

Project Report

Hizbullah: The Calculus of Jihad

Martin Kramer

*The University of Chicago Press recently issued **Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies, and Militance**, the third of six volumes arising from the Academy's Fundamentalism Project. The study is funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.*

Fundamentalisms and the State is edited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby of the University of Chicago, the project's codirectors. The book provides a systematic overview of the advances made by antiseccular religious movements over the past twenty-five years. The contributors to the volume—economists, political scientists, religious historians, social anthropologists, and sociologists—focus on the impact these movements have had on national economies, political parties, constitutional issues, and international relations on five continents and within the religious traditions of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Topics covered include the legislative agenda of the New Christian Right in the United States, the conflict between Hindu and Buddhist militants in Sri Lanka, and the economic agendas of Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

In the following chapter (reprinted here without endnotes), Martin Kramer offers an analysis of the operational tactics of Lebanon's Hizbullah ("Party of God"). Mr. Kramer is Associate Director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University.

Of the many fundamentalisms that have emerged within Islam during recent years, perhaps none has had so profound an impact on the human imagination as Hizbullah—"the Party of God." This movement of Lebanese Shi'ite Muslims gained both fame and infamy within months of its first public appearance in

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1982, by its resort to ingenious forms of violence. Hizbullah's progression from suicide bombings to airliner hijackings to hostage holding made it an obsession of the media and the nemesis of governments.

For a time, Hizbullah seemed invincible, dealing blow after blow to the "enemies of Islam" and creating islands of autonomous fundamentalism in Lebanon. Hizbullah held the attention of the world. Armies of journalists besieged the press secretaries of Hizbullah's leaders. Satellites crisscrossed the blackness of outer space above Hizbullah's bases, searching for the tracks of its adherents. Diplomats and mediators shuttled around the globe, seeking deals that would check or conciliate Hizbullah. More than any other fundamentalist movement in recent history, Hizbullah evoked the memory of the medieval Assassins, who had been feared in the West and Islam for their marriage of fierce militancy with destructive deeds. Like the Assassins, Hizbullah gave rise to an immense lore, and much confusion.

That Hizbullah owed its impact to its violence is beyond any doubt. Although it grew into a social movement, it never commanded the means or manpower necessary to seize power in Lebanon. Hizbullah's appeal remained limited to perhaps half of one sect, in a small and vulnerable state inhabited by many other sects. As for resources, Hizbullah disposed of an estimated annual budget of less than half that of the University of Chicago. The movement owed its reputation almost solely to its mastery of violence—a violence legitimated in the name of Islam. This legitimation may be fairly described as Hizbullah's most original contribution to modern Islamic fundamentalism. Hizbullah's vision of an Islamic state and society was derivative, but its methods for inspiring and rationalizing violence displayed a touch of genius.

This violence is subject to interpretation from any number of analytical and disciplinary vantage points, but any approach must necessarily settle on the core issues of cause, intent, and effect. Why and in what circumstances did the adherents of Hizbullah resort to force? What did they intend to achieve by

their acts? What were the effects of their violence? These are large questions, and the evidence is scattered at best. The purpose here is not to provide confident answers but to chart the islands of existing knowledge where answers might be found. The point is to better understand the unique predicament of Hizbullah—unique even within contemporary Islam. Nevertheless, the experience of Hizbullah may illuminate the passage of other fundamentalist movements into violence, a passage for which there are examples in every great tradition.

Shi'ite Fundamentalism in the Lebanese Context

Hizbullah's militance must first be set in context. But which context? There is the 1,400-year legacy of Shi'ism, a legacy of martyrdom and suffering, resting on an ancient grievance: the belief that Islamic history was derailed when political power passed out of the hands of the family of the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century. In the subsequent course of history, Shi'ism has sometimes erupted as a form of protest against the existing order in Islam; at other times it has retreated into an otherworldly preoccupation with messianic redemption. This inner tension in Shi'ism, and Lebanon's place in it, was explored in an earlier study in this series. The themes addressed there, especially the crisis that confronts all contemporary Shi'ism, are the necessary prelude to any appreciation of Hizbullah.

Here it is more appropriate to dwell on the narrow but rich Lebanese context of Hizbullah. Many works of reportage and scholarship now attest to the power of modern grievance among Lebanon's Shi'ite Muslims. Their pattern of settlement reflected a history of persecution, from which they had found refuge in redoubts along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The Shi'ites felt secure and free in the mountains of what is now the south of Lebanon and the plains of the Bekaa Valley, tucked between two high ranges. But when the impact of the West struck Lebanon in modern times, the isolated Shi'ites felt it last, and they were slow to modernize. When Lebanon became independent in 1946, the Shi'ites became the despised stepchildren of a

state governed by (and for) Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims.

The Shi'ites have been rushing breathlessly to catch up ever since. Demographically, they soon surpassed every other sect. In the thirty-five years between 1921 and 1956, the Shi'ite population had risen from 100,000 to 250,000, but its percentage of Lebanon's total population remained steady at about 19 percent. Yet, in the twenty years between 1956 and 1975, the Shi'ite population tripled, from 250,000 to 750,000, bringing the Shi'ites to about 30 percent of the total population. The larger size of the Shi'ite families, coupled with Christian emigration, had produced a dramatic rise in the Shi'ite proportion of Lebanon's population. The Shi'ites had become Lebanon's largest single confessional community, surpassing the Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims.

But the Shi'ites could not close the social and economic gap. Some did shake the legacy of poverty and ignorance, and forced open Beirut's worlds of commerce, administration, and education. But many more flocked from their villages to the great Lebanese capital to sweep the streets and hawk on corners. The angriest of the Shi'ites joined the revolutionary movements that swept Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s, especially those founded and led by Palestinians, who were even angrier. Other Shi'ites who still held out hope for reform created their own communal movement to promote their interests, under the leadership of a progressive cleric and middle-class professionals. After the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975, this movement created a militia known as Amal ("Hope"), which adopted a largely defensive posture in the fighting.

But geography trapped the Shi'ites in the withering crossfire of the shootout that pitted the Palestinian organizations in Lebanon against the Maronite-led Lebanese forces and Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Shi'ites became refugees, first from Maronite-Palestinian fighting in 1976, then as the result of the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon in 1978. A quarter of a million refugees poured into the squalid southern suburbs of Beirut, which they transformed into a massive village, reeking of

garbage and open sewage. By 1982, the storehouse of Shi'ite grievance had filled to overflowing, and Amal could scarcely manage it.

For some years before 1982, a few voices, mostly of Shi'ite clerics, had raised a slogan very different from Amal's call for reform. These voices pronounced the death of Lebanese confessionalism and urged the transformation of Lebanon into an Islamic state. Not only did they demand rule by Muslims, who now constituted a majority of the Lebanese, but they claimed that only an Islamic government could restore peace and independence to Lebanon. Few persons in the jaundiced world of Lebanese politics took this promise of an Islamic utopia seriously, even within the Shi'ite community. But after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979—a revolution that swept a white-bearded Shi'ite cleric to power on a tide of revolutionary rage—the idea of an Islamic state suddenly seemed real to many Shi'ites, and even urgent. The events of 1982, including the Israeli occupation of the Shi'ite south, the massacre of Palestinians by Maronite militiamen in league with Israel, and the deployment of American and French troops near the Shi'ite slums of Beirut, convinced many Shi'ites that they stood to become the victims of history once again.

As the vise closed ever tighter, the Shi'ite community finally cracked. A faction of Amal bolted, and the defectors left in the hundreds for the Bekaa Valley. They were accompanied by several fervent young Shi'ite clerics, whose minds burned with visions of a Lebanon purified by Islamic revolution. There the Lebanese Shi'ites joined hands with a contingent of a thousand Iranian Revolutionary Guards, who had come to do battle with the "enemies of Islam" now assembled in Lebanon and to spread the revolutionary message of the Imam Khomeini. Together they seized a Lebanese army barracks on a hill in the Bekaa Valley and transformed it into a formidable fortress, ringed by anti-aircraft emplacements and bristling with antennae. This base, and several smaller installations in its vicinity, would become the nucleus of an autonomous zone, governed by the precepts of Islam. The new formation took the name of Hizbullah—the "Party of God"—after a verse in the

Qur'an (V, 56): "Lo! the Party of God, they are the victorious."

Hizbullah thus issued from a marriage of Lebanese Shi'ites and Islamic Iran, and grew to become the most influential Shi'ite fundamentalist movement outside Iran. Herein lies a paradox. Iran's Islamic Revolution first targeted the Shi'ite populations of the countries immediately adjacent to Iran or across the Persian Gulf: Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Afghanistan. Some of these states had large Shi'ite populations that were in ready reach. Yet Iran's revolution ultimately had its greatest impact in Lebanon, the most westward and remote outpost of the Shi'ite world, and home to only 2 or 3 percent of the world's Shi'ites outside Iran. Despite the distance from Iran, Lebanon seemed to magnify the signal of Iran's revolution many times over, generating a Shi'ite fundamentalism that marched stridently to Iran's cadence. (Lebanon also produced the only Sunni fundamentalist movement that unashamedly embraced Iran as its model, the Tawhid movement in Tripoli.)

The paradox had a ready explanation: Lebanon's civil war amplified the effect of Iran's revolution. The collapse of the state and the resulting violence had taken a tremendous toll on Shi'ite society, producing demographic, social, and economic dislocations that dwarfed the simple discrimination suffered by Shi'ites elsewhere. Many hundreds of thousands of Shi'ites had been made into destitute refugees, in a country without a functioning state, in a capital city without operational municipalities and services. On the scale of human distress, Lebanon's Shi'ites could not be surpassed by Shi'ites elsewhere, and their hopelessness made them the most receptive of all Shi'ites to the siren calls that issued from Iran.

Just as important, the gate to Lebanon lay wide open. Iraq and the Arab Gulf states, while closer to the torch lit by Khomeini, also had the will and means to extinguish local sparks of sympathy with Iran's revolution. Iraq went to war to do so; Saudi Arabia and Kuwait launched cold wars against Iran, which included the arrest and deportation of thousands of Iran's Shi'ite sympathizers. But

in Lebanon, there was no one to arrest or deport those sympathizers, or even to keep Iran's zealots from entering Lebanon in force to join hands with their Shi'ite admirers. "The biggest obstacle to starting Islamic movements in the world is the people's attachment to governments," declared Islamic Iran's first ambassador to Lebanon. "But since the republic of Lebanon does not have much power, there is no serious obstacle in the way of the people of Lebanon." Syria, which exercised a statelike authority in parts of Lebanon, was willing to accept any help against the hostile foreign forces entrenched in its Lebanese backyard: Syria allowed a supply line of support to run from Iran through Syria to Lebanon's Shi'ites. The absence of effective government, and the ease of Iranian access to Lebanon, created hothouse conditions for the rise of Iranian-inspired fundamentalist movements in Lebanon, a situation unique in the Middle East.

The Partisans of God

Those Lebanese Shi'ites who rallied around the banner of Islam in the summer of 1982 came from many different walks of life, but they all bore a double grievance. Not only did they feel threatened by outside enemies—the "satans" against whom Khomeini railed—but also they seethed with resentment against the Amal movement and its allies in the Shi'ite clerical establishment.

At the forefront of the new movement were young clerics, all drawn from the same narrow age group. They shared the stigma of inadequate preparation for their chosen profession. The fault was not theirs. Like their elders, they had gone to the Shi'ite shrine cities in Iraq to acquire the best credentials at the best theological academies. But in the 1970s the Iraqi security authorities decided to expel most foreign Shi'ite students, and several hundred returned to Lebanon empty-handed. The Shi'ite clerical establishment then spurned them, and they became a disgruntled mass, uncertain of their allegiance. When Iran's emissaries arrived in the Bekaa Valley in 1982 and issued the clarion call to make a revolution, these young clerics rushed

to pledge their loyalty to Khomeini and assume positions of leadership in Hizbullah.

Iran's emissaries also reached out to the great Shi'ite clans of the Bekaa Valley. The Bekaa Shi'ites had long felt themselves excluded from the higher echelons of Amal, which drew its leaders from the south of Lebanon. Yet the Shi'ites of the Bekaa had recently enjoyed an unprecedented prosperity, the result of a trade in illicit drugs that had flourished since the collapse of central authority. They now sought a vehicle to legitimize their new status and found it in Hizbullah, which accorded them a disproportionate place in its leadership and turned a blind eye to the original source of their wealth. The first two incumbents of the office of secretary-general, Hizbullah's highest office, were clerics who hailed from the Bekaa Valley: Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli and Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi.

Hizbullah also fed upon another grievance against Amal. Many young Shi'ites had joined Palestinian organizations during the 1970s, usually to escape poverty. When Israel forced the Palestinian organizations out of Lebanon in 1982, these Shi'ites lost their paymasters. In a blunder Amal would come to regret, it failed to make room for these Shi'ite orphans of the Palestinian revolution, scorning them for their service in a cause that had brought misery to South Lebanon. But Iran's emissaries held no grudge against them. Indeed, many of these same Iranians had been trained in Palestinian camps before the Islamic Revolution, and they saw Palestinian service as a commendable credential. They now offered the unwanted Shi'ite militiamen jobs, weapons, and a sense of divine purpose. These Shi'ites joined enthusiastically and rose quickly through the ranks. The brilliant commander of the Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah's clandestine branch, would be a graduate of long Palestinian service: 'Imad Mughniyya.

Iran's emissaries even recruited successfully from within Amal. The established Shi'ite militia had grown brittle over the years, and some of its junior commanders concluded they had no prospects for advancement. When Iran offered Amal's malcontents some of the most senior command positions

in the new movement, they jumped at the opportunity. Hizbullah even incorporated a faction called Islamic Amal, comprising disaffected Amal veterans and led by Husayn al-Musawi.

Finally, Hizbullah won followers among the many tens of thousands of Shi'ites who had no stake in existing communal institutions. Many were impoverished refugees from the south who had crowded into the southern suburbs of Beirut. They had suffered terribly, and they regarded Amal and the Shi'ite clerical establishment as ineffectual defenders of the Shi'ite interest. Iran's emissaries moved quickly to offer food, jobs, loans, medicine, and other services to the teeming masses of impoverished Shi'ites in Beirut's slums. In return, they gave Hizbullah their loyalty. The senior cleric often named as the spiritual mentor of Hizbullah, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah, personified their grievance. His native town in the south of Lebanon abutted Israel and had often been emptied by fighting. He relocated to a Shi'ite slum in East Beirut, but lost his first pulpit in Maronite-Palestinian fighting in 1976 and arrived as a refugee to Beirut's southern suburbs. There, like other refugees, he began anew, without the help of the Shi'ite establishment. The mosque he built and guided would become the hub of Hizbullah in the city.

From this account, it is clear that Hizbullah met some very mundane needs among its adherents. Yet it also made some very severe demands. The most fundamental of these demands was the obligation to "strive in the path of God." This is the literal meaning of *jihad*, interpreted in Shi'ism as a willingness to sacrifice in defense of Islam. Hizbullah's strength resided in its ability to harness a hundred grievances to one sublime purpose and to persuade its downtrodden adherents of their own hidden strength—the strength of sacrifice.

To Right a World

One compelling idea forged a movement from these fragments of broken humanity, from the diverse grievances of thousands. It resided in a holistic vision that ingeniously transformed every kind of despair, injustice,

and suffering into the product of one great crink in the world. Muslims had abandoned Islam. Seduced by the falsehoods of others, they had cast aside the only known certainty in this world: the divine revelation of the Prophet Muhammad. The more they doubted this revelation, the further they fell from grace. Now they had lost all power to defend themselves, and their enemies preyed on their wealth, territory, and lives. Only by returning to Islam could Muslims right the world and set human history on the course intended by God.

The great return to Islam was already under way, led by the Imam Khomeini. By his appearance, he had begun to banish the darkness that enveloped the believers. Beneath his evocation of Shi'ite symbolism, his message had a dualistic simplicity: all that was truly Islamic was pure; all that was demonstrably foreign was impure. If the pure did not root out the impure, then the impure would prevail. The message touched a deep chord in Iranian culture, amplifying more prosaic grievances. Ultimately Khomeini succeeded in turning the Iranian people into a caldron of righteousness. He promised to overturn the faithless regime of the shah, purge society of hypocrites and corrupters, and cut the tentacles of the foreign powers that gripped Iran's destiny. He kept his word. The shah fell, the accused hypocrites faced imprisonment or execution, and every trace of American influence vanished. Khomeini had created the first Islamic fundamentalist state.

Lebanon's Shi'ites watched his performance with amazement. Some began to believe that his medicine could cure Lebanon as well. Hadn't Lebanon's Muslims been corrupted by foreign ways? Didn't foreign powers control the destiny of the country? Hizbullah ultimately rested on an analogy between Lebanon and Iran—an analogy that defied vast disparities in the sizes and populations of the two countries, and in their geostrategic positions and resources. In the eyes of some, Lebanon now appeared to be some remote extension of Iran, linked by a shared fealty to one man. Hizbullah's program, conveyed in its "open letter" of February 1985, declared that the movement "abides by the orders of

the sole wise and just command represented by the supreme jurisconsult who meets the necessary qualifications, and who is presently incarnate in the Imam and guide, the Great Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musawi al-Khomeini." Khomeini became the only source of legitimate authority, and by their allegiance to him the Shi'ites of Hizbullah ceased to be Lebanese. "Some say we are Muslim Lebanese," noted Husayn al-Musawi. "No! We are Muslims of the world, and we have close links with other Muslims of the world." "We do not work or think within the borders of Lebanon," declared Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, "this little geometric box, which is one of the legacies of imperialism. Rather, we seek to defend Muslims throughout the world."

Hizbullah's vision was as grand as Lebanon was small. Its goals exceeded even the transformation of Lebanon into an Islamic state. The establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon "is not our demand," said Husayn al-Musawi. The aim was not Islam in one country but the creation of an "all-encompassing Islamic state" which would absorb Lebanon. An almost apocalyptic messianism animated this vision of a sweeping triumph of Islam. Islamic revolution had first occurred in Iran, but it was not Iranian. As one of Hizbullah's leading clerics declared: "The divine state of justice realized on part of this earth will not remain confined within its geographic borders and is the dawn that will lead to the appearance of the Mahdi, who will create the state of Islam on earth." This evocation of the Mahdi, the messianic figure in Islamic eschatology, suggested that the world had entered upon the last days and that redemption might be imminent.

In this vision, Hizbullah had the heroic role of purifying a province of Islam. "We are proceeding toward a battle with vice at its very roots," declared Hizbullah's manifesto. "And the first root of vice is America." The manifesto announced that "the Imam Khomeini, our leader, has repeatedly stressed that America is the cause of all our catastrophes and the source of all malice. . . . We will turn Lebanon into a graveyard for American schemes." Once the Americans were ousted, their agents would fall as well. "We will bring

down the Maronite regime just as we brought down the shah in Iran," promised the chief of staff of the Revolutionary Guards to his Lebanese listeners—although he could only address them in Persian. And Hizbullah was finally charged with the most daunting task of all: driving Israel from Lebanon and then from existence. Israel was the "cancer of the Middle East," said Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi. "In the future, we will wipe out every trace of Israel in Palestine."

This grandiose vision served the deepest needs of the most alienated of Lebanon's Shi'ites. Through their membership in Hizbullah, the clerics, commanders, and common followers of the movement could escape narrow allegiances and embrace a vast cause that transcended the boundaries of family, clan, sect, and state. Through an affiliation with Hizbullah, the individual ceased to be Lebanese, Shi'ite, Arab—a member of a disadvantaged sect in a small war-torn state populated by many different sects. Through the agency of Hizbullah, the poor village boy or slum-dweller became a true Muslim, a member of a religious-political community spanning three continents, and a soldier in a world movement led by the Imam Khomeini for redressing the imbalance between Islam and infidelity. This was a mission above human history, a task of eschatological significance. A sense of divine purpose accounted for Hizbullah's appeal and eased its resort to violence, not only in Lebanon but throughout the world.

But to remake the world, the adherents of Hizbullah first had to remake themselves. The adherents of Hizbullah had to undergo a spiritual transformation if they were to muster the inner strength necessary for sacrifice—the kind of sacrifice without which the weak could not overcome the strong. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards brought with them to Lebanon the fire that had made the revolution in Iran. Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi, Hizbullah's secretary-general from 1991 until his assassination by Israel in 1992, was a cleric who had passed some time in higher theological studies in Najaf. He also took the first training course offered by the Revolutionary Guards in 1982. Of the two experiences, his

training with the Guards had the greater impact:

I recall one of the sights I can never forget. We were awakened at night by the weeping of the brethren Guards during the night prayer. Is this not the greatest school from which one can graduate? I also recall when one of the brethren Guards gave a weapons lesson. Suddenly, after he had given all the explanations, he put the weapon aside and swore an oath saying: "All I have explained to you will not help you; only God can help you." He began to talk about belief and reliance on God. . . . When I joined the Guards and sat with the brethren in the first course they gave in the Bekaa Valley, I felt I derived immense benefit. I felt I had truly penetrated genuine Islam. If this is how I felt, as someone at an advanced level of schooling, then how must the other youths have felt who filled the ranks of the Guards?

Fadlallah called this transformation the "rebellion against fear." The great powers inspired fear among the oppressed, who had no more than "children's toys" to mount their opposition. But by conquering their own fear, through acceptance of the virtue of martyrdom, the oppressed could evoke alarm and fear among their oppressors. In a short span of time, the first adherents of Hizbullah had overcome that fear. "The school of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard made the Muslim youths love martyrdom," said 'Abbas al-Musawi. "We were not surprised at all when, shortly after the arrival of the Guards, a Muslim youth in Lebanon smiled at death while carrying with him 1,200 kilograms of explosives."

The Revolutionary Guards passed the torch to Hizbullah's clerics. Their new role found symbolic representation in the arming of clerics at Hizbullah's rallies. They would stand in a row at the head of marches, awkwardly gripping AK-47s and M-16s, occasionally wearing the added accessory of an ammunition belt. They delivered funeral orations over dead fighters while brandishing rifles. In fact, clerics were not expected to bear arms in combat; the clips in the paraded weapons were probably empty. But the bearing of arms constituted a visual allusion to the preaching of the clerics. It reminded witnesses not that

clerics sometimes took up arms but that they guided those who did.

Violence and Virtue

The blinding light of Lebanese Shi'ite anger, focused through the lens of Iran's Islamic zeal, set a fire. To understand the impact of that violence, it must first be characterized. A day-by-day chronology of the violence employed by Hizbullah during its first decade would be long indeed—too long to bear repetition. But most of it fell into these four categories:

1. Campaigns meant to rid the Shi'ite regions of Lebanon of all foreign presence. Assassinations of individual foreigners later escalated into massive bombings, some of them done by "self-martyrs," which destroyed the American embassy and its annex in two separate attacks in 1983 and 1984, the barracks of American and French peacekeeping troops in two famous attacks on the same morning in 1983, and command facilities of Israeli forces in the occupied south in 1982 and 1983. Hundreds of foreigners died on Lebanese soil in these bombings, the most successful of which killed 241 US Marines in their barracks. These operations, combined with other, lesser actions, forced American and French forces into a full retreat from Lebanon. As one Hizbullah leader put it, they "hurriedly ran away from three Muslims who loved martyrdom." This violence also pushed Israeli forces back to a narrow "security zone" in the south. "The Israeli soldier who could not be defeated was now killed, with an explosive charge here and a bullet there," said Fadlallah. "People were suddenly filled with power, and that power could be employed in new ways. . . . it deployed a small force and a war of nerves, which the enemy could not confront with its tanks and airplanes." Hizbullah continued to launch frequent attacks against Israeli forces and their Lebanese ally, the South Lebanon Army, in the "security zone." "Our goal is not the liquidation of [South Lebanon Army commander] Antoine Lahad in the border zone," said Sayyid 'Abbas al-Musawi. "Our slogan is the liquidation of Israel."

2. Operations intended to lend support to

the efforts of Iran during the Iran-Iraq war. Before Hizbullah's emergence, its Shi'ite fundamentalist precursors launched a violent campaign against Iraqi targets in Lebanon, culminating in the destruction of the Iraqi embassy in Beirut in a 1981 bombing. The campaign later spread to Kuwait, where Hizbullah's Islamic Jihad bombed the American and French embassies and other targets in 1983, in an effort to compel Kuwait to abandon its support of Iraq. This violence peaked in a series of paralyzing terror bombings in Paris in 1986, meant to force France to abandon its policy of supplying Iraq with arms. The cease-fire between Iran and Iraq in 1988 brought this campaign to an end.

3. Operations meant to free members and affiliates of Hizbullah who had been captured by enemy governments in the Middle East and Europe. These operations included the hijacking of an American airliner in 1985 to secure the freedom of Lebanese Shi'ites held by Israel, and two hijackings of Kuwaiti airliners in 1984 and 1988 to win freedom for Lebanese Shi'ites held by Kuwait for the bombings there. The hijackers killed passengers in each of these hijackings, to demonstrate their resolve. In addition, Islamic Jihad and other groups affiliated with Hizbullah abducted dozens of foreigners in Lebanon, mostly American, French, British, and German citizens, for the same purpose. Some of these foreigners would later be traded for American arms needed by Iran in the Gulf War, but the motive for the wave of abductions remained the release of Hizbullah's imprisoned fighters elsewhere. The longest-held hostage spent over six years in captivity. Most of the hostages were freed; a few died in captivity.

4. Battles waged against the rival movements over control of neighborhoods in Beirut and villages in the south. In 1986, Hizbullah clashed repeatedly with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party over control of routes leading from the Bekaa Valley to the south. And beginning in 1988, occasional skirmishes with Amal escalated into war. Several thousand Shi'ites, many of them noncombatants, died in this intra-Shi'ite fighting, which persisted despite numerous cease-fire initiatives.

In the course of the battles, Hizbullah perpetrated several atrocities and assassinated two prominent leaders of Amal. Hizbullah usually enjoyed the upper hand in fighting, but it was denied the fruits of victory by Syrian intervention. The fighting ended in late 1990 with a cease-fire mediated by Syria and Iran.

In what way did this violence reflect its origins in a fundamentalist movement? Violence in Lebanon did not constitute a deviation. Indeed, it had become the norm. Long before the appearance of Hizbullah, Lebanon had become a land in which guns spoke louder than words. To do battle was not a matter of choice but of survival. And in some respects, this violence followed well-worn paths in Lebanon—paths blazed first by the Palestinians in the early 1970s and followed by various militias in the late 1970s. The commanders of Hizbullah were veterans of either Palestinian service or the Amal militia, and they often took pages from both books.

Nor could the “self-martyrdom operations,” which Hizbullah pioneered, qualify as a strictly fundamentalist mode of operation. Groups in Lebanon that were not fundamentalist, religious, or Shi’ite quickly imitated this method. In terms of the number of casualties inflicted by such operations, Hizbullah undoubtedly deserved place of primacy. Hizbullah employed the method first and enjoyed the advantage of surprise. But in terms of the number of operations—and the number of “self-martyrs”—pride of place went to the imitators: the secular, nationalist organizations that operated in Lebanon under Syrian auspices. A study that summarized the major round of “self-martyrdom operations” from their inception in 1983 through the end of 1986 found that Shi’ite organizations perpetrated only seven of the thirty-one attacks. Pro-Syrian organizations carried out twenty-two attacks, most notably by the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (ten attacks) and the Ba’th Party (seven attacks). (These operations were all directed against Israel and the South Lebanon Army.)

It was also obvious that Hizbullah’s collective choices regarding the extent and intensity of its violence had a clear political rationale. Hizbullah was also a political movement and,

indeed, saw politics as an inseparable part of religion. When it employed violence, it did so for political and not ritualistic purposes—to bring it closer to power. In making its choices, Hizbullah weighed benefits against costs. Violence drove enemies into retreat and created a zone of autonomous action for Hizbullah. But it simultaneously invited punitive retaliation and at times created political complications for Iran. Fadlallah fairly described the guiding principle of Hizbullah: “I believe that in all cases violence is like a surgical operation that the doctor should only resort to after he has exhausted all other methods.”

But the calculus of politics is not driven by a universal logic. It is conditioned by cultural values. Hizbullah did not simply seek power; it sought power in order to implement Islamic law. That goal had to be pursued within the law of Islam, as understood by its interpreters among the clerics. “The Muslim fighter needed answers to many questions,” said Shaykh ‘Abd al-Karim ‘Ubayd, a Hizbullah cleric who would be made famous after his abduction by Israel in 1989. “Is resistance to the occupation obligatory on religious grounds? What about the question of self-martyrdom? The law has an answer to these examples, which therefore are not political questions so much as legal questions, and here lies the role of the cleric.” Only he could provide answers; without his essential contribution, there could be no legitimate violence, since “these questions cannot be answered by the military commander, especially for the believing fighter, who must turn to a cleric who is enthusiastic, responsive, and committed to resistance.”

On the one hand, submission to Islamic law freed Hizbullah from non-Islamic moral constraints. Hizbullah felt no need to justify its acts by other codes. Its struggle was a jihad, a form of sacred warfare regulated solely by Islamic law (hence the choice of Islamic Jihad as the name for Hizbullah’s clandestine branch). It made no difference to Hizbullah’s adherents that jihad remained associated with fanaticism in the historical consciousness of the West. They did not seek the favor of world public opinion and addressed their justifications solely to Muslim believers.

On the other hand, jihad had its requirements. The Islamic law of war is the codification of a moral sensibility. While it is open to interpretation, it is not infinitely elastic. Some of its provisions compel violence—acts of punishment or resistance. But other provisions forbid violence against persons afforded protection by law. The believing public had to be persuaded that Hizbullah's actions were not criminal but "in the nature of a jihad, launched by the oppressed against the oppressors." The clerics, as interpreters of law, constantly subjected Hizbullah's selection of targets and techniques to the judgment of this law.

In doing so, they forced Hizbullah to resist two powerful temptations of its Lebanese environment. First, Hizbullah sometimes threatened to deteriorate into one more sectarian militia devoted to battling other sectarian militias. "Parties and movements and organizations begin as great ideas," warned Fadlallah, "and turn into narrow interests. Religion starts as a message from God and struggle, and turns into the interests of individuals and another kind of tribalism." That deterioration had to be fought. The clerics never ceased to remind the movement of its divine mission and to urge the expansion of the jihad to confront the "global infidelity" of foreigners. Second, Hizbullah occasionally seemed poised to imitate the sectarian militias, by employing wholly indiscriminate violence. The clerics never ceased to insist that the jihad not harm innocents. To be worthy of Islam, the struggle had to be global in conception but discriminating in execution.

In retrospect, some of Hizbullah's acts of violence met these demanding criteria; some did not. It soon became clear that in the real world, violence could rarely be pure. A few acts approximated the ideal, such as the earliest bombings by "self-martyrs" against foreign forces in Lebanon. These targeted armed, foreign intruders and so constituted legitimate jihad in the defense of Islam. And the use of "self-martyrs" assured that these attacks achieved pinpoint precision—an unusual technique for Beirut, where exploding cars usually killed indiscriminately.

Yet even here, a problem of Islamic law

arose, since some innocents did die in these attacks: the "self-martyrs" themselves. Suicide is prohibited by Islam, and the question of whether their deaths did or did not constitute suicide tugged at the consciences of Hizbullah's clerics. As long as the attacks succeeded so dramatically, the clerics suppressed all doubt. But the question resurfaced when subsequent attacks began to produce lower yields in enemy casualties. "The self-martyring operation is not permitted unless it can convulse the enemy," said Fadlallah. "The believer cannot blow himself up unless the results will equal or exceed the [loss of the] soul of the believer. Self-martyring operations are not fatal accidents but legal obligations governed by rules, and the believers cannot transgress the rules of God." The clerics ultimately banned such operations, and they gradually ended.

Other acts generated even more controversy. Abductions of innocent foreigners divided Hizbullah's clerics. Some came out clearly against the practice, which they criticized as a violation of Islamic law. Other clerics justified the hostage-holding as an unfortunate but necessary evil. But even these showed some hesitation, so that the hostage-holders often had to provide their own justifications, communicated through hand-scrawled missives to the press. Ultimately, the debate over the Islamic legality of hostage-holding did not produce a repentant release of hostages. They were usually freed when it served Iran's purposes, in moves governed by the ethic of the marketplace rather than Islamic law. But the debate did put the perpetrators of these acts in the moral docket, before the only constituency that mattered: believers in the primacy of Islamic law. And it is possible that hostage-holding would have been practiced even more extensively had this debate never taken place, although no one can say this for certain.

Finally, some acts could not be defended from the point of view of Islamic law. True, France supplied Iraq with the weapons that killed Iran's faithful in the Gulf War. Striking at French interests would show the solidarity of true believers. But the bombings that shook Paris in 1986, and which killed at random in

shops and trains, represented acts of sheer terror that Hizbullah's clerics could never have defended. And so the Lebanese Shi'ite plotters, who came from within Hizbullah, took care not to claim the bombings for Islam and even enticed a hapless Tunisian recruit to plant the bombs. Both distancing measures reflected a certain knowledge that the bombings constituted terror by *any* definition, Western or Islamic. Perhaps for this reason, the Paris bombings remained an isolated instance, although Hizbullah possessed the capability to launch similar campaigns abroad and was reported ready to do so on many occasions.

Hizbullah's war with Amal also caused deep anguish among the clerics, for it involved the killing of Shi'ites by Shi'ites. Of course, it could be rationalized: Amal had conspired with the enemies of Islam, within Lebanon and abroad. It denied the global leadership of Islamic Iran and protected Israel by barring Hizbullah's way to the south. Yet Hizbullah's clerics were not completely persuaded that these deeds justified killing, and they persisted in calling the struggle a "dissension," a *fitna*, rather than a sacred war, a jihad. This did not stem the fighting. But if Amal had to be fought, then it had to be fought quickly and in a spirit of regret. At one point, at the height of the fighting, the clerics could no longer look away, for fighters in the field had taken to mutilating corpses in Lebanese fashion—a method used to inspire terror in the enemy. The men of religion issued a religious edict against the practice.

In the end, Hizbullah's violence could not help but demonstrate the movement's contradictory character. Hizbullah was Islamic by day, Lebanese by night. What seemed right in the mosques did not always work in the alleys. Hizbullah's clerics had to know when to avert their eyes from the compromises between the ideal and the real. Was this hypocrisy? There were some principles, even of Islam, that the poor could not afford. And if the poor did not have smart bombs, then who would deny them the blunt weapons at hand? "The oppressed nations do not have the technology and destructive weapons America and Europe have," said Fadlallah:

They must thus fight with special means of their own. . . . [We] recognize the right of nations to use every unconventional method to fight these aggressor nations, and do not regard what oppressed Muslims of the world do with primitive and unconventional means to confront aggressor powers as terrorism. We view this as religiously lawful warfare against the world's imperialist and domineering powers.

But even Fadlallah drew a line: sacred ends could not be achieved *only* by profane means. There always had to be some aspects of Hizbullah's struggle that approached the exacting standards of the law. And usually there were. At one moment, a guard might beat a hapless foreign hostage to discourage thoughts of escape. But that could be rationalized if, at the same moment, a fighter of the jihad prepared himself to court death by assaulting an Israeli army patrol. "There is evil in everything good and something good in every evil," reasoned Fadlallah. Even a fundamentalist movement preoccupied with purity had to acknowledge its own impurities—and strive to cleanse itself, even as it cleansed the world around it.

The Impact of Hizbullah

During the decade between 1982 and 1992, Hizbullah's violence made an indelible impression on the world, and its name passed into common parlance. Yet Hizbullah's vision of a new age receded from grasp. By the end of the decade, the triumph of Islam in Lebanon, the further spread of Iran's revolution, and the liberation of Jerusalem all seemed more remote than ever. Lebanon inched toward a Syrian-guaranteed peace based on (revised) confessionalism—a reform, not a revolution. Islamic Iran, still smarting from wounds sustained in a failed war with Iraq, turned toward domestic reconstruction. And Arab states, Lebanon among them, sat down with Israel in direct talks to discuss a possible peace. Had Hizbullah chased the horizon?

No one could say for certain, but none could deny that Hizbullah had become one of the realities of Lebanon and the region. Hizbullah did not have the means to turn the world upside-down, but it had fought and

bought its way into the hearts of perhaps as many as half of Lebanon's politically active Shi'ites. Hizbullah had played an instrumental role in driving foreign forces out of Lebanon and continued a tireless campaign against Israel in the south. It had rendered some service to Islamic Iran by its abductions of foreigners and had also secured the release of many of its own imprisoned members. It had defeated its Shi'ite rivals in one confrontation after another, earning the respect of friends and the fear of enemies. And above all, it had initiated a return to Islam—a gradual process of inner transformation whose results no one could predict.

Still, the world had changed in profound ways while Hizbullah made itself secure. Old ideologies broke under the weight of economics; old conflicts moved toward resolution. Even Islamic Iran turned a corner, moving from confrontation to cooperation with the West. Fadlallah helped his listeners accept the fact. "Like all revolutions, including the French Revolution, the Islamic Revolution did not have a realistic line at first," he said. "At that time it served to create a state, it produced a mobilization, a new religious way of thinking and living, with the aim of winning Muslim autonomy and independence from the superpowers." But "the new phase which should now be reached is the normalization of relations with the rest of the world." To speak of the Islamic Revolution like any other revolution, to speak of accepting the world as it is—at first these ideas found little echo among Hizbullah's other clerics. But soon they also would concede that Hizbullah, too, would have to turn a corner. The release of nearly all the Western hostages in 1991 indicated that the reassessment was under way.

Fadlallah had warned against the limits of violence. The Palestinians in the 1970s had also stunned the world with their violence—and still had nothing to show for it. To avoid such an impasse, Hizbullah would have to move to a new phase: the struggle for ideas. This would be a different kind of jihad, requiring perseverance and patience, for Hizbullah had taken only a first step: "We work to arrive at a result from within the

objective and actual circumstances, some of which we ourselves must work to create, while others we must await with the passage of time. We see that these conditions do not exist in the Lebanese reality at the present stage and in the immediate stages to follow—this, despite the spread of the Islamic spirit which transformed Islam into a pressure force on political reality.”

Hizbullah began to fashion a new strategy for this jihad over hearts and minds. At home in Lebanon, it would become more committed to grass-roots social activism and more willing to substitute the slogan of democracy for the slogan of revolution. Elsewhere in the region, Islamic movements bid for power as political parties, not as revolutionary conspiracies, and they enjoyed remarkable success. Might this not work in Lebanon? After all, Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims constituted a clear majority in the country. Hizbullah began to demand a general referendum on the question of an Islamic state. In an ironic twist, Hizbullah cast itself as a champion of democracy; the “Party of God” began to evolve slowly into a political party, a *hizb*, whose clerics spoke more like candidates.

Hizbullah also transformed its own vision of its regional role. During the 1980s, the movement had looked east toward Islamic Iran, anticipating a victory against Iraq and the creation of an “all-encompassing Islamic state.” That dream had been shattered, but another arose to replace it. Hizbullah’s leaders noticed how Mediterranean Islam began to gain social and political momentum in the 1980s—in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, and among the Palestinians. Islamic movements in these countries also sought the transformation of secular state and society into Islamic state and society. Mediterranean Islamic activism is largely Sunni, as are the great majority of Muslims in the Mediterranean basin. But its attitude to Shi’ism was usually dispassionate, and it now contained pockets of open sympathy for Iran’s revolution as a genuine expression of Islam, from Tunisia’s “Renaissance” Islamic party to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Hizbullah sat astride a point where two powerful winds of Islamic reassertion con-

verged—one from the west, the other from the east. And it soon established itself as the mediating bridge between Mediterranean Islam—the Islam of the Algerian Islamists and the Palestinian Jihad groups—and the stalled but still potent Islam of Iran. In short, Hizbullah sought to play the classic Lebanese role of middleman—to stay afloat by mediating the contact between two parts of the Muslim world separated by language, culture, and space. This kind of mediation is precisely the Lebanese art, and it is the way Lebanon has found its place and livelihood in the world. Hizbullah bid to become the bridge between Shi'ism and Sunnism, Iran and the Arabs, the Gulf and the Mediterranean.

Were Hizbullah to become such a bridge, its role would change profoundly. The fighting vanguards of Islamic revolution would become the talking mediators of ideas. Lebanon would cease to be the ground of contention; instead, Hizbullah would assist the struggle of others, by becoming a regional amplifier of Islamic Iran's message. It now remained to be seen whether Hizbullah would prove as adept in persuasion as in coercion, whether its words would topple the structures that its bombs had only shaken.

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