lands and entire villages were flooded. Nasrallah reproached the Lebanese government for its negligence and declared that "dealing with the results of the present situation amounts to a jihad."<sup>9</sup> He called on the members of his organization and all its institutions to volunteer in aiding the storm victims. The media reported the mobilization of hundreds of Hizbollah activists who removed snow from the roads leading to dozens of villages.<sup>10</sup> A Hizbollah delegation that came to assess the damage in the Lebanon Valley distributed staples such as food, bread, and oil, provided medical treatment, and transferred the sick to hospitals.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond its investment in welfare and other assistance to the local population, Hizbollah is attuned to the broader national concern with economic revival. Overall, Lebanon's politicians, media, and public have been ardently engaged in the country's economic affairs in an effort to attract investors. An outstanding example of this was the near "national celebration" organized in Beirut on the eve of the opening of a Movenpick hotel in early July 2002. The hotel's opening was attended by the Lebanese leadership, including President Emile Lahud, and broadcast live with full coverage on a number of Lebanese television stations – hardly a common phenomenon in most countries. Another example of the nation's economic preoccupation was Beirut TV's short of crowds applauding a young man who paid his restaurant bill in Lebanese pounds, rather than in dollars, as his friends generally did. Similarly, a TV advertisement for the Middle East Bank on Tele Liban enthusiastically described the rehabilitation of Lebanon and its national status. The clip concluded with the announcements that "Lebanon has reemerged better than ever" and "all of us pledge our trust in Lebanon."

Operating within this environment, which will probably continue in the near future, Hizbollah's military actions could be perceived as running counter to the nation's interests. The possibility of an Israeli attack against the Lebanese infrastructure in response to Hizbollah provocation could shatter the atmosphere of stability that the government is taking pains to restore to the country. Such counterproductive repercussions to the organization are probably what motivate it to keep many of its activities anonymous. An indictment against Hizbollah would hurt the organization and brand it with the image of traitor to its pledge to protect the state and foster Lebanese economic growth.

In the coming years Prime Minister Hariri will have to achieve maximum equanimity and stability in Lebanon in order to advance his economic plans. He has tried to launch the privatization of large government companies, including cellular phone companies, in order to reduce the country's foreign debt. Hizbollah could interfere with Hariri's – and Lebanon's – efforts at extricating the country from the economic crisis by carrying out military acts that would sabotage Lebanon's image as a safe arena for investment. Some countries would be eager to invest in Lebanon if Hizbollah displayed utmost restraint. In late November 2002, twenty-seven countries and international organizations participated in the Paris 2 Convention in the French capital. By the end of the meeting, loans to Lebanon amounted to over \$4.4 billion, a pledge that received wide coverage and high-profile debate in the media. It seems that Lebanon was exempted from political payment in the form of tightening the hold on Hizbollah in exchange for the loans; nevertheless Hizbollah will have to take the political track into consideration since it claims that its military might is what protects Lebanon from Israel. Now the organization will have to stand by its words.

Hizbollah generally endeavors to participate in the public discussion on the economy, and devotes programs on Hizbollah TV to this issue.<sup>12</sup> Nasrallah has often sought to create for himself the image of a leader whose highest priority is the Lebanese economy. Thus, in a speech on May 25, 2002, he declared:

Once, in a debate on the use of resistance, I told officials that “we care about the nation, the state, and the future more than you think.” Why is that? Because when the state is threatened by security, military, and political dangers and economic collapse, God forbid, people who possess income, capital, companies, [and who have] children, mansions, and homes abroad leave [the country]. They hold dual citizenship. It's very simple. They collect the rest of their family here and leave the country. [But] our homes, graves, life, death, honor, and humiliation – remain here. Where else can we go?<sup>13</sup>

In fact, over 2003 Hizbollah became one of the key parties warning against further economic deterioration, and towards the end of the year, it cautioned that the national debt could reach \$35 billion by the end of 2004.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, Hizbollah harbors considerable reservations over the prime minister's plans for efficiency and privatization, because of the thousands of citizens who are expected to lose their jobs following the privatization of companies. Indeed, Hizbollah leaders endeavor to make their voices heard whenever labor layoffs threaten the citizens. This dimension has become perhaps even more characteristic of Hizbollah

activity since it lost South Lebanon as its main field of military operations in May 2000. For example, in June 2001, Hizbollah, Amal, and other movements such as the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) were caught up in a crisis that grew out of the intention to dismiss 1450 workers of Middle East Airlines due to deficits and the urgent need to streamline the company. Ra'd warned the government that Hizbollah had the power to take the struggle "to the street," but would avoid doing this, despite its mass following, out of awareness of the dangers involved. By the same token, the organization rejected charges that its protest over the workers' lay-off sprang from the fact that many of its supporters were employed in the company.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the privatization crisis, Hizbollah raised its flag over other issues, the first of which was the government's decision to terminate hashish growing in the Lebanon Valley. Hizbollah immediately rejected this plan and proposed that the government purchase the crop from the growers or find them an alternative source of livelihood. Two months later, in September 2001, Hizbollah fought against the government proposal for a gas hike in order to generate money to pay off the state's debt. In mid-2002 the organization protested the government decision to declare trucks running on crude oil illegal.

One example of Hizbollah's PR management in the shadow of the economic imperative is illustrated by its low profile during the summer tourist season in 2001 and 2002 (the summer of 2000 is less relevant because until the three IDF soldiers were kidnapped on October 7, 2000, the entire southern front was quiet). At the start of the 2001 tourist season, the head of the Hizbollah parliamentary faction, Muhammad Ra'd, announced that his organization would take the economy and tourist industry into consideration when operating against Israel:

At our last meeting with Hariri we realized he is convinced that there is no possibility that Israel will go to war, and that it is [only] engaged in scare-mongering. But the side that does not wage war inflicts painful blows. This does not imply that war does not exist. We agree on the question of Israel's ability to inflict painful blows, and cause serious divisions of opinion regarding resistance . . . We must be wary of this; and the resistance is mindful of Israel's [machinations] and what could happen to Lebanese society and the economic situation . . . Let us assume that we are in the summer season and a stream of tourists [has arrived] in Lebanon. Would the resistance proceed to ruin this? The resistance will act befitting the present conditions and will not be responsible for destroying the summer vacation season.<sup>16</sup>

When the 2002 tourist season began, Ra'd declared that Hizbollah wishes Lebanon success and prosperity, which it indeed subsequently enjoyed.<sup>17</sup> On August 29, 2002, Hizbollah renewed its activity on Mt. Dov, and in the mortar fire on IDF strongholds – the first operation after four months – IDF Sgt. Ophir Mishal was fatally wounded. Several days later the daily *al-Mustaqbal* published a commentary under the heading “Objectives of the New ‘Farms’ Operation and its Significance,” signed by Qasim Qasir. Regarding the timing of the operation, the Lebanese commentator quoted “observers” who counted seven factors, most of them connected with the regional situation, especially with developments in the Iraqi and Palestinian arenas. But the first consideration was that the tourist season was over and Hizbollah had not been interested in sabotaging the country’s atmosphere while tourists were vacationing.<sup>18</sup> For its part, the Lebanese government anticipates increased tourism in the coming years. In December 2002, an annual contract was signed with the American television network CNN for broadcasting advertisements that promoted Lebanon’s image as a tourist attraction. Minister of Commerce and Industry Basel Felihan announced, “We are discussing the beginning of a broader program that emphasizes Lebanon’s beauty and potential as a tourist site.”<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Hizbollah labors to present itself as a corrupt-free organization, motivated by popular wellbeing rather than any private incentives. Thus, Hizbollah leaders have continuously criticized the state’s leadership for the blatant corruption in government corridors that contributes heavily to the country’s economic plight. On June 12, 2001, Na’im Qasim declared that Lebanon was going through an economic test, and he called on the government to put an end to the “greedy hand.” A few months later, on November 9, Muhammad Yazbak, a Hizbollah parliamentarian, warned of a popular uprising if the Lebanese government did not end the widespread graft. Hizbollah regards its own clean image as a matter of highest value. In early January 2003, Nasrallah stated that it was impossible to hold a meeting then between the organization and Prime Minister Hariri because of the burning insult Hizbollah had dispatched not long before with Hariri’s accusation that the organization had attempted to transfer to its own coffers budgets intended for developing South Beirut.<sup>20</sup> Nasrallah’s response:

The worst charge was our desire for compensation in order to obtain money for the Hizbollah budget. This was grossly insulting. You can tell me that this may be accepted practice in Lebanese politics. From our point of view – from my personal point of view and that of my Hizbollah brothers – this is unacceptable. You can call us extremists and terrorists – that won’t anger

us. But to call us thieves? Not in the past, not in the present, and not in the future. Whoever needs money – we are ready to give it to him.<sup>21</sup>

Hizbollah's integration into the Lebanese political system was accompanied by internal dissension that led to violent clashes with the former secretary-general Subhi Tufayli. The organization believed it had to prove that it remained faithful to its social promises after entering the state establishment. In addition, its involvement in the Lebanese political arena continued for a different reason: the continuous struggle with its rival, Amal, for the loyalty of Lebanon's Shiite community. In South Lebanon the rivalry is expressed in the "battle" of the welfare agencies. Hizbollah agencies have unfolded a protective umbrella over the population, while Amal controls the Southern Council, responsible for investment and development in South Lebanon. The secular organization Amal, whose goal was to oust the IDF from Lebanon but not to destroy the State of Israel, was considered closer to Syria. Hizbollah, the Islamic organization, was closer to Iran in all areas, including ideology.<sup>22</sup>

In the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, an intermingling of Amal and Hizbollah flags could be seen across the border, but the differences and rivalries between the two groups remained intact and the "beginning of a beautiful friendship" never materialized. Since then, dozens of violent incidents between supporters of the two organizations have been reported. Sometimes fistfights have been accompanied with gunfire, and in at least three cases clashes led to fatalities.<sup>23</sup> The central government was forced to intervene in May 2001 to prevent the holding of two separate rallies in South Lebanon on the first anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal. Both sides acceded to the request and took part in a state-run affair that was attended by the president and prime minister.

At the same time, the two organizations are capable of working in tandem, especially when this is in Syria's interest. In September 2001, they joined forces in elections to 115 local councils in South Lebanon – the first elections in South Lebanon in thirty-eight years. The Amal-Hizbollah pact swept up a majority of votes in ninety of the councils.<sup>24</sup> Hizbollah's advantage over Amal could be said to lie in the fact that South Lebanon's liberation has been mainly engraved with Hizbollah's name. Although the power of this trump card is fading as time passes, the organization compensates for this by preserving the "resistance" option and especially by presenting itself as the ultimate defender of Lebanon against the Israeli threat. Competition between Hizbollah and Amal in the political arena could serve as a stimulus for Hizbollah to highlight its "resistance" dimension further. Already in the

late nineties, Amal-Hizbollah rivalry created an increase in military activity against Israel by both organizations.

In recent months the need to take local exigencies into consideration has added a renewed relevancy in Hizbollah's "opening up" toward the Lebanese and even international arenas. Nasrallah's rare participation in the opening address of the Francophonie Conference in Beirut, the publication of Na'im Qasim's book, which is designed to justify the organization and its goals, and the announcement of preparations to update and moderate its political platform are all signs of the organization's propensity toward marketing a new image, one more sympathetic to the host environment. In accordance with this trend, in November 2002 Nasrallah asked to convene a quiet, internal Lebanese dialogue to resolve disputes in society and unify the nation. At the same time, he also referred to the existence of differences of opinion over his organization's activity,<sup>25</sup> an indication that Nasrallah is aware of the lack of consensus concerning Hizbollah's military operations. Thus, the Hizbollah leader is trying to convince his listeners that his organization operates with the purest of Lebanese motives in mind:

At the very least, we are engaged in a national enterprise. The resistance has never been and never will be a partisan enterprise, a regional enterprise, or an ethnic-community enterprise. It is an authentic national enterprise. Even today when the resistance operates, it acts according to national considerations. Whoever thinks that the timing of some of [the organization's] positions or operations is planned by someone in the internal arena errs. I spoke about these things in the past and . . . in closed meetings with some of these people . . . You and I may differ over a particular political issue, an economic or social [issue], or over particular elections – municipal, parliamentary, trade unions, etc. These arguments are legitimate, but when it comes to the resistance, I reiterate that these differences of opinion have no background, role, or place.<sup>26</sup>

Hizbollah's increased involvement in the domestic arena can be expected to continue. Nasrallah's call for promoting an internal Lebanese dialogue was not accidental. Hizbollah sources acknowledge that it was the reflection of an internal debate over the question of the organization's orientation and policy on current domestic affairs.<sup>27</sup> The unanswered question is: which "crossroads" loom on the organization's path that will present it with a wide range of possible directions and as such will impact on Hizbollah's influence in Lebanon.



### *Promoting “Resistance” as a Defense of Lebanon*

In explaining the effectiveness of anti-aircraft fire against IDF planes, Nasrallah claims that it safeguards Lebanon’s stability and security. Indeed, the theme of the organization’s armament and military operations as protection for Lebanon against the Israeli menace is a recurring one. At the time of the IDF withdrawal, Hizbollah protested calls to disarm the organization, claiming in part that in the event of aggression, the central government could not expect support from the Security Council and the international community to enforce an Israeli retreat.

Relating to Israel’s charges that Hizbollah has stockpiled thousands of rockets and Jerusalem’s warning to Lebanon to demilitarize Hizbollah, Nasrallah declared that “one day Lebanon will need” the “resistance infrastructure” and its weapons.<sup>28</sup> In the same vein he continued, “Whoever wants to defend Lebanon must preserve the resistance in the south [because] we stand as a powerful dam before the enemy’s threats against our land and country.”<sup>29</sup> In March 2003 Nasrallah felt it necessary to reveal that a sabotage squad had been arrested in the border town of Hula, and in its possession were explosive charges supplied by Israel.<sup>30</sup>

Hizbollah’s position has won support from various circles in the Lebanese government, even if not from the majority of the establishment. For example, Defense Minister Khalil al-Harawi promised that every Israeli “violation” would be answered “by the security triad composed of the Lebanese and Syrian armies and the ‘resistance.’”<sup>31</sup> He drew a clear line between Hizbollah and the stability of Lebanon, saying:

There are diplomats who tell us, “you built a state and its institutions and liberated your land, then why do you still desire a confrontation? It is necessary for you to dismantle Hizbollah and deploy the army in the south so that your conditions will improve.” Similar ideas were also voiced by a number of Lebanese political parties who forgot that our situation was excellent in every way in 1974, but this did not prevent the crisis of 1975. We reply to these statements by [posing] the question: Do you want us to return to the situation of 1974, and begin the confrontation again?

Nasrallah attributes capabilities to his organization that the Lebanese army lacks, thus explaining the absurdity of deploying the Lebanese army along the border with Israel. On December 1, 2001 he stated that Hizbollah’s presence on the border is “a stabilizing factor [that guarantees] regional security” since the Lebanese army “is

unable to respond to every attack.” He also noted that “whoever advocates dispatching the army to the south is misinformed, since the army is already deployed in the region, but is not qualified to respond to every aggression. That is the nature of the sensitive circumstances.”<sup>32</sup> Hizbollah’s reinforcement with enormous weapons stockpiles has additional importance since the message is also absorbed in the domestic arena, and the task of disarming the organization will undoubtedly be more difficult for anyone who might consider it.

The chance to justify the claim that its deterrence protects Lebanon from Israeli aggression presented itself in 2002 during the Wazzani project crisis. Although Amal initiated the project, it was Hizbollah that gathered the credit as Lebanon’s main protector in the affair, garnering cross-the-board political and public support. The deputy secretary-general later announced that, “Had there not been the likelihood of an Islamic resistance response, Israel would have disrupted the pumping, but the enemy knows that Hizbollah was serious in its [intention to respond] and was prepared for an immediate reaction.”<sup>33</sup> Even before Nasrallah announced that his organization would respond instantly to Israeli interference with the Wazzani project, one of the leading figures in the Christian camp, the head of the al-Kata’ib (Phalangists) Party, Karim Pakradouni, delivered the same message. Needless to say, Pakradouni and the majority of the Christian camp were not traditionally Hizbollah’s political ally (although by the end of 2003 they had grown much closer). Yet on October 14, 2002, Pakradouni predicted that Israel would sit quietly and do nothing to excite the sector; otherwise Hizbollah would respond with a barrage of missiles across the border.<sup>34</sup>

In January 2003, in a token gesture to the residents of the town of Wazzani, Hizbollah handed out ten thousand liters of oil free of charge. This was done as an incentive to the people not to flee the village despite what the Lebanese perceived as an Israeli threat to take action in the near future.<sup>35</sup> A similar gesture was made to the inhabitants of South Lebanon’s Hasbaya region in March 2003 as the war in Iraq approached and the fear of an Israeli attack increased. In this case, Hizbollah set up a field clinic in a town that, according to the residents, “had been neglected by the government.”<sup>36</sup>

## Conclusion

After Israel withdrew from South Lebanon, Hizbollah was placed in an unfamiliar situation in which its freedom to maneuver in the region was drastically curtailed. The organization that was founded eighteen years earlier in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon suddenly discovered that it was almost completely denied its main area of military activity, namely, South Lebanon. Since then, Hizbollah has limited its official initiated military activity against Israel to the Shab'a Farms sector, where it carefully punctuates its operations with intervals of several months.

While Hizbollah did not entirely arrest its activity on Israel's northern border, it has increased its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation that erupted as the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, four months after Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the security zone in South Lebanon. More generally, since the withdrawal, Hizbollah refrained from extensive military operations while expanding its intelligence activity inside Israel and striving to infiltrate Israel's Arab population. For example, during the General Security Service investigation of Amr Ghazal, a resident of the Galilee who was arrested in September 2002 on suspicion of aiding Hizbollah, it was discovered that the cell phone on the body of one of the terrorists who had carried out the Matzuva attack was one of several smuggled into Lebanon by Ghazal himself. Additional interrogations have disclosed other Israeli Arabs recruited by the organization while they were visiting Jordan.

Notwithstanding this increased activity, a distinct gap exists between the assessments and concerns voiced in Israel in the months preceding the IDF withdrawal – the same reservations that effectively delayed the withdrawal for years – and the extent of their realization, although Israeli intelligence estimates predicted various Hizbollah operational patterns that did in fact materialize. The divide between the estimates and their realization thus seems to be a quantitative one, or more precisely, a matter of proportion. Although Hizbollah enjoys wide independence and freedom of maneuver, it is nonetheless limited by the interests of its strategic environment. Israel's assessment of the imperatives under which Hizbollah's operates, i.e., varying

exigencies and interests that motivate or restrain Hizbollah's activity, seems to have been flawed.

From many points of view, the integration of these interests created a framework of pressures for Hizbollah. For example, Hizbollah maintains close operational coordination with Palestinian organizations in Lebanon, and it was this cooperation, according to Israeli intelligence, that produced the Matzuva attack in March 2002. However, the political reality in Lebanon – staunch opposition to all Palestinian activity against Israel emanating from within the country – has thus far made this strike a one-time incident. Of course there is no guarantee that Hizbollah will not dispatch another Palestinian suicide team from Lebanon into Israel – Israel has indeed received several intelligence warnings of Matzuva-style attacks – but as long as a system of restraints, checks, and balances is brought to bear on Hizbollah, as it has since May 2000, then its current lines of activity are not expected to deviate much. The balance of pressures could be upset in the future, but this is not inevitable.

Whatever changes take place in the nature and limitations of Hizbollah activity, they will be determined by developments in relevant arenas – Lebanon, Syria, Israel, the Palestinian territories, Iran, and the United States war against terror. Likewise, US operations in Iraq will have serious ramifications for the region and also Hizbollah. The fate of the US presence and influence in Iraq could determine the regional players' maneuverability. The ouster of Saddam Hussein put an end to fourteen decades of Sunni control of the country, and this may have an effect on non-Sunni forces in the Middle East. Yet overall, as long as Syria and Lebanon perceive a direct military confrontation with Israel as a danger to be avoided, Hizbollah will have to take this into account. As long as Lebanon needs to attract investments from wealthy countries and international organizations in order to improve its economic distress – Lebanon's foreign debt has skyrocketed to more than \$30 billion and requires long-term management – Hizbollah will have to consider this exigency as well.

According to reliable data, over the last years, Iran has encouraged Hizbollah to continue the struggle against Israel and at the same time has acted as a restraining influence on the organization. The statements uttered by Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi in April 2002 evoked surprise and confusion in the Israeli intelligence community, as well as among Hizbollah leaders. At the height of Hizbollah's escalation on Mt. Dov, the most serious military activity since Israel's withdrawal, Kharazi landed in Beirut and announced that Israel should not be handed a pretext for attacking its northern neighbors. In May 2003 there was a new Iranian call for restraint, this time from President Muhammad Khatami while on a visit to Lebanon. Addressing tens of thousands, Khatami emphasized that "under the difficult circumstances currently

afflicting the region, we understand that American pressures on Syria and Lebanon have increased. We are acutely aware that Israel must not be offered new pretexts for enlisting American power to advance its interests. We have no desire to contribute to an escalation of regional tensions.”<sup>1</sup>

It appears, then, that in Tehran too there are people who realize that a major escalation between Israel and its neighbors goes against Iranian interests, just as there are some voices in Iran that dare to advocate publicly pragmatic positions towards Israel, such as supporting its right to exist alongside a Palestinian state. The position that Kharazi expressed in Beirut, which earned both scathing criticism and praise in the Iranian media, emanated from several platforms. First, elements exist in Iran that are displeased with their country’s image as a warmonger, especially when this image exposes Iran to international danger. Furthermore, in a head-on clash between Israel and Syria, the latter, Iran’s ally, is expected to emerge the loser, and Hizbollah too would be exposed to danger if it caused Israel to exact from Lebanon a price for the organization’s continued provocations.

On the other hand, as long as Israel continues to be embroiled in an ongoing confrontation with the Palestinians, Hizbollah will probably enjoy relatively easier conditions for operating against Israel on the northern border, as well as in the Palestinian arena and even within Israel itself. The al-Aqsa Intifada, which has inflamed the Israeli-Palestinian arena, has rendered not only Israel more vulnerable, but also the Middle East more sensitive and unstable than in the past. This state of affairs has poisoned the air between Israel and its neighbors, and strengthened Hizbollah’s ability to influence the Arab-Israeli conflict and restore its domestic relevancy as an armed organization.

Hizbollah could also confront a different reality with relative ease, a situation whereby Israel posed a critical threat to the Shiite organization, Lebanon, or Syria. In his book, Qasim contends that should Israel launch an aggressive strike against Lebanon, the fault would lie with Israel and not with Hizbollah’s provocation. From Israel’s point of view, certainly the opposite situation is preferred: that Hizbollah would be perceived in Lebanon and the world as the provocateur and aggressor.

A more positive situation, in which calm settles over the Palestinian arena and, later perhaps, a political arrangement is worked out between Israel, Syria, and Lebanon, would be a seminal threat to Hizbollah’s existence as an independent military organization. From Hizbollah’s point of view, the challenge of peace would be the supreme of challenges. The more that the region inches forward in the direction of pacification, political processes, and permanent arrangements, the more Hizbollah will be forced to adapt itself to this reality, even if repudiating it ideologically.

At the same time, Hizbollah's organizational and social status, which has become rooted in Lebanese society and the national political arena, cannot be ignored. The fundamental link between Hizbollah and its constituency through the various forms of assistance it extends to a wide public is Hizbollah's basis for adapting to future developments, beginning with a marked reduction in its military activity against Israel and culminating in political arrangements between Israel and its neighbors. Hizbollah's social and organizational infrastructure will ensure its organizational survival in the long run. A stockpile of thousands of rockets and the armed fighters are not only a deterrent against Israel but also a force that broadcasts the message to the Lebanese environment that Hizbollah is here to stay – and that one day, as a token gesture, it might agree to be disarmed. Naturally, as the outstanding representative of the Shiite community, Hizbollah would expect compensation for such a gesture. It is also possible that it will be fully integrated into the official Lebanese establishment.

The loss of the main arena of Hizbollah's military activity that had formerly won the organization its legitimacy, prestige, and national consensus has forced it to alter its modus operandi through such stratagems as camouflaged, no-signature military activity. Parallel to this, Hizbollah is trying to find alternative anchors of legitimacy in order to continue its declared military activity. This attempt, only partially successful until now, has taken the form of anti-aircraft fire along the northern border, small-scale operations in the Shab'a Farms sector, and assistance to the Palestinian struggle.

This type of activity and especially the excessive caution that Hizbollah takes to preclude an Israeli strike indicate that the leaders of the Party of God are aware that Lebanese support of their operations is limited, and that public opinion in the country is decidedly against a destructive confrontation with Israel. The Hizbollah leadership sets much store by public opinion in its deliberations for or against a particular operation. At the end of January 2003, several days after Hizbollah's first operation in several months at Shab'a Farms, Na'im Qasim announced that his organization had no intention of turning the sector into an "arena of continuous fighting of no benefit," and that a periodic operation is sufficient "to give notice that the resistance continues." According to Qasim, neither quiet on the front nor a flare-up at Shab'a Farms should be expected, rather "perpetuation of the problem that Israel created."<sup>2</sup> Secretary-General Nasrallah also announced that, "Operations by the resistance organization are very carefully considered. Hizbollah has no interest in causing an explosion in the region or leading [it] toward escalation."<sup>3</sup>

If Hizbollah would want to heighten tensions along the border, it would do everything in its power to have Israel seen as the responsible party. Israel would be

faced with a dilemma: a disproportionate response could resurrect the Lebanese consensus in favor of Hizbollah. On the other hand, no response or a tepid one could erode Israel's deterrent power and indirectly encourage Hizbollah to test Israel repeatedly with the same dilemma.

History indicates that Israel's continued military presence on Lebanese soil furnished Hizbollah with a legitimate reason to expand its arsenal and develop its fighting prowess even when the Ta'if Agreement, which ended the Lebanese Civil War, stipulated the disarmament of all militias. In 1990, it was not inevitable or automatic that Hizbollah would deviate from the norm and remain the only militia fully armed, even if Israel retained its military presence in South Lebanon. Indeed, had Israel withdrawn from South Lebanon at the end of the Lebanese Civil War, Hizbollah would have found it much more difficult to preserve and build up its military capability. Instead, throughout the 1990s the Hizbollah fighter developed into a more experienced, better-skilled, and more sophisticated enemy.

The neutralization of Hizbollah's main arena of military activity resulted in the continuation and even enhancement of its "opening-up" rapprochement with the Lebanese environment. The organization's decision to publish a new and updated platform, which according to Na'im Qasim will be more moderate in its relations with the Lebanese Christians and Western countries like France, a country understood to oppose against Hizbollah's inclusion on the European Union's list of terror organizations, is no coincidence. The decision of Secretary-General Nasrallah to participate in the opening ceremony of the French-speaking states summit in Beirut, in the presence of the French President Jacques Chirac, and the publication of Na'im Qasim's book both demonstrate Hizbollah's high-profile attempts to open itself to its domestic environs and the international arena, and also perhaps to market a new image. Nasrallah's public appeal in late November 2002 to begin a nation-wide Lebanese dialogue is also part of this campaign.

The negation of the West, then, is not inherent in Hizbollah doctrine. In March 2003, on the eve of the American-led war in Iraq, Nasrallah stressed the need to acknowledge the growing anti-war demonstrations in the West and to avoid defining the Christians as "Crusaders." Afterwards, he even called for establishing a "Muslim-Christian alignment" to unite opponents of the war against Iraq.

Basically, Hizbollah is succumbing to the demands of reality. No organization, regardless of its ideological fervor, can survive unless it is able to respond and adapt itself to the dynamics of change around it. The more that an organization remains fixed in its conceptions and behavior patterns in the face of a changing reality, the greater the existential danger that it faces. Hizbollah is aware of this. In May 2000 a

reality change occurred on the Israeli-Lebanese border, and in an instant the arena was transformed from a dynamic, turbulent confrontation into an almost complete standstill, notwithstanding the underlying tensions. Life returned to normal on both sides of the border, and Hizbollah has had to maneuver and hammer out a compromise between ideology, imperatives, and interests.

The expression “the Great Satan” that Khomeini coined for the United States has not disappeared from Hizbollah leadership rhetoric. The fatal attacks against American servicemen stationed in Lebanon two decades ago were the practical application of this ideology. However, over the years Hizbollah has matured, and the difference between its image in the early 1980s and today reflects the fact that if once it could perpetrate the mass murder of French soldiers, then today the organization’s leader can attend a conference whose guest of honor is the president of France. Another example of change is the condemnation by the organization’s deputy secretary-general, in mid-November 2002, of three explosive charges – apparently planted by Palestinians – that detonated near American food chains in Lebanon on November 12, 2002 without causing any fatalities. Qasim, whose organization was responsible for the death of hundreds of American marines, was now prepared to state that it is better to struggle against the Americans by means of an economic boycott against their products, since “explosions like these serve Lebanon’s enemies by allowing them to claim there is no stability in Lebanon.”<sup>4</sup>

Overall, it seems that Hizbollah’s leaders have toned down their rhetoric in 2003, apparently because of American war preparations for the war in Iraq and the war itself, as well as the fear of an Israeli ploy to exploit the American campaign in order to attack Lebanon. If a few months earlier Israel voiced concern that Hizbollah was likely to take advantage of the war in Iraq to launch a strike in the north, then as time passed the organization has sought to allay this fear, mainly because the leadership realized that Hizbollah’s identification with Iraq would be counterproductive to its interests. “We do not support American aggression in Iraq but every one in the region knows of the historic animosity between Hizbollah and the Iraqi regime,” declared Nasrallah in February 2003, adding that “no connection exists between Hizbollah and the situation in Iraq.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Hizbollah has been forced to consider the ramifications of the United States-led war. This is particularly evidenced by the organization’s increased caution, both in its military activity and in its official pronouncements.

Since Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon it has been evident that Hizbollah does not act spontaneously, rather calculates its operations carefully. Hence its reaction to the IAF strike in Syria on the night of October 4-5, 2003, which was the first attack of



its kind in three decades. The attack, which according to Israel targeted a Palestinian terrorist training camp outside of Damascus, came in response to the suicide bombing in Haifa's Maxim Restaurant, which killed twenty-two Israelis. Damascus-based Palestinian sources claimed that an abandoned camp of Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front – General Command had been hit.<sup>6</sup> Hizbollah cast Israel's action as an attempt to destroy long-standing, accepted "rules of the game," warned Israel against a continuation of this attempt, and cautioned that Hizbollah would not sit quietly if Syria were attacked again:

We, or some of us, must not be scared and terrified. Let us see what Mr. Sharon wants and match his steps. Does he want to get crazy and lose his mind? If he wants to get crazy, there are people who will get crazy too. If he loses his mind, there are people who are ready to lose their mind too. If he were the only insane person in the region, your fears would be understood. His craziness and insanity will be treated with similar insanity and craziness.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, official Hizbollah reaction to the Israeli strike in Syria equated it with an attack on Lebanon<sup>8</sup> – hinting at a potential Hizbollah response. In a speech in honor of International Jerusalem [al-Quds] Day, Nasrallah made it clear that Hizbollah provides a layer of defense for Syria against Israel:

Could this [Israeli] army enter southern Lebanon, Al-Biqa [Lebanon Valley], Jabal Lubnan [Mt. Lebanon], and the capital, Beirut, again? What stupid talk we hear sometimes! Who would believe such threats? Could this army enter Syria and Damascus, or Al-Biqa on its way to Homs and Aleppo? Would the road to Al-Biqa be a picnic for the Israeli Army on its way to Homs and Aleppo? This talk is just for local consumption. It would have been able to say such things before. Today, however, do not believe anything of the kind. This Israeli Army is too weak to do that.<sup>9</sup>

Of course no one can guarantee the continuation of the status quo between Israel and Hizbollah on the northern border – a dynamic that is in effect thanks to the policy of judicious brinkmanship by both parties, Israel's preventative interdictions, and in some cases Jordanian efforts. Despite this, Hizbollah's presumable covert no-signature activity contains the potential for disrupting the status quo. Israel too may decide to "collect on its debts" from Hizbollah. Until the present reality unravels, its

continuation will probably force Hizbollah to make compromises. Finally, although Hizbollah will continue to be counted among the destabilizing elements in the Middle East in the foreseeable future, its military potential will also be influenced, for in the long run, sustained quiet in the north will strengthen Hizbollah's civilian dimension and place a greater emphasis on its military power as a force designed primarily to protect Lebanon, rather than jeopardize it.

## Appendix

### **Hizbollah Operations on Israel's Northern Border following the IDF Withdrawal: May 24, 2000 – October 2003<sup>1</sup>**

- October 7, 2000 Hizbollah renews its military activity against Israel for the first time since the IDF withdrawal. In a well-planned ambush, the organization's fighters abduct three IDF soldiers (Omar Sawa'ad, Adi Avitan, and Benny Avraham). The kidnapping begins with the detonation of a roadside charge at the troops' vehicle and an intensive mortar barrage on Mt. Dov – apparently to screen the kidnapping operation. In late October 2001 the IDF announced that the three were listed as fallen soldiers whose place of burial is unknown.
- November 16, 2000 A roadside charge explodes next to an IDF convoy at Mt. Dov, no casualties. Hizbollah announces that the attack is "part of the Islamic resistance's decision to liberate the rest of occupied Lebanon," and that the attacks will continue.
- November 26, 2000 An IDF soldier, Sgt. Khalil Tahir, is killed in a roadside explosion at Mt. Dov.
- January 3, 2001 Mortar fire on an IDF position on Mt. Dov, no casualties.
- February 16, 2001 Sgt. Elad Shneor is killed by rocket fire on Mt. Dov.
- April 14, 2001 Sgt. Elad Litvak is killed by anti-tank missile fire on Mt. Dov. Israel responds by destroying a Syrian radar station in Lebanon.
- May 14, 2001 Two anti-tank missiles are fired at an IDF position on Mt. Dov, no casualties.

- June 29, 2001 One IDF soldier is moderately wounded by anti-tank missile and mortar fire on Mt. Dov. The IDF responds on July 1 by destroying another Syrian radar installation in Lebanon. Hizbollah replies by shelling Mt. Dov, no casualties.
- October 3, 2001 Anti-tank missile fire and mortar shells on Mt. Dov, no casualties.
- October 22, 2001 Anti-tank missiles and mortar shells on IDF positions on Mt. Dov, no casualties.
- January 23, 2002 Hizbollah fires anti-tank missiles and mortar shells at IDF positions on Mt. Dov, no casualties.
- March 12, 2002 Six Israelis killed in a shooting attack carried out by two Palestinians near Kibbutz Matzuva in the north. Israeli intelligence discovers that the two gunmen coordinated the attack with Hizbollah, crossing the border from inside Lebanon. Hizbollah neither confirms nor denies its involvement; Lebanon denies that the two terrorists entered Israel from its territory.
- March 30 –  
April 14, 2002 Extremely heavy shelling on IDF positions at Mt. Dov, taking advantage of Israel's involvement in Operation Defensive Shield in the West Bank. In the course of two weeks Hizbollah fires anti-tank missiles, mortar rounds, and even Katyusha rockets at Mt. Dov, and also for the first time outside the Mt. Dov sector – on the Golan Heights. No Israelis killed.
- May 7, 2002 An IDF patrol comes under fire in the western sector of the border. Hizbollah announces that its forces fired the shots in response to fire on one of its positions from inside Israel. No casualties.
- August 29, 2002 After four months Hizbollah renews its activity on Mt. Dov with anti-tank missile fire. Three IDF soldiers are wounded. Two days later, Sgt. Ophir Mishal dies of his wounds.
- December 8, 2002 A very powerful charge explodes in the western sector of the border (on the Lebanese side). An IDF patrol is hit, two soldiers wounded, one very seriously and the other moderately.

- Hizbollah probably set the charge but avoids taking responsibility. The attack was carried out in response to the liquidation of the Lebanese drug dealer, Ramzi Nahra, two days earlier in South Lebanon.
- January 21, 2003 Hizbollah shells Mt. Dov, no casualties.
- August 8, 2003 Following the August 2 assassination of Ali Hussein Salih in southern Beirut when a bomb explodes under his car, Hizbollah, accusing Israel of the operation, attacks Shab'a Farms.
- August 10, 2003 Sixteen year old Haviv Dadon killed by an anti-aircraft shell that Hizbollah launched into the Galilean town of Shlomi. Israel responds by destroying the anti-aircraft position from which the shell was launched.
- October 6, 2003 IDF Sgt. David Solomonov killed near Metulla by sniper fire from the Lebanese side of the border; another soldier wounded lightly. The attack occurred a day and a half after Israel attacks a Palestinian command center in Syria. Israel accuses Hizbollah; Hizbollah denies responsibility.
- October 27, 2003 Hizbollah strikes at Mt. Dov; no casualties reported.



## Endotes

### ***Notes to Introduction***

1. *Ha'aretz*, January 11, 1985.
2. *Ha'aretz*, January 15, 1985.
3. *Ha'aretz*, January 17, 1985.
4. Al-Manar television, January 2003.
5. Head of IDF Intelligence, Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi (Farkash), "Israel's Strategic Environment," *Strategic Assessment* 5, no. 2 (2002): 36-40.
6. The *New York Times* reported on September 27, 2002 that the organization has 8,000-9,000 Katyusha rockets with ranges of 12-18 miles, and hundreds of long-range rockets of the Fajr 3 and Fajr 5 type with ranges of 45 miles. In addition, Syria too has supplied the organization with 222 mm. rockets with ranges of 12-18 miles. On October 23, 2002, then Israeli defense minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer cited the figure of 10,000 Katyusha missiles and rockets. Since then Israeli intelligence estimates the Hizbollah arsenal to have grown by at least 1000 rockets.
7. Al-Manar, January 3, 2003. Senior figure in the organization Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid was asked if Hizbollah had received chemical weapons or other types of non-conventional weaponry. His reply: "I have no intention of revealing this now or in the future . . . We do not discuss what the resistance might possess." However, on February 1, 2003, Nasrallah announced on al-Manar television that his organization had no chemical weapons.
8. This was how the head of Israeli intelligence's Research Division, Brig. Gen. Yossi Kuperwasser, described the nature of Hizbollah activity. In a closed meeting in October 2002, Kuperwasser described Hizbollah as an organization going through an identity crisis that, because of pressures put on it, is forced to demonstrate that it upholds its "jihadic nature." Needless to say, Israeli intelligence's description of the organization as acting "in the realm of deep legitimacy" sounds contradictory to the intelligence statement that the organization is interested in dragging Israel into a military confrontation on the northern border. A confrontation at the present time would run counter to the interests of Lebanon and Syria.
9. Prof. Eyal Zisser, for example, has argued that a situation exists in which Hizbollah holds the key to peace and calm in the Middle East, *Middle East Quarterly*, fall 2002. Former defense minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer stated that Hizbollah has become "the strategic

factor in the Middle East," Voice of Israel radio, December 23, 2002.

10. According to Nasrallah, the Hizbollah flag "is no longer a party flag. Since May 25, 2000 [it] has become the symbol of victory, pride, and honor for an entire nation and no longer for a party or group [only]," *al-Manar*, February 16, 2001.

### ***Notes to Chapter 1, Historical Background of Hizbollah, "The Party of God"***

1. Shimon Shapira, *Hizbollah between Iran and Lebanon*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Ha'meuhad, 2000, (Hebrew), pp. 162-163.
2. Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. The author also describes how Mughniyah, equipped with binoculars, stood on a rooftop in Beirut and observed the two explosions that killed 241 Americans and fifty-eight French within a span of twenty seconds.
3. Radio Voice of the Oppressed, Baalbek, November 12, 1994, British Broadcasting Company, "Summary of World Broadcasts."
4. *Al-Safir*, November 23, 2001.
5. A member of Hizbollah's Political Council and the organization's spokesman, Hasan Izz al-Din, said to a group of journalists from Denmark that the suicide strikes against American targets in 1983 were not carried out by Hizbollah, but by "the forces of Lebanese resistance active at the time." *Al-Safir*, October 2, 2002.
6. On the period and the background to the establishment of Hizbollah see Anat Kurz (ed.), *Islamic Terror and Israel*, Tel Aviv: Papyrus, 1993, (Hebrew), 23-37; Shapira, 133-96; and Jaber, 74-77.
7. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 13, 2001.
8. Al-Hariri in an interview in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, London, October 14, 2001. In statements cited in *The New Yorker* of the same date, Hariri claimed that Mughniyah and the two other men wanted by the United States were not in Lebanon.
9. Israeli intelligence sources noted that Mughniyah still seemed to be active. According to *Ha'aretz* (October 15, 2001), Mughniyah had met with senior figures in the Iranian government. In a similar context, Prime Minister Barak warned on October 11, 1999 of the possibility of strikes against Israeli targets abroad as the peace process progressed (*Ha'aretz*, October 12, 1999). Even today, Mughniyah's name and activities frequently surface in Israeli intelligence material.
10. The wording of the agreement was read on Syrian television on November 5, 1990.
11. *Al-Hayat*, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 19, 2002. Nasrallah's participation was reported in the Arab press as another step in Hizbollah's "opening-up" within its environment. This was also the first time that Nasrallah attended the same forum as the United States ambassador. In the days following the conference senior Hizbollah figures presented Nasrallah's participation as a kind of slap in the face to the United States and a victory for



the organization's public message that it is not isolated, but deeply involved in Lebanese affairs.

12. *Al-Anwar*, October 19, 2002.
13. *The Daily Star*, Beirut, October 28, 2002. Nevertheless, by December 2003 no new political platform was published by Hizbollah.
14. Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizb'ullah: Politics & Religion*, London: Pluto Press, 2002.
15. Muhammad Fnaysh, for example, serves as the chairman of the Economic and Commerce Committee and is a member of the Treasury and Budgetary Committee. The Lebanese parliament's internet site is [www.lp.gov.lb](http://www.lp.gov.lb).
16. NBN television, Beirut, January 5, 2003.
17. Ibid.
18. Voice of Lebanon radio, Beirut, November 3, 1997, British Broadcasting Company, "Summary of World Broadcasts."
19. *Al-Hayat*, January 18, 1998.
20. *Al-Nahar*, January 17, 1998.
21. Ibid.
22. *Al-Hayat*, January 26, 1998.
23. *Al-Hayat*, February 1, 1998.
24. *Al-Mustaqbal*, September 9, 2003.
25. *Al-Mustaqbal*, October 2, 2003.
26. NBN, January 5, 2003.
27. *Al-Mustaqbal*, October 2, 2003.
28. From the "Proclamation" published in Beirut, February 16, 1985. Hizbollah continues to abide by the principle of not forcing Islam onto the citizens of Lebanon. The full wording of the "Proclamation" can be found in Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987, pp. 167-87.
29. See, for example, the heading of Nasrallah's official internet site: [www.nasrollah.net](http://www.nasrollah.net).
30. MBC television, Dubai, July 12, 2002. The Iranian foreign minister landed in Beirut after an escalation in Hizbollah activity, declaring that the organization should avoid offering Israel an opportunity to attack Syria and Lebanon. His statements were understood as an exceptional criticism of Hizbollah. A senior figure in the organization admitted that the Iranian foreign minister had created "confusion" in Hizbollah, *al-Mustaqbal*, Beirut, May 5, 2002. In an interview with MBC on July 12, 2002, Nasrallah admitted that "an imbroglio was created" by Kharazi's statements.
31. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 14, 2001.
32. MBC, July 12, 2002.

## *Notes to Chapter 2, The Withdrawal: Advance Assessments vs. Actual Developments*

1. *Al-Watan al-Arabi*, Paris, January 1, 1998.
2. Radio Damascus, January 6, 1998, British Broadcasting Company, "Summary of World Broadcasts."
3. *Al-Safir*, January 6, 1998.
4. Ibid.
5. *Al-Safir*, January 8, 1998.
6. *Al-Safir*, January 5, 1998.
7. *Al-Hayat*, May 20, 1998.
8. On May 17, 1999, in the immediate aftermath of his election victory, Barak reiterated his campaign promise that "within one year we will end the conflict in Lebanon." Later, July 7, 2000 became the final official date for Israel's withdrawal.
9. *Al-Hayat*, April 7, 1998. On October 6, 1999, Thanaa' al-Imam, a journalist of the Beirut daily *al-Nahar* reporting from Damascus, cited official Syrian sources that Israel's unilateral withdrawal would be considered "the final closing of the Syrian peace portfolio and the entry of the Golan issue into cold storage."
10. *Al-Safir*, April 9, 2000.
11. *Ha'aretz*, April 10, 2000.
12. Ibid.
13. *Al-Safir*, April 7, 1998.
14. Cited in *Ha'aretz*, June 30, 1999.
15. *Al-Ahram*, Cairo, February 16, 2000.
16. *Al-Hayat*, February 21, 2000. In the interview Nasrallah also stated that after a peace agreement his organization would concentrate on politics while struggling against normalization with Israel and the import of Israeli merchandise.
17. *Maariv*, November 30, 1999. A senior security figure was quoted in the report as saying "there will be incidents along the fence and patrol road," whose objective would be "to inflict casualties that will require a severe IDF response." In his view, the IDF will strike at Lebanese infrastructures, and in return Katyusha rockets will be unleashed against Israel – possibly aimed at Haifa's northern suburbs that until now had been outside the fighting arena. The official predicted that Syria "would do everything it could to heat up the Lebanese field" and this could "set the whole sector on fire."
18. Ibid.
19. *Maariv*, April 4, 2000.
20. *Ha'aretz*, April 28, 2000.
21. *Ha'aretz*, May 15, 2000.
22. In an interview with the author, September 4, 2003.
23. In an interview with the author, July 21, 2003.

24. An evaluation paper by the head of Military Intelligence, Amos Malka, entitled "IDF Assessments on the Israeli-Lebanese International Border without an Agreement," was distributed to the prime minister, defense minister, and other figures in the army and defense establishment on March 7, 2000.
25. See above, n. 17.
26. In an interview with the author, September 4, 2003.
27. Avraham Sela, "Who Needs Assad?" *Ha'aretz*, April 6, 1999.
28. Avraham Sela, "Leave, and Restore the Fence," *Ha'aretz*, April 20, 1999.
29. Ibid.
30. Anat Kurz, "Hizbullah at the Crossroads," *Strategic Assessment* 3, no. 1 (2000): 14-17.
31. Augustus Richard Norton, "Hizbullah: From Radicalism to Pragmatism?" *Middle East Policy*, January 1998.
32. Augustus Richard Norton, *Hizbullah of Lebanon: Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics*, Council of Foreign Relations, New York, 1999, p 32.
33. The author interviewed Maj. Gen. (res.) Dayan in preparation of this study, October 16, 2002.
34. Conversation with the author, October 7, 2002.
35. *Al-Safir*, May 15, 2000.
36. Voice of Lebanon radio, May 31, 2000, British Broadcasting Company, "Summary of World Broadcasts."
37. Muhammad Ahmad al-Qubaysi, *al-Shahadah wa al-Tahrir, Janub Lubnan – Waqa'i wa-Ahdath 1987-2000*, Dar al-Hadi, Beirut, pp. 180-81.
38. Voice of the Oppressed (Sawt al-Mustaza'fin) radio, Baalbek, June 10, 2000, British Broadcasting Company, "Summary of World Broadcasts." On this occasion Nasrallah stated that following Israel's withdrawal the Shiites would demand greater rights. According to Nasrallah, he had no interest whatsoever in the office of president of Lebanon or in turning the country into a Shiite republic.
39. Saad-Ghorayeb, p. 189. According to the author, Hizbollah was forced to agree to these moves in order to preserve its anti-Israel resistance image.
40. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 23, 2000. A news item from Beirut reported that one Palestinian, not two as stated in Israel, was killed in the attack. The Lebanese report claimed that the dead person was from the Palestinian refugee camp Ayn al-Hilwah.
41. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 29, 2001.
42. *Al-Manar*, January 28, 2001.
43. *Al-Nahar*, January 29, 2001.
44. Agence France Presse, January 31, 2001.
45. *Al-Hayat*, April 10, 2002, cites Hizbollah sources.

### ***Notes to Chapter 3, Hizbollah Motives and Exigencies***

1. From the time of the withdrawal until mid-December 2003, the organization charged there were 8,382 sea, air, and land violations, *al-Intiqad*, December 12, 2003.
2. *Al-Safir*, September 2, 1999.
3. In an interview with the author, September 4, 2003.
4. MBC, July 12, 2002.
5. In an interview with the author, October 16, 2002.
6. In a conversation with the author in preparation of this research, October 2002.
7. Conversation with the author, October 7, 2002.
8. NBN television, Beirut, January 5, 2003.
9. Conversation with the author, October 7, 2002.
10. *Al-Baath*, Damascus, January 11, 2003. Assad also claimed that the majority in Israel is not interested in peace.
11. *Al-Hayat*, January 25, 2003. The newspaper quoted Fadlallah's interview with the MBC television station a few days earlier. Fadlallah denied his role as Hizbollah's spiritual leader.

### ***Notes to Chapter 4, Four Major Junctures since the Withdrawal***

1. *Al-Nahar*, January 10, 2003. Ibrahim Bayram's article notes that one of Hizbollah's important achievements has been "the great show of respect [it receives] at the highest levels of Syrian leadership."
2. On a number of occasions Assad accused Israel of "Nazism" and racism of a type worse than Nazi Germany. In May 2001, at a reception for the Pope in Damascus, Bashar al-Assad indirectly accused the Jews of informing on Jesus and causing his suffering, and he expressly mentioned the Jews' betrayal of the prophet Muhammad.
3. Na'im Qasim, *Hizbollah: The Method, the Experience, the Future*, Beirut, Dar al-Hadi, 2002, p. 348. Qasim also states that Bashar al-Assad was not prepared for the resistance to suffer even "a scratch."
4. The *New York Times* reported on September 27, 2002 that Syria started supplying the organization with 222 millimeter rockets with ranges of approximately 19-29 kilometers. An Israeli source is quoted as saying that this is a new development.
5. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 8, 2001.
6. Ibid.
7. Syrian television, December 24, 2001; *Ha'aretz*, December 27, 2001.
8. *Al-Hayat*, April 10, 2002.
9. In an interview with the author, February 4, 2003.
10. An advertisement that the weekly could be obtained in Lebanon and in Syria appeared on al-Manar television on April 20, 2003.

11. Part of Muhammad Ra'd's response to the "Syria Accountability Act" proposed by the United States Congress, which defined Syria, inter alia, as an occupying force in Lebanon, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 11, 2002.
12. On October 8, 2002, Deputy Secretary-General Na'im Qasim noted in an interview with the daily *al-Nahar* that "a weakened Syrian presence in Lebanon could prompt Israel to exert pressure on Lebanon, and make it easier to isolate Lebanon and force it to implement security and political measures and a list of Israeli demands."
13. Journalists' briefing, March 2003.
14. *Al-Nahar*, May 22, 1999.
15. The slogan appeared in English, at the end of the film.
16. *Al-Hayat*, July 21, 2001.
17. *Al-Mustaqbal*, April 15, 2001.
18. Agence France Presse, February 19, 2001.
19. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 18, 2001.
20. *Al-Mustaqbal*, May 25, 2001.
21. *Al-Nahar*, October 6, 2002.
22. *Al-Safir*, September 9, 2002.
23. *Al-Safir*, September 7, 2002.
24. Many senior Hizbollah officials have discussed this subject. On April 9, 2002 the Shiite leader Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, who is considered close to Hizbollah but who rejects being called the organization's spiritual leader, declared that "the enemy is incapable of opening a second front because the resistance's missiles can reach Haifa now . . . [Therefore] Israel's threats [against Lebanon] are aimed at intimidation." During the Wazzani water crisis a similar claim was heard in Hizbollah circles. In Qasim Qasir's *al-Mustaqbal* article of October 8, 2002, a senior Hizbollah source was quoted as saying that a crisis along Israel's northern border would require the IDF to move forces from the Palestinian territories to the northern front, and this would encourage and inspire the Palestinians and grant them "a rare chance to intensify confrontations and the movement of military units in every direction." On the eve of the Wazzani pumping, Na'im Qasim predicted that Israel would do nothing to Lebanon "since its hands were tied," and for this reason its threats against Lebanon "have no value" (*al-Anwar*, Beirut, October 14, 2002). Regarding Israel's intention to prevent a collapse in the northern arena at all costs, Hizbollah can also refer to Israel's official policy. Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer declared on more than one occasion that Israel would do everything in its power to avoid the opening of a "second front" in the north (see, for example, Army Radio, January 24, 2002).
25. On August 25, 2002 the Hizbollah official responsible for South Lebanon affairs, Sheikh Nabil Qawuq, stated at a memorial ceremony for the organization's fallen comrades that "today Hizbollah's arsenal on the border acts as a force and true guarantee for Lebanon, the intifada, and the entire Arab and Islamic region, against all American and Israeli

threats." He further stated that, "Hizbollah today serves the Arabs as a balance against the Zionists and may be considered as genuine help to the intifada."

26. An example of Hizbollah's apologetics in this matter may be Nasrallah's statement that whoever is certain that Hizbollah has become merely the "border guard" in South Lebanon is mistaken, *al-Mustaqbal*, March 8, 2003.
27. Another example of how Hizbollah's "justification" can be interpreted despite its inactivity may be found in Muhammad Ra'd's statement on January 12, 2003. Ra'd claimed that at times conditions of inactivity are "stronger" than offensives when "the cannons roar." Deputy Secretary-General Qasim explained that from his point of view, "there is no difference between the willingness to fight and engagement in combat since both represent the continuation of our plan to return the Shab'a Farms," *Voice of Lebanon*, January 25, 2003.
28. *Al-Manar*, March 17, 2002.
29. *MBC*, July 12, 2002. In Nasrallah's words, "In effect, when the front calmed down, all the cities and refugee camps had fallen, that is, there was no longer an open confrontation from 'within.'" Later Nasrallah explained there was no need for the continuation of intensified military operations against Israel.
30. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 2, 2001.
31. Daniel Sobelman, "Hizbullah Lends its Services to the Palestinian Intifada," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, November 2001.
32. *Al-Hayat*, April 10, 2002. Hizbollah sources are quoted in the report as saying that in this case, "We would employ all means available without any restraints." Their reasoning is that an Israeli move of this kind would be detrimental to Lebanese existence. The report went on to say that Hizbollah leaders had updated the Lebanese government on its position. Furthermore, Hizbollah's threat to respond to a mass deportation of Palestinians did not refer only to their expulsion to Lebanon. On March 24, 2002, Nasrallah announced that his organization was prepared "to open a new front against Israel if Palestinians were deported to Jordan."
33. One poignant example is the sudden, firm announcement by President Emile Lahud on November 9, 2002, following a CNN report that Mughniyah conspired with al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in South America to strike against American and Israeli objectives. On December 27, 2002 the Lebanese president denied a report that appeared the previous day in the Israeli *Ha'aretz*, that combat materiel had been transferred to Hizbollah from Iraq.
34. US Senator Bob Graham, who served as chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was quoted in the *New York Times* on December 24, 2002 as saying that the administration should confront Hizbollah prior to Iraq since this is the most sinister terrorist organization in the world. In September 2002, the American deputy secretary of state, Richard Armitage, defined Hizbollah as the "A-Team" of world terror organizations.
35. *MBC*, July 12, 2002.

36. Ibid.
37. Senior Israeli Military Intelligence officer, December 2002.
38. See, for example, Hizbollah's public relations spokesman, Hasan Izz-al-Din, in an interview with *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 1, 2002.
39. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 23, 2001. On December 6, 2002 Hizbollah announced via al-Manar: "We remind the international community that on a number of occasions we have confirmed that al-Qaeda does not operate in Lebanon and there are no connections between Hizbollah and al-Qaeda." At the same time, intelligence reports indicate that there has been local cooperation between activists of the two organizations. For example, an October 2002 internal report by the Israeli Foreign Ministry mentioned that there are "certain signs" of possible local-tactical cooperation between Hizbollah and al-Qaeda activists, though this does not imply that "strategic cooperation" exists between the two organizations.
40. *Defense News*, February 17, 2003.
41. Daniel Sobelman, "Israel Sees New Realities in the Middle East," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 2003, p. 39.
42. A Hizbollah source quoted in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* on October 6, 2002. According to this source, Nasrallah condemned attacking American citizens on moral and humanitarian grounds, but Hizbollah's position was not influenced by the September 11, 2001 events, and its operations at the Shab'a Farms are designed to prove the seriousness of the organization's official position. In February 2002, Nasrallah related with scorn and contempt to the accusation that his organization had cooperated with al-Qaeda and was involved in the September 11 attack. In an MBC interview on July 12, 2002, he stated that the Americans "know that no link of this sort exists, not in the past and not in the present." According to Nasrallah, the absence of Hizbollah-al-Qaeda cooperation is not due to Shiite-Sunni differences, but to "the political program, combat priorities, and view of the struggle."
43. According to Brig. Gen (res.) Yechiam Sasson, who, until the summer of 2002 served as the head of the counter-terrorism department in the prime minister's office, since the events of September 11, 2001, Syria and Iran, as well as Hizbollah, have been trying to "veil" their activity. According to Sasson, after the attack on the United States, Hizbollah began receiving part of its fighting materiel by sea, rather than by air from Iran via Syria. Sasson claims that Imad Mughniyah's departure from Iran and arrival in Lebanon is one example of the way Iran tries to conceal its connection with terror.
44. pp. 378-379.
45. *Defense News*, February 17, 2003.

### *Notes to Chapter 5, The Rules of the Game*

1. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 9, 2002.
2. Radio Lebanon, Beirut, May 18, 2000.
3. *Ha'aretz*, May 22, 2000.
4. Al-Manar, May 21, 2000.
5. *Al-Nahar*, May 28, 2001.
6. Aridi announced this on April 16, 2002 in reference to the escalation of Hizbollah activity at Shab'a Farms.
7. In a conversation with the author, October 28, 2002.
8. "Radar for Radar" was also the lead headline of the Beirut daily *al-Mustaqbal* on the day after the attack, July 2, 2001. This was the second time a Syrian radar facility in Lebanon was destroyed by Israel in response to Hizbollah activity. The first, in Dahr al-Baydar, was destroyed on April 15, 2001 in response to the killing of Sgt. Elad Litvak on Mt. Dov.
9. *Al-Intiqad*, December 28, 2001, in an article that summarized the events of the previous year. Hizbollah took credit for the "failure" of the "equation that the enemy had tried to enforce, according to which every Hizbollah operation would result in a strike against a Syrian army position." Hizbollah averred that "a new equation has been created, termed 'the radar equation,' because of the immediate attack on the radar position at al-Samaqa [in Mt. Dov] and the wide-scale offensive on positions at Shab'a Farms."
10. On November 3, 2002, for example, the air force carried out one of the largest flight activities over Beirut since the withdrawal. The *Daily Star* reported the following day that at least seven warplanes passed over the skies of Beirut, leaving the Lebanon capital's skies "marked with the planes' vapor trails." The report mentioned that it was carried out on a day in which Israel announced the appointment of Shaul Mofaz as defense minister, and this was interpreted as an Israeli warning that its patience vis-à-vis Hizbollah had expired.
11. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 13, 2001.
12. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 15, 2001.
13. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 11, 2002.
14. Al-Manar, February 9, 2002, British Broadcasting Company, "Summary of World Broadcasts."
15. Ibid.
16. The data on IAF flights is taken from daily Hizbollah reports regularly published in the organization's weekly journal *al-Intiqad*. The data on anti-aircraft fire, excepting January-February 2003, was collected by the IDF Northern Command and received from the IDF spokesperson.
17. *Al-Mustaqbal*, May 20, 2003.
18. *Al-Intiqad*, December 27, 2002.
19. Ibid.
20. Agence France Presse, February 3, 2003.



21. Channel 1 television, February 2, 2003; *Ha'aretz*, February 5, 2003.
22. *Al-Manar*, January 1, 2003.
23. *Al-Safir*, February 10, 2003.
24. *Al-Mustaqbal*, August 21, 2003.
25. *B'Makhaneh*, August 22, 2003.
26. *Ha'aretz*, November 7, 2003.
27. See the statements of the official responsible for Hizbollah activity in the south, Sheikh Nabil Qawuq, in *al-Intiqad*, December 27, 2002.
28. *Yediot Aharonot*, for example, reported that Salih financed Tanzim attacks in the Nablus area, August 29, 2003.
29. *Al-Hayat*, August 3, 2003.
30. *Al-Manar*, August 8, 2003.
31. On the formation of the rules of the game and the "passive agreements" in Lebanon in the past, see Zvi Lanir, *The Israeli Involvement in Lebanon – A Precedent for an "Open" Game with Syria?* Research Paper No. 10, The Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, September 1980.
32. Na'im Qasim, in an interview with the *Voice of Lebanon*, January 25, 2003.
33. *Al-Safir*, January 23, 2003.
34. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 23, 2001. *Al-Safir* reported as early as October 31, 2000 that from Hizbollah's point of view the "Grapes of Wrath" understandings continue to be in effect.
35. *The Daily Star*, October 7, 2002. The report noted that Hizbollah began preparing bunkers in South Lebanon and expanding the extant tunnels in case of an Israeli offensive. A detailed description was given of the expansion and renovation of an abandoned tunnel and the installment of lighting and railway tracks. An *al-Nahar* article from January 14, 2003 pointed out that Hizbollah had dug tunnels and set up underground shelters in South Lebanon to be used in case of confrontation with Israel.
36. *The Daily Star*, January 6, 2003.
37. In mid-January 2003 a senior IDF officer stated in a press briefing that Israel had no knowledge of the cause of the blast. The security establishment only knew that there were no casualties. The officer estimated that Nasrallah's "moderate" and "apologetic" tone stemmed from his awareness of the state of affairs in the Middle East on the eve of the US-led war in Iraq.

### ***Notes to Chapter 6, Hizbollah's Arsenal and Means of Deterrence***

1. On November 16, 2002, the Lebanese journalist Ibrahim al-Amin wrote in *al-Safir* that Hizbollah refuses to discuss attempts at agents penetrating into Israel via Arab countries. Nevertheless, this was a matter of "activity with special dimensions" that would come to expression "at a later stage in a clash between the two sides." According to al-Amin, such

activity “is linked to preparations by the two sides for what appears to be an inevitable confrontation.”

2. In an interview with the author, November 3, 2002.
3. Voice of Israel, October 30, 2002. Ayyub was supposed to train Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists in the manufacture of sophisticated explosives. *Al-Safir* reported on October 31 that Ayyub was originally from the village of Juyya in South Lebanon, and was accidentally stopped by Palestinian security forces while he was traveling through West Bank cities. It also mentioned that after the Palestinians learned of his organizational affiliation, their attitude toward him changed and they tried to help him. During his arrest his passport and papers were lost, and according to *al-Safir* an attempt was made to furnish him with new documents to enable him to leave Israel.
4. This information was relayed by a senior intelligence official in a closed conversation in December 2002.
5. Ibid.
6. *Ha'aretz*, February 14, 2001. The mortar fire first occurred on January 30, 2001. On February 1, 2001 then Director of IDF Technology and Logistics Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi (Farkash) publicly announced that “Hizbollah, not Hamas” had carried out the first mortar fire.
7. Hizbollah’s official response on the arrest of Lt. Col. Omar al-Hayb, who was accused of spying for the Lebanese organization on October 24, 2002, was “no comment.” Na'im Qasim stated that “Hizbollah is not obligated to affirm or deny what the Zionist enemy reports, especially regarding a spy network,” Radio Hizbollah, al-Nour, October 25, 2002. Two main reasons may be cited for this policy. One, the organization views the dissimulation of its operational capability as a reinforcement of its deterrent strength. This has also been the organization’s traditional position on information regarding the number and types of rockets it possesses. Two, these disclosures are liable to embarrass Hizbollah on the internal Lebanese and international levels and sabotage its efforts, and Lebanon’s, to bestow upon the organization the image of a “resistance” movement, as opposed to a terrorist organization. On October 26, three days after Israel published the incident, the daily *al-Safir*, considered sympathetic to Hizbollah, reported a three-week old news item about spy equipment discovered in Lebanon for guiding and transmitting data to IAF planes. On October 28 the newspaper published a picture of the place where the devices were hidden.
8. Daniel Sobelman, “Hizbollah Infiltrates Israel,” *Jane's Intelligence Review* 15, no. 4 (2003).
9. Al-Manar, October 15, 2002. In an interview, the Lebanese journalist Ibrahim al-Amin estimated that Hizbollah had a “target bank” in Israel more diverse than Israel’s in Lebanon.
10. *Ha'aretz*, June 3, 1994.
11. According to a senior Israeli intelligence officer whose expertise is terrorism, in a conversation with the author in October 2001. Hassan Nasrallah hinted at this at a November 1, 2002 rally in the al-Yarmuk Camp in Damascus commemorating the seventh anniversary of the assassination of Fathi Shqaqi, the general-secretary of Islamic Jihad in

Palestine. Nasrallah said that “the resistance movement in Palestinian has succeeded in overcoming the assassination by the heavy price [it has exacted from] the enemy, its troops, and settlers,” *Al-Anwar*, November 2, 2002.

### ***Notes to Chapter 7, Hizbollah in the Lebanese Domestic Arena***

1. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 12, 2002.
2. *Al-Mustaqbal*, November 16, 2002. Nasrallah discussed his organization’s involvement in granting aid to the families of fallen comrades and recalled that “the resistance was not composed of a single factor, but of a number of elements and this is what prepared it for victory.”
3. Details on these institutions can be found on the following internet sites: [www.aljarha.org](http://www.aljarha.org), [www.shahid.org.lb](http://www.shahid.org.lb), [www.jihadbinaa.org](http://www.jihadbinaa.org). Regarding the Shahid organization, the daily *al-Safir* reported on November 15, 2002 that the agency, which was established in 1982, today cares for 1284 families of fighters killed in action, 276 families of prisoners, the great majority of whom were released from Israeli jails, and the families of 376 citizens killed in Israeli attacks. Presently the institution has assisted 850 children of the organization’s fallen comrades, so that they no longer depend on aid and are financially self-sufficient. The Reuters news agency in Beirut reported on February 18, 2003 that throughout the 1990s Jihad al-Binaa’ repaired over 6000 houses, mainly in the south, that were damaged by the fighting in the region. A recent example of Jihad al-Binaa’ activity appeared the day after the Hizbollah operation on Mt. Dov on January 21, 2003, which led to an IDF barrage on the surrounding villages. Members of the organization visited approximately a dozen houses and began repair work.
4. The film short was first aired on al-Manar in November 2002.
5. *Reuters*, Beirut, October 28, 2002.
6. Qasim, p. 115.
7. These and additional details on the social dimension of Hizbollah are taken from Qasim, pp. 114-119.
8. In a conversation with the author, January 6, 2002.
9. *Al-Safir*, February 26, 2003.
10. *Al-Safir*, February 27, 2003. The report specified the dirt roads and streets cleared by Hizbollah bulldozers supplied by Jihad al-Binaa’.
11. *Al-Nour*, February 28, 2003.
12. For example, al-Manar, December 17, 2002 and January 20, 2003.
13. *Al-Safir*, May 26, 2002.
14. *Al-Nahar*, October 6, 2003.
15. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 25, 2001, June 27, 2001.
16. *Ha’aretz*, July 22, 2001.
17. The Lebanese minister of tourism, Karam Karam, said in an interview with the Lebanese

weekly *Monday Morning* on September 30, 2002 that “the country’s tourist sector is constantly expanding. This year, the summer season was much more successful than in 2001. The number of visitors grew by twenty percent.” According to Ministry of Tourism figures for the last decade, the number of tourists entering Lebanon has been continuously rising, excluding a slight decrease in 1996 (apparently in the wake of Operation Grapes of Wrath).

18. *Al-Mustaqbal*, October 9, 2002. However, in the summer of 2002 the Israeli security establishment received a warning defined as “very material” regarding Hizbollah’s intention of carrying out another attack in the Matzuva “format.” I cannot determine what led to a reduction in the alert level (it may have stemmed from an Israeli counter-move). The alert may have been based on information concerning a secret visit by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander, Yahya Rahim Safavi, to Lebanon and Syria where he met, among others, top Hizbollah leaders. A key Israeli security source revealed to me on September 2, 2002 that Safavi’s visit to Lebanon was made “in an escalatory context.” This meant that on August 29, 2002, the Israeli security establishment entered the highest level of alert, including given the first indications of a Hizbollah operation that might include abductions.
19. *The Daily Star*, February 3, 2003.
20. NBN, January 5, 2003.
21. Ibid.
22. The first Amal office in Iran opened only on July 25, 2001, Agence France Presse, July 27, 2001.
23. For example, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 26, 2002, reported that life sentences were given the previous day in Beirut to two Amal activists who had murdered two Hizbollah activists in July 2000 in the South Lebanon town of Markaba. On December 2, 2001, the Lebanese army had to intervene to break up a mass brawl between supporters of the two organizations in the South Lebanon town of Kafr Hata. The media reported that the Lebanese army surrounded the entire city. Hizbollah claimed that the fight began when Amal supporters threw stones and objects at the funeral procession of a Hizbollah fighter. Incidentally, this was not the only time the Lebanese army had to intercede in an Amal-Hizbollah clash.
24. Agence France Presse, September 11, 2001.
25. *Al-Intiqad*, November 15, 2002.
26. Ibid.
27. *Al-Mustaqbal*, November 20, 2002.
28. Ibid.
29. *Al-Safir*, February 17, 2002. According to Nasrallah’s speech before pupils in Beirut on October 22, 2002 and broadcast on al-Manar, today Israel cannot “do whatever it wants” as in the past. In this spirit, Hizbollah’s representative in parliament Abdullah Kassir stated on December 21, 2001 that “the resistance’s willingness to withstand every Israeli

threat and to respond will prevent the enemy from riding roughshod over the Lebanese people, their sovereignty, and land.”

30. *Al-Mustaqbal*, March 8, 2003.
31. Voice of Lebanon, February 9, 2002.
32. *Al-Intiqad*, December 7, 2001.
33. Na'im Qasim on Radio al-Nour, October 25, 2002. The widespread support of the initiative was defined by Qasim as one of the “blessings of the resistance.”
34. *Al-Nahar*, October 15, 2002.
35. *The Daily Star*, January 13, 2003.
36. *The Daily Star*, March 18, 2003.

### ***Notes to Conclusion***

1. *Al-Mustaqbal*, May 14, 2003.
2. Voice of Lebanon, January 25, 2003.
3. *Defense News*, February 17, 2003.
4. *Al-Safir*, November 15, 2002.
5. *Defense News*, February 17, 2003.
6. *Al-Safir*, October 6, 2003.
7. Al-Arabiyah television, Dubai, October 11, 2003 (FBIS translation).
8. Hizbollah's official statement following the attack: “We consider the aggression against Syria an aggression against Lebanon, Palestine, and the entire nation. We feel that the phrases of condemnation fall short from expressing the real required position regarding what has happened. Syria has long stood by Lebanon during all of its tribulations and hardships and tolerated for this purpose pressures, siege, terrorism, and constant threats. Syria is the one which supported Lebanon to resist the occupation and liberate its land. Hizbollah declares its complete commitment to the joint destiny and battle with the steadfast and proud Syrian leadership and people. We call on the Lebanese people to realize the scope of this serious development and its impact on Lebanon and the region. We also call on them to be prepared to face all possibilities with an enemy led today by a stupid and foolish leadership, which enjoys full support from the most stupid and foolish US administrations in history,” *Al-Manar*, October 6, 2003.
9. *Al-Manar*, November 21, 2003 (FBIS translation). Note that already in April 2003, Hizbollah's official responsible for southern Lebanon stated that “the southern arena will remain the arena that protects Syria,” *al-Hayat*, April 28, 2003.

### ***Notes to Appendix***

1. Agence France Presse, *Ha'aretz*.



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