A Victory for Islamism?

The Second Lebanon War and Its Repercussions

Magnus Norell

Policy Focus #98 | November 2009

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Translated from the Swedish-language edition of *Islamismens seger—from Libanon to Iran*, originally published in Sweden by Fri Tanke förlag (www.fritanke.se), © 2009 by Magnus Norell. Translated and published in the English language by arrangement with Fri Tanke förlag. All rights reserved.

Published in 2009 in the United States of America by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy,
1828 L Street NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036.

Design by Daniel Kohan, Sensical Design and Communication
Front cover: A French UN peacekeeper's tank passes a billboard showing Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, left, and Hizballah leader Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, right, in the southern village of Borj Qalaway, Lebanon, September 2006. (AP Photo/François Mori)

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Magnus Norell is a senior analyst at the Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI) in Stockholm and an adjunct scholar of The Washington Institute. As a recent Fulbright scholar and visiting fellow at the Institute, he focused on the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hizballah. Prior to joining FOI, Dr. Norell served as a special analyst for the Swedish Secret Service and a senior analyst for Swedish Military Intelligence. As a research analyst at the Swedish National Defense College, he created a backchannel between Hizballah and Israel to facilitate the 2000 Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. He publishes in both Swedish and English on a wide array of international security issues, including terrorism, radical Islamist extremism, the role of intelligence in counterterrorism, and UN reform.

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Note on the Translation

Policy Focus 98, with the exception of the Executive Summary, is a translation from the Swedish of Magnus Norell's *Islamismens seger—from Libanon to Iran*, originally published in Sweden by Fri Tanke förlag in 2009. Apart from minor editorial changes to render the language smoothly, this work represents a faithful transcription of the original text. The Executive Summary is the work of The Washington Institute.

Executive Summary

THIS STUDY, TRANSLATED FROM the original Swedish, examines the international community's long series of failures in Lebanon between the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal and the 2006 war with Hizballah—failures caused primarily by an inability to confront Lebanon's truly divisive issues. These problems have repeatedly led to new crises and pose a danger to the entire region.

The conflict between Lebanon and Israel is no longer a conflict between two states. Since the end of Lebanon's fifteen-year civil war, Hizballah has remained strong enough to drag the country into war against the will of the sovereign government. In tandem with its military operations, Hizballah, or the "Party of God," has provided legal, social, and political services to many Lebanese. Hizballah is thereby able to keep its conflict with Israel alive, making any attempt at a peaceful solution impossible.

At the same time, Syria and Iran are working both regionally and internationally to interfere with the various initiatives intended to strengthen the Lebanese government. This situation is an embarrassment for the international community. In the face of threats from Damascus and Tehran, the United Nations and, to some extent, the European Union have allowed themselves to be run over. The best example of this trend is the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose presence in the South was supposedly bolstered with the passage of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701 near the end of the 2006 war. Shortly afterward, Syria made it clear that any attempt to patrol the Lebanese-Syrian frontier—the main access route for arms from Iran to Hizballah—would be seen as a hostile act and met by force and closure of the border. The threat had its intended effect. Even before the ink had dried on UNSCR 1701, the UN declared that it had no intention of patrolling the border it had been empowered to control. Today, three years after UNSCR 1701 expanded UNIFIL's authority and increased its size from 2,000 to 15,000 personnel, the force is still incomplete. This reluctance to seriously confront the basic problems of Lebanon and its neighborhood is rooted in a fear of placing the UN in conflict with Hizballah, even if such a move would benefit the Lebanese government.

In contrast, Hizballah has been able to reinforce its position in southern Lebanon at a time when the government is held hostage by an ineffective "national dialogue" process. Hizballah has no interest in ending this dialogue; rather, continued discussion ensures the indefinite postponement of demands for disarmament and allows the party to keep the conflict with Israel alive, effectively hindering any breakthrough in Arab-Israeli negotiations. Since the armistice went into effect in August 2006, Hizballah has received regular shipments of arms and other matériel from Syria, across the same border the UN has scrupulously avoided monitoring.

Although assistance to the Lebanese government has been the stated goal of a long series of generous UN resolutions, in the end they have become nothing more than rhetorical dust. The harsh reality is that when confronted with the prospect of conflict that may not be resolved though dialogue alone, the UN chooses to bow down to threats of force. For Lebanon, this amounts to a tragedy. The country has no chance of strengthening its tenuous democratic structure if Hizballah is permitted to remain a state within the state, backed by its own militia.

Repercussions for Lebanon

The political fallout of the 2006 war continues to be felt in Lebanon. In November 2006, Hizballah suspended its participation in the Lebanese cabinet, paralyzing the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Simultaneously, the party erected a tent camp in central Beirut, bringing normal business to a standstill. Hizballah and its supporters then laid siege to the parliament and the prime minister's headquarters, further undermining the state. Despite these actions, Siniora's rump government continued to function, albeit without Shiite ministers.

The crisis escalated in spring 2008 when the government demanded an investigation into Hizballah's security cameras at Beirut airport and its autonomous telecommunications network. Tensions turned to violence in May of that year, when Hizballah took over West Beirut by armed force. The government and opposition struck an agreement in Doha, Qatar, to defuse the crisis, and a coalition government was formed that once again included Hizballah ministers. In fact, Hizballah's position in the government was strengthened by the Doha Accord, which provided the opposition with a blocking third of ministers and essentially gave the Party of God veto power over all government decisions.

Hizballah's increasingly obvious influence as a kingmaker in Lebanese politics has allowed the party to emphasize its demands for a more Islamic society and perpetual war against Israel. Its success to date is based on a strategy of adapting to the local political structure while maintaining its long-term regional goals.

Repercussions for Syria

The 2006 war provided Syrian president Bashar al-Asad with an opportunity to portray his nation as the leading regional force in the larger, strategic struggle against Israel. This, of course, was nothing new: such rhetoric dates to Israel's founding in 1948. The 2006 war instilled new life in the rhetoric, however, allowing Asad to claim that Hizballah's victory was a new beginning on the path to total victory and Israel's destruction. Damascus was therefore able to demand increased influence in broader political processes that began as a result of the war.

The recurring political crises in Lebanon have underscored the country's importance in facilitating Syria's role as a regional actor. Through Lebanon, the regime in Damascus is able to influence the situation in the region and undermine any peace deal with Israel that does not also satisfy Syria's claim to the Golan Heights. Furthermore, by serving as a way station for all Iranian support to Hizballah, Syria has considerable control over both Iran and Hizballah's ability to act. This situation allows Damascus to keep its options open in the event of new, direct negotiations with Israel. The regime saw the outcome of the 2006 war as confirmation that its political approach had been successful.

Repercussions for Iran

Iran has shown that it is not above supplying very sophisticated matériel to Hizballah and other nonstate players. Examples include the Chinese C-802 missile used in the near sinking of an Israeli ship in July 2006, and the more advanced rockets and missiles that Hizballah provided to Hamas during its six-month ceasefire with Israel. Iranian support is visible all over Lebanon, with each Iranian ministry and department having a branch office in Beirut. In addition, several Tehran-funded institutions operate independent of direct government control, such as the Iranian Red Crescent; the Committee of Ayatollah Khomeini, which focuses on education and propaganda; and al-Alam, an Arabic-language television station that Tehran founded in 2004, with offices adjacent to the Iranian embassy in Beirut. These Iranian interests in Lebanon reach far beyond purely military factors or rhetoric against Israel. Tehran's financial support to various Lebanese social and charity organizations has had a significant impact on Hizballah's popularity.

Today, Tehran has partially fulfilled many of its regional goals. While Iran's Arab neighbors have lost regional and international influence, Iran has increased its clout, making it practically impossible to ignore Iranian wishes when formulating regional policies. From its status as special observer at Gulf Cooperation Council meetings to the fact that the Obama administration has announced a willingness to engage it in dialogue, Iran has become the Middle East's only regional superpower. The country has significantly expanded its influence not only in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories, but also in Afghanistan. It has developed a close alliance with Syria to ensure that the conflict with Israel remains alive and that any serious peace initiatives in the foreseeable future will be destined to fail.

Conclusion

Seen in the light of the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, the war in Lebanon is just one of many unfinished Middle Eastern conflicts. But the 2006 war did clarify an important point: the conflict is not primarily about occupation or Israeli settlements, although these factors are obviously significant. Hizballah attacked Israel just as it has done on several occasions since 2000 because it could not imagine a future in which Israel exists. The conflict is about Hizballah's active attempts to prevent any form of peace process that might potentially end in a long-term agreement with Israel.

This point has regional significance as well. Israel and Hizballah were not the only parties that clashed in summer 2006. Regional actors such as Iran, Syria, and Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia and Egypt were active as well. In this respect, the tensions that are fragmenting the region today—between Sunnis and Shiites, Arabs and Israelis, Islamists and moderates, not to mention Lebanon's own sectarian communities—have deepened.

Therein lies one of the war's most tragic consequences: Hizballah continues to proclaim the 2006 war as a victory for armed struggle. Indeed, the war represents a victory for the belief that there is no need to compromise or get involved in complicated political processes with uncertain outcomes in order to get results. It works just as well, perhaps even better, to defeat Israel on the battlefield and force it to make concessions. If a sufficient number of other Arab actors adopt this destructive analysis of the war, the foundation will be laid for a new series of armed conflagrations and small-scale wars that could continue for many years to come.

Preface

ON AUGUST 31, 2006, three weeks after an armistice agreement ended the summer war between Israel and the Lebanese movement Hizballah, the Swedish government hosted a donors conference in Stockholm. The result of intensive lobbying initiated during the war itself, the summit came to be symptomatic of how the international community has dealt with "the Lebanese problem" for many years.

The decision to convene the conference was influenced heavily by domestic Swedish politics: national elections were only weeks away, and the incumbent administration was eager to gain popularity through a new policy initiative. In addition to coordinating financial aid for Lebanon's reconstruction, the summit aimed to strengthen the government in Beirut and help it reclaim authority over the South, particularly the Hizballah-controlled areas below the Litani River. Yet, despite this goal, the current situation in Lebanon is almost identical to that which existed before the war. To be sure, some of the reconstruction funds have reached the local populace, but this is due primarily to Hizballah's continued control over the state's public works machinery. None of the fundamental issues plaguing the country have been resolved—neither its internal divisions nor its conflicts with Israel, Syria, and Iran. Consequently, the risk of further violence still looms large, even amid the steady flow of rhetoric and dollars into Lebanon.

Part of the blame for this situation lies in the misguided political concern that motivated the donors conference in the first place. Far from altering Hizballah's role as a "state within the state," the summit seemed to make things worse. Instead of subjecting the group to political pressure, the donor community permitted Hizballah to strengthen its hold on the South, and arms shipments continued to arrive from Iran via Syria. Today, Hizballah is stronger than it was in July 2006, when the war began.

Nor did the conference help Lebanon create a foundation for long-term peace on the domestic or Arab-Israeli front. The government now finds itself in a much more vulnerable position vis-à-vis Hizballah than it has for some time. This was demonstrated in May 2008, when the group temporarily took control of Beirut and forced the administration to acquiesce to political demands that amounted to sweeping Hizballah veto power.[1] The most recent parliamentary elections did not alter this balance of power; following the June 2009 vote, the seats were distributed more or less as they had been in the 2005 elections. In short, Hizballah's hegemony continues to pose a fundamental challenge to Lebanese society, and there is little to suggest that this will change in the near future.

The international treatment of the Lebanese issue before, during, and after the Stockholm conference reflected an inability to grasp the regional significance of the Israeli-Lebanese conflict. At its core, this conflict is not a face-off between two states, nor has it been for a long time. Nearly two decades following its fifteen-year civil war, Lebanon still houses an armed movement, Hizballah, that is strong enough to drag the country into war against the government's will. At the same time, that movement has succeeded in providing legal, social, and political services to the Lebanese people. As a result of its efforts, Hizballah has been able to keep its conflict with Israel alive and prevent any attempt at a peaceful solution. This problem would be less serious if Hizballah's goal of demolishing Israel and transforming Lebanon into a theocracy were mere rhetoric. Both Iran and Syria are involved, however—practically as well as politically. These regimes actively support Hizballah with matériel and money, partly in an effort to preserve the group's role as an armed actor vis-à-vis the Lebanese government.

On the political level, Tehran and Damascus have interfered with the various regional and international

1. Nima Damidez and Magnus Norell, "En ny början? Libanon efter presidentvalet" [A new beginning? Lebanon after the presidential election], *FOI Memo 2435* (Swedish Defence Research Agency, May 2008).

initiatives aimed at strengthening the Lebanese government. This constitutes an embarrassment for the international community, whose efforts in the region have been thwarted continually. But this tactic is entirely in keeping with the two countries' clearly stated political agendas—and, regrettably, it has worked. The UN and, to some extent, the European Union (which often seeks to act as a geopolitical counterweight to the United States) have allowed themselves to be run over by Syria and Iran, often with very little resistance.

The UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), whose presence in southern Lebanon has been ramped up since the end of the 2006 war, is perhaps the most salient example of this state of affairs. Soon after the war, Syria made it clear that any attempt to patrol the Lebanese-Syrian frontier—across which Hizballah receives its arms—would be seen as a hostile act and met by force and closure of the border. The threat had its intended effect: before the ink had dried on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701, which offered a political resolution to the war, the UN folded and declared that it had no intention of challenging Syria by patrolling the border. This decision was made despite the Lebanese government's request for assistance on that very issue. In fact, UNSCR 1701 had granted UNIFIL its expanded mandate and had clearly assigned the border patrols to the UN.[2]

UNSCR 1701 also stated that only UNIFIL and the Lebanese army were permitted to carry arms in the area between the Litani River and the Israeli-Lebanese border; all other armed groups in Lebanon were to be disarmed. Since Hizballah was the only group still fitting that description, there was hardly any doubt about the intended target of the demand—one first expressed by the international community in UNSCR 1559, adopted in 2004.[3]

But shortly after the ceasefire, in August 2006, Lebanese minister of defense Elias Murr let it be known that there would be no disarmament. Instead, a compromise was worked out with Hizballah, which promised not to openly display its arms. In return, there would be no attempts to confiscate or destroy the group's arms stockpiles. The question of Hizballah's weapons—which form the basis of the organization's power in Lebanon—was again shunted aside in favor of a new "national dialogue." This longstanding dialogue initiative has attempted to resolve the predicament of Hizballah arms since the end of the civil war in 1990, and nothing suggests that it will be any more productive this time. To the contrary, Hizballah has been able to reinforce its position in the South unhindered, while the Lebanese government remains powerless to impose solutions, held hostage by the ineffective national dialogue process. Hizballah has no interest in concluding this dialogue, since further talks ensure that the demand for disarmament will remain indefinitely postponed. In fact, Hizballah's stronger position has led to an increase in arms shipments from Iran via Syria. Several observers have noted this problem, leading the UN to issue a formal protest against Syria for violating UNSCRs 1559 and 1701.[4]

The Lebanese army, along with UNIFIL, has deployed approximately 15,000 troops along the Israeli-Lebanese border in the South. But that presence does not amount to any real control over the area. Thus, even if the military wanted to disarm Hizballah, it lacks the capability to do so. The poorly trained and inexperienced soldiers of the Lebanese army would be no match for Hizballah's seasoned guerrilla fighters.

Another significant impediment to disarmament is the religious composition of the Lebanese army. When the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975, the army quickly fractured along sectarian lines. Since 1990, several Lebanese administrations have tried to alleviate these points of friction. They are still present, of course, and Lebanese politicians have attempted to avoid situations that might cause the old divisions to resurface. Confronting Hizballah in earnest would likely be one such situation. Approximately 70 percent of privates in the Lebanese army are Shiite, the sect from which

2. United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1701" (2006), http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm (accessed June 23, 2009).
3. United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1559" (2004), http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2004/sc8181.doc.htm (accessed June 23, 2009).
4. Paragraph 14 in the text of UNSCR 1701 concerns the right of the UN force to assist the Lebanese government in its attempt to secure its borders.

Hizballah recruits practically all of its members. Most officers, on the other hand, are Christian or Sunni. This too was the case before the civil war.

For its part, UNIFIL would be hampered in any disarmament effort due to problems in its own governing mandate. UNSCR 1701, like so many other Security Council resolutions, is full of ambiguities that allow for a range of interpretations. As a result, there is no universally agreed-on understanding of what it actually says. These ambiguities would place UNIFIL in a precarious position should it ever decide to crack down on arms trafficking over the Lebanese-Syrian border. For example, the resolution explicitly states that UNIFIL is permitted to carry out operations only between the Litani River and the Israeli border. But Lebanon's border with Syria stretches north of that area. Although such ambiguities helped 1701 pass in the Security Council, they also ensured that the resolution lacks teeth (unless figures such as the UNIFIL commander choose to interpret it aggressively).

Today, several years after the Security Council expanded UNIFIL's authority and increased its size from approximately 2,000 to 15,000 troops, UNIFIL has still not fulfilled its mandate. This reluctance to seriously confront the basic problems of Lebanon and the surrounding region is rooted in a fear of placing the UN in conflict with Hizballah, even if a more aggressive approach would benefit the Lebanese state. Such fears have been reflected in the decisions of individual member states as well. Sweden, for example, drastically reduced its contribution to UNIFIL following the 2006 war: it offered only a single corvette to patrol the Lebanese coastline, despite having committed ground troops in previous years. This maritime contribution was intended to prevent arms smuggling to unsanctioned groups in Lebanon, but in reality, it was mere tilting at windmills: Hizballah receives virtually no weapons by sea, and other groups that might make use of this route are so insignificant as to have no practical impact.

The reality is that since the 2006 armistice, Hizballah has been receiving regular shipments of arms and other matériel by land, from across a border that the UN scrupulously avoids monitoring. If the border were watched—as the mandate allows[5]—UNIFIL would run the risk of provoking a conflict with Hizballah and perhaps even Syria. But monitoring the border would also provide an opportunity to lend practical assistance to the Lebanese government, in accordance with a long series of UN resolutions over a number of years. Unfortunately, UN resolutions regarding Lebanon tend to turn to rhetorical dust, and not merely because they are ambiguously phrased. When confronted with the prospect of a conflict that appears unsolvable through dialogue alone, the UN has bowed down to threats of force. For Lebanon, this amounts to a tragedy; the country has no chance of strengthening its tenuous democratic structure if Hizballah is permitted to remain a state within the state, backed by its own militia.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon himself has confirmed the UN's failure to live up to its commitments under UNSCR 1701. After a March 2007 visit to Lebanon, he described reports of continued arms smuggling from Syria and Iran to Hizballah. Thus, it took a new secretary-general and almost a year to publicly acknowledge what everyone already knew: that neither UN resolutions nor additional UN forces have resulted in a real ability or willingness to stop the rearmament of Hizballah. Probably without irony, Ban called the smuggling a "blatant violation" of UN resolutions, and the United States, France, and the United Kingdom subsequently demanded that a UN special investigator be appointed to look into the matter.

Additional proof of the steady flow of weapons to Hizballah has come from the movement itself. In an April 2007 interview with the *Guardian*, Sheikh Naim Kassem, the group's deputy secretary-general, said that Hizballah had rearmed in anticipation of its next war with Israel.[6] That Hizballah's admission of its continued violation of UN resolutions would appear in a major foreign newspaper reveals the contempt with which the group regards the UN, and the total

5. Ban Ki-Moon, Reuters, May 8, 2007.
6. "US in Covert War against Hizbullah," *Guardian*, April 10 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/apr/10/usa.syria.

impunity under which it operates. The situation brings to mind the words of Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi regarding foreign involvement in the region: "Great powers should never get involved in the politics of small tribes."

The primary purpose of this book is to describe and analyze the international community's long series of self-inflicted failures between Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon and the outbreak of the summer 2006 war. These failures were caused primarily by political cowardice in confronting truly divisive issues—issues that have led to crises and wars time and time again, and which continue to pose a danger to the region at large. If the situation does not change significantly, it may only be a matter of time before a new conflict erupts in and around Lebanon.

1 | Introduction

THE SITUATION JUST BEFORE ISRAEL'S May 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon was a chaotic one: a combination of Lebanese rocketfire on Israel, kidnappings, terror, Israeli counterattacks, and fears of a humanitarian disaster. As Israel pulled back from its so-called security zone in the South, the United Nations promised to support the Lebanese government and prevent Hizballah from establishing a "state within the state." And in 2004, UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559 called for Hizballah's disarmament. This task was to be carried out in part by the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which had been stationed in the country since 1978. The flow of international assistance also included economic and political support for the Lebanese government. With it, national authorities were expected to assume control over southern Lebanon. All in all, Hizballah's role as a well-armed militia operating completely outside government control was correctly identified as the primary obstacle to addressing Lebanon's problems.

As is now commonly known, the international community's efforts to support Lebanon were a profound failure. We have witnessed the same tragic sequence of events unfold over and over again. The ingredients and the actors are the same, standing ready to reenact the same scenario today.

As in years past, Israel's withdrawal following the 2006 war was met with another round of pledges for additional UN troops, donor conferences, and solemn speeches about the need to help Lebanon rebuild. Then, as now, there was talk about the importance of supporting the Lebanese government in reclaiming control over the South and countering Hizballah. The UNIFIL presence there was already established in accordance with UNSCRs 425 and 426 of 1978, which formed the basis of the force's mandate to "assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area."

Yet, despite this longstanding UN presence, Hizballah had no difficulty establishing itself in southern Lebanon after the May 2000 withdrawal—in other words, confronting the group in any serious way was always out of the question. For its part, the Lebanese government had been too weak to confront the organization on its own in 2000. The author, along with colleague Magnus Ranstorp, participated in some of the processes that preceded the Israeli withdrawal at that time, and it was a strange feeling to experience a similar scenario after the 2006 war. Before May 2000, it was clear to both the Israeli and Lebanese governments that disarming Hizballah and bringing the South under Beirut's control were necessary conditions for a peaceful solution that could stand the test of time. It was equally obvious that the Lebanese government would not be able to do this on its own. Despite its previous troubles with the UN, however, the Israeli government decided to "bet," as it was put at the time, that the international community would remain true to its word, especially since troops and a mandate from the Security Council were already in place.

The prospect of disarming Hizballah has become even more difficult since 2000. The group has spent the intervening years greatly expanding its military capacity, to such a degree that it can now decide whether Lebanon goes to war. Not only has Hizballah bolstered its military power and political influence, it has also strengthened its relations with Syria and Iran. Finally, it has kept its conflict with Israel at a level high enough to ensure that the question of peace remains moot, but not so high as to endanger its political and military position within Lebanon.

To be sure, the thirty-four-day war in summer 2006 came as a surprise to Hizballah—even the movement's leader, Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, has admitted as much. And the group's losses, in terms of both matériel and manpower, were greater than has previously been acknowledged. Nevertheless, shipments of arms and other items from Iran and Syria have easily compensated for these losses. Meanwhile, the international community's various political and diplomatic initiatives since the end of the war have maintained the

status quo rather than advancing the prospects for a long-term solution.

As mentioned previously, UNIFIL's current mandate already offers an opportunity to help the Lebanese government. The latest UN resolutions, including UNSCR 1701 (passed in 2006), appear to be stronger than UNSCR 1559, lending further weight to Hizballah's disarmament. Specifically, the newer resolutions stipulate that the area south of the Litani River be free of nonstate militias, while the expanded UNIFIL now has a mandate to halt any arms shipments to Hizballah across the Lebanese-Syrian border (though see the Preface for a discussion of problems with the wording of these mandates).

Yet the international community, via UNIFIL, has tacitly abided by the internal agreement between Hizballah and the Lebanese government that allows the group to keep its arms hidden in southern Lebanon. This agreement has undermined calls for the group's full disarmament and demilitarization. In addition, the question of what is to be done with arms stored in other parts of Lebanon has been postponed indefinitely.

Lebanon's convalescent democracy will never fully recover as long as Hizballah can maintain its current position, backed by its own militia. And the UN has failed to show that it has either the will or the ability to disarm the group. It was Hizballah's role as a state within the state that caused the conflict to become "hot" in summer 2006. Because the conflict is still unresolved, the risk for new flare-ups will therefore remain high. At its core, this situation is a result of Hizballah's position in Lebanon, its commitment to fighting Israel by any means possible, and its willingness to block any political deal that accepts the existence of a Jewish state. Therefore, the prospects for long-term peace are fairly poor.

2 | Background

THE MIDDLE EAST TODAY suffers from a severe lack of confidence-building efforts. Instead, suspicions, heightened tensions, and a general fear of renewed violence have replaced the hopeful climate that characterized the peace process of the 1990s, with Lebanon perhaps the most notable example of this trend.

Despite this climate, the Middle East will remain a key area of interest for the European Union for the foreseeable future. This is true on all levels: economically, politically, and militarily. But even from a strict security perspective, the region cannot be ignored. Although a large part of the Islamist terrorism that has struck Europe in recent years has been linked to Central and South Asia, the Middle East remains important as a recruiting center for Islamist militants devoted to an extremist version of political Islam.

Moreover, the EU's relationships with Middle Eastern countries have grown stronger in recent years, thanks to the Association Agreements that have been negotiated within the Barcelona Process and the European Neighborhood Policy. The EU contributes a significant amount of aid to foster, among other things, human rights and democracy in the region. In several Middle Eastern countries, democratization processes have begun, though the outcomes are far from certain at the moment.[7] Many other regional countries, however, have been moving in the opposite direction.[8] The Arab experts who produced the UN Development Program's *Arab Human Development Report* have identified three main obstacles to regional development: the scarcity of political rights and democratic governments, the lack of women's rights, and inadequate education. It should also be noted that the aid given to promote human rights and democratization has had its greatest impact in those countries where such processes were already underway.[9] In countries such as Syria and (pre-2003) Iraq, these investments produced no noticeable movements toward democracy.

Although conditions vary sharply within the region, commonalities such as poverty, rapid population growth, and rampant unemployment are shared across the board. Emigration from the Middle East to Europe has, at times, been extensive. And the fact that 8,000 Swedish citizens had to be evacuated from Lebanon during the summer 2006 war revealed how much migration binds the Middle East and Europe together. Not only do the region's conflicts cause waves of migration, they also erect barriers between countries that impede economic growth. Lebanon is a good example of this phenomenon, as well.

Many Middle Eastern countries have also witnessed a greater commitment to activist Islam. This is most obvious in the way that political Islam, or Islamism, has increasingly become a political force to be reckoned with throughout the region.[10] One of the most salient examples unfolded in Lebanon in May 2008, when Hizballah instigated an armed confrontation with the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. At that point, it became clear that the confrontation could spread rapidly throughout the region.[11] Although a solution was worked out with the help of mediation from Qatar, the result was a clear victory for Hizballah, not a compromise that satisfied all parties.

The 2006 war and its aftereffects are also significant in this respect. As described in the Preface, the conflict between Israel and Hizballah involves more than just these two parties alone—it is intimately linked to several other regional problems, including Islamist

7. For example, Lebanon, Iraq, and the Palestinian territories.
8. For example, Egypt and Iran.
9. For a more extensive discussion of these issues, see Magnus Norell, *Mellanöstern efter kriget i Irak-demokratisering med förhinder?* (Stockholm: SNS, 2004).
10. Damidez and Norell, 2008.
11. It should be noted, however, that according to several opinion polls, many Muslim Arabs see no inherent contradiction between Islam and democracy. See, for instance, G. Khouri in *The Daily Star*, November 16, 2005; and Massoud Derhally, "Yearning for Change," Arabianbusiness.com, October 9, 2005, http://www.arabianbusiness.com/492075?ln=en (accessed June 23, 2009).

terrorism. And the international community's sometimes awkward inability to settle the conflict increases the likelihood of another war. Should one break out, it would be clear that what was once considered a locally confined conflict will have achieved regional significance, with considerably higher stakes to match. All the actors in the Lebanese drama have been sucked further into this now-regional conflict.[12] This means that Lebanon's problems are less likely to be solved in a way that would limit the risk of new "hot" conflicts.

The biggest losers in the 2006 war were the Lebanese people (whose homes and means of livelihood were largely destroyed in the fighting) and the Lebanese government (which suffered the ultimate humiliation of finding itself utterly irrelevant and ignored). The economic upturn that Lebanon had experienced in previous years came to an abrupt end. Its infrastructure took a long time to repair and, in some cases, has still not been restored to prewar standards. And the country is still far too weak to defend itself from external attacks or handle internal threats to its stability; the Lebanese people have concluded that their government is incapable of defending them from enemies foreign or domestic.[13]

The war's fallout also influenced Lebanon's domestic politics, culminating in the spring 2008 showdown in which Hizballah took control of internal political developments once and for all. Officially, the Siniora government, supported by the March 14 coalition—an alliance of anti-Syrian domestic political parties backed by the United States and France—managed to remain in power. But as discussed previously, Hizballah's campaign of political pressure and civil disobedience, along with the violence of May 2008, helped the group gain considerable influence over the government regardless of election results.

Of course, the 2006 war had come as a surprise to Hizballah, as Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah admitted shortly after the end of hostilities.[14] The organization lost approximately 500 men from its elite units and, at least in the short term, its members could no longer readily appear in public with arms in hand. Moreover, once UNIFIL was bolstered in the area south of the Litani River, Hizballah found its access to the Israeli-Lebanese border—which it could depend on before the war—cut off.

Within a couple of years, however, Hizballah managed to rebuild its capabilities and reclaim the initiative in the South. It replenished its supply of arms and rockets, half of which the Israelis had destroyed in the war. Although there may be fewer arms south of the Litani River, this is likely a result of new arms being moved north rather than an indication of diminished stockpiles. Similarly, new bunkers have been built to replace those targeted during the hostilities. And as recently as November 2008, Hizballah carried out military drills south of the Litani River in violation of UNSCR 1701.[15] That Hizballah—knowing full well such activities would hardly go unnoticed—carried out these drills without any attempt to conceal them speaks volumes about the status the group enjoys in Lebanon today. This status has only been bolstered during the reconstruction of southern Lebanon, given that Hizballah has proven to be significantly more reliable than either the Lebanese government or the West.[16]

In light of these factors, Hizballah now finds itself in a stronger position than it has for a long time. The victory it claimed in summer 2006 has been put to good

12. This is not the place to go over the many conflicts that have affected, and are still affecting, the relationship between Israel and its Arab neighbors. With regard to Lebanon, there are a number of longstanding issues that predate Hizballah and its role in the country. The Palestine Liberation Organization, in its day, held a similar position, as "a state within the state." Another similarity between the two organizations is the Lebanese government's weakness and inability to neutralize the external and domestic groups that, at least in part, have acquired influence by force of arms.
13. See note 12.
14. Both Hassan Nasrallah and Mahmoud Koumati, the second-in-command of Hizballah's political wing, have admitted in interviews that they were completely unprepared for the magnitude of the Israeli response to the kidnappings. Nasrallah has admitted that had he known what the Israeli response would be, he would not have launched the operation. See Daniel Byman and Steven Simon, "The No-Win Zone: An After-Action Report from Lebanon," *The National Interest*, November/December 2006, p. 56.
15. Barak Ravid, "Report: Hezbollah Carries Out Military Drills in South Lebanon," *Haaretz*, November 22, 2008, http://www.haaretz.com (accessed June 23, 2009).
16. One example is the donors' conference that was held under the auspices of the Swedish government immediately after the war. See, for instance, Magnus Norell, "Regeringens givarkonferens förvärrar situationen i Libanon" (The government's donor conference is worsening the situation in Lebanon), *DN.se*, August 30, 2006, http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?a=568826 (accessed June 23, 2009).

use in its propaganda—its victory in the increasingly important media war has been unequivocal. Although many Lebanese look at Hizballah with great suspicion, most agree that it won the war.[17] In addition, the conflict and its aftermath have shown that the group is the most important and powerful actor in the country, one that continues to enjoy a surge in prestige domestically and beyond. Hizballah's popularity is due in part to its ability to claim that it was the only Arab force that could stand up to Israel and win.

This does not necessarily mean that Hizballah wishes to engage in another large-scale confrontation with Israel in the near future. Yet, thanks to the changes it forced on the Lebanese government and the UN protection it enjoys, Hizballah is guaranteed significant influence in all future government decisions, while also retaining its new and improved arsenal. Furthermore, the group has its own communications network that covers the country and provides intelligence from Beirut's airport to its harbor—all completely independent from official channels.[18] Both the war and its political aftermath in Lebanon have also strengthened Hizballah's long-term strategic vision—namely, that of preventing any normalization of relations with Israel.

Another of the war's winners is Iran, Hizballah's closest ally. The Iranian regime has long viewed Hizballah as a successful example of its ability to export the Islamic Revolution. For Tehran, the war constituted further proof that it is possible to confront Israel without paying too high a cost. Supporting Hizballah has been, and still is, a convenient way for Tehran to expand its regional influence.

There is no doubt, however, that Iran had nothing to do with the war's outbreak. Some have suggested that Iran initiated the conflict to pressure the United States in Iraq and divert attention from its nuclear weapons program, but this was hardly the case. When it comes to Iraq, Tehran has sought to influence the situation through various Iraqi Shiite groups rather than trying to influence the Americans directly. Furthermore, Nasrallah's postwar admission—that he would not have kidnapped the two Israeli soldiers had he known the consequences—also undermines any notion that Iran was somehow behind the war.

Of course, Iran was quick to replace Hizballah's losses in arms and matériel in the wake of the war, and continuing such support makes good political sense in Tehran's eyes. By maintaining significant influence in Lebanon, Iran is in a good position to counter U.S. influence in the Middle East and become the most important regional actor opposing Israel. In that sense, Hizballah's victory in the war was also Iran's victory. Furthermore, Iran has recently strengthened its ties with Syria, another of the war's winners.

For Damascus, the war marked a turning point: Syria had been pushed into a corner after Lebanon's March 14 movement forced it to withdraw its troops from the country. Moreover, the UN had released an unusually tough first report on the murder of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, identifying Syrian officials by name as being responsible. [The first report named members of the Syrian regime in the tracked changes of a version leaked to the press in the days following its announcement.—Ed.][19] But the war and its aftermath changed the regional and intra-Lebanese dynamics, bringing Hizballah's preeminence to the fore.

Today, it has become all too clear that those who dared to challenge Syria and Hizballah prior to 2006 now find themselves on the losing side. The events of May 2008, along with the assassinations of anti-Syrian journalists and politicians in 2007, reinforced the view that confronting Hizballah and Damascus exacts a heavy cost. As in the past, Hizballah's dependence suits Syria well, giving the regime a useful tool in any future negotiations with Israel and the West. And although

17. "Majority of Lebanese Believe Hizballah Won the War," *The Daily Star*, August 26, 2006, cited in Byman and Simon, p. 57.
18. This network is one of the issues that triggered the May 2008 face-off between Hizballah and the Lebanese government. See Damidez and Norell, 2008.
19. The German prosecutor who led the investigation, Detlev Mehlis, proved able to resist pressure when he named individuals connected to the Syrian government as responsible for the murder. Mehlis was replaced by a significantly more pliant successor, who changed the original report and removed many of the more controversial parts. The new UN tribunal began its work in March 2009. For the mistakenly released report, see http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/syria/mehlis.report.doc. For Mehlis's official report, see http://www.un.org/news/dh/docs/mehlisreport/ (accessed June 30, 2009).

Damascus supports Iran and Hizballah at the moment due to aligned interests, this could change.

As for all other actors in the Middle East, the war and its aftermath continue to affect their stances toward Hizballah. After initially criticizing Hizballah, the more moderate Sunni-dominated countries quickly changed their tune as the war ravaged Lebanon and public opposition to Israel grew. The quick war that Israel and, surely, the United States had envisioned became something else, and Hizballah's strengthened position and rising popularity forced the moderate Arab states to take a more cautious approach.

Within Lebanon itself, the war illustrated how the conflicts that had divided the country for many years had not disappeared. What has changed since the war is that Hizballah has boldly established itself as the country's dominant political and military force, and the roles of Syria and Iran have been strengthened. Meanwhile, the country's moderate forces, including advocates for democracy and reform, have lost ground. It is doubtful whether the Lebanese government can change this reality, but it certainly cannot do so without large-scale international support.

It is unclear what form such support ought to take. As previously stated, the massive support Hizballah gained during the war has made Lebanon's Arab neighbors leery of criticizing the group too strongly. They also want to avoid accusations of meddling in Lebanon's internal affairs, especially since the Doha Agreement (signed between the Lebanese government and the Hizballah-led opposition) has gained political legitimacy.[20] Although this agreement was more or less forced on the government in the wake of armed clashes between Hizballah and progovernment militias (the army remained on the sidelines), the outcome of the fighting has since been given official, political sanction.

The Doha Agreement also affects the options available to other outside parties. On one hand, the international community has committed itself to supporting the elected government. On the other hand, however, it is afraid to challenge Hizballah, which still has troops in the South[21] and the capability to strike Israel with long-range rockets.[22] The UN's mandate (guided by UNSCRs 1559 and 1701) has more potency than ever before, but this authority has gone unused. The UN's role in Lebanon therefore remains largely symbolic, and UNIFIL's expanded presence will not change that fact. It is too early to tell what this will mean for the UN's credibility as a peacekeeper. But a larger and more expensive UN force—financed and filled mostly by Europeans, doing little except driving around and flying the UNIFIL flag—will not garner greater trust or respect.

For Israel, the war did not constitute the definitive showdown for which it had hoped. Israeli forces did not deal a serious enough blow to bring Hizballah down, though they did inflict some significant damage.[23] Most important, Hizballah was able to continue its rocket barrage against Israel even during the ground offensive. And the remains of the kidnapped soldiers, who had been killed at some point during the ambush or while in Hizballah's custody, were not returned until much later, and only as the result of a prisoner exchange with Hizballah.

The war's real turning point came after it became obvious that Israel could no longer achieve any kind of strategic victory—specifically, when Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert insisted, as a condition for a ceasefire, that the two kidnapped soldiers be returned and

20. By broadening the government, Hizballah and its allies managed to acquire a "blocking third" of the ministerial portfolio seats in the Lebanese cabinet. This meant that Hizballah was able to block any decision that ran counter to its interests. This reflects the ambivalent attitude of Hizballah to the state. On the one hand, it is part of the political structure in Lebanon. On the other hand, it is primarily interested in retaining its weapons and military structure independently of the state. The nation-state does not comprise an important part of Hizballah's ideological foundation.
21. A "gentleman's agreement" of sorts can be said to govern the relationship between the UN and Hizballah in the South: members of Hizballah refrain from transporting or showing their weapons in the open, and the UN refrains from aggressively searching vehicles or buildings belonging to Hizballah.
22. Byman and Simon, p. 60.
23. During the first days of the war, when Israel won its greatest successes (by taking out Hizballah's medium-range Fajr missiles), the criticism directed at Hizballah was the greatest. Even Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan made it clear that they did not mind if Israel continued its operation until Hizballah was broken. See, for example, Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hizballah and the War in Lebanon* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 98, 102–3.

that Hizballah leave southern Lebanon. To Hizballah and many others, including members of the Israeli government, Olmert had set the bar too high. Hizballah had been caught by surprise by Israel's powerful response, particularly the precision strikes targeting rocket launch pads that the group's leaders had believed to be safe. But Olmert's demand convinced Hizballah that all it had to do was to hold on, refuse to agree to any of the terms, and declare itself the victor once the war was over.[24]

The last opportunity for Israel to agree to a ceasefire with favorable terms evaporated on July 30, when its forces bombed the southern village of Qana.[25] Shortly before that incident, U.S. efforts led by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had produced a ceasefire draft that all parties agreed to in principle.[26] After Qana, however, the agreement did not stand a chance, and Prime Minister Siniora was forced to bar Rice from returning to Lebanon for the next meeting.[27]

Nor has the aftermath of the war turned out in Israel's favor. The expanded international presence might make it harder for Hizballah to strike across the Israeli border, but UNIFIL, regardless of its size, would not be much of an obstacle for the group if it were to attack Israel. The challenge for Israel's new government will be to internalize the conclusions of several official commissions of inquiry published after the war, the best known of which was the Winograd Commission.[28]

The most important consequence of the second Lebanon war is that it may have ushered in a new phase of Israel's conflict with its neighbors, many of whom are still banking on a military solution to "the Israeli problem" and now view this course of action with renewed legitimacy. This does not mean, however, that negotiations are out of the question under any circumstances.

A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

From a historical point of view, the Arab-Israeli conflict can be divided into three periods. The first stretched from Israel's 1948 declaration of independence to the October War of 1973. During this time, opposition to Israel was dressed in the garb of pan-Arabism. The goal of this ideology was to build coalitions based on Arab unity in order to isolate and destroy Israel militarily by waging war on multiple fronts.

The fundamental problem with this strategy was rooted in the very ideology of pan-Arabism. The Arab states, led by Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser, found it impossible to unify their strategic goals, a weakness that led to defeats in the wars of 1948 and 1967. Ironically, it was Syria and Egypt's partially successful attack on Israel in October 1973 that caused Cairo to abandon the failed project of collective Arab strategic thinking and sue for a separate peace with Israel. This spelled the end of the "classic" period of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In the second period, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict came to the foreground, pushing Israel's conflict with its Arab neighbors to the sidelines. Combining political initiatives with an armed struggle that included terrorism, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was able to open several fronts against Israel while also striking at Jewish targets around the world. Having portrayed its armed struggle as part of a worldwide revolutionary struggle against colonialism, the PLO was able to ally with a host of leftist groups, most notably in Europe. These groups provided political support that extended into the European mainstream.

As with the pan-Arab approach, however, the PLO's multifront tactics were hampered by the organization's inability to formulate a coherent strategy. Under Yasser

24. Ibid., pp. 108–9.
25. Twenty-eight people were killed, including seventeen children. The strike was not conceived as an attack against civilian targets, of course, but it was a result of a tactic whereby the Israeli air force would bomb suspicious houses on the outskirts of villages, where Hizballah may have hidden its short-range Katyusha rockets. It was a deliberate tactic of Hizballah to use civilian structures as weapons storage (not just for rockets), mostly houses on the outskirts of the villages (Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days,* pp. 158–61). These short-range rockets were very hard to target for the Israeli air force. At the end of July, all the known targets were taken out; Israel carried out preemptive attacks against suspected targets. The house in Qana was one such target. The attack caused an even bigger stir because a similar attack had taken place in the same village in 1996 (during Operation Grapes of Wrath), when another house was fired upon by mistake, killing many civilians.
26. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*, pp. 154–58.
27. Ibid., p. 163.
28. See *New York Times*, January 30, 2008. Preliminary results were presented in April 2007, and in January 2008 the full report was published.

Arafat, who dominated decisionmaking to a significant degree, the PLO made a long series of tactical decisions that resulted in an equally large number of different policies. Despite some successes on the tactical level,[29] the PLO's broad approach to reaching a political solution amounted to a dead end. Arafat's death in 2004 marked the end of the period in which the Arab-Israeli conflict was defined primarily as an Israeli-Palestinian affair.

Today, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been transformed into a primarily religious clash between Israel and Islam. The beginnings of this transformation can be traced to Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini brought forth a new vision of Islam's role in the conflict with Israel. Unimpressed by Israel's military victories, Khomeini rejected the notion that the country's existence was a fait accompli. He viewed the conflict and the establishment of Israel as an affront to God, and the struggle against Israel as a test for Islam. If Muslims stayed true to their faith, he argued, Israel would be annihilated.

For that to become possible, Islamists could not remain content with a passive, supporting role. Instead, their stance amounted to a direct critique of countries such as Saudi Arabia, which supported the Palestinians financially without sacrificing its otherwise luxurious standard of living. In order to defeat Israel, a more activist role was necessary, and the 1982 war in Lebanon provided such an opportunity. After the Israeli invasion, Iran was presented with an opportunity to strengthen and expand its role there. Tehran already had a toehold in Lebanon thanks to its support of the country's Shiite population. The creation of Hizballah allowed Iran to open a front against Israel that was entirely independent of other Arab states and the PLO, which Khomeini saw as incompetent and corrupt. Hizballah's strategic aim was to resist Israel on all fronts, thereby hastening its final defeat.[30]

During the 1990s, various Islamist movements gained influence in the region and became increasingly important political actors. Hizballah successfully struggled against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. Israel's withdrawal in 2000 was viewed as a victory for Hizballah and, more generally, as proof that armed struggle could achieve measurable results in the fight against Israel.[31] On the Palestinian front, Hamas gained power at the expense of the PLO, culminating in a victory over Fatah, the largest PLO party, in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. The victory was solidified when Hamas ousted Fatah from Gaza in June 2007.

The Islamists had never hidden their view that the only way to confront Israel was through armed struggle. But not until summer 2006 did the Islamists seriously challenge the strategic monopoly that the Arab states and the PLO had over choosing how to approach Israel. The type of struggle the Islamists favored was primarily a long-term war of attrition, which they believed would eventually lead to Israel's defeat. The 2006 war in Lebanon provided the Islamists with an opportunity to push their strategic vision of how the Arab world should deal with Israel.[32]

Several factors contributed to this rebirth of armed struggle as an overarching strategy. First, Hamas's 2006 electoral victory gave the Islamists a mandate to change the entire Palestinian strategy. From the Islamist perspective, the Oslo peace process was an unprecedented failure. The electoral victory—and Hamas's military victory in Gaza a year later—allowed the organization

29. A good example was the Palestine Liberation Organization's success in allying itself with a plethora of left-wing groups by portraying its cause as a postcolonial one in the 1970s and 1980s. This tactic has caused many left-wing observers today to see Israel as a purely colonial project. Especially in Europe, this has influenced the image of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are examples of this in Sweden as well. When Sweden played a Davis Cup game against Israel in Malmö, Sweden, in March 2009, the left-wing majority in the Malmö municipality (led by Ilmar Reepalu) decided that the game would be played without an audience. The security reasons that were put forth did not fool anyone: the police had no difficulties controlling the protestors, and the decision to play the game without an audience divided the municipality along party lines. Reepalu himself claimed that the game would enrage the many voters of Middle Eastern extraction in the city. This demonization of Israel, deliberate or not, is an example of the significance this question has in Sweden. See also Per Gudmundson, editorial page, *SvD*, March 11, 2009.
30. Note that this was in regard to Israel as a state. Thus, it was not just the occupation of southern Lebanon that was the problem.
31. This interpretation, however, ignores a number of factors that played into Israel's decision to leave Lebanon unilaterally. In the long term, this may become dangerous, of course, since it might lead to a lowering of the bar for violent confrontation.
32. See, for instance, Omran Salman, "The Era of Iranian Hegemony in the Middle East Is upon Us," *Aafaq.org*, September 1, 2008, http://www.aafaq.org/english/Index.aspx (accessed June 23, 2009).

to shift its focus back to violent confrontation. To the Islamists, both the June 2006 kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in Gaza and Hizballah's attack the next month testified to the power of their strategy and its potential for success.

In May 2000, Israel withdrew its troops from Lebanon without a peace agreement,[33] and in August 2005, it disengaged unconditionally from Gaza. In Israeli decisionmaking circles, these actions were seen as a way of improving the prospects of a long-term peace agreement. But the Islamists perceived these events as pure capitulation, a result of their own armed struggle. Consequently, moves that had been intended to provide an opening for peace negotiations instead had the opposite effect, increasing the Islamists' political influence at the expense of those parties still working toward a negotiated settlement. In both cases, Israel's unconditional concessions worsened the overall security situation for all parties concerned: the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the Lebanese.[34] These events are excellent examples of what can happen when two fundamentally different negotiating traditions and strategic perspectives meet.

The other factor that has shifted the paradigm away from negotiation and toward armed struggle is Iran's desire to attain nuclear weapons.[35] A nuclear Iran would quickly change the balance of power in the region in an unprecedented way. Regardless of how long it will take the regime to obtain such weapons, the question itself has strengthened the Islamist argument that the best way to deal with Israel is to defeat it on the battlefield. Through the combination of Iran's nuclear ambitions, Hizballah's rockets, and Hamas's takeover of Gaza, it has once again become part of legitimate political discourse to speak of the conflict with Israel as something that can be solved militarily, through a multifront attack led by Islamists.

During the 2006 war, this coalition of forces found itself at war with Israel for the first time. Iran was reluctant to be dragged into war at that point, but it made a virtue of necessity and managed to turn the conflict to its advantage, even though the military outcome did not amount to a clear victory for either side. That did not change the Islamists' view, however. Through their prism, the war was a decisive victory. Furthermore, the war revealed the source of the coalition's power: a basic and well-thought-out ideological foundation, complete with the "evidence" that, because they had won the war, God was on their side. From this viewpoint, armed struggle had forced Israel to leave both Lebanon and Gaza.

The coalition has been able to flex its military strength by combining various actors—a state (Iran), a semistate actor (Hamas), and a nonstate actor

33. When the author (along with colleague Magnus Ranstorp, then working at St. Andrews University in Scotland), helped to create a channel for secret contacts between Hizballah and Israel in 1997–2000, the question often surfaced "What would happen next?"—that is, after an Israeli withdrawal. It was rather obvious that in order for a withdrawal to be successful and not lead to future confrontation, it was absolutely necessary that the Lebanese government be assisted in taking control of the South. That the power vacuum arising from an Israeli withdrawal would lead to a Hizballah takeover was plain to see. At the time, however, Syrian forces still occupied parts of Lebanon, and it was equally obvious that the Lebanese government would not be able to reclaim the South while Damascus backed Hizballah and worked against any initiatives that did not take Syrian interests into account. This was the message that the author and Dr. Ranstorp brought back from encounters with Lebanese interlocutors. These warnings were not heeded, however—although the withdrawal itself was carried out relatively quickly and painlessly, Hizballah did in fact assume control over the South. The summer 2006 war was therefore expected, even if its timing was uncertain. As for the secret contacts preceding the 2000 withdrawal, their purpose had been to investigate the consequences of a unilateral move out of the Israeli security zone established in southern Lebanon in 1978. The initiative came from Israeli politician Yossi Beilin, who for several years had argued within the Labor Party in favor of such a move.
34. For the Israelis, the rocketfire from Gaza has continued, as have the terrorist attacks coming from there. Israeli countermeasures, ranging from limited attacks and incursions to take out launch pads, to Operation Cast Lead in the winter of 2008–2009, have meant additional fighting and suffering for Palestinian civilians. For the Lebanese, the Israeli withdrawal resulted in a Hizballah takeover, and a new brand of foreign soldiers controlling the area.
35. This controversial issue has dominated the relationship between Iran and the West for a long time. Iran's repeated assurances that it is only striving to develop nuclear power for peaceful use are contradicted by its own politics, as well as by the UN and International Atomic Energy Agency's repeated criticisms of Tehran's activities. Furthermore, there is no doubt that Iranian nuclear weapons would lead to a regional arms race. Several countries in the region—such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which are already very critical of Iranian ambitions toward acquiring nuclear weapons and becoming a regional superpower—have stated that they would pursue nuclear weapons if Iran acquired nuclear technology. Interestingly, Israel's possession of nuclear weapons has never produced such a reaction. This underscores the fact that Iran is seen as a far more serious destabilizing factor than Israel. See also: Emily B. Landau, "New Nuclear Programs in the Middle East: What Do They Mean?" *INSS Insight* (edited by Mark Heller) no. 3 (December 11, 2006); Magnus Norell, "There Are Alternatives to Both War and Diplomacy," *Judisk Krönika,* vol. 75, no. 2, årgång 75, April 2007, pp. 33–37.

(Hizballah), each with its own innovative tactics and weapons systems (e.g., rockets, long-range artillery, suicide bombings). Through these tactics, each has attempted to vitiate Israel's superiority in conventional warfare. The 2006 war testified to the strength of this coalition and the power of its ideological foundation.

This new stage in the conflict between Israel and its neighbors is not entirely complete. On the one hand, the Islamists have achieved a number of victories that have caused a political shift in favor of armed struggle, confrontation, and a complete rejection of Israel's right to exist. On the other hand, there are weaknesses in the Islamic coalition, and it may not be able to change strategic thinking as much as it would like. After all, as a result of the 2006 war, the border with Israel is increasingly inaccessible to Hizballah, and a rocket or artillery attack would give Israel an excuse to strike back. Furthermore, the coalition is dominated by Iran and Shiite Islam, which makes it difficult to reach Sunni-dominated areas of the Arab world.

Nevertheless, this coalition of radical Islamists is strong enough to block any new peace initiative, at least as long as the international community does not fully support it. The peace processes of the 1980s and 1990s made considerable gains and proved that there is support for a peaceful settlement. But without complete and consistent international backing, that goal will be impossible to reach.

In addition to demonstrating the risk of armed militant groups along Israel's border, the 2006 war showed that the region could become considerably less stable if no progress is made toward peace between Israel and its neighbors. The Arab-Israeli conflict is not the core problem of the Middle East. Radical Islamism is—especially its ability to subvert the rather weak forces that advocate negotiation.

3 | Causes and Effects of the Second Lebanon War

HIZBALLAH'S ATTACK on Israel on July 12, 2006, provided the immediate trigger for the month-long war. Under the cover of rocketfire aimed at several Israeli cities, Hizballah militias crossed the border and attacked two Israeli vehicles. During the attack, which had been planned for several months, several soldiers were killed and two were kidnapped.[36] Kidnapping Israelis and using them as bargaining chips to secure the release of its own prisoners has been one of Hizballah's longstanding goals. In this way, Hizballah opened a new front against Israel, primarily to exploit Israel's embroilment in Gaza at the time. The attack may have been an attempt to directly support Hamas in Gaza, which would explain the timing: at that time, the Gaza Strip was subject to heavy pressure from Israeli forces, a situation that had arisen as a result of the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier a few days earlier.

A ceasefire came into effect on August 14, after the UN Security Council had passed UNSCR 1701 on August 11. The resolution was intended to restore full control over all parts of the country to the Lebanese government, as well as enforce the disarmament of all domestic and foreign groups operating in Lebanon, which UNSCR 1559 had called for in 2004. Thus, UNSCR 1701 outlawed all arms dealing not approved by the country's government. And to assist the Lebanese government, it expanded the existing UNIFIL force.[37]

Hizballah and Hamas have no operational links, but Hizballah has functioned as something of a role model to Hamas with regard to its political and military structure. Both movements receive support from Iran and want to eliminate Israel. Both are opposed to making peace with Israel and both employ a similar mix of political, social, and military activities, including terrorism, that characterize some Islamist movements in the Middle East.[38]

The stated aim of the attack was, as previously mentioned, to acquire prisoners who could be held hostage and used as bargaining chips in negotiations with Israel. Hizballah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, said that the only way for Israel to secure the release of its soldiers would be through a prisoner exchange. It was not the first time that Hizballah had attempted such an endeavor. This time, however, the consequences would turn out to be significantly more serious than Nasrallah had anticipated.

Another motivating factor for Hizballah might have been a desire to prevent a solution to the crisis in Gaza that did not benefit Hamas. Both Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and his Palestinian counterpart, Mahmoud Abbas, have said that an agreement was all but complete but that the delicate negotiating game between Israel and Gilad Shalit's kidnappers, over whom the Palestinian government had no control, broke down after Hizballah's attack.

Some have speculated that Iran was directly involved in the attack in order to thwart, or at least complicate, the UN Security Council's attempts to condemn Iran's nuclear program. There is, however, no hard evidence to support this theory. In any event, the war had no influence on the effort to force Iran into making concessions: on July 31, in the midst of the war, the Security Council issued a resolution demanding that Iran immediately cease its uranium enrichment. Hizballah acted on its own, but it informed Iran that an attack was imminent.

While Iran does not control Hizballah, the two parties have an understanding that Hizballah must seek Iran's approval before engaging in operations that have international or regional consequences. Since Hizballah's leadership was expecting the "usual" Israeli response—limited artillery fire, possibly coupled with

36. The attack clearly amounted to a casus belli (which obviously did not *force* Israel to strike back): Hizballah crossed an international border and killed and kidnapped foreign soldiers of a country with which Lebanon was not at war. The interesting aspect, however, was not the obvious cause of the war but that Hizballah was able to do this at all without having to take the Lebanese government into account whatsoever.
37. From approximately 2,500 men at the start of the war, the current number has reached about 12,700. The goal was for a force of 15,000 men.
38. See Magnus Norell, *Radical Islamist Movements in the Middle East* (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March–June, 2006).

an air strike—Iran was informed of the operation on July 12. The consequences turned out to be far more serious than what many in Lebanon, including Nasrallah, had expected.

But the war and its consequences for Lebanon are not undisputed, even among the Lebanese Shiites in Hizballah: discussions about the wisdom of Nasrallah's aggressive tactics have been ongoing since the war began. Criticism of Nasrallah came from Hizballah's political adversaries in the March 14 coalition—which dominated the government at the time of the 2006 war, while Hizballah was a minority coalition partner in the government—as well as from other oppositional parties.

Most interesting and important to the future is the criticism that came from within Hizballah. For example, Hizballah's former secretary-general, Subhi al-Tufeili, has taken Hizballah to task. In an interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Siyassa*, Tufeili, who out of loyalty stood behind Hizballah during the war, accused Hizballah of becoming a tool of Iran, and even its security service.[39] He also explicitly said that the policies of Hizballah's leadership caused the war, laying the blame for dragging Lebanon into a costly war squarely with Hizballah.

Tufeili also discussed Syria's desire to influence Hizballah and even to use the organization to further its own interests—even when the pursuit of those interests is harmful to Lebanon.[40] Another issue that surfaced in the interview, and that several other Lebanese commentators have touched on, is the international tribunal investigating the murder of Rafiq Hariri. The UN's investigation identified leading Syrian politicians and military personnel, and even some Lebanese with connections to the Syrian security services, as responsible.[41] That the war came at an opportune moment for the Syrian regime is beyond doubt. The Lebanese government came under great pressure to resign and to reform, such that Hizballah would gain a significantly larger role. Like Syria, Hizballah demanded an end to the UN investigation into Hariri's murder. According to Tufeili's analysis, however, Iran's influence over Hizballah is much greater than that of Syria.

Another important precursor to the war was UNSCR 1559, adopted on September 2, 2004, which called on the Lebanese government to disarm Hizballah and place army forces in southern Lebanon. None of this happened, since the Lebanese government was far too weak to face down Hizballah—a fact that came as no surprise to anyone. But the resolution nevertheless gave Hizballah a sense that it might be wise to anchor and consolidate its position in Lebanon. What Hizballah—along with every other actor in the region—saw was that the international community was not interested in actually enforcing the resolution.

Tactics and Strategy

The triggers of the war have been discussed above. The underlying cause of the conflict was that Hizballah was never seriously confronted, nor was disarmament ever attempted. This reluctance and inability to handle Hizballah allowed the organization to establish itself beyond its stronghold in southern Lebanon, in Beirut. Parts of the city remain outside the authority of the Lebanese government—a legacy of the civil war, when Hizballah established itself in the city. The government has little control over the neighborhood of Haret Hreik, where Hizballah had its headquarters. From there, Hizballah planned and directed all its operations.

Contributing factors to the war on the Israeli side have already been discussed above, but the actions of Hizballah in and of themselves were a sufficient casus belli: Hizballah launched an attack, penetrating the

39. *Al-Siyassa*, December 14, 2006.
40. Tufeili is not the only one criticizing Hizballah from within. Other important people of good standing in the Lebanese Shiite community have said similar things. These include Muhammad Hassan al-Amin, an Islamic thinker and judge in the Shia Islamic court in Lebanon; Sayed Ali al-Amin, the former mufti in Tyre and Jebel Amel, formerly of Amal (the other large Shiite movement in Lebanon, whose leader, Nabih Berri, is the speaker of parliament); and Hani Fahs, a scholar on Islam. He was also an apprentice of Ayatollah Khomeini.
41. See United Nations, *Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005)*, http://www.un.org/news/dh/docs/mehlisreport (accessed June 23, 2009).

Israeli border, killing a number of soldiers, kidnapping two others (who were later killed), while also shooting rockets against various Israeli cities and villages with the aim of killing and injuring noncombatants. The attack was carried out with complete disregard for the Lebanese government, which included two Hizballah members, who were not informed beforehand—an indication of the strong position Hizballah enjoys in the country.

According to international law, it is the Lebanese government that is responsible for activities in its territory. Thus, in principle, it is responsible for Hizballah's attacks. In practice, however, the government in Beirut was powerless to prevent Hizballah from acting, and it still would have been powerless had it known beforehand what Hizballah was about to do. This is the core of the problem in Lebanon. Israel filed a complaint with the government in Beirut, which it knew full well was powerless to do anything. Meanwhile, the UN refused any responsibility by deferring to the same government, despite UNIFIL's mandate to prevent precisely those kinds of actions against Israel.

As has been pointed out before, it might never be entirely clear why Nasrallah chose to initiate his operation at that time. The disturbances in Gaza were undoubtedly an important factor. Attacks and kidnappings had been occurring for a long time and, as was shown above, Hizballah has been openly propagating continued conflict with Israel and has publicized its intentions to kidnap and/or kill Israelis whenever possible. It was the fact that soldiers were not only killed, but also kidnapped, that limited the options of the Israeli government. A powerful response was necessary. And possibly, it was the extent of the response that surprised Hizballah.

But the decision to answer quickly and forcefully also meant that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) did not have sufficient time to prepare.[42] After having participated in various counterterrorism missions and small-scale operations on the West Bank and Gaza, the IDF's ground forces were more or less unprepared for a traditional ground war against a regular enemy.[43] Even though there were preexisting plans for an invasion of Lebanon to eliminate Hizballah, the army was unprepared to act on such short notice. Instead, it was the navy and air force that provided the bulk of the forces initially. The navy erected a blockade of Lebanon, and during the first forty-eight hours the air force destroyed practically all of Hizballah's medium- and long-range rockets. What was not destroyed was forced underground and remained unusable for the rest of the conflict.

The air force was not able to knock out Hizballah's short-range rockets, which Hizballah continued to fire throughout the war—3,500 in total—causing great damage to Israel's civilian infrastructure. In order to neutralize the threat, it became necessary to bring in ground forces. This is where Israel's failures became most apparent. Some reservist units, who had not trained together for many years, performed inadequately. Poorly organized logistical support left troops without important equipment, such as night vision goggles and bulletproof vests. And they mounted clumsy frontal attacks against an enemy that was well trained, motivated, and entrenched in good defensive positions.[44]

Ultimately, the IDF managed to reach most of its targets, but it never succeeded in ending the rocket-fire entirely. Nor did the Israelis take many prisoners, a clear indication that they never succeeded in cutting off Hizballah's reinforcement lines. This was all the more remarkable since there were ready-made plans to quickly airlift Israeli troops and deploy them along the Litani River, thereby cutting off Hizballah's support lines and crushing militants through a two-front attack, from north and south. But it was not until the end of the war that troops were deployed in the north, and the plans to launch the operation were never initiated.

42. Martin van Creveld, "Israel's Lebanese War—A Preliminary Assessment," *RUSI Journal,* October 2006.
43. It merits pointing out that Hizballah's firepower is more akin to that of a regular army than that of the more commonly used "militia." Hizballah has a structure modeled on the Iranian pattern, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.
44. Van Creveld, "Israel's Lebanese War."

These problems were accentuated by internal dissension within the Israeli military staff. In the middle of the war, Army Chief of Staff Dan Halutz replaced the chief of northern command, Gen. Uzi Adam, with his own deputy, Moshe Kaplinsky.[45] This change did not lead to any noticeable improvements.[46] And Adam did not stay quiet: as soon as he was fired, he began to criticize the military leadership, especially Halutz, for having prevented him from implementing the plans that had been prepared for such a situation.

In the end, a commission was appointed, named after Eliyahu Winograd, the judge chosen to lead it. The conclusions, criticisms, and proposed reforms that the report laid out spurred a series of radical changes in the IDF. These changes could be seen during Israel's operation in Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009. Israel's tactical, operational, and logistical shortcomings were evident during the 2006 war and became the subject of expansive reform. Like other modern industrial nations, Israel had been charmed by the notion that wars could be won with advanced technology and that relying primarily on ground forces was a thing of the past.[47] This, of course, turned out not to be true. The war also emphasized the need to ensure that reservists receive sufficient, continual training.

Israel's greatest concern, however, is the rocketfire, a problem it had to deal with in the north and the south with Hamas in Gaza. When Israel decided to respond forcefully to the incidents in Lebanon and Gaza, the potentially serious effects of an increased threat of rockets and missiles launched by nonstate actors played a large part in its decision.[48] Israel is also expending considerable effort to create a missile-defense system that is effective against short-range Katyusha rockets.[49]

Of course, another question is whether the long-term consequences of the war will prevent new conflicts from erupting or encourage them. Israel's forceful response in Lebanon and Gaza might work as a deterrent vis-à-vis Hizballah and Hamas. At the same time, however, the 2006 war has not prevented Hizballah from expanding its military capacity. Nor has the war made Hizballah change its attitude toward Israel in any way. It remains to be seen whether the 2006 war will prove to be the last of its kind or merely another round in a far more extensive war. But considering the situation in Lebanon and the strengthened position of the Islamists in the region, new conflicts are likely.

Even if there are no eruptions of regular warfare in the near future, it is likely that the conflict will continue in another form—namely, as a war between intelligence agencies. This was already the case during the last war between Israel and Hizballah.

Hizballah's security service consists of three main parts: preventive security, which handles the protection of its leadership (including Nasrallah); counterespionage, which was very active during the war; and the investigations branch. This war between the intelligence agencies has continued after the war, and for Israel the main objective is to locate Nasrallah, who rarely appears in public, and other key leaders in the organization. The branches of Hizballah's security service have been important in its contact with Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In Lebanon, these branches strengthen Hizballah's position within the country by, among other tactics, killing opponents and tracking political opposition.

The war showed why Hizballah was so successful in resisting Israel. The extensive network of tunnels and bunkers that Hizballah created in southern Lebanon and Beirut turned out to be extremely effective. These tunnels and bunkers, created by Hizballah when Israel pulled out of Lebanon in May 2000, were intended

45. As a consequence of the war, Halutz, too, was forced to resign in January 2007.
46. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*.
47. Perhaps the best-known example is former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, whose doctrine of high-tech war was disproved through two wars. Though certainly effective in some aspects, it was not necessarily sufficient to win the war.
48. When it comes to Gaza, it is clear that Hamas has endeavored to expand its ability to fire on Israel with increasingly sophisticated long-range rockets. One of the things that came out as a result of the fighting in Gaza was the extent of Hamas success in smuggling sophisticated weaponry into Gaza.
49. Israel has one of the world's only operational missile-defense systems, called "Arrow" ("Chetz," in Hebrew).

to serve both offensive and defensive purposes. The IDF was planning to destroy as many of them as possible during the operation, but the war ended before there was time to implement the plan.[50] This network was rebuilt, and Hizballah's ability to use it in waging asymmetrical warfare has been restored.

Due to the way the tunnel system was constructed, Lebanese civilians ended up in the line of fire. Tunnels and bunkers were often built near civilian homes or storage facilities, many of which were used to store weapons. As a result, they were targeted by the Israeli attacks. Hundreds of houses were destroyed and hundreds of Lebanese civilians were killed. For Hizballah, this was a "victory," since it lent credence to the argument that Israeli attacks were killing and injuring Lebanese civilians.

Another variation on the same theme was Hizballah's tactic of firing Katyusha rockets at Israel from locations close to UN observation posts. Israel, Hizballah hoped, would not run the risk of hitting the UN stations, thus allowing Hizballah to avoid drawing fire. And if the Israelis did decide to return fire, UN workers were liable to be killed or injured, which could then be used as Hizballah propaganda.[51]

The network of bunkers and tunnels that Hizballah built from 2000 to 2006, which have now been repaired and expanded, was of little use to civilians. Their only option for avoiding the fighting was to flee, which, in turn, created a situation in which Israel could be accused of attacking civilians.[52] Hizballah's tactic of using residential areas to launch rockets was deliberately done to put civilians in harm's way, and it was used to turn popular opinion against Israel.[53]

As a consequence of Hizballah's tactics, the number of Lebanese civilians killed or injured was in the hundreds, whereas Israel's civilian losses were relatively small. This was because Israel, unlike Hizballah—or, for that matter, the Lebanese government—provided civilians with bomb shelters and facilitated their relocation during the fighting. Israel never deliberately directed its attack against civilian targets, something that Hizballah did without exception and as a matter of course.[54] Another issue that has been a part of this discussion is Israel's use of cluster bombs.[55] These weapons are not illegal, but they can easily kill and injure civilians since they are widely dispersed and may be hard to find.

Hizballah's tactics, in short, were geared toward demoralizing the Israelis by turning international public opinion against them. This tactic had great success. Hizballah never needed to win militarily; it was sufficient not to lose. And even when the Israelis won, it could be turned to Hizballah's advantage, since those victories often resulted in civilian casualties.[56] Hizballah's use of civilians as shields sometimes made it very difficult for Israel to target Hizballah fighters without also injuring civilians.[57]

In conclusion, the 2006 war was fought between two forces with two very different conceptions of

50. The closest parallel is the Vietnam War, during which the Viet Cong's extensive system of tunnels, including in Saigon, made it possible for it to carry out attacks inside Saigon.
51. This happened on several occasions. One of the best-known incidents was the Canadian observer Maj. Paeta Hess–von Kruedener, who was killed at his post in the village of el-Khiam during the war. Only a couple of days before the incident, Hess–von Kruedener wrote an email to Canadian television saying that Hizballah was using his UN post as a "shield" to launch rockets into Israel. Israel returned fire on several occasions to areas close to the UN position, before the final strike that killed Hess–von Kruedener and three other observers. According to Hess–von Kruedener, this was a common tactic employed by Hizballah that occurred several times every day. See Joel Kom, with files from Steven Edwards, CanWest News Service, for *The Ottawa Citizen,* July 17, 2006.
52. It should be pointed out that this is not a position on the question of whether Israel really did carry out operations that could be classified as war crimes. According to Human Rights Watch this was indeed the case. See *Human Rights Watch*, vol. 18, no. 3, August 2006.
53. Ibid.
54. Nor is this a valid argument or excuse for any Israeli attacks that killed or injured Lebanese civilians. It does not mean, furthermore, that Israeli attacks against, say, convoys did not kill Lebanese civilians. Indeed, Human Rights Watch has brought out claims that that was the case. Ibid.
55. *Jerusalem Issue Brief*, vol. 6; and *Jerusalem Report*, November 13, 2006, pp. 20–21.
56. In part, Israel tried to avoid harming civilians by dropping leaflets, transmitting radio announcements, and sending out text messages encouraging the population to leave the area before the attacks took place, but this was not always sufficient to entirely avoid civilian casualties.
57. This was done in part by using civilian houses to store weapons and as entrances to tunnels and bunkers. In part, it was done by using civilian neighborhoods to launch rockets and missiles.

how war should and must be fought. At least since Operation Litani in 1978, when Israel first established its security zone in southern Lebanon, Israel has fought several low-intensity battles against its Palestinian and Lebanese adversaries. This kind of "post-heroic" warfare[58] is characteristic of the non-existential conflicts that some liberal democracies in the West, including Israel, have fought since World War II. These post-heroic wars have two main goals for the countries waging them: to avoid losses among their own combatants, and to avoid, or at least minimize, civilian losses.[59] For a long period, such warfare allowed Israel to combine operational efficiency with a high standard of ethics, in fighting battles against an enemy that fought "heroically"[60]—an enemy, in other words, that had no compunction about sacrificing its own fighters and whose aims included killing as many of the enemy's civilian population as possible.

The Lebanon war, as well as the subsequent fighting with Hamas in Gaza, exposed the limitations and dilemmas inherent in these kinds of conflicts. For Israel, the dilemma lay in the fact that its ambitious political and military goals made it necessary to risk larger losses of its own troops and of Lebanese civilians. Initially, Israel adhered to the logic of post-heroic warfare. But this limited its ability to maneuver, and when it diverged from this doctrine, more Israeli soldiers and Lebanese civilians died.

This, in turn, suited Hizballah perfectly. A non-state actor such as Hizballah attacks the conventionally stronger enemy in part by limiting the fighting to small-scale conflagrations involving small units. Tactically, this was accomplished by engaging the IDF in guerrilla warfare and, whenever possible, avoiding larger battles.[61] Strategically, the aim of Hizballah's rocketfire on northern Israel was to demoralize Israeli civilians. This continued throughout the war. Israel—in part because of its adherence to the post-heroic doctrine of warfare—was reluctant to deploy large infantry forces in order to prevent Hizballah from exploiting the terrain. It was thus impossible for Israel to stop the rocketfire. In turn, hundreds of thousands of people had to leave their homes in northern Israel, which, too, became a tool in Hizballah's increasingly important propaganda war.

Another flaw in Israel's tactics was an overreliance on its high-tech air force at the expense of ground operations. During the first forty-eight hours of the war, the Israeli air force destroyed virtually all of Hizballah's long- and mid-range rockets with firing ramps. According to Israeli war plans, this initial success was to be followed by an immediate pincer movement by airborne infantry and commandos, whose task was to cut off Hizballah's supply routes along the Litani River. But this only happened in the last days of the war, when it was already too late. Instead, Israel began with far slower and less effective frontal attacks. These played into the hands of Hizballah, which made full use of its militants' defensive positions. The air force was unable to neutralize the short-range rockets that Hizballah relied on throughout the war, a task that required ground troops.

The underlying problem was that Israel's military and political ranks expected the air force, in combination with smaller special units, to be sufficient. That attitude accorded with the post-heroic logic under which Israel was operating. When the predictions proved false, it quickly led to friction between the military and political leadership, indecision, and needlessly slow and costly deliberations.[62]

As the outcome of the war made abundantly clear, ignoring fundamental military principles and significant shortcomings in the political-civilian management of the war effort was bound to cause problems. None of the very ambitious goals that the Israeli government

58. Avi Kober, "The Second Lebanon War," BESA Perspectives, Perspectives Paper 22, (September 28, 2006).
49. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
61. Even when Hizballah was forced to fight in large-scale battles, it often succeeded in inflicting significant losses on the Israel Defense Forces, since it fought effectively from the defensive positions it had built around southern Lebanon.
62. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*.

initially set out were ever met, making the failure all the more serious.[63]

Instead, Hizballah was able to declare victory by dint of not having been defeated and not having been forced into making any concessions. Its tactics had been very successful, and Hizballah could, with some merit, claim that it had repelled the Israeli attack. Overall, and for these reasons, the war was a success for Hizballah, even though the criticism that surfaced even within its own Shiite community was never entirely silenced. Taking a longer view, the war also made it possible for Hizballah to strengthen its position domestically in Lebanon.

63. This becomes even more obvious in light of the fact that the Israeli starting position was fairly advantageous: internal unity as to the justness of the war, international backing of its right to self-defense—including implicit support from several Arab countries that did not mind seeing Hizballah and Iran suffering a defeat—and a feeling that time was on its side in carrying out its operation.

4 | The War's Actors

Lebanon

The domestic components of Lebanon's problems have been well documented. Deep-seated wounds were never allowed to heal entirely after the misery of the fifteen-year civil war. Lebanese society is deeply fragmented along clan, tribe, and family lines. Regional, social, and ideological differences continue to divide the country. As was made clear before, during, and after the second Lebanon war, the state lacks genuine authority, which harms its credibility as an institution capable of protecting its citizens and providing sufficient social services. In addition, there is a deeply entrenched system of corruption, through which various parties have a vested interest in keeping the state weak to benefit sectarian interests. A last addition to Lebanon's troubles is the assassination of anti-Syrian leaders such as former prime minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005.[64]

These domestic conflicts and fissures are often exacerbated by foreign actors; Hizballah's strong ties to Iran and Syria are the most notable example. The situation is worsened by the fact that the two political blocs competing for power in Lebanon are of equal strength. On the one hand, there is the moderate March 14 coalition. It won the most seats in parliament in the June 7, 2009, election and has the support of the more moderate Sunni-dominated countries, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, as well as the backing of the West. On the other side are Hizballah and its allies—including the March 8 coalition, which actually won more votes—supported by Iran, Syria, and various Islamist movements in the region.

The tug of war between these two groups is based on a conflict that runs far deeper than mere politics. At least since the final years of the Lebanese civil war, two completely different visions of Lebanon have competed for influence in the country. The Lebanese scholar Nadim Shehadi refers to them as "the riviera" and "the citadel."[65] "The riviera" sees the country as built on tolerance and openness, whereas "the citadel" seeks to transform it into a bunker state and the front line in a war against the United States and the West, from which Israel is to be resisted by any means necessary.

Both these ideological projects have local and regional dimensions. They draw completely different conclusions from the 2006 war, and they enjoy support from all parts of Lebanon. Neither is entirely sectarian. The visions of Lebanon's reconstruction are radically different. Regionally, Saudi Arabia is the primary investor in the "riviera model"; Iran is the main sponsor of "the citadel."

The model advocated by the March 14 coalition envisions a future for Lebanon based on the way things were before the civil war—a cosmopolitan country with an open and tolerant society, sustained by trade and a strong service industry. Support and protection comes from the West, and it comes from the knowledge that the country is founded on free, democratic principles with the military playing a limited role.

The success of this vision for Lebanon was dependent on the Middle East peace process, which had the potential to make Beirut, and Lebanon, a hub of finance and trade in the new Middle East. For almost an entire decade, the main architect of this vision was Hariri, who, thanks to his close ties with Saudi Arabia, set out to transform Lebanon into a center of a new, peaceful Middle East. Countries such as Egypt and Jordan—both of which have peace agreements with Israel and thus a vested interest in the success of this project—were important allies.

The second vision looks completely different. To begin with, the supporters of this vision draw fundamentally different conclusions from history. As they see it, Lebanon descended into civil war because it was too

64. In addition to the murder of Rafiq Hariri, a dozen other politicians and journalists critical of Syrian influence and Hizballah's role in Lebanon have been murdered.
65. Nadim Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel: The Battle for Lebanon," *Open Democracy,* August 22, 2006, http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle_east_politics/riviera_citadel_3841.jsp.

weak, because it lacked a strong, coherent idea of what it should be, and, no less importantly, because it was too open to the world at large, and to the West in particular. To protect itself, the state needed a strong army and security service and control over the economy.

Furthermore, it was believed that the peace process—especially if successful—would drastically reduce Lebanon's ability to play a key role in the armed struggle against Israeli and Western influence. When Israel pulled out of the security zone in southern Lebanon in May 2000, it was seen as a victory, the result of an honorable struggle and an incentive to continue the armed struggle. In large part, it was then Lebanese President Émile Lahoud who, sympathetic to that ideological current, facilitated the process. In addition to the support from Iran, Syria, and Hizballah, with his anti-Americanism, Lahoud was able to count on the support from such disparate countries as Venezuela and China.

The struggle between these two visions has characterized Lebanese politics ever since. During the years immediately before and after the war, this conflict paralyzed political life in Lebanon. Hizballah and its supporters claimed that the struggle was by no means over. Pointing to the Sheba Farms dispute, over land they claimed was Lebanese territory still occupied by Israel even after the withdrawal in 2000, they argued that the whole country was not yet liberated. Only armed struggle, Hizballah and its supporters claimed, could guarantee final victory over Israel, and Hizballah was the only group that could guarantee Lebanon's security.

The opposition, for its part, claimed that Israel's withdrawal in 2000 made Hizballah's demands to keep its arms untenable. The opposition also maintained that diplomacy was a better way to recover the Sheba Farms and solve other domestic issues. At that time, many Lebanese could not even identify the area on a map—including Nabih Berrih, the speaker of the parliament.[66]

There can be little doubt that for the proponents of "the citadel," the 2006 war and its aftermath was a partial victory, perhaps not because of the military outcome, but because of the political fallout from the war. What can be said for certain, however, is that this tug of war over Lebanon's soul will characterize future political struggles in Lebanon.

Another explanation of Lebanon's current political situation can be found in the developments that followed the Israeli withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon.[67] Israel and Hizballah had been fighting a low-intensity war in the area around the security zone, a situation that has been a constant since the mid-1980s. The evacuation was preceded by several years of backchannel negotiations, some of which involved the author.[68]

After the Israeli withdrawal, Hizballah continued to build its military capacity, in spite of the international community's decision that all Lebanese militias would be disarmed in accordance with UNSCR 1559, which was adopted in 2004. Hizballah's disarmament was also stipulated in the Taif Accord, the peace agreement that ended the Lebanese civil war. However, the Taif Accord also called for the liberation of the South by any available means. Because of Israel's continued presence in southern Lebanon, Hizballah was considered a "resistance" group rather than a militia, and it was understood that, under the Taif Accord, it could keep its arms.

Hizballah also continued its attacks against Israel. A stated aim of these attacks was to kidnap Israeli soldiers to use as bargaining chips in negotiations with Israel.[69] As Hizballah's military capacity grew, so did its confidence. Kidnappings, along with sporadic rocketfire targeting Israeli cities and villages, yielded some results. The successful attacks resulted in the recovery

66. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*, p. 38.
67. The Security Zone was created in 1978 after a short Israeli operation intended to prevent cross-border attacks. These attacks had been ongoing since the late 1960s.
68. See note 33.
69. The best-known case was an attack close to Mount Dov on October 7, 2000—that is, only four months after the Israeli withdrawal. Three soldiers were kidnapped, and their bodies were later exchanged for Lebanese prisoners in Israel. The scandalous part of the attack was that UN personnel, who did not intervene, filmed it. To make matters worse, they then refused to hand over the film for a long time.

of prisoners, and Hizballah's were anticipating a similar result from the attack of June 12, 2006.

Since the ceasefire, Hizballah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has skillfully exploited the results of the 2006 summer war to strengthen Hizballah's political position. Hizballah's attempt to consolidate its power has not been limited to its military strength; its political ambition has grown, too. The relationship between Hizballah and the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora deteriorated after the 2006 war, culminating in the resignation of Nasrallah and his allies from the cabinet, which paralyzed the government.[70]

But the remaining cabinet ministers did not resign as Hizballah had hoped. With the support of a parliamentary majority, the government tried to push through reforms and fulfill UNSCRs 1559 and 1701. Hizballah blocked this attempt by laying siege to downtown Beirut, making it impossible for the government to function,[71] and by delaying the election of a new president. In addition to preventing its disarmament, Hizballah, along with its allies, also temporarily succeeded in preventing the implementation of the parts of the UN resolutions that regard the investigation into the assassination of Hariri. The UN's first investigation[72] identified representatives of the Syrian and Lebanese security services as responsible for his murder. The investigation also concluded that the Syrian regime deliberately misled the investigators. An important goal of the opposition was preventing the results of the investigation from leading to a trial.[73]

To help explain the current situation, it should also be noted that Michel Sulaiman, then chief of staff of Lebanon's army, said that the army would not try to disarm Hizballah, or search for its weapons.[74] Nor has the army seriously attempted to patrol the Syrian border or prevent the smuggling of weapons to Hizballah. It is doubtful that the army could stabilize southern Lebanon. With approximately 70,000 men in total, it has limited capabilities and, in some cases, antiquated equipment.[75] As has been pointed out before, the majority of its officers are Christians and Sunni Muslims, whereas the privates and junior officers are 70 percent Shiite.[76] It is very unlikely that today's army would survive a crisis, such as the one that preceded the breakout of the civil war in 1975. Tensions remain between the various confessional groups. If anything, they have grown since the May crisis in 2008, when the army proved unwilling to resist Hizballah's invasion.

Thus, UNSCR 1701 has not been carried out in its entirety. In fact, its central tenets—the disarmament of Hizballah and the establishment of control over the Lebanese-Syrian border—have yet to be implemented.

Soon after the war, it became evident that UNSCR 1701 did not prevent Hizballah from rearming and replacing destroyed and lost weapons. Only one month after the war ended, in September 2006, Nasrallah declared that Hizballah had replaced all the weapons lost and had become stronger than it was before the war.[77] Paragraphs 14 and 15 of UNSCR 1701 give the Lebanese government, in cooperation with UNIFIL, a mandate to secure its border to prevent illegal arms deliveries. Nasrallah's statement was therefore an unabashed confession that Hizballah had violated the resolution.

70. His allies were the Shiite organization Amal and the Christian Free Patriotic movement.
71. From the fall of 2006 until May 2008, Hizballah operated a tent camp in central Beirut. The camp was built as a protest against the government, and it resulted in large parts of Beirut being blocked.
72. United Nations, *Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1595 (2005)*.
73. In this, it has been relatively successful, since the UN has switched investigators and changed some of the most controversial conclusions, which clearly identified Syria as responsible. The court proceedings, however, began on schedule in March 2009.
74. During the period in which Israel maintained its security zone in southern Lebanon, it was even more difficult to try to disarm Hizballah. Hizballah's supporters had kept their guns when everyone else had relinquished theirs (at least largely). Nor is the conflict with the government in Beirut new; Hizballah's role in the country has given rise to a continual crisis for the government that—even when it was trying to decrease Hizballah's influence—has proved incapable of disarming them. As Rafiq Hariri put it already in 1996, "We are unable to disarm Hezbollah, whether we agree with their political platform or not" (Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*, p. 37).
75. Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict," Order Code: RL33566, September 15, 2006.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid; Nicholas Blanford, "UN Resolution 1701: A View from Lebanon," PolicyWatch 1414, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 21, 2008.

The Lebanese Elections. Hizballah's leadership has repeatedly declared that the organization will not disarm. Instead, it argues that Hizballah needs weapons to defend Lebanon in the absence of an effective Lebanese army.

The question of what it is, exactly, that is to be defended after Israel left the security zone in May 2000[78] has been raised many times, both before and after the 2006 war. Hizballah has chosen to focus on a small patch of land on the border between Syria and Lebanon. The area is a part of the Syrian Golan Heights and, as such, should be of no relevance to Lebanon.[79] But the border between Lebanon and Syria has never been formally delineated,[80] and both Syria and Lebanon, not just Hizballah, have in recent years claimed that the area really belongs to Lebanon. The area has remained uninhabited since 1967, when it was appropriated by Israel from Syria during the Six-Day War.

The area allows Hizballah to claim that not all of Lebanon is liberated, justifying the organization's possession of arms.[81] Nasrallah has also said that whatever the UN has to say on the matter is irrelevant to Hizballah.[82] The question is complicated further by the forces in both Lebanon and Syria that still consider these two countries as one. The two countries were, up until independence in 1943, twin protectorates under a French mandate from the League of Nations. After independence, some parties continued to propagate the idea of "one country," and no diplomatic relations were ever established.[83] The current ambiguity over ownership of the Sheba Farms is sure to remain, since it gives both Syria and Hizballah space to maneuver in dealing with any future conflicts with Israel. As far as Hizballah is concerned, nothing good can come out of a solution to its conflict with Israel before Israel has reached a peace agreement with Syria. The present situation plays right into Hizballah's hands. Since the end of the war, the government in Beirut has launched new initiatives with regard to the area.[84] The idea that has been put forth is for the UN to assume jurisdiction over the area until Lebanon's claim can be met in full.[85] Naturally, the text glosses over Syria's and Hizballah's lack of interest in resolving this issue.

It is possible, however, that Syria will become interested in resolving the issue as new peace negotiations with Israel over the Golan Heights unfold, but hardly before that. This makes it difficult for the UN, which considers the area as part of Syria,[86] to deploy there merely because the Lebanese government has asked it to.

Hizballah's popular support among the Shiite population is an aggravating factor for the Lebanese government in its attempts to reclaim control over southern Lebanon and disarm Hizballah. When the army chief of staff is unwilling even to attempt to disarm

78. This process was formally concluded on June 16, 2000, when the secretary-general informed the Security Council that Israel was in compliance with the UN demands (UN Security Council Resolution 425), after having withdrawn from all Lebanese territory.
79. For the UN, the areas fall within the jurisdiction of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF).
80. Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict."
81. Since assuming office, Lebanon's president, Michel Sulaiman, a Syria loyalist, has claimed that the Sheba Farms area is Lebanese territory and needs to be liberated. See, for example, Sulaiman's speech from August 1, 2008 (Sana Abdallah, "Lebanon to Release Statement on National Resistance, Hezbollah Weapons," *Middle East Times*, August 1, 2008). The dispute is not likely to be resolved that easily, and even if the Syrian president said earlier this year that Syria and Lebanon are going to establish diplomatic ties, this has not yet happened. Nor has there been any progress on the work to settle the border. Lebanese military maps identify the area as belonging to Syria (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Shebaafarms.png [accessed June 30, 2009]), as does the UN, which considers the area to belong to the Syrian Golan Heights. Meanwhile, other army maps identify the areas as being north of the border, i.e. inside Lebanon (see "Carte du Liban," Lebanese Army, http://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/Arabic/popup.htm?/images/pics/geographic/1sur100000.jpg [accessed June 17, 2007]).
82. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*, p. 38.
83. At the beginning of 2009, Syria decided to appoint an ambassador to Lebanon.
84. Lebanese prime minister Fouad Siniora presented a seven-point plan at a conference in Rome on July 26, 2006. Nothing came of the conference, but the preface to UN Security Council Resolution 1701 references the plan, which included a stipulation to place the area under UN jurisdiction "until border delineation and Lebanese sovereignty over them are fully settled" (Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict," p. 9).
85. Ibid.
86. On several occasions after June 2000, the UN has confirmed that it regards the area as Syrian. See, for example, "Statement by the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council, June 18, 2000 (accessed September 29, 2006); and Gary C. Gambill, "Syria and the Shebaa Farms Dispute," *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin,* vol. 3, no. 5 (May 2001), http://www.meib.org/articles/0105_l1.htm (accessed September 29, 2006, and June 23, 2009).

Hizballah, the government's task of reclaiming control over southern Lebanon becomes even harder. The resignation of the Hizballah ministers in November 2006 should be understood in the light of this crisis. The ministers resigned in order to vitiate the government's attempts to constrain Hizballah's ability to act unilaterally. The possibility of integrating the militia into Lebanon's regular army must be weighed against the potential risk of fanning the flames of sectarian strife in the process. Regardless, there is no reason to believe that Hizballah would be willing to even entertain the idea of dissolving its militia by integrating it into the Lebanese army.

The 2008 May Crisis. The run-up to the crisis in May 2008 had its beginnings during the second half of 2004, when Prime Minister Hariri, with the support of the United States and France, began to push the Syrian occupation force out of Lebanon. This, in turn, was triggered by Syria's attempt, via its allies in Lebanon, to get the Lebanese parliament to extend Syrian-backed President Émile Lahoud's term in office—in violation of the Lebanese constitution. In September 2004, the UN Security Council passed UNSCR 1559, which, among other things, demanded that all domestic and foreign militias be disarmed and that "all foreign forces withdraw from Lebanon" and cease their involvement in Lebanese domestic affairs—a not-so-subtle allusion to Syria.[87]

The Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon in April 2004. The withdrawal was the result of demonstrations in Lebanon, coupled with foreign protests and pressure against Syria after the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, which many Lebanese blame on the Syrians. In the elections held in June, the anti-Syrian, West-oriented camp won a decisive victory. It was a triumph for those forces in Lebanon that nourished the vision of Lebanon as an open, democratic part of the Middle East.

During the rest of 2005, a number of Lebanese journalists and politicians, all with anti-Syrian backgrounds, were assassinated. It was an obvious attempt to roll back the successes of the March 14 coalition. In June 2005, the parties compromised, and Hizballah was given two cabinet posts. For the first time ever, Hizballah had direct access to government power, and it had achieved it without winning an election.[88]

The political fallout in Lebanon from the war also proved significant in the long run. Beginning in November 2006, Hizballah set out to paralyze Beirut and all government activity of importance. It employed radical activities, including civil disobedience campaigns. Among other things, Hizballah erected a tent camp in central Beirut, which made it impossible to conduct any normal business in the area. The government offices were under siege, and parliament could not convene. Hizballah's cabinet members resigned shortly after the war, when the government refused to meet a series of demands that Hizballah put up as conditions for staying in the government. Although Hizballah hoped the resignations would cause the government to fall, that did not happen. The crisis escalated, with the government and opposition trading accusations[89] until the spring of 2008, when the conflict finally ended in clashes between Hizballah and various militia forces loyal to the government.

On Friday May 9, 2008, Hizballah seized control over large parts of Beirut.[90] The immediate trigger was the government's decision on May 6, 2008, to dismiss the Hizballah-friendly Beirut airport security chief, Gen. Wafiq Shuqeir, after he had allowed Hizballah to set up its own surveillance cameras at the airport.[91] But the crisis was the culmination of a years-long conflict

87. United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1559" (2004).
88. A close friend in Beirut put it thus, "Hizballah has used arms to get itself into Government House!"
89. See, for example, H. Avraham, "Lebanon Faces Political Crisis in Aftermath of War," *Inquiry and Analysis*, no. 299, Middle East Media Research Institute, http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA29906 (accessed June 23, 2009).
90. Hizballah's military incursion was not limited only to Sunni-dominated western Beirut. The organization also seized other areas with a more mixed population (Shiite, Sunni, Christian, and Druze).

between the Siniora government and the opposition—namely, Hizballah.

On the same day that the government issued its decision to dismiss Shuqeir, it proposed to investigate the legality of Hizballah's private telecommunications network. Hizballah responded quickly with a series of countermeasures. At the initial stages, these were comprised of civil disobedience and attempts to take control over the infrastructure in Beirut. Hizballah, in other words, was flexing its muscles in order to get what it wanted. By May 7, it had become clear that the situation had escalated and that Hizballah was beginning to strengthen its grip on the country: the airport was closed and media critical of Hizballah were shut down. The opposition party Tiyar al-Mustaqbal (the Future Movement), led by the Saudi-born Saad Hariri, found itself under considerable pressure from Hizballah's militia. Fighting in various parts of Lebanon between supporters of Hizballah and supporters of the March 14 coalition—in which Hariri's Future Movement is the largest party—started on May 7 and continued for a week.

It turned out to be an uneven fight since, by and large, Hizballah's troops are better equipped, trained, and motivated than any other group in Lebanon today. Even the Lebanese army did not stand a chance against the movement. Since Hizballah is the strongest military force in Lebanon, an unconventional military imbalance between the country's government and its opposition has arisen. The disparity became clear during the fighting, when the Lebanese Armed Forces remained on the sidelines as Hizballah took control of Beirut, only to resume control when Hizballah's leadership ordered its troops to hand power back to the army.

This show of strength proved effective and politically rewarding for Hizballah and its allies. Following mediation efforts in Doha, Qatar, an agreement between the warring factions was reached on May 21, 2008. The Doha agreement required extensive diplomacy between the most influential actors in the region—Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia—and it was a decisive victory for Hizballah. The government initiatives that triggered the crisis—the dismissal of Shuqeir and the investigation into Hizballah's telecommunications network—were reversed unilaterally by the government, and Hizballah ministers rejoined the cabinet.

The agreement also facilitated the election of a new president, which had not been possible since November 2007, when President Lahoud resigned at the end of his term. The elections on May 25, 2008, offered no surprises. Former Army Chief of Staff General Michel Sulaiman was elected president. A Christian, he was accepted by both the March 14 coalition and the Hizballah-led opposition. The international community also welcomed Sulaiman's appointment. The crisis that took place in mid-May, which pushed Lebanon to the brink of another civil war, resulted in a new, seemingly more stable Lebanon. But in light of Hizballah's strengthened position as the de facto kingmaker in Lebanese politics, stability is far from certain. The question remains, of course, how this will affect Lebanon's future development.

The chances that Lebanon can solve its present conflicts and achieve a workable political system unburdened by sectarianism have decreased. The events of the first weeks of May 2008 made it clear that Hizballah is a force that any Lebanese government must take into consideration, regardless of whether the party has representation in the cabinet. With the May crisis, Hizballah has, once again, shown that it is the most powerful actor in Lebanon today. The army, formally controlled by the government, refrained from intervening, except when it was formally "invited" by Hizballah to resume control of certain areas. Hizballah's demand for a coalition government that includes the opposition and gives it a right of veto over important decisions has now been met. And so Hizballah and its allies may acquire

91. There were suspicions that Hizballah was prepared to bring weapons and matériel in directly via the airport and not just through the Syrian-Lebanese border, as has so far been the case—this, in order to find alternative routes to bring in arms should the border with Syria be closed (for whatever reason). As early as a couple of weeks after the armistice in August 2006, the Turkish authorities announced that they had intercepted five Iranian planes and one Syrian plane with arms deliveries for Hizballah (Blanford, PolicyWatch 1414). In other words, only a few weeks after Resolution 1701 (which includes a complete arms embargo) had been passed, Iran and Syria were working to bring additional weapons into Lebanon.

ultimate control over the government, regardless of electoral outcomes. It should also be noted that Hizballah does not seem to have the ambition to acquire absolute power in Lebanon and impose an Islamic state like the one in Iran. Lebanon's current electoral system, which invariably results in coalition governments, suits Hizballah's purposes perfectly.

This illustrates another important ingredient in the political and social structure of Lebanon. Hizballah's strength is a result of its self-definition, which is based on religion. Since Shiite Muslims comprise as much as 40 percent of Lebanon's population, Hizballah has a large potential constituency. This demographic weight is particularly beneficial in outlining the political platform before elections. It also causes other sects, including the other large Shiite party, Amal, to band together to counter Hizballah's influence. (Today they are closely allied with each other.) Hizballah's leadership knows this, and it has tried, especially since the war ended, to emphasize its Lebanese identity and downplay its sectarian profile. The Lebanese flag, for instance, is becoming an increasingly common staple at Hizballah gatherings, and spokesmen for Hizballah repeatedly underscore the importance of "national unity" and working for the good of all of Lebanon. Nonetheless, other groups in Lebanon are still suspicious of Hizballah. It is clear that without its formidable military capacity, Hizballah would not be able to retain its influence, even with the support it enjoys from Syria and Iran. The elections in June 2009 underscored this reality: Hizballah failed to expand its appeal to non-Shiite groups in Lebanon.

The events of May 2008 undermined Hizballah's claim that it was a movement for all Lebanese. That Hizballah was so quick to turn its weapons against other Lebanese to defend its foreign and particularistic interests heightened the tensions in the country, and the war and its aftermath have not done anything to soothe the conflicts. On the contrary, the political aftermath only made matters worse.

All concerned parties in Lebanon have gambled with political capital and, in the series of political crises that has afflicted the country since the war, they have lost. Some groups, of course, have lost more than others.

Once again, the government has proved severely limited in its ability to seize the initiative and force Hizballah into the political fold. The effort to deal with Hizballah's military structure by investigating its telecommunications network and the attempt to stop its control over the airport were unmitigated failures. The army, formally under the control of the government and the ministry of defense, proved incapable of standing up to Hizballah. This is due in part to the presidential ambitions of Michel Sulaiman, the chief of the army, and it is doubtful whether Sulaiman could have been president without Hizballah's support.

The army is passive because it lacks sufficient equipment, training, and manpower to challenge Hizballah in an open confrontation. Today, Hizballah is much more than just a militia. It is a regular army, complete with its own uniforms, communications network, and arms stockpiles. It is completely beyond the control of any government institution. The Lebanese army's loss of credibility may prove difficult to repair. After the civil war, the army was hoped to be a symbol around which the Lebanese, irrespective of religion or ethnicity, could unite and build a *Lebanese* identity. Many Lebanese hoped that the army would provide the basis for national unity as a means of countering the built-in tensions of the political system. Although this hope is not altogether dead, the crisis in May 2008 showed how long a way there is to go.

Finally, although Hizballah was strengthened by its latest confrontation with the government—it forced it to back down from all its demands—it might have to pay a significant price internally for the success. In turning its weapons on other Lebanese—not an unprecedented move, though it has never before been done so openly—many Lebanese came to regard Hizballah as promoting a sectarian agenda, not a national one. Since the Israeli withdrawal and the war in 2006, Hizballah has been at pains to underscore that it always puts Lebanese interests first. The events in May 2008, however, have shown that Hizballah is not beyond using force to protect its independence from the government. A desire to fight the Israeli occupation is no longer a valid excuse for Hizballah's retaining its own military structure outside the government's control. It

is obvious that this part of Hizballah's activities is in line with the strategic interests of Iran and Syria in the tug of war with Israel and the Sunni-dominated countries such as Saudi Arabia.

Israel

Israel has only one demand with regard to Lebanon, one it has voiced persistently ever since its May 2000 withdrawal: that Lebanon, with the help of the UN, stop the rocketfire, border incursions, and kidnappings. For a long time, Lebanon and the UN have failed to meet this demand.

When the Israeli government decided to go to war, it was the result of a hasty and ill-thought-out process.[92] As fate would have it, Israel's newly elected government was led by people with scant military experience. Neither Prime Minister Ehud Olmert nor Defense Minister Amir Peretz had much experience with defense issues.[93] Army Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, who was also new on the job, refused to launch a ground offensive for several weeks. There were even prepared plans for such an offensive that were modeled on scenarios almost identical to the actual situation Israel found itself in during the summer of 2006. Instead, Halutz relied almost exclusively on the air force. This turned out to be a grievous mistake, as several people within the IDF pointed out during the campaign.[94] During the first hour of the war, Israel took out several stationary rocket-launch pads made for Iranian-made Fajr ("dawn," in Persian) rockets, hidden in houses at various locations in southern Lebanon. This was Israel's greatest success in the war, and it took Hizballah by complete surprise, because Hizballah believed that these weapons were entirely unknown by the Israelis.

With regard to the short-range Katyusha rockets, the situation was different. These can be fired quickly, giving the Israeli air force little chance to neutralize the threat before the mobile launch pads were removed. Only a ground offensive could deal with this issue. Even though there were preexisting plans for how such a ground offensive would be carried out, throughout the war Halutz refused to launch such an offensive. In this, he was supported by Olmert and, initially, by Peretz. And so Hizballah was able to fire its rockets against Israel for the duration of the war, even from positions very close to the border. The air force, from which Halutz himself had emerged, failed to suppress the rocketfire.

When the ground offensive was finally launched, it was too late to make any real difference. A ceasefire had already been negotiated[95] and the date for its activation had already been decided when the offensive began. It lasted less than two days and failed to achieve its stated goals. Many of the Israeli casualties occurred during these forty-eight hours. Criticism of the military and political leaders was devastating.[96] They were accused of mishandling the offensive, stalling, only to then needlessly waste human life once the ground offensive was launched. In short, the discussion that preceded the offensive and the internal frictions within the military leadership made for a truncated and inefficient offensive, launched too late to be of any real use.

The criticisms voiced after the war revolved around several issues. First, none of the stated aims of the operation had been achieved. The kidnapped soldiers had not been freed; because Hizballah refused to allow Red Cross representatives to visit them, at that time it was not known whether they were still alive. Hizballah had not been taken out of commission or crushed, and the one-sided reliance on the air force had not significantly decreased the rocketfire. Second, neither the civilian population nor military was ready to handle the war. On the military side, there were logistical shortcomings: equipment was not delivered to the troops on time, and the wrong decisions were made in choosing between the air force and infantry. The military leadership remained

92. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*.
93. Peretz came up through the Israeli labor union Histadrut, for which he served as head for many years. He was forced to resign in June 2007 amid a wave of criticism, not least from other parts of the Labor Party. Furthermore, he lost the Labor chairmanship to Ehud Barak, who had led the withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000.
94. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*.
95. Ibid., pp. 201–8.
96. Ibid.

internally fragmented throughout the war, and it underestimated Hizballah's capabilities.[97]

Another issue that was discussed after the war—one that had its origins in the 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon—was the character and focus of Israel's defense forces. These had changed since 2000, as a result of the intifada. As the Winograd Commission and other commissions found, insufficient and irregular training and an exaggerated reliance on the air force and unmanned aerial vehicles explained the military's poor performance. The war made it clear that a reliance on the air force and other technical solutions was not an adequate substitute for ground forces when it came to neutralizing the threat that Hizballah's rocket and missile units posed.

Voices within the IDF and the government, such as former defense minister Shaul Mofaz, claimed from the start that, after the initial successes of the air force against the Fajr missiles, the government should have initiated negotiations and launched a ground offensive to put force behind its words.[98]

Following the ceasefire in August 2006, the significant political consequences of the wartime failures began to unfold. The defense minister and several leading military figures were forced to resign or chose to quit before being forced out. Several investigatory committees were appointed, the Winograd Commission among them, and their conclusions will likely be discussed for a long time.[99]

In the long run, the consequences in Israel of the second Lebanon war may extend beyond politics. Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 and the disengagement from Gaza in August 2005 were both intended to renew the peace process. They represented a way to upset the status quo and improve the standing of those on the other side, be they Palestinian or Lebanese, who were interested in a peaceful solution, by allowing them to point to tangible benefits from peace processes. The problem, of course, was that these initiatives did not result in any real benefits for the Israelis. The disengagement from Gaza and Lebanon increased, not decreased, rocketfire. And civilians paid the highest price.

Furthermore, these initiatives were viewed as signs of weakness by both Hamas in Gaza and Hizballah in Lebanon. For these organizations, the withdrawals amounted to Israeli surrenders, and they probably increased, rather than decreased, the risk of further military conflict. As a result, the Israeli population now looks far more suspiciously on unilateral peace initiatives like these. Political parties that choose to adopt such a strategy in their political platforms will find it difficult to win future elections. This, of course, will make it more difficult for Israel to find an opening in its relations with its Arab neighbors.

This brings us to Israel's most talked-about aims: deterrence. One of the most important reasons why the newly elected Israeli government's response to the kidnapping was so severe was that it wanted to send a signal to Hizballah and other potential enemies that the price of continued raids into Israeli territory would be steep. That the kidnapping occurred only a couple of weeks after the kidnapping of a soldier in Gaza is likely to have been a contributing factor: it became necessary for the new government to resort to a more forceful response in light of two such attacks in close succession.[100] Similar incidents in the past, following the 2000 Israeli withdrawal, had not resulted in any major response from Israel. Hizballah's

97. Ibid.; Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict," pp. 11–13.
98. The plans that had been drawn up specifically for such a situation as the one that triggered the war in Lebanon predicted initial air strikes against specific targets (which did indeed occur) as well as a ground operation in which troops were deployed along the Litani River in order to cut off Hizballah's transport and supply routes and then to proceed southward with the aim of capturing the Hizballah forces between two shields. Indeed, this was what the overdue ground offensive intended to accomplish. But by that point it was already too late. Before the operation was even underway, operatives were told they had only sixty hours before the ceasefire would be in effect, which, Halutz promised the cabinet, would be enough time. It turned out, however, that this was far too little time. Most importantly, Hizballah was likely to be saved by the bell from being rounded up and utterly defeated, the operation's coup de grace.
99. Van Creveld, "Israel's Lebanese War."
100. This becomes even more evident if seen in the light of similar cross-border attacks in the past, such as the one at Har Dov only a couple of weeks after the 2000 withdrawal. At that time, Israel limited its response to a few air strikes since it did not want to escalate the conflict. The result of this incident (and the Israeli response) was that Hizballah—and Hamas—realized that this kind of attack could pay off and that Israel was not likely to react very strongly to relatively "small" incidents.

"miscalculation," then, was based on previous experience. Nasrallah emphasized this when the UN representative in Lebanon confronted him with the question.[101] He assured the representative that Hizballah was not seeking a large-scale conflagration, and that the incident would not escalate the conflict.

Israel's longstanding policy of a restrained response to Hizballah's provocations had led Nasrallah to believe that another kidnapping was unlikely to lead to any major escalation, much less war. Israel had gone to great lengths to minimize the risk of new kidnappings. Accordingly, it maintained a state of alertness and conducted its patrols so that it would minimize the risk of confrontation as much as possible.[102]

But Israel's restraint was taken by Hizballah as evidence that its strategy of constant rocket attacks and kidnappings worked, without provoking Israel too much. It was in Hizballah's interest to maintain a state of conflict just short of full-scale war in order to stymie any serious peace process.

Furthermore, several years of trying to avoid confronting Hizballah had made the IDF reluctant to patrol the border aggressively in order to "disturb" Hizballah's preparations. This was a tactic that had been used successfully in the past as standard operating procedure in Lebanon and with regard to various Palestinian groups.

When a host of factors coincided, a trio of Israeli leaders almost entirely lacking in defense experience decided that it was time to put their foot down. Hardly anyone had expected such a harsh Israeli response to the relatively minor incident, but it is possible to argue that the Israeli response in 2006 served as a warning. Furthermore, Israel's response was a reaction to six frustrating years of failed attempts to push the Lebanese government or the UN, preferably both, to deal with Hizballah and implement UNSCR 1559.

Seen in this light, the lessons of the 2006 war might deter Hizballah from launching future attacks. But it is equally possible to claim the opposite, that Hizballah has been emboldened. None of the basic reasons for the war have been resolved. Hizballah's position has strengthened. Lebanon's political situation is just as complicated, with the only difference that Hizballah and its allies now have a stronger legal and constitutional position from which to control much of what happens in the country.

For Hizballah, too, the basic issues remain the same: Israel is still viewed as an enemy that must be fought with all means necessary. In Lebanon, Hizballah's clearly stated aim is, primarily, to act as a base for the movement's larger strategic and ideological struggle. Its dependence on Iran and, to a lesser extent, Syria plays a part here. If, say, the United States launches new initiatives with the intention of driving a wedge between Iran and Syria, or if Iran is pressured to stop its nuclear weapons program, Lebanon's security situation will worsen. Moreover, Israel's unilateral withdrawals from Gaza and Lebanon did not produce the intended opening toward a new peace process. On the contrary, these withdrawals are seen, not only by Hizballah and Hamas, as victories in the armed struggle. These events probably did serious damage to the Israeli model of deterrence.[103]

Exactly how the war will affect Israel in the long term is hard to predict. There can be no doubt, however, that the war led to some serious introspection. The soul-searching was not only about the core problem of the war—the conflict with Hizballah—but also, more significantly, about Israel's future role in the Middle East. Since the unilateral steps Israel took to open up an opportunity for a new peace process with the Palestinians and Lebanon caused more, not less, violence, many have lost hope that a peace process will bring about any positive benefits. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that the very move meant to facilitate peace and fewer violent attacks instead resulted in the opposite. But for the long-term work toward peace, this development is bad news.

101. Harel and Issacharoff, *34 Days*, pp. 75–76.
102. Ibid., pp. 39–50.
103. See, for instance, Martin Kramer, "The American Interest," *Wall Street Journal*, November 21, 2006.

Hizballah

> No one can imagine the importance of our military potential as our military apparatus is not separate from our overall social fabric.
>
> —Open letter from Hizballah[104]

Today, Hizballah is better equipped than it was at the outbreak of the war in 2006. Even though Israel's response to the kidnappings and murders was far more forceful than what Hizballah's leadership had expected, the poor showing of the Israeli army gave Hizballah little reason to fear a new confrontation. The build-up of arms stockpiles and the strengthening of defensive lines and communications networks—both north and south of the Litani River—are a clear indication that Hizballah expects to be even better prepared if or when another war breaks out.[105] Hizballah's strongholds are located north of the Litani River and in the Bekaa Valley, where large areas have been made off-limits to most Lebanese. In the area south of the Litani River, it has been more discreet, so as to avoid embarrassing the Lebanese soldiers stationed in the area. The basic principle, however, is to prevent UN resolutions or forces, such as UNIFIL, from standing in its way. On several occasions, Hizballah has violently prevented UNIFIL from patrolling the areas over which it is formally responsible.[106] Another war with Israel is expected to happen sooner or later, and Hizballah is not prepared to allow its preparations to be hampered, either to the north or south of the Litani River.[107]

Hizballah's successes during the 2006 conflict were made possible by several years of preparation and depended on several different factors. During the six years that passed between the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 and the outbreak of the war, Hizballah expended significant effort in building up its defensive capabilities in southern Lebanon. It created an extensive network of bunkers, gave its militiamen frequent training, expanded food and weapons supplies around the Litani River, and prepared plans for defending the area in a future battle with Israel. All these activities were carried out with large support from Iran and Syria.[108]

The extensive network of bunkers proved to be particularly effective in countering Israel's advance into Lebanon. In part, this was because, for a long time, Israel was reluctant to commit ground forces in the operation.[109] But even if the Israeli air force made it more difficult to move troops around, Hizballah's order of battle was such that the various defensive systems, based on the bunker networks, were generally self-sufficient with regard to weapons and food. That, together with an intimate knowledge of the area and good communications, was sufficient to put up a more effective resistance to the IDF than had been expected.

On several occasions, Hizballah attempted to penetrate Israeli territory with small forces, but these were repelled every time.[110] Hizballah was, however, able to continue its rocketfire on Israel throughout the war. Even though artillery or air force counterattacks were initiated only minutes after the initial attacks, on most occasions, Hizballah's highly mobile rocket-firing crews were able to leave the area in time. This speaks volumes about the extent of Hizballah's preparations and the effectiveness of its strategy of firing rockets.[111]

104. From a somewhat expanded version of "Nass al-Risala al-Maftuha allati wajahaha Hizballah ila-l-Mustad'afin fi Lubnan wa-l-Alam," first published as an open letter on February 16, 1985, in the Lebanese daily *al-Safir*. It was subsequently published as a brochure as well, in which the Hizballah program was laid out and explained. This translation was published in *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 48 (Fall 1988).
105. That Hizballah has gone to great pains to prepare for another war—in which it has internalized the lessons of 2006—is made clear from a report that Hizballah has laid fiber optic cables in the area south of the Litani River (see http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=2940). According to paragraph 8 of Resolution 1701, this area is to be kept free of arms and armed personnel who do not belong to UNIFIL or the Lebanese Army. Furthermore, Hizballah conducted a large training exercise in November 2008, again in the South. See *al-Akhbar*, November 5, 2008 (http://www.alakhbar.ca/pdf/numero%20555.pdf) and *al-Hayat*, November 6, 2008.
106. Blanford, PolicyWatch 1414.
107. Civilian sources in Lebanon say that Hizballah continues to maintain its bunkers and weapons storages in the South. It makes sure that material and supplies are kept in fresh supply and it pays local staff to see to this (Blanford, PolicyWatch 1414).
108. Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict," p. 10.
109. The larger offensive was not launched until a couple of days before the ceasefire went into effect (see the preceding section), but smaller operations with smaller units were launched throughout the war (mostly to hunt Katyusha batteries).
110. Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict," p. 11.
111. This primarily concerns short-distance rockets (i.e., Katyushas). As was pointed out earlier, the Israeli air force destroyed almost all long- and medium-range rockets during the first hours of the war.

Iran's and Syria's support of Hizballah in rebuilding its capabilities in southern Lebanon and in rebuilding the rest of Lebanon has already been mentioned. Iran's support is of particular interest. The country's current regime has contributed both the religious and ideological base for Hizballah, but it has also, in an unconventional manner, financed a large part of Hizballah's activities. Before the war, in early summer 2006, Iran had already changed the way it finances Hizballah—mainly in reaction to the increased pressure that the U.S. Treasury placed on Lebanese banks in its investigations of suspicious financial transfers to Hizballah.[112] The unconventional, or possibly very *conventional*, way that Iran supported Hizballah was by smuggling cash in diplomatic pouches between Tehran and Beirut. Unlike money transfers through banks, the method left behind no trace.

The branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that funded Hizballah during and immediately after the war was led by Gen. Mir Faysal Baqer Zadah. During summer of 2006, in direct connection to the war and its immediate aftermath, a number of these transfers were carried out.[113]

The money came from various religious centers that were not directly under the control of the government, primarily from one run by an imam called Reza in the city of Meshed.[114] Money was also sent from smaller centers in Qom, Shiraz, Kerman, and Isfahan. In doing so, the government in Tehran used an old and trusted—and difficult to trace—method of transferring money.[115] Consequently, the Iranian government could not be held directly responsible for its financial support, and it could avoid accusations of financing an organization labeled by many as a terrorist organization.

The support for Hizballah thus comes from kindred organizations in Iran that back their coreligionists in Lebanon. Until the United States stepped up its efforts—which have been redoubled after the war, for obvious reasons—Iran transferred money primarily through Bank Saderat, an Iranian bank that maintains four offices in Lebanon. The money that flowed into Lebanon after the war was earmarked to aid the reconstruction effort, allowing Hizballah to quickly help civilians rebuild their homes and infrastructure. The effort stood in stark contrast to the slowness with which the government in Beirut and the international community acted.

In Lebanon, it was primarily Hizballah's chief of finances, Hassan al-Shami, who handled and distributed the funds.[116] Al-Shami used his two companies—Beit al-Mal and Yossr—which control Hizballah's welfare organizations and which also collect money from Shiite Muslims in North America and South America. This enables Hizballah to mix the financial support it receives from various sources, making it even more difficult to trace its origins.[117]

The basis for Hizballah's activist politics can be traced back to the traditional division between activism and passivism in Shia Islam.[118] Both these ideas have had adherents in Lebanon, but as Hizballah's influence has grown, the activist part has become dominant.

112. Since Hizballah is classified as a terrorist organization by the United States, all support for the organization is considered aiding terrorism and is therefore illegal.
113. Interestingly enough, this altered image of how Iran supports Hizballah financially can be traced to the end of June 2006, when the first large transport took place. It came along with the Iranian foreign minister, Manoucher Motaki, on his visit to Beirut, where he was meeting with his French counterpart, Philippe Douste-Blazy.
114. Intelligence Online, no. 532, October 6, 2006 (http://www.intelligenceonline.com).
115. Ayatollah Khomeini utilized these channels to fund his revolution in 1979.
116. Al-Shami is from Nahariya in southern Lebanon and, furthermore, is Hassan Nasrallah's son-in-law.
117. As late as March 2009, Iran condemned Interpol's arrest orders for a number of Iranians (including former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani) for involvement in the terrorist attacks on a Jewish center in Buenos Aires. Eighty-five people were killed in the attack. And Iran's new designated minister of defense—Ahmad Vahidi—is wanted by Interpol for involvement in the same bombing.
118. These two branches or traditions within Shiism largely follow the two schools of jurisprudence that predominate within Shiism. *Akhbari* (the literalists) claimed that they were allowed to "hold off on Friday prayer" until the hidden imam returned, which led to a more passive attitude to the issue of religion and society. They also claimed that interpretations of religious texts could only be done with a basis in the Quran, the verbal traditions (Sunna), and the lives of imams. The second school is *Usuli* (the rationalists), who believed that they were in the position of successor in the absence of the imam. This led them to assume a far more activist position, of which Khomeini's revolution is a good example. Based on *Usuli*, there was a possibility to free interpretation within the framework of *Itjihad*.

An example of the passive branch of Shia Islam is the Iraqi Shiite leader Ali Sistani.[119] The passivist tradition, of keeping out of the political sphere as much as possible, is based on the knowledge that political forces "come and go." Especially with Shia Islam—which has always been the minority and which has often been the victim of oppression by the dominant Sunni forces—this was a lesson for which the community has had to pay dearly. Since the dominant forces were often Sunni, the relationship between the two branches of Islam was, at best, one of disinterest; at worst, it was one of open hostility, with various forms of oppression as a result. The passivist philosophy is based on the notion that one should devote time to theological issues and leave the political arena entirely. With the exception of Iran and now Iraq, Shia Islam has been a minority religion in all the countries dominated by Islam.[120]

For its entire existence, Shia Islam has been wholly dependent on the beneficence of the majority's culture and political power. The widespread victim mentality within Shiite tradition is largely explained by this history, which also explains much of the passivist tradition within Shia Islam.[121]

Even though it grew out of the same religious roots and historical experiences, the second philosophy, the activist branch of Shia Islam, is much younger. The most notable representative of this tradition is Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. His political activity has in great part overshadowed the religious changes he instigated after Iran's Islamic Revolution of 1979. The notion of a religious "high office" (the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists)[122] directly involved in day-to-day politics and the importance of "guiding" politicians on the true religious path were, when Khomeini imposed them, completely alien traditions to most Shiite Muslims. This was the case even though Khomeini based the changes on existing religious traditions.

It is this activist tradition, aided by its strengthened position after the Islamic Revolution, that serves as the foundation for Hizballah today. The links between Shiites in Iran and Lebanon—and between Lebanon and the various religious sites of learning in Najaf and Karbala in Iraq—have ancient roots, of course, and they were established long before Hizballah. But as a result of the Islamic Revolution and the Lebanese civil war, the new regime in Iran was presented with an opportunity to exert influence over Lebanon much more directly. Hizballah—which, in turn, is an offshoot of the older Shiite organization Amal[123]—was modeled after its Iranian mother organization. Hizballah, although not directly controlled by Iran, maintains links so strong that, with few exceptions, it is very unlikely that it would reach any important decision before consulting those branches of the Iranian government that are actively involved in its activities.[124]

In this way, the activist tradition was essential to the establishment of Hizballah. Hizballah's current secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, demonstrates the tradition's importance. His worldview is significantly influenced by the view of Shiites as victims of oppression by domestic and foreign enemies.[125]

The Shiite view of the religious leadership's role "during the absence of the imam" and the conflict

119. Even if Sistani is influential in Iraq, it is mainly due to his religious standing, not as a politician. Sistani has never actively tried to gain political power or a political position. His role in Iraq does, however, illustrate the degree to which politics and religion are intertwined in Iraq.
120. In countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Bahrain, Shiites comprise the largest minority, and sometimes the majority, but the political and religious power has always rested with the Sunnis, with Iran as the sole exception.
121. For more on Shia and this "cult of victimization" especially, see Farha Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs*. (London: Pluto Press, 2005); and Heinz Halm, *Shiism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).
122. *Wilayat al-faqih*. After the 1979 revolution, this effectively became the decisionmaking body in Iran.
123. *Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniya* (The Lebanese Resistance Detachments). "Amal" means "hope."
124. The decision to carry out the kidnappings that led to the outbreak of the war in 2006 was no exception to this principle. No one, neither the Hizballah leadership nor Iran, had expected the nature of the Israeli response. Since similar events had taken place in the past, and Hizballah for many years had attempted to kill and kidnap soldiers inside Israel, Iran was not informed of this particular event before it took place.
125. Hizballah divides the world into two categories, *mustakbirun* (the oppressors) and *mustad'ifin* (the oppressed). Questions concerning society, the economy, social justice, and the situation in the Middle East in general are fitted into Hizballah's ideological worldview of good versus evil, which allows little room for compromise. Hizballah follows the Iranian interpretation of *Usuli* and views the state as a necessity, the least bad alternative to achieve equality and liberty in anticipation of the hidden imam.

between religious, political and national interests thus had a crucial influence on Hizballah and, by extension, on Lebanon. Since its founding, Hizballah has evolved into perhaps the most talked-about Shiite political actor in the world, after Iran.

Religious-Ideological Background. [This section is based on a forthcoming study by Eli Göndör at the University of Lund.—Ed.] In 1959, Iranian-born Musa al-Sadr arrived in southern Lebanon to assume the leadership of the population of the Shiite coastal town of Tyre. Al-Sadr urged the Shiite population to seize on an existing law from 1943 that regulates the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the parliament, in order to improve their social and economic station. In 1975, he formed the organization *Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniya* (the Lebanese Resistance Detachments) or Amal ("hope," in Arabic). Its primary purpose was to empower the Shiites of Lebanon and defend them from the threats posed by the civil war. After 1978, Amal's primary goal was to fight the Israeli forces that were occupying part of southern Lebanon. But the organization never amounted to anything more than yet another one of the religiously fueled armed militias that ravaged Lebanon. Accepting an official invitation from Libyan President Muammar Qadhafi, al-Sadr flew to Libya in August 1978 and disappeared without a trace.

It was the most radical elements within Amal that founded Hizballah. Syria, which controlled parts of Lebanon at the time, allowed Iran to contribute to its development by sending 1,000 civilian and military instructors from the IRGC to the Bekaa Valley.

Hizballah received ideological guidance from the two ayatollahs who were most strongly linked to the notion of Shiite revival—Baqir al-Sadr, from Iraq, and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, from Iran. In 1968, Baqir al-Sadr founded the Iraqi party al-Dawa (the Calling, or the Mission) in order to establish an Islamic state in Iraq and spread Islam to the rest of the world. In 1980, he was executed in Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussein due to his support for Iran's Islamic Revolution. Al-Sadr's view of the Islamic Revolution became one of the fundamental pillars of Hizballah. The other pillar rested on Khomeini's notion of *wilayat al-faqih*. Acting under this philosophy, Hizballah believes itself to be acting in accordance with a messianic calling whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic society in Lebanon.

Hizballah's political development benefited from massive Iranian support, the training of guerrilla units, financing of schools and hospitals, and cash payments to the poor. Hizballah expended considerable effort winning over the population in the southern suburbs of Beirut, which largely consisted of Shiites who had been forced to flee their homes in the South as a result of Israel's security zone. Hizballah managed to ally with Ayatollah Fadhlallah, who was a central figure for Lebanon's Shiite population. This strengthened the organization, allowing it to develop an ideology that toed the Iranian line. Israel's presence in southern Lebanon gave Hizballah another reason to expand its guerrilla activities. In the 1980s, *al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Resistance), which became Hizballah's military wing, was founded. Its main goal was to expel the Israeli forces from southern Lebanon. In 1983, the organization carried out attacks in Beirut that targeted French and American troops from the multinational peacekeeping force, which had been assigned to supervise the Palestine Liberation Organization's retreat from Lebanon in 1982. The support from Iran, the aid to needy Shiite Muslims in southern Lebanon, and a successful guerrilla campaign against foreign forces in Beirut and southern Lebanon transformed Hizballah into a hybrid between a militia and a social charity. It was perceived to be working for Lebanon's independence and overall success.

Hizballah is run by a council of seventeen members who decide, through a majority-rule vote, religious, legal, political, social, and military matters. In matters that cannot be immediately resolved, the council turns to the leadership in Iran. An advisory body of fifteen members coordinates the organization's various goals and focuses on three main activities—security, social welfare, and religious activities, including propaganda and media. The social welfare activities are especially effective, as the 2006 war demonstrated. While the Lebanese government, aided

by the international community, conferred and discussed, Hizballah activated its various social branches and provided relief—in the form of money, food, and medicine—quickly and efficiently to the southern parts of the country.

Hizballah's military is divided into two sections. *Al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Resistance) consists of civilians who maintain normal lives until they are called up for battle or suicide missions (a practice that stopped with the Israeli withdrawal in 2000). This makes them difficult to identify. *Al-Jihad al-Islami* (the Holy War of Islam) is a standing force that carries out, for instance, guerrilla attacks against the Israeli army when it was deployed in the security zone in southern Lebanon or rocketfire attacks on civilian communities in northern Israel.

At the same time, Hizballah is aware of the opposition in Lebanon to the establishment of an Islamic state based on *sharia* law and has therefore taken a pragmatic stance on the issue. It does not mind fighting in the name of all Muslim countries. It views the Palestinian question as a problem for all Muslims, regardless of whether they are Sunni or Shiite. Fully aware of the explosive nature of the Sunni-Shiite divide, Hizballah goes to great lengths to tone down the differences in an effort to foster a united Muslim front against those viewed as *mustakbirun* (oppressors).

Hizballah holds that Islam has been in ideological conflict with the West throughout its history. Everything from the Crusades to European colonialism is, according to Hizballah, evidence of the large divide separating Western civilization from Islamic civilization. Just like Iran, Hizballah sees the United States as the "great Satan," while other countries, such as England and France, are just as evil, conspiring with the United States and Israel against Islam.

Even though Hizballah is a Shiite organization, its ideology and social activities are similar to those of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, both of which are Sunni movements.[126]

Iran's attempts to become the highest authority in Shia Islam have not always impressed Hizballah. Even if Iran was significant in establishing Hizballah, it would be wrong to claim that Hizballah's leadership has uncritically bowed to Iran's authority. Its spiritual leadership, for example, has remained critical of *wilayat al-faqih* as practiced in Iran, and it views itself as having an equal authority and an independent position in the Shiite world. This difference has become increasingly marked since Khomeini's death, and especially since the political crisis in Lebanon that followed the 2006 war.

Limitations. Following the events of May 2008 and the agreement between the government and the opposition that defused the crisis, a coalition government was formed, which again included ministers from Hizballah. When, in 2005, Hizballah first had members appointed to ministerial positions in the Lebanese government (in the aftermath of the "Cedar Revolution"[127]), it was a sign of how far the movement had come in integrating into Lebanese political life. It was a sign, furthermore, that the other ethnic and religious groups in Lebanon had more or less accepted Hizballah's role as a leading force in the country.

When Hizballah rejoined the government, it regained the position it had held after the 2005 crisis. In fact, its position became stronger because the Doha agreement (which resolved the conflict and ended the fighting) provided the opposition with a "blocking third" of cabinet seats, which it did not have previously. With representation in the government, Hizballah can directly influence the country's politics and prevent its own disarmament. The 2006 war and its political consequences, as well as the fighting in Gaza from December 2008 to January 2009, has helped make Hizballah stronger than it has been for some time. In the South, it still retains control, despite the large number of UNIFIL troops and the increased presence of Lebanese army troops.

126. Norell, *Radical Islamist Movements in the Middle East*.
127. The Cedar Revolution was the name of the movement sparked by the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri, which precipitated the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon.

Hizballah's long path, from its beginnings in 1982 as one of many small armed groups in the Lebanese civil war to reaching the inner corridors of power, reveals the strength of its organization, structure, and ideology. That it has been able to come all this way without compromising any of the fundamental aspects of its ideology or its long-term strategic goals—and without disarming—also speaks to the strength of the movement in relation to other Lebanese actors.

Hizballah's position provides a good example of how an Islamic movement can successfully balance a long-term strategy with local political considerations. Even though Hizballah is still considered a terrorist organization by the United States and other countries, the movement has not had to make any significant changes in its policies or overarching strategy.

Lately, Hizballah's increasingly obvious role as a kingmaker in Lebanese politics has made its demands for a more Islamic society and for a perpetual war against Israel more common.[128] The successes that Hizballah has achieved over its history indicate that the tactics that it employs—adapting to the local political structure without changing its long-term goals—work.

As Hizballah's leaders know, there are, of course, factors that restrict its ability to act. First, it cannot expand its constituency beyond the Shiite community as long as it fails to make fundamental changes to its politics. Even though Lebanese Shiites are widely accepted to be the largest single community within Lebanon (although this is impossible to know for certain without a full census), Hizballah has not succeeded in attracting other groups in Lebanon. This prevents Hizballah from plausibly arguing that it is a national party that represents all Lebanese, not just the interests of the Shiite community.

The other factor that limits Hizballah is, of course, the danger of continued tension and confrontation with Israel, for which the population of southern Lebanon risks paying a high price. The 2006 war highlighted this dilemma. Nasrallah's statement that he would never have carried out the operation had he known what the reaction would have been should be understood in light of this dilemma, and it should be taken as evidence that Hizballah leaders are aware of the problem. The criticism directed against Hizballah, even from within its own ranks, for having dragged Lebanon into an unwanted war was overwhelming. That the Hizballah leadership is aware of this was made clear, for instance, during the 2008–2009 crisis in Gaza when Hizballah, despite its blood-wrenching rhetoric of crushing Israel, made no practical attempt to help Hamas.[129]

Hizballah's leadership knows this, too. To counter the charge that the movement's politics have a deleterious effect on Lebanon at large, Hizballah has spent large sums of money on social activities, which are open to all Lebanese, and it initiated the rebuilding of southern Lebanon immediately after the 2006 war. One of the movement's key activities has always been to supply Shiites with the social and economic aid that the government in Beirut has failed to provide.

A third limiting factor—and possibly the most bothersome for the international community—is Hizballah's close relationship with Iran and Syria. Syria's influence on Hizballah has sometimes been characterized as tactical; that is to say, only as long as the Syrian regime has an interest in supporting Hizballah will it continue to do so. But if the political circumstances change, Syria is equally willing to give up its special relationship. There is much evidence to support that view, but the analysis does not take into consideration the close relationship between Nasrallah and Syrian President Bashar al-Asad.

Hizballah has taken great pains to strike a balance between maintaining its identity as Lebanese and preserving its relationship with Syria. Hizballah's relationship with Syria is fundamentally important to its survival; for instance, all its weapons come from Syria. At the same time, Nasrallah has distanced himself from Syria and, especially since the crisis in May 2008, he

128. Simon Haddad, "The Origins of Popular Support for Lebanon's Hezbollah," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 29 (2006), pp. 21–34.
129. With the exception of a few rockets that were immediately followed by Israeli artillery fire, no attacks were launched from Lebanon during the fighting in Gaza.

has emphasized that Hizballah is, first and foremost, a Lebanese movement. Because of the widespread anti-Syrian sentiment among the Lebanese, Hizballah cannot appear too close to the Syrian regime.[130]

Iran's relationship with Hizballah is of an entirely different kind. Without Iranian assistance, it is doubtful whether Hizballah would even exist today. Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has been the most active and important supporter of Hizballah, politically, economically, and militarily. Of even greater regional importance are Iran's efforts to foster cooperation between Islamic movements in the region, with Iran itself as the main actor in the drama. Ever since Israel deported 400 Hamas members to Lebanon during the winter of 1992,[131] Iranian governments have supported coalitions between Islamic movements, such as Hizballah and Hamas. This has proved especially useful in preventing Arab-Israeli peace initiatives. Common enemies, such as the United States, Israel, and the West in general, make these efforts easier.[132]

Hizballah's reaction to the fighting in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 may have soiled its pure ideological veneer. Its pro-Hamas rhetoric never led to concrete action. But from a Lebanese perspective, it was probably a wise move: Hizballah put Lebanon's interests first. After several years of political assassinations—in some cases, with Syrian fingerprints on the gun—political upheaval culminating in a few bloody days in May 2008, and increased tensions in Lebanon, Hizballah needed to strengthen its Lebanese identity. It hardly lies in Lebanon's national interest to keep the conflict with Israel alive.

At the same time, however, Hizballah has gone to great lengths to retain as much maneuvering room as possible. The May 2008 crisis showed that it is not above using force against other Lebanese if it feels doing so is necessary to defend itself. There are also indications that Hizballah—in an ambition, similar to that of Iran, to cultivate closer ties between like-minded Islamic organizations—has started to consider cooperating with radical Sunni Muslims, which, in some cases, have links to al-Qaeda.[133] In the long term, this last point might turn out to be the most serious aspect of Hizballah's role in the region. Indeed, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has demanded that the European Union and others label Hizballah a terrorist organization because Hizballah supports radical Palestinian groups that are trying to subvert the PA's efforts to launch a serious peace process with Israel. Especially after the second Lebanon war and the fighting in Gaza, this question has received greater prominence.[134]

Hizballah's role as a channel through which Iran funnels support to groups such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades also furthers its goal of keeping the Arab-Israeli conflict alive. The foremost concern of these groups is to undermine any initiative that could lead to a peace process. As long as such efforts can be prevented, there is no room for an Israeli-Lebanese peace, which suits Hizballah's agenda perfectly.

In the long term, the question arises of how long Hizballah will be able to sustain this balance between its internal and regional goals. The May 2008 crisis showed how far the leadership is willing to go in order to preserve its position in Lebanon. After the elections

130. As has already been pointed out, during the winter of 2008–2009, a process that had been running over several years, by which Syria opened an embassy in Lebanon, came to an end. The reason why Syria has not opened an embassy until now is that Syria has considered Lebanon part of Syria—an attitude that has not helped the relationship between the two countries. Syrian involvement in Lebanon has often been brutal. Many politicians and journalists have been murdered for criticizing the Syrian regime.

131. The author was stuck in a bus going from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv, as a result of the legal drama that took place in Israel when Hamas's Israeli lawyers tried to prevent the deportation by appealing the verdict. There was a major security alert during the court procedures in Jerusalem, which caused traffic chaos.

132. *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin,* vol. 4, no. 2 (February and October 2002); Leslie Susser, "The Specter of Iran," *Jerusalem Report*, March 6, 2006, pp. 12–14.

133. See, for example, Yoni Fighel and Yael Shahar, "The al-Qaida–Hizballah Connection," *ICT Report*, February 26, 2002; and Matt Levitt, "Ban Hizballah in Europe," PolicyWatch 958, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 16, 2005.

134. It is interesting to note how little concrete help the PA has received from Europe on this issue, in spite of the obvious problems this poses for the PA in its attempt to conduct a peace dialogue, while at the same time having to deal with internal opposition (supported by actors such as Hizballah, Iran, and radical Sunni Islamist groups with links to al-Qaeda), whose goal it is to prevent any kind of long-term peace process with Israel. See also Amos Harel, "Group Tied to Qaida Has Post Near Lebanese Border," *Haaretz*, March 13, 2006, http://www.haaretz.com (accessed June 30, 2009).

in 2009, there have been no real signs that Hizballah will face internal pressure to make concessions regarding disarmament or other issues that are crucial to its long-term goals. If Hizballah's links to radical jihadist Sunni groups become more apparent, however, this might change. With Hizballah in the government, these connections could be awkward for Lebanon's relations with other states.

In conclusion, Hizballah's leadership, so far, has been fully aware of the considerations that must be taken into account if the organization is to retain an active role in Lebanese politics. The saber rattling in May 2008 is something it would like to avoid in the future. As a result, there are a certain number of limiting factors that the Hizballah leadership has to take into account. These limiting factors revolve around four different themes.

The first challenge for Hizballah is retaining the support within its own base, Lebanese Shiites. Without that support, it is hardly possible for Hizballah to maintain its electoral success or its position in Lebanon.

The second major challenge is gaining acceptance as a legitimate political actor by the rest of Lebanese society. This is much harder to achieve, especially after the events of May 2008. Nor do the movement's long-term goals—to Islamize society in line with Shiite theology—gain it much support outside its base. Suspicion of Hizballah is still widespread, and the movement's close relations with Iran and Syria add to that suspicion.

Nevertheless, Hizballah wants to alleviate those tensions. One way it has attempted to do so is by presenting itself as the voice of the poor in Lebanon, irrespective of religious affiliation. For example, it works closely with labor unions. It is impossible to tell now whether this will be sufficient to bridge the many divides that exist in Lebanon today—which Hizballah shares responsibility for creating—but as long as the movement strives to make Lebanon a "frontier state" in the struggle against Israel and the West, these gulfs will be difficult to overcome.[135]

The third challenge for Hizballah concerns its relations with Syria. This is, as has been mentioned earlier, an ambivalent relationship. On the one hand, Hizballah needs Syria's help to bring in weapons and other matériel, and the relationship is strengthened by the close personal link between Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Nasrallah. On the other hand, these close relations are a problem for many Lebanese. Most Lebanese perceive Syria's longstanding involvement negatively, which explains why, since the 2006 war, Hizballah has increasingly distanced itself from Syria and attempted to appeal to other parts of Lebanese society.

Finally, there is the matter of Hizballah's relationship with Iran. As has been previously pointed out, Iran is by far Hizballah's most important external partner—ideologically, religiously, economically, and militarily. Iran is always in the background, and sometimes even in the foreground, when Hizballah tries to find its way in the dangerous waters of Lebanese politics. Without Iran, Hizballah would not be in its current position, with vast influence over Lebanese politics.

The benefits of Tehran's relationship with Hizballah are obvious to Iranian leaders. Iran's long-term goal is to create spheres of influence throughout the region, and this aim is helped by Hizballah's ability to function as a conduit for such influence. Hizballah thus occupies a key position in Iran's strategy—not only when it comes to Lebanon, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, as a way to reach other, non-Shiite Islamist groups, such as various radical Palestinian movements. Iran's influence over Hizballah's military and financial network gives the Iranians a strong position from which to influence Lebanese politics. It is therefore entirely unlikely that Hizballah will disarm or change its policy on its own accord about peace with Israel.

Political Victory. Beyond Lebanon, the view is somewhat different. Iran's use of Hizballah to reach other non-Shiite groups has already been mentioned. It is

135. Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel."

because of these activities that Hizballah is a leading force in the wave of radicalization and Islamization in the Middle East, a movement whose momentum originates in Iran. The religious foundation, which supports so much of Hizballah's ideological, political, and military activities, is a fundamental pillar of Hizballah's worldview and of crucial importance to the movement's various activities. There is no immediate conflict between Hizballah's short-term, tactical considerations in Lebanon—where it is attempting to preserve internal calm and avoid fighting with other Lebanese groups—and a more long-term goal aimed at changing society at large. The latter is a goal that will take a long time and demand great patience.

In this context, it is important to remember that Hizballah's religious imperatives do not in themselves constitute an obstacle to playing an active political role. In Hizballah's view, all the various parts of society should and will be used to serve the overarching goal of forming a religious state. It is not just Hizballah that has realized the benefits of participating in the political process. Around the Middle East, Islamic movements are organizing themselves politically and claiming successes.[136] Whether radical Islamist movements should be allowed to participate in the political process is therefore a moot question; they are already a part of it. The question, rather, is how the different political systems in which these movements are active should handle the fact that many of the goals of these Islamist parties are both racist and undemocratic.[137]

Furthermore, it is in this nexus between its short-term and long-term goals that Hizballah becomes more significant in a regional perspective. Thanks to—or as a result of—the religious dogmas that govern much of its activities, Hizballah sees itself as a frontier movement in a universal struggle between good and evil.[138]

At the core of this ideology is the end goal of a religious state based on religious law. An essential piece of this religious ideology is the belief that God is the only source of legitimate law and, therefore, that there is no need for any human attempts at making law. According to this view, all the answers to any imaginable human problems are already answered in the Quran and Sunna. This is why the only people who are able to represent the people are *Ulema*, the religious jurisprudents. Furthermore, since God is the only lawgiver, it follows that all laws are religious, and must be so in order to be legitimate. In short, theocracy is the ideal.[139] The thesis that only God can rule also means that the Western idea of the secular nation-state is a fundamentally evil creation, since man is trying to usurp God and rule in his place.

It is obvious that this basic outlook can become awkward for a movement such as Hizballah. Two ideological worldviews collide with each other. But at the same time, the long-term aim to establish God's kingdom on earth, a goal shared by Christian fundamentalists, will not occur until the distant future.[140] And so it is the duty of every believer to live as a good and righteous citizen. That is why political activity is seen as a step on the way to realizing God's kingdom. According to Hizballah and other like-minded groups, this duty includes the duty to defend oneself and to fight against evil. This is a religious imperative, and it is why disarming Hizballah is not likely to occur in the near future. To take part in the struggle against the enemy is seen as a nonnegotiable religious imperative.[141]

136. Norell, *Radical Islamist Movements in the Middle East*.
137. See, for instance, "Hamas Charter," http://www.mideastweb.org/hamas.htm (accessed June 24, 2009), as well as writings by important Islamic ideologues, such as Sayid Qutb, Hassan al-Banna, and Abu al-ala-Mawdudi.
138. Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel."
139. Christer Hedin, *Bibeln och Koranen* (The Bible and the Koran) (Stockholm: Verbum, 2002), pp. 94–95.
140. Both Sayid Qutb and Abu al-ala-Mawdudi refer to this condition as *hakimiyyat Allah* (God's kingdom).
141. During the 2006 war, the Israel Defense Forces found several small booklets titled *al-Jihad* (holy war). These were not specifically directed at Hizballah, but produced by Imam Khomeini's Cultural Center in 2004. The Lebanese part of this center is located in southern Beirut, in the Harat Hreik neighborhood (which was hard hit during the war). The booklet (only sixty-four pages long) was found with several of Hizballah's operatives, which indicates that it was seen as an authoritative guide to Islamic ideology. The booklet argues in favor of martyrdom and holy war, and considers jihad as both doctrine and manifesto. Martyrdom is considered the highest form of jihad and ensures the martyr a place in paradise. Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies (http://www.intelligence.org.il/new_site.htm), August 27, 2006.

Most important, Hizballah views its warriors, first and foremost, as Shiite Muslims. These Shiites believe that their military duties are their community's vital religious tasks. It is the religious identity as Shiite that is the most important to them, not the national identity as Lebanese. This ideological-religious interpretation also explains why Hizballah places rhetorical emphasis on the importance of Lebanon as a frontier state.[142]

This ideological and religious interpretation of its tradition also colors how Hizballah views conflict resolution, both in the short and long run. As far as the domestic political scene in Lebanon, Hizballah has toned down certain aspects of its ideological message, such as the long-term goal of an Islamized society, which it has put off to the future. Instead, other aspects of the movement's activities are emphasized, such as its social and economic initiatives. Hizballah's primary goal is to lessen domestic tensions and maintain its influence. Hizballah has dealt with political conflicts within Lebanon in a number of ways, from engaging in normal political activity to using armed force. Ideally, however, internal conflicts are to be resolved peacefully. Because Hizballah does not shrink from using force if necessary, and because the movement currently faces no serious challenges on this level, other parties understand not to challenge Hizballah.

When it comes to external enemies—namely, Israel—different rules apply. Like many other Islamic movements, Hizballah openly argues for the destruction of Israel. There is no room for compromise. Hizballah's leadership has declared loudly and clearly that only short-term truces, on Hizballah's own terms, are acceptable. The war against Israel is an overarching struggle and part of Hizballah's religious mission. According to Hizballah and its supporters, in order for a long-term peace to be possible, Israel must cease to exist as a state.[142] Representatives of Hizballah, like those of Hamas,[144] have stated that this may be achieved in stages. In other words, accepting Israel's overwhelming strength, Hizballah believes that temporary agreements are possible and legitimate so long as the end goal remains the same. Since Israel pulled out of Lebanon in 2000 and evacuated Gaza in 2005, this position has enjoyed a renaissance of sorts. As has been pointed out, Hizballah viewed these events as proof that armed struggle was an effective way to defeat Israel.

Even before Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000, Hizballah had adopted a long-term plan for how to continue its struggle against Israel. The group's devotion to the idea of *muqawama* (resistance) is another reason why it will resist disarmament. In accordance with this long-term strategy, Hizballah laid out a plan—in large part based on its religious-ideological foundation—for how to handle continued military confrontations with Israel. It consists of several key components.

First, Hizballah built a broad and extensive military infrastructure, often embedded and hidden within civilian structures.[145] By building it like this, Hizballah minimized its vulnerability to potential Israeli attacks and spread manpower and matériel in accordance with its order of battle.[146] Embedding military equipment and personnel among civilians violates the rules of war and does not grant immunity from attacks,[147] but it was expected that Israeli forces would nevertheless be reluctant to attack targets near civilians. And if the Israelis did attack, Hizballah would win propaganda points by drawing attention to their brutality and

142. Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel."
143. During the fighting in Gaza, this was not manifest to any significant degree on the practical level (armed Palestinian groups were allowed to fire rockets across the border with Israel) but rhetorically, representatives of Hizballah supported Hamas, which condemned Israel and those countries that did not do the same in a sufficiently forceful manner, such as Egypt and Jordan.
144. See, for example, Abu Musa Marzouq—deputy chief of Hamas's political bureau—in an interview on *Dream TV*, February 13, 2006, http://www.memritv.org; Special Dispatch—Palestinian Authority, February 22, 2006 (accessed June 30, 2009).
145. "Hezbollah's Use of Lebanese Civilians as Human Shields," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies, December 5, 2006, p 4.
146. The focus here was on small, independent forces that would respond to Israeli attacks through rocketfire against civilian targets inside Israel and with guerrilla attacks against the invading Israeli army.
147. See, for instance, *Human Rights Watch,* vol. 18, no. 3 (August 2006), p. 43; and Avi Bell, "How Should Israel Respond to War Crimes Accusations from the War in Lebanon?" *Jerusalem Issue Brief,* vol. 6, no. 13 (November 2006).

insensitivity to civilian casualties. This strategy turned out to be wise, and the war played itself out much as Hizballah had predicted.[148]

In the long run, Hizballah's plan was to establish itself in the South militarily, in Beirut and the Bekaa Valley. In southern Lebanon, Hizballah expanded its military infrastructure in accordance with the above plan. Its political and military leadership was located in Beirut,[149] and its training camps and logistics were located in the Bekaa Valley. After the war, both Beirut and the Bekaa Valley regained their functions. South of the Litani River, the expanded UNIFIL presence has made it somewhat more difficult for Hizballah to act as openly as it did before. But, again, UNIFIL is not a major impediment to Hizballah.

Militarily, Hizballah has expanded its capacity in a few key areas.

Offensively. Before the war, Hizballah had a stockpile of approximately 20,000 missiles and rockets with short-, medium-, and long-range capabilities. Most of these were positioned in southern Lebanon, inside civilian storage facilities. The goal was to enable Hizballah to conduct a long-term campaign of firing rockets against Israeli civilian targets in the event of an Israeli attack.

Defensively. Hizballah's defensive structures were also based in southern Lebanon, especially in the mountains around Nabatiye. Their aim was to allow Hizballah to fight Israeli troops through guerrilla warfare, a tactic it subsequently and successfully used while avoiding direct combat. Hizballah's order of battle was based on fielding small, autonomous groups of militants who stepped in and out of uniform and attacked their targets with sophisticated antitank guns and Katyusha rockets. Here, too, a cornerstone of the strategy was to embed the groups in civilian society. This strategy also worked well during the war, and when Israeli forces initiated their ground offensive, they suffered heavy casualties. Hizballah's structure was never tested to its full capacity, since Israel's ground offensive was launched so late in the war that no large-scale fighting occurred.[150] Hizballah then used this to its advantage, claiming that it had remained undefeated in the conflict.

Logistics. The most efficient logistical build-up that Hizballah utilized during the war was the extensive network of bunkers in southern Lebanon. This proved to be very effective. In combination with the hundreds of storage spaces in civilian households, primarily in the South, these structures contributed to a significant degree to Hizballah's success. In addition, the storage facilities and training camps in the Bekaa Valley and around Baalbek were a key logistical hub for matériel that was brought in from Syria.[151] Israel was somewhat more careful with attacking these areas, since it did not wish to drag Syria into the war. But toward the end of the war, and at least on one occasion after the cease-fire, the Israelis attacked these bases with some success. Today, these storage facilities and logistical hubs continue to function without difficulty, and Hizballah has been able to replace practically all the matériel that was lost during the war.

Intelligence. Syrian and Iranian influence is obvious in matters of intelligence. It was in this area that it became evident that these two countries were involved in the war, if not directly in the fighting. At the end of 2005,

148. There is a parallel here to Hamas and the fighting in Gaza in the winter of 2008–2009 and Hamas's tactic of embedding its combatants among the civilian population. The use of so-called human shields has always been an integral part of Hamas's strategy. As expected, the civilian casualties among the Palestinians elicited especially harsh criticism that was directed at Israel during the fighting. See "Hamas—Human Shield Confession," YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0wJXf2nt4Y (accessed June 24, 2009).
149. In Beirut, primarily in the Harat Hreik neighborhood, which was more or less leveled by the Israeli air force during the war.
150. The smaller special units that Israel sent into Lebanon during the war to hunt Katyushas did significantly better and turned out to be an effective weapon against Hizballah. The military leadership, however, did not follow up on these successes.
151. This is still happening and has been since the war's end. The UN's special envoy to the Middle East, Terje Röd-Larsen, stated in the summer of 2008 that Syria's continued transfer of arms to Hizballah was a violation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 and was contributing to continued instability in the region.

Iran and Syria agreed to share signals intelligence with Hizballah, which it put to frequent use during the war. This process preceded the fighting, and during the war, two operational surveillance stations, out of a planned total of four, were already in use. These two stations are located in northern Syria (in the al-Jazirah region) and in the Golan Heights.[152] It was the station in the Golan Heights that mattered the most during the war, since it enabled Hizballah to gain real-time information about Israeli troop movements.

The purpose of these stations is, of course, to gather intelligence from Syria's neighbors, primarily Israel and Turkey. The war gave this initiative a boost, and it turned out to be a vital component in Syrian-Iranian cooperation. The stations are operated by a joint Syrian-Iranian force, composed of Syrian operatives from the external security services and Iranian personnel. Iran provides the lion's share of the financing, which comes from the IRGC espionage department.

The stations answer directly to a joint Syrian-Iranian mechanism for intelligence gathering: the information is sent directly to Syria's chief of military intelligence, without going through the usual intelligence channels, before being passed to the Iranian counterpart. But nevertheless, Hizballah was given access to the information these stations gathered. This was handled by IRGC officers, who functioned as liaison officers. It is worth noting, furthermore, that the power and influence that Hizballah has in Lebanon is largely dependent on these external factors.[153]

After the war, a significant majority of Lebanon's Sunni, Druze, and Christian populations, as well as many Shiites, criticized Hizballah for dragging the country into war. Furthermore, Hizballah's position within Lebanon does not automatically confer significance on Hassan Nasrallah regionally. After the war, Nasrallah did enjoy a temporary surge in popularity, at least rhetorically, in other Arab countries, both from intellectuals and the masses. But that support never really translated into structural and material support. Many still consider Hizballah a tool of the Iranian regime, a sentiment that is even truer after the war, and the group is regarded with great suspicion throughout the region.

Indeed, the war strengthened the belief that Hizballah primarily acts not in the interest of Lebanon but rather in the service of Iran and Syria. Hizballah's ability to determine national issues of war and peace probably came as a rude awakening for many Lebanese, as the debate that followed the war and the political crisis that erupted after the ceasefire illustrated.[154] This, of course, is connected to the outcome of the war itself. Hizballah, which claims to have won the war by virtue of not being crushed, has been able to rearm, and thus has proved itself capable of standing up to the Israeli army. The long-term consequences of this point of view will not become clear until later. If the organization's representatives believe their own rhetoric, Hizballah is more likely to attempt daring new military actions against Israel.

The internal criticism against Hizballah for having dragged Lebanon into an unwanted war is aimed, in part, at Hizballah's close relationship with Iran.[155] For instance, Nasrallah's recognition of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as *Marjaa al-Taqlid*—the highest religious authority in Shia Islam—contradicts most Shiite Muslims' conception of proper religious custom. Khamenei is an important politician, but a lightweight as a religious figure. Most Lebanese Shiites consider Ayatollah Ali Sistani in Iraq or Ayatollah Muhammad-Hussein Fadhlallah in Lebanon vastly more credible as *Marjaa al-Taqlid*.[156]

Nasrallah was also criticized for his dominance within Hizballah as it was pointed out, shortly after

152. As of June 2009, the other two stations—at Bab al-Hawa in northern Syria, close to the border with Turkey, and in the Abu Kamal region in northeastern Syria—are operational. See, for example, *Jane's Defence Weekly*, July 19, 2006.
153. The Israeli army encountered several examples of proof that the Iranians were directly involved in the bugging operations in southern Lebanon, when it investigated several of the bunkers that Hizballah had built in villages and towns around southern Lebanon.
154. See, for example, Yossi Melman, *Haaretz*; Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel"; and Michael Béhe, "State of Denial," *TNR Online*, August 7, 2006.
155. Amir Taheri, "Hezbollah Didn't Win," *Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2006, p. A14.
156. Ibid.

the war, that the ruling council had not properly convened in five years. Furthermore, Nasrallah was criticized for trying to undermine Prime Minister Siniora's economic development project, which was aimed at rebuilding Lebanon as an oasis in a troubled region. Nasrallah's own project is geared toward making Lebanon a frontier state in the clash of civilizations, of which Nasrallah considers himself a part.[157] The criticism against Nasrallah accuses Hizballah, in effect, of sacrificing Lebanon to cater to Iran and its regional ambitions. That criticism has continued since the war and has not fallen silent, even now that Hizballah has joined the government.

Nasrallah was already the object of criticism during the war, when a leading Saudi theologist, Abdallah bin Abd-al-Rahman bin Jabrin issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) against Hizballah. The *fatwa*, issued in response to the question of whether supporting Hizballah was in accordance with Islam, stated that not only was support for Hizballah forbidden, but also that Shiite Muslims were to be considered the enemies of Sunnis. It led to a war of words between various religious interpretations and a discussion about whether "Muslim unity" trumped religious dogma.[158]

The conflict between Sunni and Shiite is almost as old as Islam itself. Hizballah's efforts to become a pan-Islamic movement have to take into account these real tensions, which, at least today, act as a ceiling that will restrict the movement's ability to grow.

That Saudi Arabia is a source of radical and sometimes violent statements about Shia Islam should come as no surprise. The country, whose governing ideology was based on a very orthodox and strict interpretation of Sunni Islam, has long considered Shiites to be apostates. Since Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, the tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia has grown, and Hizballah is considered by leading representatives of the regime and religious authorities in Saudi Arabia as nothing more than an Iranian tool. Here, the criticism is that Iran and Hizballah have set out to fragment Islam and that they are striving to topple the Sunni-dominated regimes around the Middle East. With Iranian representatives such as the late Ayatollah Khomeini and, now, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad, these tensions and conflicts show no sign of abating.

Hizballah, therefore, has a lot to lose if it does not play its cards right. If the electorate were convinced that the party's activities were but a cover behind which to prepare new confrontations with Israel, the future possibilities of the organization in a democratic Lebanon would be jeopardized. It is in this light that one should understand the demands Hizballah made as a precondition to reentering the national unity government it had once shunned. Hizballah demanded a sufficient number of cabinet ministers to block any important decision it views as "hostile."[159] During the spring 2008 crisis, this primarily concerned disarmament and the extent of the Lebanese government's cooperation with the international tribunal investigating Rafiq Hariri's murder. Hizballah's agenda hinges on its ability to preserve its status as an armed resistance group with a somewhat ambiguous relationship to the Lebanese state—a relationship that has meant that the organization, through its members of parliament, has been working to a large degree on preventing acts deemed undesirable. It is an agenda that is mostly aimed at preventing the Lebanese state from diminishing in any way Hizballah's standing in the country.

This was also clear in Hizballah's attitude toward UNSCR 1701, which was worded ambiguously enough that Hizballah could agree to it. As a result of the war and UNSCR 1701, the region has largely returned to the status quo. There now exists a sort of division of labor, in which the Lebanese army functions solely as a policing force, while Hizballah retains its weapons—including the new ones it has acquired since the war ended—and a toothless UNIFIL stands idly by, lacking the power and the political will to act without Hizballah's approval. The only tangible setback for

157. Ibid.; Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel."
158. Bin Jabrin's *fatwa* can be found online at http://www.ibn-jebreen.com (accessed June 30, 2009).
159. International Crisis Group, "Policy Brief No. 20," December 21, 2006, pp. 8–9, 12–13.

Hizballah is that it had to agree not to display its weapons openly.[160] But this is not a major issue, and in no way does it hamper its ability to initiate future actions against Israel.[161]

Syria

For Syria, the years following the 2006 war have underscored the importance of preserving its influence in Lebanon. Even after Syria withdrew its regular forces in 2005, some of its security and intelligence officers remained in Lebanon. Today, practically all military matériel arrives to Hizballah via Syria. Because of this relationship with Hizballah, Damascus plays an important role in Lebanon. Although Syria has hardly any operational control over Hizballah, it exerts at least an indirect influence.

Without a doubt, Syria holds a key to Lebanon's future. There are several questions about how the international community should deal with Syria's role in Lebanon. At the core of this discussion are two main views. On one side, there are those who argue in favor of a broader engagement with Syria and serious talks with Bashar al-Asad's regime. Easing the current sanctions against Syria would be one potential incentive to convince the regime to cooperate. Another incentive would be to remove Syria from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism and acknowledge Syria's "special role" in Lebanon. Of course, this second proposal would not be viewed kindly by large swaths of the Lebanese population.

On the other hand, there are those who claim that such an obsequious policy toward Syria would only make Damascus even more recalcitrant and resist reform even more ferociously, since it would be given more slack without having to pay a real price for it. This camp claims that Syrian involvement in Lebanese affairs has brought more harm than good, and so Syria should not be rewarded with an invitation to the negotiating table before it has shown a genuine will to reform.

This discussion is likely to continue, and both arguments will affect the international community's relationship with Syria. Even if the focus were to shift somewhat toward trying to get Syria to agree to new talks, however, the basic relationship is unlikely to change. The aftermath of Iran's June 12 elections has reintroduced this issue to the agenda, and the decision by the U.S. government to send a new ambassador to Damascus after a four-year hiatus shows Syria's importance as a regional actor.

The recurring political crises in Lebanon have also underscored how important Lebanon is to Syria's role as a regional actor. Through Lebanon, the regime in Damascus is able to influence the situation in the region and undermine any peace deal with Israel that does not also satisfy Syria's claim to the Golan Heights. By serving as a way station for all Iranian support to Hizballah, Syria has considerable control over both Iran's and Hizballah's ability to act. This also allows Damascus to remain open to future changes in course—especially if it believes it can make progress on the Golan Heights dispute by negotiating directly with Israel.[162] Such negotiations have taken place in the past, of course, and it is in this light that the Turkish-mediated indirect negotiations between Israel and Syria of 2006–2008 are best understood. It is essential to Syria to preserve its freedom of action, even at the expense of the ideological purity of the motto "resistance against Israel."

Syria will continue to influence Lebanon's attempts to attain greater political stability at home and reach a peace deal with Israel. The regional peace and reconciliation process hinges on Syria's cooperation, while, at the same time, Syria is a vital link between Iran and Hizballah. So far, the international community's efforts have focused on getting Syria to moderate through negotiations, a tactic that has not yet yielded any tangible results. The alternatives to such a dialogue, such

160. Magnus Norell, "Realities of the UN in Lebanon," PolicyWatch 1466, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 27, 2009.
161. Ibid; and International Crisis Group, "Policy Brief No. 20," pp. 6–7, for an illustration of Hizballah's view of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.
162. In spite of this, it should be underscored that the Syrian regime views its relationship with Iran as very important. Indeed, the two countries signed a new defense agreement on May 28, 2008.

as sanctions, are out of the question at present for both the EU and the United States.

On the contrary, the Syrian regime has reclaimed some of the political influence that it lost after its army was forced to leave Lebanon. This happened in part thanks to the role given to Syria in the Iraq Study Group Report, published in the United States in the fall of 2006, which proposed that the United States increase its engagement with Syria and Iran.[163] But if that happened, Syria and Iran would increase their influence in the region, a development that would hardly help democratization and liberalization in Lebanon or anywhere else.

In keeping with the proposal to give Syria a larger role, U.S. representatives have intensified the United States' relationship with Syria.[164] The Obama administration has already given Syria increased diplomatic attention. The primary goal is to drive a wedge between Iran and Syria and break the deadlock that has arisen as a result of the Gaza crisis in the winter of 2008–2009. Whether this will result in any new strategic changes remains unclear, as Syria is unlikely to take any radical steps that might endanger its close ties with Iran and Hizballah.

The current Syrian regime is, however, prepared to come in from the cold and position itself as a key regional actor. In anticipation of such a development—which would take considerable time, considering the suspicion with which Syria is treated by its neighbors and the Obama administration—President Asad has attempted to distance himself somewhat from Iran, aware of the image, widespread in the Middle East, of Syria as an Iranian lapdog.

Syria's support for Hizballah is not unconditional, a fact of which Hizballah is well aware. The Syrian regime has made it clear that as long as the Golan Heights remain under Israeli occupation, Hizballah can count on its support. Thus, there is a clear link between these two issues in the regional policy of the Syrian regime. For Hizballah, this means that it stands to benefit from continued conflict between Israel and Syria. This fits well with the movement's strategic thinking and its view of itself as a resistance movement whose primary enemy, Israel, must be vanquished to attain peace.[165] At the same time, however, these interests do not always dovetail; even though Hizballah has obstructed the investigation into Hariri's murder, it publicly approved of the concept of a depoliticized tribunal, which ran counter to Syrian interests. Similarly, it accepted UNSCR 1701, in spite of Syrian objections. In the larger regional game, Iran—not Syria—is Hizballah's most important backer. Nevertheless, Hizballah depends on Syrian benevolence and support for its supply of weapons.

Syrian policy regarding the connection between the Golan Heights issue and Hizballah has, for several years, been geared toward preventing any peace negotiations or peace deals that do not take Syrian interests into consideration. This policy has prevented any progress in the peace negotiations. The Syrian regime accomplished this through its military occupation of Lebanon and, later, by keeping its security services in Lebanon to support Hizballah and, if all else fails, to murder its opponents.[166] The murder of Pierre Gemayel in November 2006 was a case in point; Gemayel was slated as a strong anti-Syrian and, by extension, anti-Hizballah presidential candidate. Many Lebanese thought his murder was tied to the Syrian regime. But regardless of who was behind the murder, it ridded both Syria and Hizballah of a vocal critic. The widespread

163. The Iraq Study Group worked on developing a new strategy for the U.S. presence in Iraq.
164. The Democratic speaker of the house, Nancy Pelosi, visited Syria (and other countries in the region) in April 2007, and the Obama administration dispatched a representative to Syria in March 2009. In June, a new ambassador was appointed.
165. Hizballah's second-in-command, Naim Qassem, provided an example of this point of view of Hizballah with regard to Israel in an interview with the International Crisis Group in Beirut on December 8, 2006. See International Crisis Group, "Policy Brief No. 20," p. 6.
166. The murdering of one's political opponents is nothing new. An earlier example is the 1982 murder of the Lebanese President Bashir Gemayel, whose government had just signed a peace treaty with Israel—an agreement that was never implemented because of the assassination. Both Gemayel and Hariri were killed by powerful bombs that also killed tens of others. A later case was the murder of Pierre Gemayel, the minister of industry, in November 2006. The murder was linked to the Syrian regime. See, for example, Jim Hoagland, "Realism, and Values, in Lebanon," *Washington Post*, November 26, 2006, p. B07.

perception among many, perhaps most, Lebanese that Syria was behind the murder is more significant than who actually committed it, and the murder is a clear signal that Syria has not left Lebanon.

But the distrust is not likely to abate as long as the Asad regime continues to allow militant Islamists to infiltrate Lebanon and Iraq.[167] When Syria withdrew from Lebanon in May 2005, after the murder of Rafiq Hariri, it left behind its security services network and most of its agents. That network is still there, and it operates as the Syrian regime's representative in Lebanon. The chief of the security service was then Asad's son-in-law, Col. Assef Shawkat, who has since lost some of his influence in this matter.[168]

It is this intelligence structure that handles the Islamic activists who are smuggled into the country. These activists are intended to be used against UNIFIL—if it were to start patrolling more aggressively and/or disrupt the arms traffic between Syria and Lebanon—and the Lebanese army. Practically, this traffic is managed via a Syrian network in Palestinian refugee camps such as Ain al-Hilweh, where the Palestinians have their own active Islamist groups. A part of this network consists of a newly created logistics hub that, according to intelligence sources in Lebanon and Europe, has ties to al-Qaeda. These activists can also be found in Palestinian refugee camps, such as Burj al-Barajneh, Beddawi, and Mar Elias.

By supporting the movement of Islamists and allowing them to use Syrian territory, however, the Syrian regime could be playing with fire. The risk is not only in challenging the United States and other Western countries, such as France, but perhaps even more significantly that Sunni Muslim extremists may turn against Syria. As a result of the Asads' Alawite background, the Syrian regime has already been targeted by Islamist-tinged insurrectionists[169] and is considered by orthodox Muslims to be full of apostates. There is a risk, therefore, that old tensions might resurface and strike back against the Syrian regime. It is attempting to carefully control the stream of militant jihadists going into Iraq, but it is not very far-fetched to suggest that this task may prove too difficult and that it will become impossible to preserve total control.

If it plays its cards right, Syria can regain its prominence as a regional actor in the strategic game over Lebanon and the Middle East. This is bad news for Lebanon, but for Syria it might mean that it can regain the position it once occupied: an actor that none of its neighbors can afford to ignore. As the Lebanese-born Johns Hopkins University professor Fouad Ajami once said of Syria, "Syria's main asset, in contrast to Egypt's preeminence and Saudi wealth, is its capacity for mischief."[170]

Syria's role is interesting from another point of view, too. The 2006 war brought in its wake an opportunity for Bashar al-Asad to portray Syria as the key country in the larger, strategic struggle against Israel. This, of course, was nothing new; rhetoric about battling Israel has been seen as a fundamental task for all Arab countries and has been around ever since Israel was founded in 1948. But as a result of the 2006 war, Asad was able to revive this rhetoric and apply it to the current situation to claim that Hizballah's victory was a new beginning on the path toward total victory and the destruction of Israel.[171] This did not mean that the

167. See, for example, *Stratfor Morning Intelligence Brief*, December 5, 2006.
168. Intelligence reports from January 2009. The sources cannot be identified due to security procedures. In another round of changes within the Syrian intelligence apparatus, Assef Shawkat was reportedly promoted when finishing his term as head of military intelligence in June 2009. See "Syria Reshuffles Top Security Posts," *The MEMRI Blog*, Middle East Media Research Institute, http://www.thememriblog.org/blog_personal/en/17863.htm (accessed July 9, 2009).
169. During the 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood grew stronger in Syria to the point of posing a threat to Hafiz al-Asad's regime. Consequently, Asad crushed the revolt by bombing its stronghold in the Syrian town of Hama. Over a few days in February 1982, the regime employed infantry, pansar, and artillery divisions to crush the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Thousands of people, the vast majority of whom were innocent civilians, were killed during the operation. For an excellent account of the incident, see Thomas Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).
170. Barry Rubin, "Why Syria Matters," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 4 (December 7, 2006).
171. On August 15, 2006, Bashar al-Asad made a speech to the Syrian association of journalists that was aired live on Syrian television (and translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service). In the speech, Asad welcomed everybody "to the new Middle East," ironically alluding to Shimon Peres's stated hope that the Oslo process would indeed lead to a new Middle East. What Peres meant, of course, was a new peaceful Middle East, whereas Asad's scenario was built on previous radical and militant ideas where war (not peace) with Israel was the goal. The Lebanon war and Hizballah's victory were seen by Asad as the beginning of this "new era" in the Middle East.

Syrian regime wanted an immediate war with Israel, but it did mean that the regime in Damascus was again able to portray itself as the leading regional force in the struggle against Israel. And as a result, it demanded increased influence in the broader political processes that began as a result of the war.

The crucial element of this ideological view of the Arab-Israeli conflict was that Israel was demonized and that the armed struggle still proved to be an effective means to achieve progress. From this it followed that compromises were unnecessary, and that internal reforms—such as democratic reforms, a more liberal economy, and increased human rights protections—could be dismissed as unnecessary and even dangerous diversions from the path to war that would return to Syria part of what it had lost since the late 1990s.[172]

An example of this rhetoric came in Asad's speech to the Syrian Association of Journalists, in August 2006. In his speech, Asad said that only power and violence could force the other side to make concessions and start negotiations. This thinking was nothing new. It reflects earlier ideological principles that were relevant during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when leaders of the pan-Arab movement—with Gamal Abdul Nasser at the helm—repeatedly made similar statements that violence was the only way to defeat Israel and Western imperialism. The only difference now is that yesterday's pan-Arabism has been replaced by today's political Islamism—represented by movements like Hizballah and Hamas.

Thus, the outcome of the war was seen by the Syrian government as confirmation that its political approach had been successful. The cornerstones of this approach were offering as few concessions as possible; employing an uncompromising attitude to negotiations, whereby Syria demanded maximum concessions at the outset while refusing to offer anything other than minimal ones;[173] and close relations with Iran, Hizballah, and Hamas.[174] A continued ambiguous attitude to peace with Israel is a leitmotif.

This position was strengthened following the 2006 war. The Islamists saw the war and its aftermath as confirmation that their militant attitude toward Israel was the right approach. Israel's retreats from Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005 were seen as a success of the armed struggle, not as Israeli attempts to restart the peace process. Since the war in 2006, these ideological arguments have gained new ground in the Middle East. Several years of stubborn insistence from Islamists and their supporters that violence pays off has earned the notion more credibility.[175] What significance this will have for any future peace initiative is difficult to tell.

There can be no doubt, however, that the opportunity to bring about a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians is practically nonexistent at the moment, a reality underscored by the fighting in Gaza during the winter of 2008–2009. Radical Islamism, regardless of whether it is given a piece of political power, will put its mark on the political agenda in the region.

Syria's role in this changing political picture is important. By the mid-1990s, when the Oslo peace process was at its most successful point, there was a belief in change and reform. Peace and democracy would lead the way for the regimes in the region. This turned out not to be the case, and the role that Syria played turned out to be vital. The Syrian regime, first under Hafiz al-Asad and then under Bashar al-Asad, never fully supported the powers of reform that the Oslo process had strengthened. On the contrary, Syria exploited the space that the West afforded it as

172. See note 171.
173. It is worth noting that these sentiments mirror the ideas of Bashar al-Asad's father, Hafiz al-Asad (who died in 2000). At a meeting with the British ambassador to Syria in 1986, Hafiz said, "If I were prime minister of Israel with its military superiority and the support of the world's number one power, I would not make one single concession." Christopher M. Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), p. 212.
174. The external leadership of Hamas is still based in Damascus, which gives the Asad regime considerable influence over the organization. This was shown during the fighting in Gaza in 2008–2009, when the leadership in Gaza wanted a ceasefire after only about a week, but was constantly overruled by Khaled Mashal and the other leaders in Damascus.
175. As mentioned earlier, the militant Islamists view previous events, such as the Israeli withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza, as the result of this "armed struggle," which strengthens the Islamic world's view of the conflict with Israel as an existential struggle between good and evil.

an incentive to engage with the peace process. It happily accepted the economic benefits that were offered, but it never changed the fundamental premise of its politics. This meant that it retained its control over Lebanon, continued to support radical Islamists such as Hamas and, of course, Hizballah, and deepened its relationship with Iran. That it continued the same policies—save for a few concessions during the 1991 Gulf War and peace negotiations with Israel in the late 1990s—shows that the regime never seriously intended to abandon its current course.

Had Syria instead chosen to start working to reform its role in the region, it would have marked a significant change. Since this was never seriously considered, however, Lebanon never had a chance to change course after the 2006 war and transform the conflict's result into something positive. Instead, Syria's policy made it impossible for the Lebanese government to reclaim control over the country, and it was ultimately forced to include Hizballah in the government.

Syria's gamble—to support radical Islamists who are sworn enemies of peace with Israel, while taking part in peace talks with Israel—has been successful, from the point of view of the regime in Damascus. Staying in power is the name of the game, and Syria, even though it is playing both sides, has been able to continue its policy without suffering any real consequences, such as serious multilateral sanctions or direct military threats.

The Syrian regime continues to exhibit a stubborn inability, or rather a refusal, to understand how Israel works politically. Instead, Damascus makes its decisions based on wishful thinking of how things *ought to be*. This is also nothing new. As early as the 1960s, there was widespread resistance in the Arab world to recognizing Israel's existence. Israel was viewed as weak and incapable of defending itself, and it was only a matter of time, some thought, before it would be forced to its knees and its population would have to flee. In previous decades, it has been the pan-Arabic, nationalist forces that stood for this point of view. Today, and even more so since the 2006 war, it is the radical Islamists who represent it. The key concept is that Israel and the West are hostile to Islam and weak.[176] It follows, then, that if only enough Israelis are killed, the country will collapse.

This is the main reason why terrorism—defined for the purposes of this study as attacks against noncombatants—has been used in the past and is still being used today. Terrorism has been used not because the perpetrators are "evil," but because it is considered to be an efficient tactic.[177] The only real difference between the rhetoric of the earlier Arab nationalists and today's Islamists is that today the focus is religious, that is, that Islamism can succeed where Arab nationalism failed. In addition to the obvious differences in content between these two ideological currents, the basic premises are similar. First, the "Arab-Muslim world" is threatened by a conspiracy led by the United States and Israel and, to some extent, the West at large. Second, there is an internal enemy in the form of moderate Arab leaders who threaten internal cohesion and whose less grand ambitions prove that they are traitors. Only those who are prepared to continue the struggle against Israel by any means necessary can be considered righteous and worthy of respect for maintaining the true Arab and Muslim values. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the revolutionary states of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq stood against the reactionary monarchies of Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Today, it is Iran, Syria, and the nonstate actors Hizballah and Hamas that stand against Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

What a series of Syrian regimes has succeeded in doing—and in this they have been fairly consistent—is to preserve Syria's position between these two poles in order to continue playing a key role in the region, if

176. There are many examples of how this kind of reasoning has lived on since the 1950s and 1960s. It is particularly interesting to see how the past rhetoric of the Palestine Liberation Organization is almost identical to the current rhetoric of the Islamists.
177. As early as 1968, Yasser Arafat said that if the Palestinians attacked civilian targets, the Israeli economy would be weakened, which would create and maintain a climate of tension and anxiety that would eventually lead to a situation in which life in Israel would become unbearable (Rubin, "Why Syria Matters," p. 16). Half a century later, Hizballah is using the same language and ideological justification for attacks against civilans in Israel (ibid., p. 16). Furthermore, this has been the tactic used by Hamas when it has been governing Gaza. Rocketfire against Israeli communities did not provide any military benefits. Not even during the fighting in winter 2008–2009 did Hamas fire on the Israeli army, but it continued to target Israeli noncombatants.

only as an actor that cannot be ignored. Although Syria has primarily exerted a negative influence, its various governments have indisputably been able to navigate the murky waters of Middle Eastern politics.

In contrast to the position of Iran, where the revolutionary fire still has a measure of influence on practical politics, Syria's position is significantly more difficult to analyze. The pragmatism that was such an apparent and decisive part of Hafiz al-Asad's presidency is only partially evident in Bashar al-Asad's. Bashar has a much closer relationship to Hizballah's leader, Nasrallah, than Hafiz ever did, and his relationship with Tehran has made Iran the leading force in the alliance, something that Hafiz never allowed. Whereas Hafiz al-Asad managed to retain Syrian independence vis-à-vis other actors without losing sight of the goal to reclaim the Golan Heights, Bashar has sided decisively with the radicals. As a result, Syria may have a harder time engaging in serious peace negotiations with Israel.

Another problem for Syria is that the past decades of following a rejectionist policy toward Israel—now being repeated under the guise of Islamism—brought with them a series of failures. These policies rested on the ideological premise that if only the Arabs and Muslims were prepared to exert themselves fully in defeating Israel, the outcome would be a given. Fifty years later, the results of that policy are clear: Israel is stronger economically, politically, and militarily than ever before. Both Jordan and Lebanon have suffered civil wars. All the countries that fought Israel on the battlefield have been defeated. The region has experienced economic recessions, material losses, and human suffering at the hands of repressive, undemocratic regimes. As the Islamists adopt the same policies as past Arab rulers, there is already proof that they will be no more successful than those who tried them before, when the policies were dressed in the garb of nationalism. The result will be more struggle and suffering in exchange for a reward that might not come in ten or one hundred years—if ever—and at the price of continued suffering. If the focus is on "resistance" against Israel and the West, there is little room for political or economic reform.[178]

This policy has turned out to be a sure-fire way to prevent economic and political growth and democratization across the region. But it has also been an effective method for some regimes, such as Syria, to maintain power. Demonizing Israel, an integral part of this policy, makes peace more difficult to achieve. That is, after all, the point of the policy.

Today's Islamic ideology, which in many parts echoes yesterday's Arab nationalism, can be summed up in a few key points. First, a significant number of radical Islamist movements have gained ground during the last decades.[179] Furthermore, the hate and mistrust of the United States, Israel, and the West has increased, at least compared to the 1990s, when there was a widespread belief that peace between Israel and Arab countries was possible. This hate and mistrust has been expressed not only verbally but also in the form of terrorist attacks, which are justified by painting the United States, Israel, and the West as dangerous enemies of the entire "Muslim world."[180] Some believe that the ends justify the means, and that violence and terrorism are necessary in order to achieve a total victory. From this follows a belief that the coming revolution will unify Muslim countries. Radical Islamists deeply mistrust diplomatic solutions and compromise, a sentiment based on the notion that in refusing to compromise, there is always the possibility that, ultimately, one will get everything one wants.[181] An uncompromising position testifies to strength and steadfastness

178. The Egyptian playwright Ali Salem, whose work is heavily censored in his home country, wrote of this ideological attitude, "You won't ask questions for a simple reason. In a state of war, no one argues . . . or asks questions. 'Is this the right time, man? . . . Get back to the trench immediately!'" Ali Salem, "My Drive to Israel," *Middle East Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2002).
179. Norell, *Radical Islamist Movements in the Middle East*.
180. It might be worth pointing out that the expression "the Muslim world" is an expression favored by the Islamists themselves. The idea that all Muslims, irrespective of where they live—be it Michigan, Afghanistan, or Dubai—would have more in common with each other than with their conationals is a recurring theme among radical Islamists. It constitutes an important rhetorical tool to prove that the Muslim *umma* it is fighting for trumps the nation-state and that it is the duty of all Muslims to put their duty toward this *umma* before national loyalties.
181. A good example of this is the reception that the U.S. President Barack Obama's overtures (presented in his June 4 speech in Cairo, for example) received in Muslim countries. He was mocked by the radical Islamists and in countries like Iran for his statements regarding a "new era" in the relations between the United States and Muslim countries, which received his statements with great suspicion.

in the face of the enemy. In the end, this ideological outlook results in an ever more inhospitable environment for democratization, reform, and peace initiatives—none of which was desirable to past dictators and nationalist regimes and none of which is desirable to today's Islamists.

It remains to be seen, then, how the Syrian regime will handle the fact that it is the radical Islamists who define the parameters of the conflict.

Iran

Historically and culturally Shiite, Persian-ruled Iran—only approximately half its population is ethnically Persian—has had a significant influence in the Middle East. With its aggressive rhetoric, the Islamic Republic is viewed by the international community as a threat. Its religiously and ideologically based politics have put off the United States, Israel, and neighboring regimes, as has its support for Hizballah in Lebanon. Iran, for its part, considers itself under assault from the United States and hounded by pro-West forces in the region.[182]

The political rhetoric from the Iranian leadership has changed since the 2005 presidential elections. President Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad's statements about Israel and the Holocaust and about his country's right to enrich uranium have been cause for international concern. Several of the most racist and anti-Semitic statements that have been made by the president, however, are commonly used by representatives of the Iranian regime, too.[183]

Regional stability and security ought to be in Iran's interest, and there are some positive signs. The country has, for instance, played a constructive role in the process of rebuilding Afghanistan. At the same time, however, it is actively working against the peace process in the Middle East, and it supports both Hizballah and Hamas in their campaign against Israel. Tehran claims to respect UNSCR 1701 regarding Lebanon, but it continues to supply Hizballah with arms.[184] In addition, the social and economic support that Iran gives Hizballah allows it to retain its influence in Lebanon.[185]

In contrast to what several intelligence experts and diplomats have claimed over the years, Iran has shown that it is not above supplying Hizballah and other nonstate organizations with very sophisticated equipment. The Chinese C-802 missile that was used to nearly sink an Israeli ship in an attack on July 14, 2006, for example, was supplied by Iran. Another example is the more advanced rockets and missiles that the Palestinian Hamas was given during the six-month ceasefire with Israel.

It became apparent that Iran is trying to build a missile defense system that could also be used by non-Iranian actors in January 2008, when Israel tested its new Jericho III missile, which has a range that covers all of Iran. Commenting on the test, the then head of the IRGC, Mohsen Rezai, said that it did not alter the balance of power. He also claimed that Iran could still annihilate Israel with missiles launched from Syria and that, in the event of a U.S. or Israeli attack against Iran, a retaliatory strike would also come from Hizballah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad.[186] The openness with which an official representative of the Iranian regime had spoken revealed the extent of Iran's influence over nonstate groups. And it was a clear warning to the world not to get in the way of Iran's regional ambitions.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry has the primary responsibility to coordinate military support to

182. Not least since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with U.S. troops deployed in both countries, the Iranian regime has often pointed to "the American threat."
183. The most common statements along those lines regard the Holocaust, which Ahmadinezhad repeatedly has denied, and statements to the effect that Israel should be destroyed.
184. The Iranian embassy in Beirut works as a liaison office between Iran and Hizballah. Several Iranian intelligence agents are stationed there as a matter of course. There are four main actors involved in the logistical and financial support to Hizballah: the Iranian foreign ministry, defense ministry, the IRGC, and VEVAK, the government body controlling the Iranian security services. Another important reason why Iran claims to support UN Security Council Resolution 1701 was the fact that no serious measures were taken to prevent the weapons transports to Hizballah. As a result, the most awkward parts of the resolution never became an issue for Iran and Hizballah.
185. The main part of this support was channeled via something called *Jihad-i Sazendagi*, loosely translated as "rebuilding jihad." After the 2006 war, it was the organization that was the quickest to provide funds for the reconstruction efforts for the Shiite population in southern Lebanon.
186. Middle East Media Research Institute, "Special Dispatch—No. 1820," January 23, 2008.

Hizballah. It is through the foreign ministry that the people who are involved in Iranian intelligence in Lebanon receive their diplomatic covers.[187]

Of particular interest to this study are the operatives in the IRGC's Qods (Jerusalem) Force. This force is interwoven with the Iranian General Staff, and its main task is to coordinate Iranian operations abroad, including terrorist attacks.[188] Qods also trains foreigners to undertake operations or participate in regular combat for Iran. It is divided into three main branches: intelligence, training, and finance, and each, in turn, is divided into one branch for Iran and one that deals with foreign operations. All three branches are led by high-ranking military officers who often hold the rank of brigadier-general. In addition to its military branches, Qods has a political branch called "General Staff for the Export of the Revolution." This branch establishes links with individuals and organizations interested in spreading the Islamic Revolution. This, of course, also concerns regions that are not Shiite. Palestinian Hamas and some other parts of the Muslim Brotherhood are examples of organizations that are of interest to Iran. After the fighting in Gaza in 2008–2009, this support has gained increased significance, since it is viewed by Iran as an efficient way of undermining Fatah and the other, more moderate forces within the Palestinian movement.[189]

Furthermore, there are differences in how the military hardware and the political, civilian, and social aid are distributed. The military support is flown to Syria from Iran before it is driven into Lebanon. The town of Baalbek is a center for this distribution. Palestinian groups that inhabit both sides of the Syrian-Lebanese border carry out a significant portion of these transports. These groups operate beyond the control of the UN and the Lebanese army, which is formally supposed to control the border. But no troops patrol the border, and the arms transports are carried out without any involvement from the UN or the Lebanese government.[190] Hizballah's indiscreet modus operandi in carrying out these transports and its clearly stated goal to prepare for a continued conflict with Israel are clear indications of the strength it has gained in Lebanon thanks to Iranian support.[191] When it comes to transporting weapons, there is no real need for a private foundation or a private business to serve as a cover. Instead, Hizballah uses the safest and most direct route, as described above.

After the war, when much of Hizballah's matériel had been destroyed or captured, the organization expended great effort to replace its supplies.[192] Hizballah's scattering of storage facilities around the area turned out to be very successful during and after the war. Hizballah does not want to provoke UNIFIL, and this tactic allows its operatives to move around unarmed.[193]

Nonmilitary aid, however, is distributed mostly through unofficial businesses or foundations, such as the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee and the Iranian Red Crescent. With both military and nonmilitary aid, the Iranian embassy in Damascus is a key link in the transport chain. Especially after the war, it is safer to use Damascus than Beirut, since it is more difficult for foreign intelligence agencies to monitor transports there.

Finally, there are a number of offices around Lebanon (primarily in the southern suburbs of Beirut and

187. This, of course, goes for all other countries in which Iran's security services are active.
188. An unusual insight into Qods activities came in January 2009, when the international press told of Iranian operations directed against Israeli interests in Europe and Central Asia. These operations were prevented thanks to espionage between several countries (which were not named in the reports). http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/059589.html (accessed June 25, 2009).
189. An example of the widespread nature of this policy of spreading the revolution can be seen in the many "directories" concerned with various parts of the world. There are, among other things, directories for Iraq, Palestine (including Jordan and Lebanon), Turkey, Afghanistan (including Pakistan and the Indian subcontinent), the West (Europe and the United States), North Africa (including Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, and Morocco), the Arabian Peninsula, and the republics of the former Soviet Union.
190. Norell, PolicyWatch 1466.
191. One example of how openly this is done came in January 2009, when Ibrahim al-Amin, a close associate of Hassan Nasrallah and editor of *al-Akhbar*, wrote, "The actions in the field are ongoing, the ones out in the open and the ones that remain hidden in southern Lebanon, especially in the area in which UNIFIL operates south of the Litani River" (ibid.).
192. Some important locations for such storages include the villages of Bint Jbeil and Rmaich.
193. Norell, PolicyWatch 1466.

in southern Lebanon) that are tied directly to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.[194] These offices function as official religious headquarters for him, but they are also used by various branches of the Iranian security services active in Lebanon. This is where intelligence gathering is coordinated, where various political and security-related meetings take place, and where surveillance of Iran and Hizballah's potential enemies is carried out. Lebanese sources have reported that the offices are also used to detain Lebanese prisoners.[195]

Hizballah was built up with the aid of the Iranian intelligence services in 1982, during the Lebanese civil war.[196] The IRGC trained and financed Hizballah in an effort to protect Shiites in Lebanon and fight Israel's presence there. Hizballah's development, from a purely military movement in the early 1980s to a political and military actor of note, has exceeded Iran's expectations. Today, Hizballah is an increasingly important actor in the regional power struggle, in which Iran is involved. Hizballah's position in Lebanon allows Iran to keep the conflict with Israel alive and prevent any attempt to secure a long-term peace process among Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

In the confrontation with the United States and the West over the Iranian nuclear program, Iran also benefits from having access to a second front in Lebanon. The political conflict in Lebanon is always played out against the backdrop of this larger regional conflict. Through both Iraq and Lebanon, Iran is able to pressure the United States and the West if the latter increase their pressure to end Iran's nuclear program. So far, the strategy has been very successful.[197]

Since 1979, Iran's regional ambitions and the larger conflict with the West (primarily with Israel and the United States) have constituted a framework for Iranian politics. These have also determined much of Iran's tactical and strategic considerations.[198] The acquisition of nuclear weapons has been a key factor in this political game.[199]

The Nuclear Weapons Issue. In 2002, it was revealed that, for the previous eighteen years, Iran had managed to keep its nuclear activities and facilities hidden from the UN's nuclear proliferation watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). By the end of 2004, Iran reached an agreement with three EU countries—Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—to freeze its uranium enrichment program. The agreement was to serve as the foundation for negotiations over a long-term solution. Six months later, however, Iran abandoned the freeze, and the negotiations ended. At the beginning of 2006, the IAEA leadership reported the issue to the UN Security Council. Since continued attempts to negotiate did not move the matter forward, the Security Council adopted UNSCR 1696 on July 31, a binding resolution calling for Iran to end its enrichment program. Noncompliance would result in another resolution on sanctions.

Iran's answer to the offer came at the end of August of the same year, and it was sufficiently ambiguous to keep further sanctions at bay for a while longer. Iran has continued its efforts to avoid a political escalation that could lead to sanctions. At the same time, however, it has continued its efforts to acquire nuclear technology.

194. Ali Khamenei is the highest so-called *Marjaa al-Taqlid*, or "source of imitation," and therefore, a religious authority of note.
195. Interviews in Washington, D.C., in January and February 2009. The informants will remain anonymous for security reasons.
196. The civil war took place between 1975 and 1990.
197. Also, the fighting in Gaza can be seen in the light of this larger regional conflict. It is a conflict that pits Iran with its regional ambitions against Sunni-dominated countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. None of this is new, but there is no doubt that Iran, through its support of Hamas and other radical Sunni groups, is trying to create positions from which its influence can be expanded. This is relevant not least in undermining the resistance against Iranian nuclear weapons. The fighting in Gaza temporarily shifted the spotlight away from the problem. A report from the French National Assembly with regard to Iran claimed that the country could reach a breakthrough already in 2009. The report was published shortly after the fighting broke out in December 2008 and was therefore shunted aside, which suited the regime in Tehran perfectly.
198. These basic ideological considerations at the time of the Islamic Revolution did not necessarily have to lead to a deep conflict with the United States, which did occur. At that time, the United States was not interested in getting into a conflict with Iran and would have accepted an Islamic regime if only this regime had not tried to seek the overthrow of its neighbors, made great efforts to export its revolution, and worked against an Israeli-Palestinian peace (which was a top priority of President Jimmy Carter at the time).
199. The ambitious project to modernize Iran and make the country into a regional superpower was begun already during the reign of the former Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This was true as well for the nuclear program.

So far, these diplomatic initiatives have not yielded any results, and it is difficult to see how they could lead to a radical change in Iran's behavior. For Iran, having nuclear technology is a matter of prestige, and having nuclear weapons would immediately give it a much stronger position in the region.

UNSCR 1696 demanded that Iran cease all uranium enrichment, including nuclear research and development, within a month. If Iran did not agree to this, the UN would take appropriate measures to compel Iran to adhere to the resolution. Although Iran—through President Ahmadinezhad and other representatives—has denied that it wishes to develop nuclear weapons, it has for years claimed the right to continue its research and development, which most likely will lead to its having nuclear weapons within a few years. As a signatory to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, Iran has the right to develop nuclear technology for peaceful means, with international safeguards.

The deadline that UNSCR 1696 stipulated for Iran to change its policy came and went. Less than five months later, on December 25, the Security Council passed UNSCR 1737, which levied sanctions against the Iranian regime for not having complied with previous resolutions. Iran's response to UNSCR 1737 was quick. President Ahmadinezhad claimed that it would do no damage to Iran and that those who voted for it would come to regret doing so. Iran was given sixty days to meet the demands of UNSCR 1737. It hardly came as a surprise that when the deadline arrived on February 21, 2007, Iran once again refused to comply with the UN. The next day, the IAEA published a new report showing that Iran was continuing with its uranium enrichment and that approximately a thousand centrifuges were operational at its nuclear facility in Natanz—more than the IAEA and other independent experts had believed that Iran possessed.

The debate about whether Iran will acquire nuclear weapons has continued for many years. Regardless of the final result of this discussion, there can be no doubt that Iran will have the capacity to produce nuclear weapons within the foreseeable future, barring any unforeseen incidents. When Iran reaches "the point of no return" in its nuclear research, it will have mastered the entire nuclear cycle—when enriched uranium can be manufactured and stored far from the nuclear installations themselves. At that stage, the installations will become practically impossible to find. Based on open sources and barring any unforeseen developments, within another two or so years after having passed that point, Iran will have accumulated enough fissile material to manufacture a nuclear bomb.

So far, none of the attempts to slow down or stop Iran's progress have been successful, as the many UN resolutions have made clear. The question is whether the international community considers the acquisition of nuclear weapons to be worse than the consequences of a military intervention, and the answer will determine what will be done about Iran's nuclear program in the future. If the UN and others are serious about their rhetoric, Iran will have to be stopped before it acquires nuclear weapons, but not necessarily before it has acquired the capacity to develop them. The problem lies not with a nuclear Iran per se but with a nuclear Iran under the present regime. If the current regime were to acquire nuclear weapons, such a development would surely result in a regional nuclear arms race. Several countries, such as Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, have made no secret of this. These countries, along with practically all others in the region, view Iran's nuclear initiative as part of its longstanding ambition to become a regional superpower. Armed with nuclear weapons, Iran's ambitions would be much more difficult for neighbors to manage.

The question is, what are the alternatives? Which actors can do sufficient damage to Iran's nuclear weapons program to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and what would be the results of a military attack?

If the various diplomatic tracks being pursued do not result in any breakthrough—and nothing suggests that they will—and the international community nevertheless chooses not to resort to force to stop Iran, then conflicts in the future cannot be ruled out. It might turn out that the Iranian regime really does mean what its representatives say: that Israel is to be destroyed, even if it comes at a steep cost to Iran. Although this is not a likely alternative at the

moment—there are more factors against it than for—it cannot be dismissed entirely.

It might also turn out that a diplomatic failure will bring about a preemptive Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. The international community has experienced one Holocaust already in the face of a more or less indifferent world. And so it might slip into a military confrontation that no one really wants but that the Israelis—reluctant to take the risk that Iran will not act in accordance with its rhetoric and military build-up—see as unavoidable. Even though one should not equate rhetoric with action, it may prove difficult to demand that the Israelis hold off on an attack indefinitely, given that the current Iranian regime continues to deny the Holocaust and is acquiring the military capacity to carry one out. Since the war in Lebanon in 2006, this rhetoric has continued unabated, even in the UN General Assembly. Iran's allies in the region, such as Hizballah and Hamas, have turned up the pressure on several occasions, for instance after the fighting in Gaza during the spring of 2008 and the winter of 2008–2009.

It is hardly possible to bring Iran's nuclear weapons process to a complete halt with a military strike. In contrast to the Israeli attack on the Iraqi reactor in Osiraq in 1981, which knocked out the Iraqi nuclear weapons program at an early stage, no such possibility exists for Iran. Most likely, it is already too late, since Iran has let the nuclear genie out of the bottle. The aim of a military strike, then, would be to cause enough damage to stall Iran's nuclear development long enough for a new regime, more open to compromise, to take the old one's place.

With two groups of aircraft carriers in the area, the United States is, of course, in a position to attack Iran and take out part of its capabilities. And even though representatives of the Bush and Obama administrations have said several times that military action is not imminent, the U.S. military presence sends the message that it can strike at any time.

The only other actor with the ability to seriously weaken Iran's nuclear weapons program is Israel. Since 1981, the Israeli air force has improved, and it now has a greater capacity. Israel also has an incentive: President Ahmadinezhad and several other representatives of the Iranian regime never miss an opportunity to speak in favor of a world without Israel.

A military attack, even a limited one, will inevitably have incalculable repercussions for the whole region. The risk that an attack would cause a major regional war might not be as great as the opponents of the military option usually claim. More important, however, the danger of a military attack would lead to internal unrest around the region. In such a situation, many radical groups would be strengthened in their claim that the West and Israel are the real enemies. It does not take a major war to cause political convulsions in the Middle East. On the basic issue—preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons—there is a fairly widespread consensus.

These are all considerations that Iran has to take into account. So far, Tehran has used both sticks and carrots in its attempts to spread its influence in the region. The message to its immediate neighbors is different from what is transmitted to its enemies. In dealing with the latter, Iran roots its rhetoric in an attempt to portray itself as a formidable opponent that the rest of the world should not challenge. But the various economic sanctions have affected Iran. And despite the often high price of oil in recent years, which has provided Iran with a considerable windfall, Ahmadinezhad has been unable to deliver the improvements in social welfare and economic development that he promised in the 2005 elections.

The results of the latest elections revealed the widespread dissatisfaction with the current government. Disdain for Ahmadinezhad's policies and rhetoric can also be found on various Iranian blogs and websites, based in Iran and abroad. Iranians particularly dislike his denial of the Holocaust and his anti-Semitic hate speech, which, they feel, makes the country look ridiculous. Dissatisfaction with Ahmadinezhad was palpable before the presidential election in June 2009. His margin of reelection was so large that it could not have been achieved without tampering with the results, suggesting that the powers that be, spearheaded by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, were well aware of

Ahmadinezhad's unpopularity. Regardless of the price, they felt that even the minor reforms to the ruling religious structure that Ahmadinezhad's competitors desired were best avoided. The continued protests and demonstrations against the perceived cheating may not threaten the regime itself, and they are first and foremost a protest against Iran's oppressive religious establishment, not its nuclear program per se.

A military strike, then, is an option of last resort to stop Iran. In recent years, various multilateral organizations have tried, through negotiations, to shift Iran's focus away from acquiring the technical know-how to produce nuclear weapons. Iran, meanwhile, has used this to stall for time and avoid sanctions while completing its nuclear program. If and when Iran finally acquires the ability to produce nuclear weapons, it will immediately have strengthened its position in the region.

This means that if various diplomatic and political initiatives fail to prevent the current Iranian regime from developing nuclear weapons, a military strike might be the only option left. As has been shown, the ability to prevent such a development through diplomacy has shrunk considerably in recent years. At the same time, even if there are no diplomatic aces up anyone's sleeve, the chances are good that increased economic and political pressure will cause the regime to implode. Ahmadinezhad is not a dictator, and the manipulations after the June elections showed that real power rests with the Guardian Council and the supreme leader, not the president, and that even within the ruling circles there are tensions.

During Ahmadinezhad's presidency, there has been, even at the highest political level, dissatisfaction with the president's use of the nuclear issue to divert attention from shortcomings closer to the hearts of the Iranian people: a lack of economic development and the problems related to the sanctions that have been imposed on Iran. These sanctions are, in part, a result of Ahmadinezhad's confrontational stance. Reports from Iran indicate that even Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has instructed the president to tone down the rhetoric and leave the nuclear issue to those who are handling the negotiations with the UN and the West.

Another sign that the political elite's criticism of the president has become tougher came when Khamenei's most important foreign policy advisor, Ali Akbar Velayati, after a meeting with Khamenei declared that the Holocaust was a historical fact and severely criticized those who questioned it. This, however, has not significantly prevented the president from continuing to make hateful statements. Nevertheless, it highlights the internal frictions that no government in Tehran can overlook.

Whether the contested and manipulated reelection of Ahmadinezhad will change anything has yet to be determined. The continued demonstrations and protests may well have an impact in the long run. These protests reveal more than just dissatisfaction with the regime's flagrant cheating and the brutal crackdown. They are a powerful protest against the fundamental Islamist idea that politics can be governed by religion, or rather, that God's human interpreters, in the form of religious scholars, should have the last word when it comes to political development. It is therefore possible that Ahmadinezhad will be the last president representing this traditional line of thinking.

Iranian Support for Hizballah. Iran's influence in Lebanon goes far beyond mere military and economic aid. Hizballah, after all, owes its very existence to support from Iran.

This support is visible all over Lebanon.[200] Almost every single Iranian department has its own office in Beirut.[201] In addition to these quasi-official government offices, several Iranian institutions are funded by Tehran, although they operate independent of direct government control, . These include the Iranian Red Crescent and the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, which focus on education and propaganda. Also in this group is al-Alam, the Arabic-language television station started by Tehran in 2004, whose offices are right beside the Iranian embassy in Beirut.[202]

200. Mehdi Khalaji, "Iran's Shadow Government in Lebanon," PolicyWatch 1124, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 19, 2006.
201. This is true, for instance, for the departments of education, health, culture, intelligence, and communication.
202. Khalaji, PolicyWatch 1124.

Iranian interests in Lebanon thus reach far beyond the purely military aspects and the support for resistance against Israel. Of much greater significance to Hizballah's popularity is the support that comes from Iran in the form of various social activities and charity organizations.

Iran's Lebanon policy has undermined regional political stability, and its one-sided support for Hizballah has resulted in more confrontation. A good example of the kind of criticism often leveled against these policies and of the widespread suspicion of Iran comes from Othman al-Omeir, the Saudi editor of the reform-minded website "Elaph." In an opinion piece published in early 2007, he wrote that Iran is trying to propagate its Shiism only as a way to reach political goals and accused Iran of meddling in Lebanese and Iraqi domestic affairs.[203] In so doing, he touched on the two major issues around which Arab criticism of Iran revolves. Iran's religious leaders are seen as determined to spread their faith and political influence as far as possible. The statements that representatives of Iran and Hizballah made after the war, which claimed a great victory and the right to speak for all Muslims, proved to many Middle Eastern countries that Iran is behaving aggressively.

What concerns advocates of democracy in Lebanon is thus not only Hizballah's military power, but also its ideological links to Iran.[204] Even if Hizballah were to be disarmed one day—either as a result of a political agreement or because Israel wipes out the military branch in another confrontation—Hizballah's social and political capital, intimately linked to Iranian interests and influence, will enable it to maintain its decisive role in Lebanese politics. Since Hizballah's rhetoric and policies are based on a continued confrontation with Israel and the forceful resistance to peace agreements, such a situation would continue to pose a political threat.

The problem for reformers in Lebanon is exacerbated by the fact that Iran, while using Lebanon to pressure other countries, is also working to turn Lebanon into a "frontier state" in its struggle against Israel. Tehran's support for Hizballah—its primary tool—has meant that Hizballah has gained significance as a political party. Now, Hizballah has come to play the leading role in government coalitions since it achieved a "blocking minority" of ministers in the Lebanese cabinet following the Doha agreement in 2008. If Iran is forced to discontinue its support of Hizballah and dismantle its shadow government in Lebanon, the picture could change. But this is unlikely to occur in the near future.

Today, Tehran has attained the partial fulfillment of many of its regional goals. Iran has expanded its influence in the region, while its Arab neighbors, seen in a larger context, have lost regional and international influence. In spite of the resistance and distrust that this expansionist policy has caused, Iran has acquired a position in the region that makes it practically impossible to ignore Iranian wishes when formulating regional policies. This can be observed in everything from Iran's status as special observer at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) meetings to the Obama administration's willingness to talk to Iran. One important reason for these developments is the recognition that Iran's position is too strong to ignore. In addition, the regime changes in Iraq and Afghanistan ridded Iran of uncomfortable neighbors, even though it meant that U.S. troops were stationed close to its borders.

Iran's ambitions have increased regional tensions. Suspicion of Iran's long-term ambitions is, as has been pointed out, deep. Thanks to the Iranian regime's expansionist politics, the Sunni-Shiite conflict has been brought to the foreground. Several representatives of the Sunni-led regimes in the Middle East have warned that an Iranian-led alliance is threatening Arab countries.[205] They point out that the Shiites, who make up

203. Y. Carmon, H. Varulkar, Y. Mansharof, and Y. Yehoshua, "The Middle East on a Collision Course: The Saudi Position," *Inquiry and Analysis,* no. 319 (January 31, 2007), Middle East Media Research Institute.
204. This comes out in a number of ways. The most obvious example of how close the links are between Hizballah and Iran came at a meeting between Hassan Nasrallah and Iran's religious leader, Ali Khamenei, in 2001. At the meeting, Nasrallah publicly kissed Khamenei's hand, a gesture that symbolizes that Nasrallah recognizes Khamenei as his leader (Khalaji, PolicyWatch 1124).
205. Examples of such statements can be found from everyone from the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, to King Abdullah of Jordan. Whereas Zarqawi (and many other radical leaders with him) openly advocated jihad against the Shiites (thereby denying that they were Muslims), Abdullah was more cautious and warned of an Iranian threat against Arab countries. See Barry Rubin, "Iran: The Rise of a Regional Power," *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10, no. 3 (September 2006).

only about 10 percent of all Muslims, are the majority in Iran, Iraq, Oman, and Bahrain, and have large minorities in Lebanon (where the Shiites are likely the largest group), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. The implication is that they are a potential fifth column. Religious authorities have never disputed such statements, and so they are considered truths.

To get around these very real problems, the regime in Iran has emphasized its Muslim identity and portrayed itself as a representative of all Muslims fighting against U.S. and Western influence in the region. These efforts include anything from the constant pinpricks Iran directs at European countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, to the more expansive support it gives to Hizballah and Hamas. Iran, then, is Muslim first, Iranian second. As was mentioned above, it is far from certain that this message will be enough to convince other, Sunni-dominated countries in the region, but it has doubtlessly contributed to the perception of Iran by many Muslims as one of the few powers that dare challenge Israel. On this issue, at least, Iran has largely managed to bridge the Sunni-Shiite divide.

Iran is the Middle East's only real regional superpower since no Arab state can claim to have that status, especially after the years of Arab nationalism à la Gamal Abdul Nasser and after Saddam Hussein's fall from power in 2003.[206] Iran has significantly expanded its influence in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, and Afghanistan. It has developed a close alliance with Syria that ensures that the conflict with Israel is kept alive and that any serious peace initiatives will fail. In the GCC region, Iran is developing an increasingly close relationship with Qatar.

Relatively speaking, Iran has significantly more power today than ever before in the history of the Islamic Republic. This has been achieved by a regime that openly has sought conflict with the United States, supports terrorist organizations,[207] and equally openly works to prevent Arab-Israeli peace.

Role of the UN

The UN's involvement in Lebanon is longstanding. Of most interest to this study is the period from 1978 (when the first UNIFIL force was deployed) to 2006. During this time, the UN patrolled southern Lebanon and, with varied success, tried to keep the peace. In the long run, the UN has been unable to live up to its commitments. Most important, it has never been able to deliver the kind of support to the Lebanese government that would have given Beirut, rather than Damascus or Tehran, control over Lebanon's future.

Nor has the UN prevented large-scale fighting between Israel and the Palestinians or the Lebanese. As a result of its failure to help the Lebanese government regain control and disarm the militias—first, the various Palestinian groups and then, Hizballah—and its failure to prevent these groups from using Lebanon as a springboard for attacking Israel, the UN has contributed to a situation that, from a security and political point of view, is worse than at any point since 2005.

After the civil war ended in 1990, and after Israel left the security zone in southern Lebanon, there was an opportunity to turn things around in Lebanon. As was pointed out earlier, the UN must take part of the blame for failing to seize that opportunity. The example of the Sheba Farms, in the area where Syria, Lebanon, and Israel meet, illustrates this failure. When Israel pulled out of Lebanon, the UN was supposed to confirm that the withdrawal had been carried out in full. After a month of sometimes farcical incidents—such as when the border was moved a few inches—the UN declared that Israel had withdrawn from Lebanon, thereby fulfilling UNSCR 425, which had been adopted in March 1978.[208] The Sheba Farms area, which belongs to the Syrian Golan Heights, was

206. Even though both Turkey and Israel have stronger armies and are significantly better equipped economically for the future, both these countries lack Iran's ambitions to be a regional superpower.
207. Terrorist organizations are defined here as organizations that Iran supports and that are on lists of such organizations put out by the United States, the UN, and the EU.
208. The statement from the secretary-general to the General Assembly was made on June 16, 2000, and did not exclude the possibility that Syria and Lebanon could agree on the border at a later stage.

not a part of this, and the area was under the jurisdiction of the UN Disengagement Observer Force that was monitoring the Syrian-Israeli border. Lebanon, backed by Syria,[209] claimed that this piece of land was indeed part of Lebanon. But the UN did not change its position.

The controversy surrounding the Sheba Farms has remained unresolved, a situation that Hizballah took advantage of to claim that Israel was still occupying Lebanese territory. Israel's conflict with Hizballah was far from resolved following its withdrawal in 2000, as the conflict surrounding the Sheba Farms added fuel to the fire, and Hizballah took control over southern Lebanon. The UN, however, never attempted to strengthen UNIFIL. Instead, Hizballah, unthreatened, was allowed to take over the South and prepare for the next conflict with Israel. Over the next six years, the Sheba Farms became a constant source of violence along the border.[210]

One of the most serious incidents occurred in October 2000, when three Israeli soldiers were attacked in the area, dragged across the border, and later killed. This incident took place just a few yards from a UN post, and UN forces were close enough to film the incident. But they never intervened. At first, the UN denied any knowledge of the deed, and it took almost a year before it admitted that the film existed. Meanwhile, clips had been shown on both Syrian and Lebanese television. The bodies of the soldiers were not returned until January 2004, in a prisoner exchange between Israel and Hizballah. The incident foreshadowed the attacks that would lead to the war in 2006.[211] It underscored Hizballah's longstanding policy of kidnapping Israelis in the hopes of exchanging them for prisoners.

Although UNIFIL might not have been able to prevent this incident and others like it, a more robust UNIFIL force would have made it more difficult for Hizballah to establish itself in the South, completely beyond the control of the government. The illusion that the government in Beirut controlled the South, and therefore was responsible for what occurred there, became increasingly difficult to maintain as Hizballah consolidated its power. Between 2000 and 2006, UNIFIL never hampered this process.

The credibility of UNIFIL was also damaged during the war itself. One explanation for why the UN at first denied the existence of, and then refused Israel access to, the film taken by the UN forces was that it had to keep up the appearance of being impartial. In defending its decision not to release the film, the UN wrote in a report that it wanted to ensure "full impartiality and objectivity" and that it needed "to ensure that military and other sensitive information remains in their domain and is not passed to parties to a conflict."[212] But during the war, UNIFIL published Israeli troop movements and other detailed military information on its website. Nothing similar was published about Hizballah. In doing so, UNIFIL violated its own stated policy of neutrality.

After the war, UNIFIL's mandate was expanded in accordance with UNSCR 1701, which stipulated the terms of the ceasefire. Both UNSCR 1701 and the earlier UNSCR 1559 gave UNIFIL the mandate to disarm groups that were not part of the UN or the Lebanese army. The mandate also gave UNIFIL the right to patrol the border between Lebanon and Syria, where most of Hizballah's matériel enters Lebanon. Thus, there was no obstacle preventing the UN from taking a more active role in helping Beirut reclaim control over the whole country. Nonetheless, the UN has not confronted Hizballah, and patrolling the border is out of the question. As a result, the UN, despite UNIFIL's expanded manpower, has become a mere bump in the road for Hizballah to bypass. Both sides try to avoid conflict, and the UN presence does not prevent Hizballah from continuing its military expansion and attendant political control of southern Lebanon.[213]

209. Despite these statements, no permanent agreement has been reached on the location of the border between Lebanon and Syria.
210. Congressional Research Service, "Lebanon: The Israel-Hamas-Hezbollah Conflict," p. 8.
211. Ibid.
212. Lori Lowenthal Marcus, "What Did You Do in the War UNIFIL?" *The Weekly Standard* 11, no. 47 (April 9, 2006).
213. Norell, PolicyWatch 1466.

5 | Conclusion

SEEN IN THE LIGHT of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, the war in Lebanon was not decisive. Instead, it has fallen into the large category of unfinished conflicts that the Middle East has witnessed since the September 11 attacks.

The war did, however, clarify the basic causes of the larger struggle looming in the background. The Arab-Israeli conflict is not primarily about occupation or settlement. These factors are significant, of course, and must be addressed in order to achieve peace. Yet Hizballah did not attack Israel because of the occupation of the Sheba Farms or the West Bank—it attacked Israel because it is not interested in any sort of peace. Just as it has done on several occasions since 2000, Hizballah attacked because it could not imagine a future in which Israel exists. The conflict is therefore shaped by the group's attempts to prevent any process that might end in a long-term peace agreement.

These factors necessarily have wider regional significance. Israel and Hizballah were not the only parties that clashed in July 2006, after all; Iran, Syria, and Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia and Egypt were active as well. In this respect, the tensions fragmenting the region today—between Sunnis and Shiites, Arabs and Israelis, Islamists and moderates, not to mention Lebanon's own sectarian communities—have deepened.

This regional point illustrates how the 2006 war encompassed several different dimensions. The first was the Arab-Israeli conflict. Hizballah attempted to dress the war in this garb, and although only some Arabs agreed with that interpretation, it was nevertheless an effective way for the group to garner support beyond its own sect. In this sense, the summer war constituted the sixth Arab-Israeli war.

Another dimension was Lebanon itself—the war was yet another means of shaping the country's internal situation, which concerns nothing less than what form the state will eventually take.[214] The 1989 Taif Accord, which ended the Lebanese civil war, stipulated that all militias were to be disarmed. This mandate was enforced—more or less—on all groups except Hizballah, which actually expanded its militia following the accord. The murder of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri in February 2005 and the Syrian military withdrawal from Lebanon two months later gave renewed strength to the domestic political forces demanding Hizballah's disarmament. Yet, because Hizballah was the strongest military force in Lebanon (and the only real force in the South), such demands were easily buried under the so-called "national dialogue." As described in chapter 4, this tug of war between the "citadel" and the "riviera"[215] is ongoing, and the outcome is still far from certain.

The war had a global dimension as well. In particular, it highlighted the question of how best to handle radical Islam and its offshoot, militant Islamism.

All of these dimensions are connected, but they can be viewed separately as well, and they have had different implications for various actors. One overarching conclusion is that the 2006 war and its aftermath amounted to a victory for those who favor continued conflict between the Arab-Islamic world and Israel. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any concession from either side that would change the current state of affairs, at least in the short term. The Sheba Farms dispute or other territorial issues cannot hide the fact that the root of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a refusal to accept an Israeli state; if nothing else, the Lebanon war made that clear.[216] And Hizballah has declared itself the representative of the Arab side of that conflict.

Herein lies one of the war's most tragic consequences: the notion that it was a victory for those who subscribe to armed struggle, those who believe they can achieve results without compromising or getting involved in complicated political processes with

214. Shehadi, "Riviera vs. Citadel."
215. Ibid.
216. It should also be emphasized that this fact, of course, does not exclude the possibility of future changes with both Iran and Hizballah, as well as with other Islamists.

uncertain outcomes. From this perspective, it is just as effective, or even more so, to confront Israel on the battlefield and force it to make concessions. If a sufficient number of other Arab actors accept this destructive analysis of the war, the foundation will be laid for new armed conflagrations for a long time to come.

The fighting in Gaza supports this view—Hizballah and Hamas have used similar reasoning to justify armed conflict with Israel. And their efforts in recent years—from the war in Lebanon to the Gaza hostilities that have continued ever since Israel evacuated its settlements there in 2005—have fostered greater mistrust between the respective populations. The end result is a hardening of attitudes and a decreasing willingness to compromise, which benefits those who are not interested in long-term peace.

Another key factor is that the Lebanon war ended in a ceasefire—a far less stable solution than a proper peace agreement. This state of affairs has fomented expectations among Islamists of a second round. Furthermore, the position of strength Hizballah has acquired since the war has made any full-fledged peace initiatives practically impossible.[217] By virtue of avoiding defeat and disarmament, Hizballah has been able to claim, with some merit, that it did not lose the war. This "victory," along with the group's subsequent maneuvers to strengthen its position in Lebanon, has underscored the similarities between the Arab nationalist ideology of the past and the Islamist ideology of today. The old goals of the Arab nationalists—to defeat Israel by force of arms, to fight deleterious Western influence, and to give Arab countries a common ideological base—are different from current ideology in name alone. The only real differences are that Iran is now more influential, and that nationalism, having joined causes rhetorically with Islamism, now reaches more people.

More than thirty years after the Arab states and their military commanders concluded that it would be impossible to defeat Israel by military means, new leaders are making the opposite claim.[218] Since the 2006 war, Islamist representatives such as Hizballah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal, and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad have become more aggressive in predicting Israel's ultimate defeat. Prior to the war, this sentiment was limited mostly to individuals and organizations that had advocated violence as the only route all along. Afterward, however, these voices experienced something of a renaissance. The question of Israel's existence, which had been taken off the agenda in the past, once again became the subject of debate in the media and other circles. For example, one can find serious discussions of topics such as how long it would take—one generation or several?—to realize the vision of a Middle East without Israel. Without a doubt, individuals like Ahmadinezhad have been important catalysts for this development. But it is the putatively successful military actions of the Islamists that have played the most important part in changing this worldview.

The doctrine behind these views is commonly called muqawama. Sometimes translated as "resistance," a better rendering would be "constant struggle" or "constant war," which is certainly what Mashal and others mean by the word. Supporters of this doctrine have used the Lebanon war and the more recent 2008–2009 Hamas-Israel skirmishes to prove that theirs is the right path: that it is possible to confront Israel with force and win.

Summarizing the ideologies underpinning this doctrine is important because it highlights the specific steps that Islamists believe Arab and Muslim countries should take in their dealings with Israel. First, long-term peace with Israel is considered out of the question, as is any form of recognition of Israel's right to exist. Temporary truces are acceptable if necessary, as was the case with Hamas in Gaza.[219]

217. There were critical voices even when the war was ongoing on the Arab side that claimed that Hizballah was the guilty party and that the mere fact that it was not crushed is not sufficient to qualify as a victory. Abdel Monem Said Aly, "The Sixth Arab-Israeli War: An Arab Perspective," *Middle East Brief,* no. 11 (October 2006), Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University.
218. See, for example, Ehud Yaari, "The Muqawama Doctrine," *Jerusalem Report*, November 13, 2006, p. 60.
219. During the Gaza ceasefire discussions in January–February 2009, Hamas demanded that Israel open its border before it would agree to a cessation of fighting. In other words, the group made no attempt to move toward a permanent solution. And even as Hamas asked for this tangible concession (open borders), its only offer in return was to stop firing rockets—a powerful illustration of its strategy of extracting concessions through violence.

Second, it is not necessary to delay action until the Arab world has reached military parity with Israel, as both Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser and Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad sought. Instead, rocketfire, kidnappings, and other asymmetrical tactics can be used to achieve victory. Whatever the tactic used, the war must continue unless a temporary truce is in effect.

Third, it is not necessary to conquer territory; the more important goal is to systematically wear down Israel's morale. It follows, then, that targeting Israeli civilians is the best approach. The goal is to prevent the enemy from winning, not to achieve a quick military victory. In this way, Israel's conventional military strength is turned into a benefit for its opponents, who can shift their focus from military to civilian targets. The conflict in Gaza has revealed this tactic's effectiveness—Israel cannot entirely stop the rocketfire from that territory unless it reoccupies the Strip, as the fighting in 2008–2009 made clear. Although Hamas seemed to take serious damage in that fighting, the organization nevertheless survived and continues to exert its influence over the area. In fact, the negotiated ceasefire was used as an opportunity to smuggle in new weapons and consolidate Hamas's role as the most important political force in Gaza.

Meanwhile, Hamas's strategy resulted in noticeable gains on both the intra-Palestinian and international fronts. For example, despite the June 2007 collapse of the Saudi-brokered agreement between Hamas and Fatah, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has continued to pay Hamas operatives in Gaza, including terrorists. In other words, taxpayers in those countries that contribute to the PA budget—currently $120 million per month—foot some of the bill for Hamas as well.[220]

The massive criticism directed against Israel following its attacks in Gaza also benefited Hamas, which received considerably less flak for its role in the hostilities. And the political processes that followed the fighting have led to discussions in UN and European Union circles about whether to resume dialogue with Hamas. These discussions have taken place without Hamas fulfilling any of the conditions originally set for reengagement—clearly a decisive victory for the organization.

"Root Causes" and Future Prospects

Jihad, the most important tool in the Islamist struggle, is more of a religious act than a nationalistic one—it is waged in the name of Allah rather than national patriotism. Therefore, the Arab nation-state is seen as the wrong tool for the job. From the Islamists' view, Arab states have failed to provide their people with the welfare to which they are entitled. More important, these states have failed to carry on the fight against Israel. The Islamists believe that they must shoulder both of these responsibilities themselves. In addition to their purely military activities, these movements provide various social services that are often far more efficient than those offered by Arab governments.

Thus, Islamist doctrine is based on offering an alternative, all-encompassing system for everything from social welfare to military operations. So long as this process is in effect, the conflict with Israel is bound to become hot from time to time.

The Islamists' ability to take the initiative in recent years goes hand in hand with another notable trend in the Middle East—the notion that Israel is entirely to blame for the ongoing conflict, especially since the wars in Iraq and Lebanon and the constant fighting in Gaza. Islamists maintain that Israel is the root of all evil and that removing it will ameliorate most of the ills plaguing Arab and Muslim countries. This hypothesis has also gained ground in Arab academic and political circles. In the wake of the September 11 attacks, an alternative view seemed as if it might gain traction. This view emphasized corruption, low literacy rates, oppression of women, and lack of reform as the most important explanations for the problems of Arab countries.[221] In this regard,

220. The relationship between Hamas and Fatah is exceedingly complex, of course, but the financial links are clear. See for example Dan Diker and Khaled Abu Toameh, "Can the Palestinian Authority's Fatah Forces Retake Gaza? Obstacles and Opportunities," *Jerusalem Viewpoints* no. 569 (January–February 2009).

221. It is important to remember that such a debate has always been going on in the Middle East. The region is not homogenous. But the advocates of reform have always had a hard time winning over their opponents. It is not just their own governments who oppose reforms and democratization, but also the Islamists, who accuse the reformists of being beholden to the West.

the various Arab-focused reports issued by the UN Development Program were signs of the times.[222] Yet these reports never received widespread attention in the region, and their conclusions have, with few exceptions, never been taken seriously by Middle Eastern regimes. Instead, there has been a partial retreat to the myth that Israel is the root of all the region's problems, whether the issue at hand is Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or Iran's nuclear program.[223]

Thus, the West is confronted with the Islamist argument that Israel's very existence is the root of the conflict as well as the even more common argument that the onus is on Israel to change—with its implication that Israel's supporters, primarily the United States, must change as well. In this manner, the boundaries have become blurred between the Islamist desire to eliminate Israel and the more academic/political view that Israel must change in order for peace to be possible. According to the latter position, the fault lies primarily—sometimes exclusively—with Israel and the United States. The Israeli perspective, of course, is very different.

All of this means that the prospects for long-term peace initiatives have decreased, while the Islamists' ability to prevent such initiatives has increased. The further apart the two sides are in their understanding of the core issues, the more difficult it will be to bridge the differences.

For Hizballah and its supporters, this situation is further proof that justice is on their side. They have little or no willingness to compromise, because their own tactics, as encompassed by muqawama, have proven successful. In their view, Israel was defeated in Lebanon while Hizballah's position was strengthened, both politically and militarily. In addition, Hizballah has been able to ignore international demands for disarmament without paying a price. And although the 2006 war, the subsequent domestic conflicts in Lebanon, and the Hamas-Israel confrontation in Gaza have increased Sunni-Shiite tensions to some extent, one can discern the outlines of a future in which Hizballah's viewpoint has gained ground in Arab and Muslim countries, regardless of the group's religious ideology.

It is interesting to note that this process has been accompanied by a trend in which Israel's Western critics adopt the Islamist critique. Whether the topic is violations of the rules of war or the failure to pursue a two-state solution, Islamist anti-Semitism has become a natural part of the discourse on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A Swedish variation on this theme was brought to light by a January 2009 incident in Stockholm, where Swedish politicians participated in an anti-Israeli demonstration during which calls such as "Death to Israel" could be heard. Although they took part in the event to protest Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, not to support demands for eliminating the country, the officials, by participating in a demonstration that included proponents of Israel's destruction, risked being seen as supporting Islamist ideology. Whether they did so out of naiveté is difficult to say. Nevertheless, the protest revealed a change in Western attitudes toward Islamist organizations: details such as their ideological underpinnings, which are far from democratic, seem less important to many Western observers than the opportunity to criticize Israel.

Hizballah has restored its losses from the 2006 war; the group boasts a stronger political position in Lebanon than before, and disarmament remains out of the question. It is completely unrealistic, of course, to believe that the UN will accomplish what the Lebanese government is unable or unwilling to do. Just as the 2,500-man UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was incapable of meeting its obligations before the war, a bulked-up 15,000-member force is destined to fail in the same way. The only real difference between the two is the impact on the taxpayers who foot the bill. Thus, we are back to square one.

222. The *Arab Human Development Report* was part of the UN Development Program's series of Human Development Reports. The series began in 2002, and four reports were issued between 2002 and 2005. The first one identified three main areas in which Arab countries suffered "deficits" and needed to focus their resources: knowledge, freedom, and women's emancipation.
223. David Brooks, "A War of Narratives," *New York Times*, April 10, 2007.

At the same time, it is increasingly obvious that neither the 2006 war nor the subsequent political crises in Lebanon were inevitable. Both could have been prevented if the UN, the EU, and other international players had acted more forcefully after the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, when Hizballah took control in the resulting power vacuum. If the goal was to secure a long-term peace for Lebanon, then disarming Hizballah and supporting the Lebanese government were necessary conditions.

If the international community now decides that it is incapable of meeting these conditions, might it be better off lowering its ambitions for the Lebanese labyrinth and adjusting its rhetoric accordingly? That would require admitting that there is no long-term peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, accepting Hizballah's strengthened role in Lebanon (with continued Iranian backing), tolerating a cold war along the border with Israel, and giving up any hope for a bilateral peace deal or détente. At the very least, such an approach would be far more honest and far less hypocritical.

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