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# Hezbollah: Ideology, Practice, and the Arab Revolts

*Between popular legitimacy and strategic interests*

Samir Shalabi



**LUND**  
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# Abstract

In the years prior to what became known as the Arab Spring, regional public opinion strongly favored Hezbollah due to its principled commitment to the liberation of Palestine. As popular upheavals swept through the Arab Middle East in 2011, this sentiment continued as the movement gave its support to the initial uprisings. However, as the protests reached Syria the image of Hezbollah as a champion of the oppressed shifted when it decided to side with the regime of Bashar al-Assad and thus raising the question of what it is that actually drives and determines the actions and policy decisions of Hezbollah. As such, this thesis focuses on the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice in the context of the Arab revolts of 2011 and beyond. It argues that Hezbollah is a deeply rational and pragmatic movement that when necessary does not hesitate to disregard its doctrinal principles in favor of its material interests. This relationship is analyzed using the Social Movement Theory known as 'framing' as well as a perspective on ideology influenced by materialism.

*Keywords: Hezbollah, ideology, Arab revolts, social movement, framing, terrorism*

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# 1. Introduction

Since 2011 the Arab Middle East has witnessed a series of revolutions and uprisings that ushered in an era of change in a region that had been characterized by entrenched dictatorships and repressed populations. As the old order seemed to crumble in the face of massive popular mobilizations, established political players across the region were confronted with unprecedented challenges and dilemmas. Prominent among those players was the Lebanese Shi'a movement, Hezbollah. In the decades prior to the upheavals, Hezbollah had experienced an extraordinary evolution from being a relatively marginal guerrilla force, conducting sporadic attacks against its arch-enemy Israel in reaction to the latter's military aggression on Lebanon in the late 1970s to early 1980s, into a mature organization, social movement and political party. In addition to being the only Arab actor having inflicted military defeats on Israel in 2000 and 2006, Hezbollah had also become part and parcel of the Lebanese political structure through a process of integration starting in the 1990s.

Furthermore, since the 2003 US invasion and subsequent occupation and destruction of Iraq, Middle East politics has been marked by a new cold war<sup>1</sup> over regional influence between two competing axes led by Saudi Arabia on one side and Iran on the other. Hezbollah, together with Syria, form the core of the coalition bloc led by Iran. The Arab revolts presented opportunities as well as challenges in this regard as the regional struggle came to take the form of proxy conflicts in some of the countries where the unrest occurred. Being a crucial ally of Iran and Hezbollah, Syria came to be a particularly important area of conflict because the nature of the post-civil war regime there is expected to determine the outcome of this regional power struggle.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the role of ideology in the actions of the protagonists is important, not only in order to determine the motives of the actors themselves but also to understand the drivers of the broader regional dynamics. This thesis will thus

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<sup>1</sup> The current cold war is an updated version of one that took place in the 1950s-60s pitting a coalition of Arab nationalist republics against another coalition of reactionary monarchies. M. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*, 3rd edn., New York, Oxford University Press, 1978.

<sup>2</sup> F. G. Gause III, *Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War*, Washington D.C., Brookings Institution, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Papers/2014/07/22-beyond-sectarianism-cold-war-gause/English-PDF.pdf?la=en> (accessed 19 May 2015); T. Cambanis, 'Iran is Winning the War for Dominance of the Middle East', 14 April 2015, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/14/yemen-iran-saudi-arabia-middle-east/> (accessed 19 May 2015).

focus on the relationship between the ideology and practice of one of the key forces in this regional struggle, Hezbollah, within the context of the Arab revolts of 2011 and after.

## 1.1 Aim and Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to examine the way in which Hezbollah's ideological principles relate to its practical behavior regarding the movement's response to the Arab revolts of 2011 and beyond. More specifically, I want to investigate the extent to which Hezbollah's actions during the popular upheavals, as well as its portrayal of them, reflect the movement's ideology. The relevance of this area of study, in addition to the regional cold war dynamics mentioned in the introduction, can be traced back to the way in which Hezbollah has been portrayed and classified in the Western — and to some extent in the Arab — world. Many states, international organizations, and large parts of the media have described Hezbollah as having established itself at the “forefront of international terrorism”. For example, in 1997 the United States labeled Hezbollah as a “Foreign Terrorist Organization,” in 2002 Canada listed Hezbollah as a “terrorist entity,” and in 2013, the European Union added Hezbollah's “military wing” to its terrorism blacklist.<sup>3</sup>

I am not primarily concerned here with determining whether or not Hezbollah is a terrorist organization, but there are certain aspects regarding this issue that relates to the subject that I will investigate. Firstly, it is highly problematic for states, international organizations, or for that matter the scientific community, to label any actor as a “terrorist” when (a) there is no internationally agreed upon definition of what terrorism actually constitutes<sup>4</sup>, making the label a more or less meaningless analytical category<sup>5</sup> and, more importantly, when (b) the principle of terrorism, generally is applied to only one party to a conflict, most often non-state actors, making violence committed by states somehow legitimate.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, portraying

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, ‘Country reports on terrorism 2011’, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2011/195553.htm#hizballah> (accessed 19 May 2015); Public Safety Canada, ‘Listed Terrorist Entities’, <http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrt/cntr-trrrsm/lstd-ntts/crnt-lstd-ntts-eng.aspx#2027> (accessed 19 May 2015); J. Pawlak and A. Croft, ‘EU adds Hezbollah's military wing to terrorism list’, *Reuters*, 22 July, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/22/us-eu-hezbollah-idUSBRE96K0DA20130722> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Terrorism is nevertheless commonly understood to be ‘the intentional targeting of civilians to achieve political ends.’

<sup>5</sup> ‘There is no UN definition of terrorism’, *Human Rights Voices*, [http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/EYEontheUN/un\\_101/facts/?p=61](http://www.humanrightsvoices.org/EYEontheUN/un_101/facts/?p=61) (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Examples of terrorism committed by states are the US's violent aggressions (direct and through proxies) in Latin America resulting in thousands of civilian deaths as well as its international assassination campaign

a group such as Hezbollah in this way conveys the impression that its actions are primarily driven by ideology or identity, such as the desire to destroy Israel or expanding the regional role of Shi'a forces. Such a narrative may conceal the instrumental use of ideology as a tool of legitimization and thus the very nature and character of many non-state actors. This thesis will thus attempt to challenge the assumption that Hezbollah is primarily an ideologically-driven movement and instead argue that viewing Hezbollah as a rational player, which perhaps is more concerned with its own material interests than it is with fulfilling its ideological goals, will provide not only a more nuanced understanding of this self-proclaimed resistance movement, but also a perspective on the current regional power struggle that is more rooted in *realpolitik* than identity.

The question to be investigated will therefore be as follows:

How does Hezbollah's ideological principles relate to its practical behavior and policy orientations regarding the movement's stance on the Arab revolts?

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primarily in Yemen and Pakistan which as of yet has killed hundreds of civilians under the pretext of preventing people suspected of potentially intending to harm US interests at some point in the future. Israel's devastating assaults on Gaza is another example, one of which was described by the so called the Goldstone report as "a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population" referring to Israel's 2008-09 'Operation Cast Lead' but could just as easily be applied to many of the other attacks, the latest of which being the 51 day war in the summer of 2014. A final example is the international sanctions regime imposed on Gaza by 'the Quartet' (US, UN, EU, Russia) and Israel following the victory by Hamas in the 2006 legislative elections there, declared by the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center to have been free and fair. The purpose of the sanctions was to get the people of Gaza to repudiate Hamas as their leadership and choose the "right" government to represent them. So, considering the principle of law that stipulates that "the doer of an act must be taken to have *intended* its natural and foreseeable consequences," meaning, that an act which predictably and inevitably results in the death of civilians should be understood as a deliberate act, 'the intentional targeting of civilians to achieve political ends' seems to be an accurate characterization of the examples just mentioned, thus qualifying them as acts of terror. This is obviously not how terrorism conventionally is understood. If the definition is utilized when describing some actors but not others, the principle is hypocritically applied. As such, if the principle of terrorism is used, it should either apply to all actors in a consistent fashion or not be applied at all. Amnesty International, *United States of America: 'Targeted Killing' Policies Violate the Right to Life*, London, 2012; Amnesty International, *Will I Be Next? US Drone Strikes in Pakistan*, London, 2013; N., Chomsky, *On Western Terrorism*, London, Pluto Press, 2013, Chapter 1, 6; *Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict*, 2009, p. 408; National Democratic Institute, *Final Report on the Palestinian Legislative Council Elections January 25, 2006*, Washington DC, 2006, p. 3; International Crisis Group, *Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas*, 2006, p. i; *Breaking the Silence, This is How we Fought in Gaza: Soldiers testimonies and photographs from Operation 'Protective Edge' (2014)*, 2015; International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion on the Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 1996, 'Dissenting Opinion of Judge Weeramantry', p. 498.

## 1.2 Delimitations

The main delimitation in this thesis has to do with the time-period to be studied. I have chosen to restrict the scope of the investigation to the period after the eruption of the Arab uprisings and after, due to the fact that the study will be more focused and will give a more in-depth analysis of a specific part of Hezbollah's history. Because of the contemporaneity of this thesis' subject, this delimitation also allows me to update earlier studies on Hezbollah.

## 1.3 Theoretical Framework

To understand the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice, I will attempt to integrate a concept from classical Social Movement Theory called "framing" with a perspective on ideology inspired by materialism. Studying Hezbollah by using the tools of social science developed for the study of the rest of the world is not just useful in itself but is also a way to view an Arab-Islamic actor such as Hezbollah as a "normal" social actor that employs resources, strategies, and practices the way that any other social actor does. By taking this approach, I reject any sort of Arab or Muslim cultural exceptionalism as the prism through which to understand and explain social movements, mobilization, or any other social phenomena in the Middle East. Instead, and as others have observed, it is important to emphasize the rationality of even the most violent Islamic movements in order to avoid culturalist or neo-Orientalist perceptions of the region.<sup>7</sup> In this section I will therefore first define Hezbollah as a "social movement organization," then present the theory of "framing," and proceed to outline the materialist conception of ideology, which will finally lead me to integrate these theories into a framework for understanding the ideology-practice dynamic of Hezbollah.

### 1.3.1 *Hezbollah as a social movement (organization)*

Defining what exactly constitutes a social movement is not always an easy task and has even been described as a "theoretical nightmare".<sup>8</sup> A few characteristics of social movements are

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<sup>7</sup> J. Beinin and F. Vairel (ed.), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., California, Stanford University Press, 2013, pp. 2-3, 12.

<sup>8</sup> C. Barker, 'Class Struggle and Social Movements', in C. Barker, L. Cox, J. Krinsky, A.G. Nilsen (ed.), *Marxism and Social Movements*, Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2014, p. 47.

that they “[pursues] a common political agenda or ‘common cause,’” have “a visible constituency or membership base”; “[e]ngages in collective actions ... in pursuit of the movements political goals”;<sup>9</sup> “are involved in conflictual relations with clearly identified opponents” and “share a distinct collective identity”.<sup>10</sup> One author defined social movements as “organized yet informal social entities that are engaged in extra-institutional conflict that is oriented towards a goal”.<sup>11</sup> Another described them as “a process in which a specific social group develops a collective project of skilled activities centered on a rationality ... that tries to change or maintain a dominant structure of entrenched needs and capacities, in part or whole”.<sup>12</sup> This indicates firstly that social movements are complex phenomena, and secondly, that they ought not primarily to be understood as *formally* organized entities. This means that a differentiation needs to be made between social movements as such and movement components that are organized in a more formal fashion. The latter is usually referred to as “social movement organizations” (SMO). An SMO is “an organization that has been associated with a social movement and which carries out the tasks that are necessary for the movement to survive and be successful”.<sup>13</sup> In short, it is the formally organized component of a social movement.

As Hezbollah was initially created with the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon, modeled on the Iranian example; alleviating the suffering of Lebanon’s deprived; and expelling Israel from illegally occupied territory, it aimed for social and political change on a collective level, thus qualifying Hezbollah to be categorized as a social movement and a SMO.<sup>14</sup> The distinction between a social movement and a SMO is important partly due to the highly organized, disciplined and professional nature of Hezbollah but also because of the movement’s institutionalization and integration into the Lebanese political system from the 1990s onwards, leading to it being rendered as a legitimate political actor, and not simply an

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<sup>9</sup> J. Horn, *Gender and Social Movements Overview Report*, BRIDGE, Institute of Development Studies, 2013, p. 22., <http://www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/4/document/1401/FULL%20REPORT.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>10</sup> D. De la Porta and M. Diani, *Social movements: An introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Malden MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Four Stages of Social Movements: Social Movements & Collective Behavior > Four Stages of Social Movements’ in *Research starters: academic topic overviews*, p. 2, <http://www.ebscohost.com/uploads/imported/thisTopic-dbTopic-1248.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>12</sup> C. Barker, in *Marxism and Social Movements*, p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Four Stages of Social Movements: Social Movements & Collective Behavior > Four Stages of Social Movements’ in *Research starters: academic topic overviews*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> M. Anastasio, ‘Hezbollah as a social movement organization: using social movement theory to explain origins and collective action’, *Foreign politics and Policy* [web blog], <https://foreignpoliticsandpolicy.wordpress.com/2013/03/05/hezbollah-as-a-social-movement-organization-using-social-movement-theory-to-explain-origins-and-collective-action/> (accessed 19 May 2015).



informally organized social force.<sup>15</sup> This also alludes to the fact that labeling Hezbollah as merely a “terrorist organization” is an all too simplistic characterization of that movement. If an honest and nuanced understanding of Hezbollah is desired, labeling it as such will not be constructive.

So, the basic assumption of this thesis pertaining to the definition of Hezbollah is that Hezbollah is a Lebanese Shi’a social movement that strives for large-scale changes in the existing social and political order, through the use of a combination of official activity within the Lebanese political system, as well as military activity against Israel and its occupation forces (or other opponents). Defining Hezbollah as a social movement does however not mean that it is *only* a social movement. It is also a political party, militia, social welfare organization, and a participant in government, but for the purposes of this thesis I will define Hezbollah as a social movement.

Now that Hezbollah has been defined, the following section will deal with a Social Movement Theory referred to as “framing”.

### *1.3.2 Framing theory*

Originally introduced by the work of sociologist Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, the concept of framing at its most basic, comprises the methods utilized by social movements to mobilize support by way of shaping and disseminating their messages to potential adherents in a manner that encourages them to support those movements.<sup>16</sup> A commonly used definition of the concept is “*the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action*”.<sup>17</sup> With this definition, a frame can be understood as a way of interpreting and presenting oneself and the world with the purpose of motivating people to act, in order to fulfill specific goals as well as to provide justifications

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<sup>15</sup> J.L. Gleis and B. Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2012, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Harper & Row, 1974; R.D. Benford and D.A. Snow, ‘Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 26, 2000, p. 614., <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/223459?uid=3738984&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21106871399013> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>17</sup> D. McAdam, J.D. McCarthy, M.N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*, Cambridge, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996, p. 6. (emphasis in original).

for those activities and goals. According to Noakes and Johnston, “to explain their actions and to motivate participants, movements must produce interpretive packages that explain a range of problems in relatively narrow terms, highlight some issues, and ignore others”.<sup>18</sup> In this way, social movements are not merely seen as reflections of structural arrangements but are rather viewed as being actively involved in processes of meaning construction. The framing approach is therefore agency-oriented in the sense that social movements, or activists within them, are shaping the ways they want their messages to be interpreted. However it also involves the concept of contention in the sense that it generates frames that differ or challenge existing ones. The result of this agency- and contention-oriented activity that social movements are involved in is referred to by Bedford and Snow, among others, as “collective action frames”.<sup>19</sup>

## CORE FRAMING TASKS

Social movements construct collective action frames partly as their adherents:

negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who or what is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements and urge others to act in concert to affect change.<sup>20</sup>

These are the key functions of collective action frames that Bedford and Snow call “core framing tasks”. They are termed “diagnostic framing” (problem identification and attributions), “prognostic framing,” and “motivational framing”.<sup>21</sup>

- *Diagnostic framing* involves identification of some social or political condition that is seen as problematic and presents potential constituents with the causes of that condition while directing blame or responsibility towards someone or something.
- *Prognostic framing* contains a proposed solution to the problem(s) and presents strategies for its remedy.
- *Motivational framing* provides a rationale for collective action and motives to join the movement and to ameliorate the identified problem(s).

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<sup>18</sup> J. A. Noakes and H. Johnston, *Frames of protest: social movements and the framing perspective*, Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2005, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Benford and Snow, 'Framing processes and Social Movements', pp. 613-14.

<sup>20</sup> Benford and Snow, 'Framing processes and Social Movements', p. 615.

<sup>21</sup> Benford and Snow, 1988; Benford and Snow, 'Framing processes and social movements', p. 616-17.

These framing processes can therefore be seen as ways in which social movements communicate with their constituents and shape their discourse in a way that resonates with people and motivates them to action.

### *1.3.3 Critique of the framing perspective*

Frame analysis has not been exempted from critique. Robert Benford provides an insightful “insider’s critique” of the theory claiming that the field has focused too much on conceptual development and case application at the expense of “more systematic empirical studies” which has meant that specific operational definitions of the concept that for instance quantitative researchers can use has been lacking.<sup>22</sup> He furthermore asserts that the work on framing theory overwhelmingly has centered on descriptive research whereby the “research agenda has been to identify the universe of specific frames”. This has meant that the study of the processes and dynamics of framing have been given a lower priority.<sup>23</sup> A further criticism is what Benford calls the “reification problem” by which he refers to “the process of talking about socially constructed ideas as though they are *real*, as though they exist independent of the collective interpretations and constructions of the actors involved”. It is thus not social movements that frame issues; it is rather the *people in them* that do.<sup>24</sup> Finally, he points out that much of the framing scholarship has an “elite-bias”. By this he means that the literature focuses on the framing by the movement elites while failing to take into account other movement adherents participating in creating collective action frames.<sup>25</sup> This is something that this thesis surely is guilty of.

Nevertheless, as framing theory does not specifically deal with the function and role of ideology in social movements or society in general, I will in the next section provide a materialist perspective on ideology that will compensate for the relative lack of the instrumental view of ideology in framing theory.

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<sup>22</sup> Benford, R.D, ‘An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective’, *Sociological Inquiry*, Vol. 67, Issue 4, 1997, pp. 411,413, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1997.tb00445.x/abstract> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Benford, R.D, ‘An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective’, *Sociological Inquiry*, p. 414.

<sup>24</sup> Benford, R.D, ‘An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective’, *Sociological Inquiry*, p. 418. (emphasis in original)

<sup>25</sup> Benford, R.D, ‘An Insider’s Critique of the Social Movement Framing Perspective’, *Sociological Inquiry*, p. 421.

#### *1.3.4 A materialist conception of ideology*

Although included in framing theory is the notion that constructed realities — but not ideology per se — can be used to justify collective action, I wish to emphasize this aspect by relating it to a materialist understanding of ideology. Ideology in this tradition is conceived as a function of social relations rooted in material reality and is utilized by society's dominant group(s) to legitimate its position in the social structure. Ideology in this sense functions to serve the interests of the powerful yet is displayed as serving the interests of society as a whole regardless of social position. Ideology's ultimate role then, is to conceal reality whenever it contradicts the dominant group's interests and it becomes a powerful tool for society's hegemonic forces. Although this understanding of ideology has its roots in the sociology of Karl Marx I will in my analysis of Hezbollah not take a strictly economic perspective but rather use fragments from the materialist ideology conception in order to enhance framing theory's legitimation aspect of reality construction.<sup>26</sup> Hence, the main aspects of the materialist view of ideology that I will use in relation to Hezbollah are the notion that the dominant group in society uses ideology to: conceal reality; further its own interests; and legitimate its societal position.

#### *1.3.5 Integrating framing theory with the materialist conception of ideology*

The result of the previous sections is a theoretical framework consisting of framing theory on the one hand and a perspective on ideology influenced by materialism on the other. These theories can quite easily be integrated by simply emphasizing that the messages articulated and disseminated by social movements to their (potential) constituents have a legitimizing function and can be used to distort reality in situations when the movement's leadership feels that it is in their interest to do so. Framing theory does not extensively deal with this issue, which is why the materialist perspective on ideology provides useful insights for understanding other aspects as to why social movements shape information the way they do. The two theories should not be understood as strictly separate from each other but rather as two sides of the same coin.

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<sup>26</sup> K. Marx, F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, 1932 [written in 1845-6], [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx\\_The\\_German\\_Ideology.pdf](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_The_German_Ideology.pdf) (accessed 19 May 2015).

## 1.4 Method and Material

As the aim of this thesis is to examine the way in which Hezbollah's ideological principles relate to its practical behavior in the context of the movement's response to the Arab revolts, the method to be used will consist of analysis of documents which will be examined and discussed in relation to official statements and speeches by Hezbollah, information from the media, NGO reports and other secondary sources. I will thus take a comparative approach when analyzing Hezbollah's official documents as well as when comparing them to the movement's public statements and actions.

For determining what exactly Hezbollah's ideology consists of I will use the movement's officially published documents, the most prominent of which are the 1985 "Open Letter" and the 2009 "New Manifesto." In addition, a book written by the deputy secretary-general and main ideologue of Hezbollah, Naim Qassem, entitled *Hezbollah: the story from within* will also be used. These sources will provide sufficient information for outlining Hezbollah's ideological orientation and will be the starting-point of the investigation. I will proceed to analyze the ideological principles relevant in the context of the Arab revolts and put them in relation to the stances and actions taken by the movement. For establishing Hezbollah's response to the revolts I will use a number of speeches delivered by secretary-general Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah as well as official statements published by the movement's Media Relations Office and satellite TV station al-Manar, in addition to various international and Middle East newspapers and reports by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

This material will be examined through the use of Social Movement Theory and a conception of ideology based upon materialism, which will provide an integrated analytical framework for understanding the ideology-practice dynamic of Hezbollah.

## 1.5 Previous Research

I will in this section briefly present some of the research done on Hezbollah in order to situate my study in the context of where the field stands today.

The phenomenon of Hezbollah has been a subject of significant interest for many researchers and scholars over the years. After the outbreak of the so-called Arab spring and Hezbollah's subsequent intervention in Syria's civil war, the interest in this movement has grown even further. One of the main areas of study has been the so-called 'Lebanonization' of Hezbollah, meaning its gradual integration into the Lebanese political system and its concomitant evolution into a mainstream political party. Another subject regards Hezbollah's relationship to political violence, that is, whether it should be characterized as a terrorist organization or a resistance movement. But when it comes to the role of ideology in Hezbollah's practical behavior the research seems to be somewhat slim, even though some important works certainly deal with aspects of this problem.

In his book titled "*The shifts in Hizbullah's ideology*," the Professor of Political Science Joseph Alagha analyses Hezbollah's identity construction by focusing on the movement's ideological evolution from a religious ideology, political ideology and political program. These three components are seen as characteristics of the stages in Hezbollah's evolution as a *jihadi* movement.<sup>27</sup> Although the book is mainly concerned with Hezbollah's ideology, Alagha in an effective way connects this to political developments in Lebanon and the region arguing that Hezbollah has been compelled to adapt to changing circumstances and abandon some of its religious ideological dogma, thus rendering it as a pragmatic actor.<sup>28</sup>

Adham Saouli, International Relations and Middle East scholar, also sees Hezbollah as being characterized by pragmatism, describing its ideological position as "shaped by Lebanese and Middle Eastern realities as the movement matures and interacts with other political actors."<sup>29</sup> In a 2003 article titled "Lebanon's Hizbullah The Quest for Survival", he depicts Hezbollah's ideological evolution as having developed in two different directions. The first is characterized by "ideological quietism" resulting from Hezbollah's integration into Lebanese politics, while the other is distinguished by "ideological clamor" as the struggle with Israel is ever-present in Hezbollah's discourse.<sup>30</sup> In this way he makes an important distinction between Hezbollah's domestic and regional approaches and demonstrates that the movement can act in diverse ways depending on the environment in which it operates.

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<sup>27</sup> J. Alagha, *Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2006, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Alagha, *Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology*, p. 212.

<sup>29</sup> A. Saouli, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah The Quest for Survival', *World Affairs*, Vol. 166, No. 2, 2003, p. 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20672680> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Saouli, 'Lebanon's Hizbullah The Quest for Survival', p. 74.

Another perspective is presented by Zayn Knaub who holds a M.A. in International Terrorism and Diplomacy from Norwich University, in his article “Why is Hezbollah in Syria?” he argues that Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria was mainly driven by religious and ideological motivations, although mentioning some strategic aspects as well.<sup>31</sup> On account of its ideological commitment to the *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the jurist), Hezbollah is described as basically a puppet of Iran which simply obeys whatever orders are given by the Supreme Leader. The relationship between Hezbollah and Syria is furthermore depicted as primarily based on ideology and Shi’a Islam, thus explaining Hezbollah’s support for the Syrian regime by referring to these ideational factors. The need for Hezbollah to maintain its alliance with Syria in order to safeguard the supply-line from Iran is taken up, but because Knaub describes Hezbollah’s and Iran’s commitment to the Syrian regime as ultimately being based on their desire to fight Israel, Hezbollah’s actions are ultimately understood by Knaub as ideologically driven.<sup>32</sup>

The following chapter will briefly outline the history of Hezbollah, taking into account its ideological evolution and its position vis-à-vis Lebanon’s political system.

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<sup>31</sup> Z. Knaub, ‘Why is Hezbollah in Syria?’, *Small Wars Journal*, 2013, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/why-is-hezbollah-in-syria> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Z. Knaub, ‘Why is Hezbollah in Syria?’, *Small Wars Journal*, 2013.

## 2. Hezbollah's Roots and Development

Why was Hezbollah founded? What role did ideology play for Hezbollah's political practice in the decades prior to the Arab revolts? What did Hezbollah's relationship to Lebanon's political sphere look like during the movement's evolution? In this chapter, these questions will be addressed and thereby provide a background for the analysis of the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice, in the context of the Arab revolts.

### 2.1 Origins and Early Development

Despite an on-going discussion about when exactly Hezbollah was founded, Joseph Alagha, a prominent scholar and expert on Hezbollah argues that it emerged in 1978 as an "Islamic *jihadi*<sup>33</sup> movement of social and political protest".<sup>34</sup> 1978 constitutes the roots of Hezbollah and its creation coincided with the first Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the disappearance of Imam Musa al-Sadr.<sup>35</sup> However, Hezbollah was not to be formalized into a concrete organization until the 1980s.

Various conditions coincided to precipitate Hezbollah's formation. On the regional level, Iran played a pivotal role providing material and ideological backing as it aimed to expand its zealous campaign of its "Islamic revolution".<sup>36</sup> The creation of Hezbollah also gave Iran a proxy force with which to attack Israel and a direct hand in Israeli-Palestinian relations.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the Islamic revolution can be seen as the culmination of a general rise of political Islam in the Arab world, which had emerged in response to the decline of secular Arab nationalism that had dominated the region since the days of Egypt's strongman Gamal

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<sup>33</sup> The term *jihad* (struggle) should however not be understood as reflecting some violent radicalism inherent to Hezbollah. Hezbollah's purpose has certainly been closely linked to militarily resisting Israel but its understanding of *jihad* is first and foremost based on the notion of a moral effort to fight the ills within oneself. This topic will be dealt with in greater detail later on in this study.

<sup>34</sup> Hezbollah officials refer to 1982 for its creation which is often repeated by many writers and researchers. Hassan Nasrallah claims that in 1978, when Israel's first invasion occurred, he was still pursuing his religious studies in Baalbek, which is located far north of the conflict area in south Lebanon, and "had nothing to do with what was going on in the country," H. Nasrallah, interview by 'Nida al-Watan', August 31, 1993, in N. Noe (ed), *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*, London, Verso, 2007, p. 124-25; J. Alagha, *Hizbullah's Identity Construction*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011, p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Musa al-Sadr was a Hezbollah ideologue whose charismatic leadership mobilized the Lebanese Shi'ites in the 1960s and 1970s into political participation. He mysteriously disappeared when on an official visit to Libya and since then Hezbollah has accused the Gaddafi regime of kidnapping him. F. Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*, USA, Cornell University Press, 1986.

<sup>36</sup> A.R. Norton, *Hezbollah A short history*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009, p. 34.

<sup>37</sup> Gleis and Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas*, p. 40.



Abdul Nasser. Internationally, Hezbollah's founding occurred at the same time as the early stages of globalization, whereby better media communications allowed Iranian clerics to spread their revolutionary Shi'ism to Lebanon and the world. Globalization also prompted the expansion of the arms industry as the global market was flooded with cheap weapons perfectly suited for the kind of irregular warfare that Hezbollah was to be involved in.<sup>38</sup>

As for local conditions in Lebanon, one of the principal causes for Hezbollah's emergence was the politicization of the Shi'ites which was the ultimate result of their marginalized and second-class status in that multi-confessional country. With the onset of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 the Shi'ites came to realize that they needed to defend themselves from attacks by other communities due to the incapacity on the part of the government to protect them, making the formation of Hezbollah a natural expression of that condition and collective mindset.<sup>39</sup> Other social processes were also relevant for the politicization and mobilization of the Shi'ites, one of which was the migration of people from the countryside to the cities. The severe living conditions that the Lebanese Shi'ites lived under in Lebanon's rural areas made them seek new opportunities in the urban parts of the country from the late 1950s onwards. The immigrants settled in slums on the outskirts of Beirut, which provided fertile ground for the development of social protest movements against what was perceived as a discriminatory system. This population would become an important social base for Hezbollah.<sup>40</sup>

The final trigger that led to the rise of Hezbollah was the second Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 that brought together various Shi'a groups who initiated a campaign of military resistance against the occupation forces. Or as Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's current secretary-general, put it: "We are a movement born as a reaction to the occupation of part of our country".<sup>41</sup> Fighting the Israeli occupation fostered a 'resistance identity,' which would come to be one of the central components of Hezbollah's ideology.<sup>42</sup>

After operating clandestinely during its first years, Hezbollah in 1985 published its political manifesto or Open Letter, disclosing its militant religio-political ideology, which signaled the

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<sup>38</sup> Gleis and Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas*, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> Gleis and Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas*, p. 38.; E. Azani, *Hezbollah the Story of the Party of God*, New York, Palgrave Mcmillan, 2011, p. 139.

<sup>40</sup> Azani, *Hezbollah the Story of the Party of God*, p. 52.

<sup>41</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview by Nida al-Watan', August 31, 1993, in Noe, *Voice of Hezbollah*, p. 127.

<sup>42</sup> J. Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring*, India, Kalpana Shukla KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2013, p. xxiii.

movement's entry into Lebanese politics. Nevertheless, Hezbollah was in the 1980s a closed sectarian movement with a rather limited following. This was partly due to its strong proclamations about overhauling Lebanon's political system and replacing it with an Islamic state, but also because of accusations by the West of Hezbollah carrying out international "terrorist" operations leading the movement to take a defensive, introvert position. The consequence of its strong ideological stances was alienation from other political and social movements and a difficulty to become part of, and penetrate, Lebanese political life.<sup>43</sup>

## 2.2 Political Pragmatism and Ideological Accommodation

When the fifteen-year civil war ended with the signing of the Taif accord in 1989 which altered the Lebanese political system, by equally distributing parliamentary seats between Muslims and Christians, and thus changing the previous arrangement that favored the latter by a 6 to 5 ratio, Hezbollah took the much-debated decision to participate in the first post-civil war elections in the summer of 1992.<sup>44</sup> It had previously denounced the political system as oppressive, corrupt and sectarian, and anyone maneuvering within it was cast as serving the interests of the regime.<sup>45</sup> Hassan Nasrallah, professed that "Opposition from within the government in its current formation would not be a real opposition, and would produce nothing".<sup>46</sup> What Hezbollah had called for was a complete and revolutionary transformation — *by peaceful and democratic means* — to achieve its goal of establishing an Islamic order that would safeguard the interests of all Lebanese people.<sup>47</sup>

During the civil war Hezbollah had operated within a vacuum, which the Taif agreement now undermined. From Hezbollah's perspective, the accord institutionalized a sort of Sunni-Maronite dominance, which would therefore exclude and marginalize it from political influence. Pressured by Iran, Hezbollah came to realize that in order to have a say in Lebanon's future while at the same time maintaining its political and social legitimacy, it had

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<sup>43</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring*, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

<sup>44</sup> Norton, *Hezbollah A short history*, p. 97; For an inside-look at the debate see N. Qassem, *Hizbullah The Story from Within*, London, Saqi, 2010, pp. 313-20.

<sup>45</sup> 'Open Letter Addressed to the Oppressed in Lebanon and the World', in J. Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011, p. 45.

<sup>46</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview by As-Safir, February 27, 1992, in Noe, *Voice of Hezbollah*, p. 74.

<sup>47</sup> "Open Letter" in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 44-45; H. Nasrallah, interview by al-Watan al-Araby, September 11, 1992, in Noe, *Voice of Hezbollah*, p. 90-91.

to opt for accommodation rather than confrontation.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in the 1990s, Hezbollah adopted a pragmatic position and a down-to-earth political program owing to the need for maintaining political influence in Lebanon's emerging pluralist public space. It had for all intents and purposes moved from marginalization to integration. Although its ideology did not change in essence, Hezbollah reinterpreted it to accommodate the changing circumstances and also separated its political program from its ideological principles. For example, one of its ideological goals was still the establishment of an Islamic state but that was not something Hezbollah actively strived for in its political activities.<sup>49</sup>

In this sense, Hezbollah acted strategically and pragmatically for the purpose of securing for itself a strong and influential position in Lebanon's political structure, thus making ideology take a back seat for more practical and realistic priorities.<sup>50</sup> It was however still able to successfully justify its participation in Lebanon's domestic political life by stating that it would "work to turn Lebanon into a country of resistance, and the state into a state of resistance" and that "In Islam, the act of serving the people and God's families, rescuing the oppressed, saving the distressed, and stretching out ones hand to the weak and dispossessed, are a huge part of the faith".<sup>51</sup> Thus, in a relatively short time since its inception, Hezbollah had moved from a position of isolation to the gradual integration into the very center of Lebanon's halls of power, and making use of central concepts in its ideology to aid in that effort.

## 2.3 Quest for Hegemony

From an ideological standpoint, the explanation for exercising pragmatism on the domestic front was that Hezbollah wanted to invest all of its energy and resources into fulfilling the movement's ultimate goal: ejecting Israel from occupied lands. Nasrallah had made it very clear when he said "Our strategy is to build a future for ourselves through confrontation with the Zionist enemy".<sup>52</sup> Continuously emphasizing the importance of the resistance meant that

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<sup>48</sup> M. Ranstorp, 'The strategy and tactics of Hezbollah's current Lebanonization process', *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol 3., No. 1, Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1998 pp. 116-117, <http://www.tandfonline.com.ludwig.lub.lu.se/doi/abs/10.1080/13629399808414643#.VTOMthfroQS> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Alagha, *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring*, pp. xxv-xxvi.

<sup>50</sup> M. Perry, 'Talking to terrorists: Hamas and Hezbollah' in K. Yambert (ed.), *The contemporary Middle East*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., USA, Westview Press, 2013, p. 317.

<sup>51</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview by al-Watan al-Araby, September 11, 1992, in Noe, *Voice of Hezbollah*, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview with al-Khaleej, March 11, 1986, in Noe, *The voice of Hezbollah*, p. 29.

when Israel finally withdrew from South Lebanon in 2000 after 22 years of occupation, Hezbollah was hailed as a ‘liberator’ by most Lebanese and the rest of the Arab world, which increased its popular appeal and legitimacy as a resistance movement.<sup>53</sup>

So, on the one hand, adopting an accommodationalist position by accepting and participating in the structures of the Lebanese state would mean that Hezbollah could devote more of its resources to the struggle against Israel instead of focusing on critiquing the Lebanese system. On the other hand, in the course of the first decade of the new century, several events occurred that indicated that Hezbollah was perhaps more interested in securing a place for itself in the top-echelons of the Lebanese political system. Specifically, after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 and the subsequent Syrian withdrawal,<sup>54</sup> Hezbollah seemed to change its political strategy and endeavored to manipulate Lebanon’s public sphere. In the following year, the July war with Israel presented Hezbollah with the opportunity to obtain the one-third veto power in the Cabinet, Lebanon’s top executive branch of government, making it clear that it now sought to fully dominate Lebanese politics. Furthermore, Hezbollah tried to secure its hegemony by militarily confronting its opponents on the streets of Beirut in 2008, but after that escalation, as well as it failing to win the 2009 legislative elections, Hezbollah settled for some minor political gains instead of risking uprooting Lebanon’s already fragile confessional system.<sup>55</sup>

That same year Hezbollah introduced its new Manifesto, which represented a significant change on some of its central principles compared to its 1985 Open Letter and was an expression of the pragmatism that had come to characterize Hezbollah in the course of its evolution. Hezbollah understood that it had to adapt to the changing social and political circumstances if it wanted to maintain its popular support base and have a meaningful impact on Lebanon’s political development. By the time of the run up to the Arab uprisings, Hezbollah had strengthened its political position and was deeply embedded in the Lebanese national context while simultaneously fostering its transnational and regional solidarities, which would prove important for how it would respond to the ensuing regional upheaval.

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<sup>53</sup> Z. Majed, *Hezbollah and the Shiite community: From political confessionalization to confessional specialization*, The Aspen Institute, 2010, p.8,

[http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/pubs/LRF\\_AW\\_digital\\_1122.pdf](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/pubs/LRF_AW_digital_1122.pdf), (accessed).

<sup>54</sup> Syria had entered Lebanon in 1976 as part of an Arab peacekeeping mission in response to the outbreak of the civil war. In accordance with the Taif agreement, Syria was to withdraw from Lebanon but failed to do so and instead became an occupying power until Lebanese and international pressure mounted leading to its expulsion.

<sup>55</sup> Alagha *Hizbullah's DNA and the Arab Spring*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

### 3. Ideology: Hezbollah's View of the World

Before examining the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice in the context of the Arab revolts, an inquiry and analysis of the ideology as such is required in order to establish a foundation that will serve as a starting-point for the investigation. Thus, the predominant part of this chapter will analyze the latest comprehensive document where Hezbollah outlines its current ideology, namely the New Manifesto, issued November 30, 2009. However, because the *religious* component of Hezbollah's ideology is given comparatively limited space in that document I will also use the book *Hizbullah: The story from within*, written by Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's current deputy secretary-general and main ideologue. Regarding the manifesto, in addition to using framing theory in the analysis I will take a comparative/historical approach by contrasting the text to Hezbollah's previous manifesto, the Open Letter, declared 16 February 1985.

#### 3.1 The New Manifesto

In addition to a foreword, the New Manifesto is composed of three parts entitled "Hegemony and Mobilization," "Lebanon," and "Palestine & the Settlement Negotiations" under which several subsections are included, dealing with issues ranging from relations with other actors to the political and economic system of Lebanon and the world. I will examine some of the most pertinent themes of the manifesto based mainly on their relevance for Hezbollah's actions during the Arab revolts and place them in relation to the 1985 Open Letter.

##### 3.1.1 *Oppressors and oppressed*

Hezbollah views the world as divided according to its interpretation of the Quranic notions of "oppressors" (*mustakbirin*) and "oppressed" (*mustad'afin*)<sup>56</sup> which, in my opinion, can be seen as the overarching theme and perhaps the most central concept in Hezbollah's political ideology. In chapter 2, section 7 under "Lebanon and International Relations," it is stated that "divergence is between the arrogant and the wretched, the oppressor and the oppressed, the

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<sup>56</sup> See for example the Quran, 2:190-93, 16:23 and 4:75.

haughty occupier and the pursuer of freedom and independence.”<sup>57</sup> The oppressors here refer to the United States and Israel and their allies as well as the representatives of “brutal capitalism” meaning the leading world powers in collusion with multinational corporations, who together seek to dominate the world.<sup>58</sup> This conceptual dichotomy of oppressors and oppressed can be understood as being among the components of the diagnostic framing that Hezbollah employs, which, as a reminder, essentially establishes what is wrong in society, why, and who or what is to blame. It allows Hezbollah to invoke a sense of injustice to those whom its message reaches and by that it manages to identify a clear problem in society of a political and social character. As noted, the causes for the problem of oppression is the global imperialist system and the main culprits are the United States and Israel. Regarding the concept of the oppressed, it refers to the people and countries suffering under this world order which Hezbollah calls for the rejection of through the “unity of the oppressed”.<sup>59</sup> The rejection of the US-Israeli-led world order and the establishment of an order based on justice and freedom is the proposed solution to the problem and can therefore be understood as the prognostic frame that Hezbollah adopts in this theme of its ideology. The diagnostic and prognostic frames are however not enough to galvanize people into action, so an additional motivational frame is needed in that regard. In the case of oppressors and oppressed, that frame consists of the call for unity, which may strengthen peoples’ identification with those considered to be part of the globally oppressed group and can thus mobilize people to action.

The concept of oppressor and oppressed is incidentally also an example of what social movement scholar William Gamson refers to as “injustice frames” which provides people with a conception of what ought to be perceived as fair, and by that can serve to politicize and thereby mobilize them.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, an injustice frame can function as a so-called “master frame;” a much broader frame that can resonate with a larger group and other social movements.<sup>61</sup> The concept of oppressors and oppressed can, in this way, be seen as a master

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<sup>57</sup> Chapter II, Section 7: “Lebanon and International Relations,” ‘New Manifesto,’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, pp. 131-2.

<sup>58</sup> Foreword and Chapter I, Section I: “The World and Western-American Hegemony,” ‘New Manifesto,’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 117, 119.

<sup>59</sup> Chapter III, Section I: “The Palestinian Cause and the Zionist Entity,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> W. Gamson., *Talking Politics*, 1992, referenced in F.C. Harris, ‘Specifying the Mechanisms Linking Dissent to Action’, in *Boston University Law Review*, Vol. 89, 2009, p. 606, <http://heinonline.org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/bulr89&page=605&collection=journals> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Benford and Snow, *Framing processes and Social Movements*, p. 618-19.

frame due to its generic character and appeal to people outside the Lebanese Muslim community.

Finally, comparing Hezbollah's notions of oppressors and oppressed in the 2009 document with the Open Letter, demonstrates that it has not changed in any significant way:

The countries of the oppressor world, in the East and the West, have coalesced to fight us ... We think that the ideological struggle between America and the Soviet Union is a bygone... both have drastically failed in achieving felicity for mankind since both capitalism and communism have failed in solving human problems by establishing a just, balanced society ... We exhort all the oppressed in the world to the necessity of forming an international front comprised of all the liberation movements<sup>62</sup> ...

And so, even though the historical realities have changed as the collapse of the Soviet Union attests to and the former bipolar international system has morphed into a unipolar, or multipolar one, depending how you see it, Hezbollah's fundamental animus to the perceived world oppressors is still clearly present.

### *3.1.2 Anti-Americanism and anti-capitalism*

The animosity towards the US is a salient feature in the Open Letter and is reaffirmed in the New Manifesto, but in the case of Hezbollah's stance on capitalism, it is addressed in greater detail in the 2009 document. Hezbollah states that the US has during the course of the twentieth century aspired for total world hegemony, which after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, was realized. The cost of the emergence of this unipolar world order and the subsequent wars the US waged on the world has been:

millions of people, visible mass destruction that has not been restricted to brick and mortar but that has reached out to affect the structure and composition of societies as well. In fact, societies have been fragmented and, in contrast to their historical developments, were forced to revert to previous confessional and sectarian conflicts ... US terrorism is the mother of all world terrorism.<sup>63</sup>

This position is not given just as strong religious legitimation as in the Open Letter where Hezbollah contends:

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<sup>62</sup> Section 2: "The "Oppressors" are in concordance about fighting us," 'Open Letter' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 41.; Section 14: "Our story with the world oppressors," 'Open Letter,' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 47.; Section 21: "International front for the oppressed," 'Open Letter,' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 52.

<sup>63</sup> Chapter I, Section I: "The World and Western-American Hegemony," 'New Manifesto,' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 120.

Imam Khomeini [Supreme Leader of Iran until his death in 1989] has stressed time and again that America is behind all our catastrophes, and it is the mother of all vice... When we fight it, we only exercise our legitimate right of defending Islam and the dignity of the umma [Muslim community].<sup>64</sup>

Regarding the global economic system, and as I briefly alluded to in the previous section, Hezbollah vehemently opposes it:

Brutal capitalism has transformed globalization into a vehicle for spreading divisions, propagating discord, demolishing identities and exercising the most perilous of cultural, economic and societal pillage.<sup>65</sup>

Networks of multinational corporations backed by the capitalist powers are said to have spread throughout the world resulting in deepening inequalities and conflicts.<sup>66</sup> Identifying fundamental structural errors in the global economic and political system, such as Hezbollah does in this way, serves to diagnostically frame a global condition perceived as problematic and would clearly resonate with anti-capitalist movements worldwide, thus also making it a master frame. This allows Hezbollah to attract allies and sympathy, and by that, it also serves to undermine the characterization of Hezbollah as simply being a “terrorist organization”.

### *3.1.3 Stance on Israel and the “peace process”*

Hezbollah characterizes Israel as an aggressive, racist, colonialist project that was imposed by the West in the heart of the Arab and Muslim world and is seen as a menace for the entire Middle East. Identifying Israel as a problem not only for the Palestinians but for the whole region, functions as the diagnostic frame for Hezbollah as this “Zionist entity” is described as having been artificial since its creation and represents “a direct aggression and a serious threat ... to the region’s security, stability and interests”.<sup>67</sup> Resistance against, and repudiation of, this “extraneous entity” is the duty and historical responsibility of the *umma* until all occupied land is liberated.<sup>68</sup> In addition to declaring its full support for “all forms of resistance” that the Palestinians choose to engage in, Hezbollah reiterates its absolute rejection of settlement negotiations and normalization of relations with Israel and calls on

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<sup>64</sup> Section 3: “America is behind all our catastrophes,” ‘Open Letter,’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 41.

<sup>65</sup> Chapter I, Section I: “The World and Western-American Hegemony,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 119.

<sup>66</sup> Chapter I, Section I: “The World and Western-American Hegemony,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 119.

<sup>67</sup> Chapter III, Section I: “The Palestinian Cause and the Zionist Entity,” ‘New Manifesto,’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 133.

<sup>68</sup> Chapter III, Section I: “The Palestinian Cause and the Zionist Entity,” ‘New Manifesto,’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 134.



Arab leaders and populations to follow suit.<sup>69</sup> Hezbollah's solution, and therefore prognostic frame, to the identified problem is perpetual resistance until the "raping of occupied land" ceases. Describing the resistance as a duty by all Muslims, invokes a crucial religious legitimizing dimension and serves as a rationale for collective action and thus the motivational frame. This frame also includes the appeal to the Arab world, making it a concern for a larger group of people.

The language in the 2009 document has been somewhat toned down as opposed to the first manifesto where Hezbollah repeatedly states that "Israel must be completely wiped out of existence" and that it is a "cancerous gland" (*al-ghudda al-sarataniyya*) that ought to be removed.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Hezbollah has often been blamed for harboring anti-Semitic sentiments, not making a clear distinction between Jews and Zionists. Although it is true that Hezbollah did not make this distinction in the 1990s, this sort of public discourse has in the last fifteen years or so been noticeably absent.<sup>71</sup> This change is reflected in the New Manifesto where Hezbollah stresses that "the struggle is by no means based on religious confrontation, or racial and ethnic partisanship," but rather on self-defense against Israel's occupation and aggression.<sup>72</sup> This sentiment was also expressed in an April 2015 interview that Nasrallah gave on Syrian television when he said that the problem with Israel is not religious but rather based on the fact that Israel is occupying land that does not belong to it.<sup>73</sup> The change also seems to be expressed in the movement's actions as Norman Finkelstein as well as Noam Chomsky among others — both prominent American, albeit anti-Zionist, Jewish intellectuals — have visited Hezbollah in Lebanon.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, these revisions are clearly a way for Hezbollah to appeal to a wider audience and represent the ability of the movement to adapt to changing historical and political circumstances. In this way,

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<sup>69</sup> Chapter III, Section III: "The Palestinian Resistance," 'New Manifesto,' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 135.; Chapter III, Section IV: "Settlement Negotiations," 'New Manifesto,' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents* p. 136-7.

<sup>70</sup> Section 15: "Israel must be completely wiped out of existence," 'Open Letter' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>71</sup> 'Nasrallah on Jews', *Mideastwire Blog*, October 29, 2012, <https://mideastwire.wordpress.com/2012/10/29/nasrallah-on-jews/> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>72</sup> Chapter III, Section I: "The Palestinian Cause and the Zionist Entity," 'New Manifesto,' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 133.

<sup>73</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview on Al Ekhbariya Al Soriyah, April 6, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3yKJuUiHII> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>74</sup> 'Finkelstein meets Hezbollah officials', *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 8, 2008, <http://www.jta.org/2008/01/08/news-opinion/finkelstein-meets-hezbollah-officials> (accessed 19 May 2015); 'US Linguist Noam Chomsky Meets With Hezbollah Leaders', *Lebanon Wire*, May 16, 2006, <http://www.lebanonwire.com/0605MLN/06051601MEMRI.asp> (accessed 19 May 2015).

Hezbollah's prognostic and motivational frames change as existing realities change and thus testify to its evolving pragmatism.

#### *3.1.4 Pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism*

In accordance with its Open Letter, Hezbollah holds fast to its ardent support and call for Arab and Muslim unity. The New Manifesto emphasizes that "There is an unambiguous need to exert concerted efforts towards overcoming those conflicts that run through Arab ranks". However, contrary to the former document, Hezbollah openly declares its appreciation to Syria and its steadfast efforts in resisting Israel.<sup>75</sup> With regard to Islamic relations, Hezbollah takes the same position as it did in the Open Letter stressing the importance of "unity among Muslims," "cooperation between Islamic countries in all fields," and support for Iran:

Iran should be perceived as the mobilization base and strategic center of gravity, a model for sovereignty, independence and liberalism, a supporter of the contemporary Arab-Islamic independence plan, and a force that strengthens the power and imperviousness of our region's countries and peoples.<sup>76</sup>

On the one hand, the prognostic and motivational frames of Muslim and Arab unity is crucial for Hezbollah due to its inclusive nature and galvanizing effect, thereby enabling Hezbollah to rally a massive amount of people in the Middle East and beyond around its causes. On the other hand, by cementing its support for Syria and Iran — both murderous dictatorships — these frames can also be viewed as narrowly sectarian and can alienate large parts of the world's Sunni community and other groups and peoples that favor more democratic systems of governance. Nonetheless, by carefully avoiding framing itself as sectarian or strictly Lebanese,<sup>77</sup> Hezbollah skillfully broadens its appeal and turns its pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism into far-reaching master frames.

#### *3.1.5 Democracy and the abolition of political sectarianism*

In chapter 2, section 3 entitled "The State & the Political System," Hezbollah asserts that it strives to establish democracy in Lebanon and to abolish the sectarian political system there. It states that "Political sectarianism is the root cause behind the Lebanese political system's

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<sup>75</sup> Chapter II, Section V: "Lebanon and Islamic Relations," 'New Manifesto' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p. 129-30.

<sup>76</sup> Chapter II, Section VI: "Lebanon and Islamic Relations," 'New Manifesto' in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, pp. 130-31.

<sup>77</sup> Hezbollah defines itself in various ways: "national liberation movement," "resistance movement," "jihadi movement."

troubles” and that it seeks “true democracy where the elected majority rules and the elected minority represents the opposition”.<sup>78</sup> It wants a state that “protects public freedoms,” “is committed to the rule of law ... and impartial application of citizens’ rights and duties, irrespective of religious sect, home region or the citizen’s views,” and “works to strengthen the role of women in society, and enhances their participation in all fields”.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, it is interesting to note that contrary to the Open Letter, which openly calls for the adoption of an Islamic system of governance by democratic means, this goal is basically abandoned in the New Manifesto, except for the vague reference to Iran as a “model for sovereignty, independence and liberalism,” in an entirely separate section, namely “Lebanon and Islamic Relations”.<sup>80</sup> Although the critique against Lebanon’s political system has been somewhat toned down since the Open Letter, identifying political sectarianism and the absence of “true democracy” as the fundamental problem in Lebanese political life serves as diagnostic frames that can attract sympathy with not only the Shi’a community but with other groups as well.

## 3.2 Hezbollah’s Religious Ideology

### 3.2.1 *Shi’ism, jihad, and wilayat al-faqih*

Since the constituents of Hezbollah’s *religious* ideology are not touched upon in great detail in the New Manifesto, with the exception of a brief presentation of it, I will, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, cover this subject by using the book *Hizbullah: The story from within*, written by Naim Qassem, Hezbollah’s current deputy secretary-general and main ideologue.

Qassem describes the “three pillars” of Hezbollah as being belief in Islam, *jihad* in the name of God, and *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the jurist). That Hezbollah hails from the Shi’a community and believes in Shi’a Islam is no secret but in the chapter on Islam, Qassem does not advance a specifically Shi’a interpretation of the religion aside from a few references to it, presumably in order to portray Hezbollah as welcoming to all sects of the

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<sup>78</sup> Chapter II, Section III: “The State & the Political System,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 125.

<sup>79</sup> Chapter II, Section III: “The State & the Political System,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, pp. 126-7. On Hezbollah’s progressive stance on the role of women in society see A.M. Baylouny, “Hizbullah’s Women: Internal Transformation in a Social Movement and Militia” in Beinun and Vairel (ed.), *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, pp. 86-101.

<sup>80</sup> Chapter II, Section VI: “Lebanon and Islamic Relations,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 131.

religion. This communicates the message that Hezbollah wants to portray itself as representing not only Shi'ites but other sects as well, making the belief in Islam a motivational frame that provides a rationale for joining or supporting the movement.

Although Hezbollah has removed its advocacy for establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon in its 2009 Manifesto, as compared to the Open Letter, the movement is still committed to this goal ideologically but not politically.<sup>81</sup> Qassem elaborates on the reasons why it is not, in the current state of affairs, a politically viable project. As in the case of the Open Letter, he writes that an Islamic system of government can only be created on the basis of the “direct and free choice of the people, and not through forceful imposition”.<sup>82</sup> An Islamic state, he continues, represents “the ultimate justice to which man aspires” and “the supreme representation of human happiness”.<sup>83</sup> Islamization should therefore only be pursued when the right conditions allow it, i.e., when people are open to the idea. Hezbollah contends that due to Lebanon’s sectarian-confessional specificities there is not sufficient support for an Islamic state and Hezbollah do not want to impose it by force. Nevertheless, connecting this to Hezbollah’s framing processes one can conclude that as the movement often criticizes Lebanon’s sectarian political system for being undemocratic, the desire to establish what it perceives as being a just and truly democratic system serves as a prognostic frame because it presents a solution to a problem that is of a broad societal character.

The second pillar, *jihad*, which is derived from the Arabic verb *jahada*, meaning “to struggle” or “to strive,” is described by Qassem in its broad definition. It is not seen as only referring to militarily combatting one’s enemy and confronting oppression (lesser *jihad*), but also the struggle against one’s “internal foes represented by the soul’s insinuations and temptations to evil or satanic calls to falsehood and all that leads to straying and corruption” (greater *jihad*).<sup>84</sup> The greater *jihad*, as the name may reveal, is actually understood to be the primary and most important of the two.<sup>85</sup> There is also a distinction within the lesser *jihad* between offensive and defensive *jihad*. Offensive *jihad* can only be practiced by the Prophet and the

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<sup>81</sup> Alagha, *Hezbollah’s Identity Construction*, p. 57.

<sup>82</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 82.

<sup>83</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 81.

<sup>84</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, pp. 86-87, 89.

<sup>85</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 90.

twelve imams<sup>86</sup> and since they are not present anymore this type of *jihad* is forbidden. That leaves defensive *jihad*, the decision of whether it is to be carried out, can only be taken by the *wali al-faqih* (the jurisconsult) who is currently the supreme leader of Iran.<sup>87</sup> In Shi'ism, *jihad* is furthermore closely related to martyrdom. *Jihad* has two fruits: martyrdom and victory; "The martyr wins martyrdom while the nation and its freedom fighters win victory".<sup>88</sup> *Jihad* and martyrdom function as powerful motivational frames, galvanizing and incentivizing the Muslim community to struggle and sacrifice in the name of God. In addition to its centrality in the religious thought of the Shi'a community, the culture of martyrdom generates bravery and a sense of fearlessness in those who participate in the lesser *jihad*, due to the fact that the fighters who believe that God sanctions their cause do not fear death.<sup>89</sup> Fostering a culture of martyrdom not only serves as a mobilization and motivational tool for Hezbollah but it also strengthens Hezbollah's military capabilities as its fighters are willing to sacrifice their very lives for the cause.

The third and last pillar is the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih*, which refers to the rule, or guardianship of the jurist. The holder of the position of *wali al-faqih*, which is the personification of the doctrine, is supposed to be the most learned in *Shar'ia* (Islamic law) and the most devoted to justice and piety.<sup>90</sup> The authority of the *wali al-faqih* is furthermore seen as the continuation of the authority of the Prophet and the twelve infallible Imams and its degree is naturally very high.<sup>91</sup> The current *wali al-faqih* is the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, and although Qassem does not explicitly write that Hezbollah follows his orders, Joseph Alagha confirms this by stating that "since the beginning, Hizbullah from a religious and an ideological stance fully abides by the ideas and opinions of Imam Khomeini as communicated by Khamene'i".<sup>92</sup> Fred Halliday gives further confirmation in a 2006 interview with Qassem in which he is paraphrased saying "all major political decisions regarding Hizbullah are referred to when not actually taken in Iran".<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>86</sup> Shi'ites believe that the rightful successors of the Prophet Muhammad are twelve Imams, the last of whom went into occultation, or hiddenness, in the year 939 and will reappear at the verge of the end of time to rid the world of evil.

<sup>87</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>88</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 102.

<sup>89</sup> N. Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-year struggle against Israel*, New York, Random House, 2011, Chapter 1.

<sup>90</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 112-3.

<sup>91</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 116-17.

<sup>92</sup> Alagha, *Shifts in Hizbullah's ideology*, p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> F. Halliday 'A Lebanese Fragment: Two Days with Hizbullah', *Open Democracy*, July 20, 2006, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/hizbollah\\_3757.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization/hizbollah_3757.jsp) (accessed 19 May 2015).

doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih* can be understood as both a prognostic and a motivational frame. On the one hand, it is seen by Hezbollah as the political system that will solve Lebanon's and the world's problems. On the other hand, by framing the doctrine as deeply embedded within the Islamic tradition — describing it as the continuation of the rule of the Prophet and the infallible Imams — it has the possibility to resonate with large portions of the *umma* which can present to them something concrete that they can strive towards and motivate them to join the ranks of Hezbollah.

To conclude, in the ideology of Hezbollah the diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing are clearly present, which signals a clear intention on the part of this movement to identify social and political phenomena seen as problematic, propose solutions to these phenomena, and motivate (potential) adherents to collective action. This represents a well-crafted strategy that allows Hezbollah to disseminate its message in a way that resonates with a variety of peoples and groups and helps to legitimate its actions — and thereby its position in Lebanon and the Middle East — which in effect strengthens Hezbollah as a movement.

In the next chapter I will analyze the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice pertaining to the period during the Arab revolts.

## 4. Hezbollah and the Arab Revolts

Now that some of the tenets of Hezbollah's ideology has been established I will turn to the positions that Hezbollah took and the ways in which Hezbollah acted during the Arab revolts and relate this to the movement's ideology. This chapter will thus attempt to answer the question of how Hezbollah's ideology and practice relate to each other and the extent to which Hezbollah's actions reflect the movement's ideological principles within the context of the Arab revolts.

Hezbollah initially embraced the popular uprisings that swept the Middle East in 2011, expressing solidarity and support for the protesters who called for the downfall of the entrenched Arab dictatorships, the establishment of democratic systems of government and social and economic justice. However, Hezbollah's seemingly ideological and moral basis for endorsing the uprisings would prove to be rather weak as the movement made a 180-degree turn when the revolts reached Syria. Rather than being driven by ideology or values, Hezbollah's approach to the Syrian rebellion seemed to a greater extent dictated by strategic calculations and the rational evaluation of available options as the group chose to side with the authoritarian Ba'athist regime of Bashar al-Assad. I will in the following sections detail the movement's response to the uprisings and demonstrate that when situations appear in which Hezbollah has to choose between its material interests and its ideological principles the movement undoubtedly prioritizes the former.

### 4.1 Relations to Arab regimes

Hezbollah's relations to many of the states in the Middle East, seems to have largely been determined by the extent to which they conform to some of the movement's central ideological principles, the most pertinent of which is the resistance against the United States and Israel. Although official Hezbollah policy is noninterference in the internal affairs of other Arab states the movement still has strong views on the conduct of Arab regimes when their policies conflict with what Hezbollah perceives to be Arab and Islamic interests.<sup>94</sup> Given the close alliances between many of the Arab governments and the US and in recent

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<sup>94</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview by J. Assange, February 2012, <http://assange.rt.com/nasrallah-episode-one/> (accessed 19 May 2015).

years even Israel,<sup>95</sup> Hezbollah views these regimes as western satellite states facilitating the US goal to dominate the region. Hezbollah expresses this sentiment most clearly in its 1985 Open Letter where it is said that the Arab “regimes cannot think of confronting the Zionist entity that raped Palestine because they were founded under colonial guardianship” and that the oil-producing states “abide by and execute what the ‘White House’ dictates to them”.<sup>96</sup> Warnings are even issued when Hezbollah claims that “The day will come when these barely standing [Arab] regimes will fall under the fist of the oppressed”.<sup>97</sup>

However, in the 2009 manifesto Hezbollah does not, at length, deal with the movement’s relations to the Arab states (aside from Syria). The issue is only mentioned in passing when criticizing the United States for “supporting satellite states and tyrannical regimes in the region” and the “silence of the official Arab world” with regards to Israeli crimes.<sup>98</sup> Despite the lack of elaboration and specificity on this question in the New Manifesto, deputy secretary-general Naim Qassem claims that the difficulties faced by Arab regimes can largely be attributed to their subordinate position in the international system whose defining feature is US hegemony. He calls on Arab states to “adopt changes aimed at achieving reconciliation with their peoples” and stresses that “Change requires re-thinking the structure of regimes”.<sup>99</sup> He further asserts that “efforts should be directed towards rallying the people and encouraging popular action” and that “Hezbollah has no relations with certain regimes whose very nature and underlying structure or political stance are fundamentally at odds with the Party’s chosen principles”.<sup>100</sup>

Concerning Arab states’ position on Hezbollah, it has historically been difficult for Arab governments to publicly criticize any efforts to confront Israel due to the importance of the Palestinian cause among the populace of the region. This has meant that Hezbollah has

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<sup>95</sup> Z. Gold, ‘Egypt and Israel: Sinai Heat Thaws the Cold Peace’, *Middle East Institute*, December 16, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/egypt-and-israel-sinai-heat-thaws-cold-peace> (accessed 19 May 2015); E. Labott and J. Diamond, ‘Israel bolsters ties to Jordan as ISIS looms’, *CNN*, February 6, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/06/politics/israel-jordan-relationship-strengthened-isis/> (accessed 19 May 2015); A. Zilber, ‘Analysis: Secret Israeli-Saudi ties likely to continue despite Abdullah’s death’, *The Jerusalem Post*, January 25, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Analysis-Secret-Israeli-Saudi-ties-likely-to-continue-despite-Abdullahs-death-388784> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>96</sup> Section 20: “Defeatist Arab Regimes,” ‘Open Letter’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>97</sup> Section 20: “Defeatist Arab Regimes,” ‘Open Letter’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 52.

<sup>98</sup> Chapter I, Section II: “Our Region and the American Plot,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, p. 121; Chapter II, Section II: “The Resistance,” ‘New Manifesto’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents* p. 123.

<sup>99</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, p. 400.

<sup>100</sup> Qassem, *Hizbullah the story from within*, pp. 401-402.



largely been spared from criticism. However, this changed during the Second Lebanon war of July 2006 between Hezbollah and Israel when several Arab governments openly condemned Hezbollah for instigating the hostilities. At an emergency Arab League summit Saudi Arabia, supported by Gulf monarchies, Jordan, and Egypt, castigated Hezbollah for “unexpected, inappropriate, and irresponsible acts”.<sup>101</sup> The rationale of this response is not difficult to comprehend. With Iran extending its regional reach, resulting from the weakening of Iraq as a regional power in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of that country, the Arab states could not pass on the opportunity to try to counter what they perceived as growing Iranian influence in the important regional state of Lebanon and those harshly worded statements sought to serve that purpose.

In conclusion, the reciprocal relations between Hezbollah and Arab governments (Syria excluded) before the Arab uprisings was characterized by dissonance and enmity; from Hezbollah’s perspective due to the Arab regimes’ cordial relations to the imperialist West; and from the perspective of the Arab regimes because they saw a rising revolutionary Iran as a threat to their own security and relative power in the region. As will become clear in the following analysis, Hezbollah’s relationship to the governments of the Arab world was critical for determining the movement’s response to the ensuing revolutionary turmoil.

## 4.2 Embracing the Popular Revolts

### 4.2.1 *Tunisia and Egypt*

When the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt erupted, it was not long before Hezbollah declared its solidarity and support to the emerging movements for social change. The first public announcement came on February 7, 2011 — seven days before Tunisia’s strongman Zine el Abedine Ben Ali was ousted and four days prior to Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak stepping down — and in that one-hour speech secretary-general Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah began by apologizing for Hezbollah’s delayed declaration of support, stating that if the movement would have openly taken the side of the revolution it was “concerned that the

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<sup>101</sup> H.M. Fattah, ‘Arab League Criticizes Hezbollah for Attacks’, *New York Times*, July 17, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/17/world/africa/17iht-arabs.2224812.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/17/world/africa/17iht-arabs.2224812.html?_r=0) (accessed 19 May 2015).

protesters would [have been] accused of being affiliated to Hezbollah or Hamas ... or Iranian Revolutionary Guards” which could have undermined their momentum and legitimacy.<sup>102</sup>

Nasrallah dedicated the bulk of that speech to the revolt in Egypt. He was keen on describing it as a “real popular revolution, a real Egyptian national revolution” devoid of factionalism:

Muslims and Christians are participating in this revolution, as are Islamic factions, secular parties, nationalist parties, and intellectuals. In fact, all the sectors of the popular classes are taking part in this revolution.<sup>103</sup>

Nasrallah described the revolt as part of the resistance against Israel and the US denouncing the claim that it was merely an uprising stemming from economic grievances. Instead, he said that “it is a revolution against everything — corruption, oppression, hunger, the squandering of the capabilities of this country, and the regime’s policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict”. He explained that the Arab and Islamic people reject US policies due to:

the absolute American support for Israel and its wars from the establishment of the Zionist entity to the Gaza War in 2008 ... and the absolute American support for the corrupt dictatorships that are US allies in the region.<sup>104</sup>

He furthermore linked the Arab regimes to Israel by saying that Israel seeks to maintain them: “Should you stand on Israel’s side which defends the regime or on the side of the Egyptian people?”<sup>105</sup> He connected the struggle of Hezbollah and the Palestinians to that of the popular revolutions, stressing that:

What you have done until today is no less important than the historic steadfastness, which we saw by the Lebanese resistance in the July 2006 war. It is no less important than the steadfastness shown by the Palestinians in the 2008 Gaza war.<sup>106</sup>

He also emphasized the religious dimension of lending support to the uprisings; “For those who stand in support of the cause of the people will be rewarded by God because they are taking a historic stance which will lay the foundations for generations to come”.<sup>107</sup> Hezbollah held a particular grudge against the Mubarak regime and had a vested interest in toppling it because of Egypt’s anti-Iranian orientation and due to the persecution of Hezbollah cells in

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Speech Delivered By Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah During The Solidarity Rally With Egypt That Was Held In Ghobairy Municipality Square – Jnah’, February 7, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erMJWhSMFbM> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>103</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered February 7, 2011.

<sup>104</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered February 7, 2011.

<sup>105</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered February 7, 2011.

<sup>106</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered February 7, 2011.

<sup>107</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered February 7, 2011.

Egypt and the imprisonment, by Egyptian authorities, of a Hezbollah operative in that country in 2009.<sup>108</sup> The day after Tunisia's Ben Ali was overthrown Hezbollah issued an official statement declaring its "pride in the Tunisian people's uprising which paves its way towards the hoped-for freedom" and called on Arab leaders to "draw lessons from what happened in Tunisia".<sup>109</sup> Hezbollah thus welcomed the uprisings with great enthusiasm and used language stemming from its own ideology to frame them in a way that connected the struggle of the protesters, to that of Hezbollah and the Palestinians.

#### 4.2.2 Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain

Hezbollah's reaction to the revolutionary upheavals in Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain were similar to those of Tunisia and Egypt. With regards to Yemen, Hezbollah's media relations office issued a statement condemning "the barbaric assault against the citizens demanding their legitimate rights, and calling for lifting the unjust regime off the Yemeni people".<sup>110</sup> The movement declared, relating to Libya that "Gaddafi is unaware that oppression and intimidation do not protect a regime based on corruption and crime, against the will and determination of a nation that adopted its firm decision".<sup>111</sup> Hezbollah's relationship to the Libyan regime had moreover been particularly strained as the movement has accused it of kidnapping one of its early ideologues and leaders Imam Musa al-Sadr in 1978.<sup>112</sup> As for Bahrain, Hezbollah declared that it:

praises these mass rallies ... the authorities in Bahrain have no choice but to fulfill the rightful demands for the people, in order to prevent the bloodshed of the innocents and to save the country from the inequity and oppression ... these mass rallies reflect the national unity within all the Bahraini sects.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> 'mubarak ya'tabir al ikhwan wa hamas wa iran 'mihwar sharr' yuhaddid istiqrar mistr' (Mubarak considers the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Iran to be 'axis of evil' threatening Egypt's stability), *Al-Arabiyya*, December 2, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/12/01/128093.html> (accessed 19 May 2015); A. Rajab, '90 min hizbollah shariku bi tahrir sami shihab' (90 Hezbollahis participated in freeing Sami Shihab), *Al-Akhbar*, July 10, 2013, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/186774> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>109</sup> Hezbollah Media Relations, January 15, 2011, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=13179&cid=416#.VSIxvFxZhfg> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>110</sup> Hezbollah Media Relations, March 18, 2011, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=13686&cid=416#.VSKFklxZhfg> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>111</sup> Hezbollah Media Relations, February 21, 2011, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=13488&cid=416#.VSIy1lxZhfg> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>112</sup> 'Hezbollah Remembers Revered Leader Imam Musa Sadr', *Alalam*, August 30, 2014, <http://en.alalam.ir/news/1627703> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>113</sup> 'Hezbollah Praises Bahrain Mass Rallies: Regime Must Fulfill People Demands', *al-Manar*, March 11, 2012, <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=14&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=48609> (accessed 19 May 2015).

In a speech on March 19, 2011 Nasrallah laid out Hezbollah's general position on the uprisings as well as continuing to detail Hezbollah's understanding of what was happening in the different countries.<sup>114</sup> He reaffirmed the Lebanese resistance's solidarity with the Arab and Muslim peoples. He asserted that the origin of the revolutions was the peoples' steadfastness and faith and he dismissed any claim that they were orchestrated by the US, which would be illogical because the regimes "serve the American project and pose no threat to Israel". He added that when a people rises up with this level of determination, patience, and perseverance it is "divine law," that it cannot be defeated and that God will be with "you [the protesters] if you stay in the arenas of confrontation and jihad". He slammed the US administration for being "complicit in the crimes of these regimes and everything they did against their own peoples" and until it changes its policy on Palestine no one should believe its comments about "supporting the rights of the people".<sup>115</sup> Regarding the Saudi-led military intervention in Bahrain on behalf of the Khalifa regime, Nasrallah condemned it and dismissed the claim that the uprising was of a sectarian nature. He saluted all the Sunni Islamic movements and leaders who supported the uprisings and said that "We stood as Shia and Sunnis with the Palestinian people and we supported them regardless of sect". He added that the violent response was similar to how Israel treats the Palestinians. Concerning Libya, Nasrallah said that the regime's response to the peaceful protests reminded him of Israel's invasions of Lebanon and Gaza, and he stressed that the UN-sanctioned military intervention on the side of the revolution had complicated matters and that Libyans should be wary of this development because it could "bring us back to the era of colonialism".<sup>116</sup>

#### *4.2.3 Summarizing principles of Hezbollah's response*

In conclusion, Hezbollah's response to these five initial uprisings can be summarized in terms of a set of principles. First, it wholeheartedly supported the revolutions against the Arab regimes. Second, it saw the toppling of the dictators as the rightful demand of the people against oppression. Third, it described the events as non-sectarian and non-factional. Fourth, it emphasized the Palestinian question and animosity towards the United States as

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<sup>114</sup> 'Sayyed Nasrallah on the Ceremony for Consolidation with the Arab Peoples on March 19, 2011', March 19, 2011, [http://www.numainda-e-rehbar.com.pk/view\\_video.php?%20viewkey=8674f898cc7add8841a3&page=1&viewtype=&category=](http://www.numainda-e-rehbar.com.pk/view_video.php?%20viewkey=8674f898cc7add8841a3&page=1&viewtype=&category=) (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>115</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered March 19, 2011.

<sup>116</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered March 19, 2011.

core drivers of the protests. Fifth, it stressed that the revolutions occurred within the context of Hezbollah's and Iran's resistance against US-Israeli domination. Sixth, it condemned foreign interventions intended to crush the protests. Seventh, it warned against the possibility that colonialism could return to the region should the people be incautious about western intentions to influence the transitions. And eighth, it stressed that when God is with the people it is impossible to defeat the people.

In the following section I will relate Hezbollah's response to the movement's ideology and draw a preliminary conclusion about how to understand that response.

### 4.3 Framing and Ideology

What can be deduced from Hezbollah's reaction to these five uprisings is that the movement framed the events in a way that reflected some of its core ideological principles. Hezbollah attempted to link the social upheavals to its own resistance agenda by utilizing the language and symbols found in the movement's ideology. Given the up-tic in the movement's popularity following its performance in the 2006 war, this strategy had the potential to further enhance the movement's standing in the region.<sup>117</sup>

As to Hezbollah's framing processes, the problematic condition that Hezbollah saw in the revolting societies was the control that the oppressive regimes exercised over their populations, the lack of political freedom, the severe economic inequalities, the human rights deficits, the alignment of the Arab regimes with the US and those regimes' passivity concerning the suffering of the Palestinians. This functioned as Hezbollah's diagnostic framing of the events. The solution to these problems (the prognostic framing) was provided by the peoples themselves by the very act of rising up against autocracy. But by articulating the necessity to topple these regimes by peaceful yet steadfast, tenacious, and adamant *resistance* Hezbollah was able to present a strategy that could be related to the struggle that it, its allies, and the Palestinians were engaged in. Hezbollah had forced Israel to withdraw from Lebanon in 2000 and successfully repelled it in 2006 and these facts provided evidence that confrontational collective action could indeed be successful when facing a mighty enemy, even though the tactics differed between the situations.

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<sup>117</sup> 'The Tide of Arab Opinion Turns to Support for Hezbollah', *New York Times*, July 28, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/28/world/middleeast/28arabs.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/28/world/middleeast/28arabs.html?_r=0) (accessed 19 May 2015).

However, the emphasis on the Arab-Israeli dimension in many of Nasrallah’s speeches dealing with the uprisings did not reflect the actual role of this issue in the revolts. The focus was in fact overwhelmingly on domestic political, economic, and social grievances and Palestine was only a marginal question that was raised.<sup>118</sup> In reality therefore, Nasrallah’s discourse became in one sense somewhat disconnected from the slogans used on the streets of Arab cities and towns when it came to the question of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Nevertheless, the issue can be understood as functioning as both prognostic and motivational frames as it presented solutions to the problems but also incentivized people to stand firm in their struggle. Additional motivational framing that Hezbollah utilized was the use of religious language. Referring to concepts such as *jihad*, sacrifice, martyrdom, and God not only legitimized the revolutions but gave the protesters a further motive to stay on the streets which would lead to the fall of the regimes and thus the implementation of just societies which could be presented as being the will of God.

#### 4.4 Preliminary Conclusion

Hezbollah’s stance on these initial uprisings — which, to relate this to this study’s research question, represents the practical behavior and policy orientation of Hezbollah — indeed reflected the principles found in the movement’s ideology. This can be substantiated by correlating the position Hezbollah took with the movement’s ideological principles, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Juxtaposition of Hezbollah’s stance on the five initial Arab uprisings with the corresponding ideological principles. Source: This table is based on the results of this study.

| <i>Stance on revolts</i>  | <i>Ideological principle</i>                   |
|---|--|
| supported the popular uprisings against the Arab regimes  | oppressors and oppressed                       |
| opposed regimes that were part of the pro-US regional axis and that avoided confrontation with Israel | anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism                 |
| emphasized the need for swift democratic transitions  | Pluralist, representative governance/democracy |
| condemned attempts to portray some of the uprisings as sectarian and                                  | anti-sectarianism                              |

<sup>118</sup> Asseburg, M., ‘The Arab Spring and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Freedom without Peace?’ in M. Asseburg (ed.), *Protest, Revolt and Regime Change in the Arab World: Actors, Challenges, Implications and Policy Options*, Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2012, p. 43, [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2012\\_RP06\\_ass.pdf#page=42](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2012_RP06_ass.pdf#page=42) (accessed 19 May 2015).

|  |                           |
|--|---------------------------|
| emphasized that people should unite regardless of sect   |                           |
| continuously referred to the “Arab and Muslim peoples” when addressing the protesters and appealed for unity | pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism |
| invoked religious concepts such as <i>jihad</i> , martyrdom, and sacrifice                                   | Islam, <i>jihad</i>       |

Now, the preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the relationship between Hezbollah’s ideology and practice in the context of these five initial Arab uprisings was in fact congruous. A further preliminary conclusion would be that Hezbollah is indeed best understood as a movement primarily driven by its ideology which would also validate the claim that the movement’s alleged “terrorist activities” are directly fueled by this ideology. However, a subtle indication that may contradict this inference has already been documented, namely the disproportionate amount of time Nasrallah, in his speeches dedicated to explaining the drivers of the revolts in terms of anti-Zionist sentiments held by the protesters, when in fact the main grievances stemmed from local issues.

So, was Hezbollah’s response to the revolts value-driven or was it just a coincidence that the first five uprisings occurred against governments that Hezbollah happened to oppose? Was Hezbollah perhaps just acutely aware of the importance of framing the events in such a way as to fit its own worldview, which would enhance its popularity and thus extend its regional influence? It will be possible to answer these pertinent questions after an analysis of the case of Hezbollah’s position on the Syrian uprising has been made. With this I will proceed in the following section.

#### 4.5 Hezbollah’s Syrian Dilemma: Popular Legitimacy or Strategic Interests?

The unwavering verbal support Hezbollah had provided to the regional insurrections had strengthened the movement’s image as a supporter of the downtrodden and defier of injustice. But with the outbreak of the uprising in Syria Hezbollah was presented with a significant challenge. Contrary to its unfriendly relations with many of the other Arab states the movement had a vested interest in keeping the autocratic Syrian regime intact, which meant that if it chose to abandon its previous position of endorsing the revolts it could severely damage its image as a champion of the destitute and oppressed.

#### 4.5.1 Hezbollah's interests in Syria

Hezbollah's interests in Syria are the following. Syria is a strong pillar in the Iran-led regional alliance — the “axis of resistance” —, which Hezbollah is a part of. The purpose of this alliance is to counter perceived western imperialism in the Middle East and loosing Syria would constitute an existential threat to that alliance. Geo-strategically, Syria is a vital conduit for the transit of Iranian weaponry and it is unlikely that a regime unfriendly to Hezbollah would permit arms to pass through to Lebanon.<sup>119</sup> A reduction in arms transfers would consequently weaken Hezbollah's deterrence capacity in relation to Israel, which would be particularly disadvantageous in the event of another conflict. Additionally, Syria provides Hezbollah with a safe-haven for training camps and weapons storage.<sup>120</sup> Hezbollah also receives much of its finances from Iran via Syria in the form of cash or other material goods.<sup>121</sup> Syria's importance to Hezbollah, however, is not limited to the purely geostrategic aspect. Politically, Syria has historically played a significantly influential role in Lebanon's domestic politics and should the Syrian regime be overthrown Hezbollah would lose an important political backer.<sup>122</sup> Furthermore, as Hezbollah subscribes to the doctrine of *wilayat al-faqih*, making it a close ideological ally of Iran, the movement takes the Islamic republic's advice very seriously. Iran could not afford to lose its most important Arab state ally and it thus urged Hezbollah to close ranks around the house of Assad when the uprising there began.<sup>123</sup> As such, Hezbollah also had an interest in preventing a Sunni-dominated regime from gaining power in Syria. On the basis of these facts, it is not difficult to comprehend the immense strategic, political, and economic significance of Syria for Hezbollah and the overthrow of such an important backer would amount to nothing less than a danger of

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<sup>119</sup> R. El Hussein, 'Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria' in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 5, 2010, pp. 803, 811, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01436597.2010.502695#.VTOMoxfroQQ> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>120</sup> D. Benjamin and D. Cohen, 'Briefing on the Designation of Hezbollah for Supporting the Syrian Regime', *U.S. Department of State*, October 10, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/08/196335.htm> (accessed 19 May 2015); M. Sullivan, *Hezbollah in Syria*, Middle East Security Report 19, Institute for the Study of War, 2014, p. 4, [http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah\\_Sullivan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Hezbollah_Sullivan_FINAL.pdf) (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>121</sup> M. Levitt, 'Hezbollah Finances: Funding the Party of God', *The Washington Institute*, February 2005, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/hezbollah-finances-funding-the-party-of-god> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>122</sup> M. Yacoubian, 'Lebanon's Evolving Relationship with Syria: Back to the Future or Turning a New Page?', *United States Institute of Peace*, May 21, 2010, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB%2033%20Lebanon%27s%20Evolving%20Relationship%20with%20Syria.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>123</sup> D. Byman and B.Y. Saab, *Hezbollah in a time of transition*, Brookings Institution Center for Middle East Policy, 2014, p. 3, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2014/11/hezbollah-in-time-of-transition-byman-saab/hezbollah-in-a-time-of-transition.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015).



existential proportions to the movement.

In the end, the dilemma for Hezbollah was to either, continue its policy of supporting the wave of uprisings and thus further trump its regional standing among Arab publics or take the side of its indispensable, yet unpopularly tyrannical, strategic-political ally. Therefore, the dilemma was ultimately about priorities; popular legitimacy or strategic depth, or put differently, following its ideology or safeguarding its material interests.

#### *4.5.2 Hezbollah's stance on Syria's revolt*

The Syrian uprising and the Assad government's brutally violent response had been escalating for over two months before Hezbollah gave its first public statement on the revolt, which had begun in March 2011 in the southern city of Deraa. On May 25, which is Lebanon's "Liberation and Resistance Day," marking the end of Israel's 22-year long occupation that occurred in 2000, Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech declaring Hezbollah's official stance on the events in Syria.<sup>124</sup> He stated that the movement is "committed to the stability, security, and safety of Syria as a regime, people, and army". Hezbollah's stance on all the Arab uprisings, including Syria's, he claimed, was based on two criteria: the regimes' position on the issue of Israel-Palestine and whether or not the regime was open to reform.<sup>125</sup> The latter criteria may have reflected a growing awareness on Hezbollah's part that the Israel-Palestine issue did not in fact play a significant role in the protests and that the peoples of the region instead considered basic freedoms and rights to be the basis for a government's legitimacy. Nasrallah claimed that the uprisings Hezbollah theretofore had endorsed, had been legitimate because the regimes were neither committed to resisting Israel nor interested in implementing political reforms. Syria on the other hand was portrayed as fully committed to the struggle for the Palestinian cause and against US-Israeli domination and its leadership and people are "convinced ... on the need to implement reform". He added that it serves American and Israeli interests to topple the Syrian regime and replace it with a "moderate" one that would be willing to sign a "submission agreement" with Israel. Nasrallah

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<sup>124</sup> 'Nasrallah calls on Syrians to support Assad', *Al-Jazeera English*, May 25, 2011, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/2011525174748827942.html> (accessed 19 May 2015); 'The speech delivered by Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on the Resistance and Liberation Day on May 25th, 2011', May 25, 2011, <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=3&cid=33&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=17623> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>125</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered May 25, 2011.

furthermore expressed his deep appreciation to Syria for supporting the resistance in Lebanon and elsewhere in the region.<sup>126</sup>

Continuing on the themes of resistance and reform Nasrallah addressed the “moderate” Arab states in a February 2012 speech to commemorate the Martyrs of the Resistance when he asked the rhetorical questions “Did you open a front? Did you fight the Israelis? ... Did you support the resistance movements?”<sup>127</sup> He went on to say that Assad had been open to dialogue since the beginning of the revolutionary upheaval and that the armed confrontation on the part of the opposition would not benefit anyone except Israel and the West who only wants chaos, devastation, and destruction of the region's last bastion of resistance. As was the case in that speech where he used phrases such as “Arab and Islamic peoples” and “Muslims and Christians,” presumably in order to avoid veiling the events in sectarian terms, he was keen on reaching as broad an audience as possible when in an address in June the same year he asserted:

our heart is aching for Syria, its dignity, position, strength, welfare, security and stability ... we call for calmness dialogue, peace, reform, transcendence of wounds, preserving Syria's unity and the unity of its people and preserving the blood of its army and people.<sup>128</sup>

After denying that Hezbollah members were fighting alongside Syrian regime forces, which incidentally had already been reported by the UN in 2012, Nasrallah for the first time confirmed this in a speech in April 2013.<sup>129</sup> He described the Syrian conflict as one between armed groups working for foreign intelligence agencies that refuse political dialogue and have carried out “the ugliest kinds of killings” and a reform-minded government that called for a political settlement from the very outset of the outbreak of hostilities. He went on to say that Syria's allies “will not allow Syria to fall into the hands of America, Israel or the

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<sup>126</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered May 25, 2011.

<sup>127</sup> ‘The Speech delivered by Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah during the Ceremony of Loyalty to the Leader Martyrs on Thursday February 16, 2012’, February 16, 2012, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=20038&cid=453#.VSfhPxdWtug> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>128</sup> ‘Sayyed Nasrallah Speech Marking Imam Khomeini's Demise in the UNESCO Palace, Beirut’, June 1, 2012, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=20415&cid=453#.VSfuGBdWtug> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>129</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered October 11, 2012, <https://www.shiatv.net/video/0ed42d94cf318195e073> (accessed 19 May 2015); ‘Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic’, *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, p. 4, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/ColSyriaDecember2012.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015); H. Nasrallah, speech delivered April 30, 2013, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJLudowK\\_Vk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uJLudowK_Vk) (accessed 19 May 2015).

*takfiri*<sup>130</sup> groups” and called on the Arab and Islamic peoples who do not want the Palestinian cause to be lost, to work for a political settlement. He furthermore gave two concrete justifications for Hezbollah’s engagement in Syria. First, he said that in the village of Qusayr, which is located near the Lebanese border on Syrian territory, thousands of Lebanese citizens live and are now threatened by *takfiri* aggressions. Second, he asserted that foreign-supported *takfiri* groups threatened the shrine of Sayyida Zainab, which is of great religious significance for Shi’ites. He added that the shrine is for both Sunnis and Shi’ites and those who defend it with their blood and martyrdom “are those who will stop sectarian chaos from exploding”.<sup>131</sup>

A month later Nasrallah was even more candid in his position on Syria. He said that what is going on is no longer an uprising against a political regime but solely an “arena for imposing political projects led by America”. The armed opposition are part of a “US-western-Arab-regional axis” fighting alongside the *takfiri* groups on the battlefield, and were “the backbone of the resistance,” referring to Syria, to brake, Israel would reenter Lebanon and bring destruction to Palestine. Therefore, defending Syria meant defending Lebanon and Palestine.<sup>132</sup>

The narrative Hezbollah disseminated largely continued in the same vein as the conflict worsened in Syria.<sup>133</sup> Following the Saudi-led and US-backed military intervention in Yemen in March 2015 Nasrallah took advantage of the opportunity to connect that event to the situation in Syria and Palestine. In a speech two days after the invasion Nasrallah condemned the Saudi-American “aggressive war” on Yemen and asked the rhetorical questions “Who is preventing a political solution in Syria? Who is igniting the fire in Syria? It is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its allies.” He went on to say that since 1948 there has never been a “Decisive Storm” (the name of the Yemen operation) against Israel and he accused Saudi

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<sup>130</sup> Derived from the word *kafir*, or infidel, *takfiri* has in recent years become a sectarian slur utilized by Shi’a groups in reference to Sunni Muslims who accuse other Muslims of apostasy. A. Zelin, ‘Vocabulary of Sectarianism’, *Foreign Policy*, January 29, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/29/the-vocabulary-of-sectarianism/> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>131</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered April 30, 2013.

<sup>132</sup> ‘Sayyed Nasrallah Delivers Speech on Resistance and Liberation Day’, May 25, 2013, <http://www.voltairenet.org/article178691.html> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>133</sup> H. Nasrallah, interviewed by *Al-Akhbar*, August 15, 2014, <http://othersite.org/al-akhbar-english-exclusive-interview-with-hezbollah-secretary-general-sayyed-hassan-nasrallah/> (accessed 19 May 2015); H. Nasrallah, speech delivered November 3, 2014, [http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=27799&cid=556#.VSkR\\_RdWtug](http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=27799&cid=556#.VSkR_RdWtug) (accessed 19 May 2015); H. Nasrallah, interview on *Al Ekhbariya Al Soriyah*, April 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3yKJuUiHII> (accessed 19 May 2015).

Arabia of abandoning the people of Palestine and of seeking to impose its hegemony over Yemen, which he claimed is also Saudi Arabia's aim in Syria.<sup>134</sup>

Three weeks later the rhetoric escalated when in another address on the Yemen conflict Nasrallah denounced one additional pretext that Saudi Arabia used for the military intervention, namely the defense of Mecca and Medina against a Houthi<sup>135</sup> take-over, saying that the real threat against the two holy places is internal to Saudi Arabia: groups influenced by Saudi Arabia's state religion Wahhabism. He went on to say that the source of the ideology of all *takfiri* terrorists is the ideology of Wahhabism and that "it is about time that Muslims and Arabs raise their voices and tell Saudi Arabia enough is enough". Nasrallah also issued an implicit warning claiming that the Houthis "now [have] the chance to bomb and attack Saudi Arabia as well as enter its Najran, Asir and Jizan [Saudi regions and cities on the border with Yemen]"<sup>136</sup>.

In these two speeches Nasrallah's rhetoric against Saudi Arabia has intensified significantly, compared to before the aerial campaign against Yemen when Nasrallah usually referred to the kingdom indirectly and as carrying out an American agenda. Now the focus is overwhelmingly on the Saudi regime *in itself* and this represents a new level of anti-Saudi rhetoric on the part of Hezbollah. Nasrallah furthermore compared Saudi Arabia to Israel and once again thanked Syria for its refusal to bow down to the "black *takfiri* ideology" of Wahhabism, referring to Syria's problem with the self-proclaimed Islamic State group (ISIS) and al-Qaida. This heightened anti-Saudi discourse can be viewed within the context of the power struggle between the two regional coalitions led by Saudi Arabia and Iran and is intended to delegitimize and therethrough, counter the spread of Saudi influence and power in the arenas of conflict from Libya and the Gulf to Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. However, the

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<sup>134</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered March 27, 2015,

<http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=29009&cid=562#.VSkAOhdWtug> (accessed 19 May 2015); He later reiterated and elaborated his view on the events in Yemen in an interview on Syrian television: H. Nasrallah, interview on *Al Ekhbariya Al Soriyah*, April 6, 2015.

<sup>135</sup> The Houthi movement (named after its successive leaders), or Ansar Allah as they call themselves, is a Yemeni political group whose members hail from the Zaidi sect of Shi'a Islam, a religious school that differs significantly from the twelver-Shi'ism predominant in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. They make up roughly 30% of Yemen's 25 million people and have historically suffered from political, social, and economic marginalization in their northern stronghold of Sa'ada and their slogan says: "God is great/ Death to America/ Death to Israel/ Curses to the Jews." T. Basu, interview with Safa al-Ahmad, April 9, 2015, *The Atlantic*, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/04/who-are-yemen-houthis/390111/> (accessed 19 May 2015); K. Zimmerman and C. Harnisch, 'Profile: al Houthi Movement', January 8, 2010, *Critical Threats*, <http://www.criticalthreats.org/yemen/profile-al-houthi-movement> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>136</sup> H. Nasrallah, speech delivered April 17, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=12yNZ8j4yKA> (accessed 19 May 2015).

rhetoric also has a divisive effect not only on a regional level but also domestically as the two main political blocs in Lebanon, the Hezbollah-led March 8 and Saad Hariri's Future Movement-led March 14, are further polarized. This has been reflected in the harshly critical responses that representatives of the March 14 alliance, which has close connections to Saudi Arabia and the United States, have given to Nasrallah's verbal attacks on Saudi Arabia.<sup>137</sup>

A final word is warranted on the significance that Hezbollah attributes to the Palestine question in the legitimization of its support for Assad. In connection with the 67<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Nakba — meaning, the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine through the expulsion of more than 750.000 Palestinians from their homes, the depopulation and destruction of roughly 500 Palestinian villages, and the killing of thousands of Palestinians, all carried out by Zionist forces of the would-be settler-colonialist state of Israel — Nasrallah warned of a new Nakba in a speech delivered on May 16, 2015.<sup>138</sup> This new Nakba referred to what he called the *takfiri* Nakba which, according to the secretary-general, is more dangerous than the original one and “will lead to the loss of the Palestinian cause”. Given the centrality of Palestine in Hezbollah's ideology and the scars that still run deep among those who lived through the 1948 events and their descendants, it is surely precarious to compare that event to the doings of armed groups in Syria and elsewhere, notwithstanding the egregious violence some of them are committing. Nevertheless, this surely represents an attempt, arguably a desperate and callous one, on the part of Hezbollah to liken, and try to politically benefit from, a momentous event in the history of the Middle East with what is occurring in Syria and the region, not least due to the existence of descendants of Palestinian refugees from 1948 fighting against the Syrian regime.

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<sup>137</sup> H. Dakroub, ‘Nasrallah's anti-Saudi tirade draws Hariri rebuke,’ *Daily Star*, April 18, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Apr-18/294897-nasrallahs-anti-saudi-tirade-draws-hariri-rebuke.ashx> (accessed 19 May 2015); ‘Jumblatt backs Saudi military action: ‘What's with Nasrallah?’’, *Daily Star*, April 19, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Apr-19/294949-jumblatt-backs-saudi-military-action-whats-with-nasrallah.ashx> (accessed 19 May 2015); ‘Geagea warns against destabilizing the Arab and regional security’, *Ya Libnan*, April 19, 2015, <http://yalibnan.com/2015/04/19/geagea-warns-against-destabilizing-the-arab-and-regional-security/> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>138</sup> I. Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 2007, OneWorld Publishing, pp. xiii, 197; H., Nasrallah, speech delivered May 16, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWA3VUC540E> (accessed 19 May 2015).

## 4.6 Hezbollah's Syria Policy: Ideology and Practice

So, was Hezbollah's stance on Syria and its uprising consistent with the movement's ideology? To begin with, it was certainly no secret that Syria is a key link in the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah regional coalition and even in the 2009 manifesto Hezbollah clearly stated its intent of upholding its alliance with these partners.<sup>139</sup> As such, Hezbollah did not contradict its ideology by taking the side of the Assad regime — that is, if alignment with certain actors as such can be considered to be ideology, or instead perhaps a consequence of that ideology. On the other hand, the choice to support its Syrian ally may conflict with some of the movement's other ideological principles. Considering the centrality of the principle of “oppressors and oppressed” in Hezbollah's ideological framework, choosing to support a brutal totalitarian state that was, and is, killing its own population does not seem to really fit with that notion. However, since Hezbollah sees the Israel-Palestine conflict as the most central and pertinent question for the Middle East region and which undoubtedly contains the oppressor/oppressed component, from that perspective one might be able to argue that Hezbollah acted within the confines of its ideology by supporting a state that allegedly is a champion of the Palestinian cause.

However, examining Syria's record on the Palestine question reveals a rather different reality. For instance, Syria's 1976 intervention in Lebanon was partly based on the goal of crushing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) operating in the country at the time. Syria also bore responsibility for the so-called Tel al-Zaatar massacre on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon that same year.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, relations between Syria and Hezbollah on one side and the Palestinians on the other have deteriorated during the current Syrian civil war. The majority of Palestinian factions endorse the fight against Assad, including Hamas, the PLO, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, with the notable exception of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC) and some smaller factions.<sup>141</sup> Since

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<sup>139</sup> Chapter II, Section V: “Lebanon and Arab Relations” and Section VI: “Lebanon and Islamic Relations,” ‘New Manifesto’, in Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents*, p.130-31.

<sup>140</sup> E. Goldstein, *Wars and Peace Treaties: 1816-199*, London, Taylor & Francis, 2005, p 130.; N. Khalil, ‘Syria War Polarizes West Bank Palestinians’, *al-Monitor*, September 17, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/09/syria-war-palestinians-baath.html> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>141</sup> Other pro-regime Palestinian factions include Liwa al-Quds al-Filistini and the Palestinian Liberation Army. C. Kozak, “An army in all corners:” Assads campaign strategy in Syria’, *Middle East Security Report 26*, April 2015, p. 16, <http://understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/An%20Army%20in%20All%20Corners%20by%20Chris%20Kozak%201.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015); J. Schanzer, ‘Why the Palestinians are turning against al-Assad’, *CNN*, August 3, 2012, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/08/03/why-the-palestinians-are-turning-against->

2012 Syrian government forces have besieged the Palestinian refugee camp Yarmouk located in southern Damascus, which has led to unimaginable suffering for the civilian population living there. This is not least due to the Assad government's bombardment of the camp, which has intensified since ISIS entered it in early April 2015, but also because of its blockade of the camp preventing food and medical supplies from getting in.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, Qusay Zakariya, a Palestinian refugee who survived the Assad regime's 2013 notorious chemical weapon attack and who later was able to flee the country described how the regime dealt with people opposed to the Syrian system: "From the beginning, if you were Sunni, and especially if you were Palestinian, you were treated like something less than human by Bashar's forces."<sup>143</sup>

As such, while the Syrian government has based its legitimacy on its alleged struggle against Israel on behalf of the Palestinians, in reality the regime's support for the Palestinian cause is more likely to have been conditional on its narrow interests making Syria's credentials as a "resistance state" — to put it mildly — ambiguous.<sup>144</sup> And so, as one of Hezbollah's pretexts for intervening in Syria was the defense of Palestine the facts on the ground indicate a different situation. Hezbollah is not only fighting against Palestinian rebel factions and supporting a government that bombards Palestinian civilians and besieges their neighborhoods; the movement may even, if this situation continues, come to sever the long-standing alliance it has with the Palestinians.

Considering Syria's resistance record and its behavior in the current conflict, it is arguably the case that Hezbollah's choice to side with Assad did in fact contradict its central ideological edict of fighting for the liberation of Palestine. What is more, there seems to be an internal contradiction in Hezbollah's ideology as the movement purports to strive for

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al-assad/ (accessed 19 May 2015); M. Zaatari and W. Mrouehl, 'Palestinians fear war with Hezbollah', *The Daily Star*, January 9, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jan-09/243527-palestinians-fear-war-with-hezbollah.ashx> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>142</sup> Amnesty International, *Squeezing the life out of Yarmouk: War crimes against besieged civilians*, London, 2014, <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/yarmouk.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015); M. Chulov, 'Palestinians flee to Lebanon after jet bombs Syria's largest refugee camp', *The Guardian*, December 18, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/18/syria-palestinian-refugees-flee-yarmouk> (accessed 19 May 2015); 'Rights group: ISIS still controls 80% of Yarmouk', *Middle East Monitor*, April 17, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/18104-rights-group-isis-still-controls-80-of-yarmouk> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>143</sup> M. Weiss and H. Hassan, *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*, USA, Regan Arts, 2015, p. 134.

<sup>144</sup> Kandil, H., 'The Challenge for Restructuring: Syrian Foreign Policy' in B. Korany and A.E. Hillal Dessouki (ed.), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Globalization*, Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, 2009, pp. 429-31.

Palestinian freedom and rights while Syria's credentials in that regard is clearly deficient, making the alliance with that Ba'athist state notably questionable.

One further contradiction regarding Syria is worth mentioning. As Hezbollah claims to vehemently oppose capitalist economics on account of its devastating effects on society, choosing to take the side of Assad's Syria, which since the 1990s has implemented a series of neoliberal reforms that have benefited the networks of state- and business elites and concentrated the country's wealth at the top of the social class hierarchy at the expense of the working population that has endured severe austerity measures, is not really conducive to Hezbollah's anti-capitalist creed.<sup>145</sup>

Hezbollah's Syria policy and military intervention has also compromised its pan-Arab and pan-Islamic credentials. By deciding to protect the Assad regime, whose leadership belongs to the Alawite minority, which is an offshoot sect of Shi'a Islam, it prioritized the sovereignty of the state over the sovereignty of the people, which meant that the movement might be perceived by some as basing its policies on narrow sectarian and state-centered loyalties. However, it is important to point out that the notion that the relationship between Syria, Iran, and Hezbollah is based on the fact that they supposedly share the same religious affiliation is a misconception. The identity of the Syrian regime is secular Ba'athism and the Alawism of the people of the upper echelons of the regime is very distant from the twelver-Shi'ism practiced by Iran and Hezbollah. The alliance between Hezbollah and Iran on one side and Syria on the other should be understood as purely based on common political and strategic concerns, not religion.<sup>146</sup>

Nevertheless, setting aside perceptions of the religious Alawism of the house of Assad, factually, Hezbollah's involvement has indeed inflamed regional as well as domestic Lebanese sectarian tensions and fueled the very extremism the movement claims to combat, not least due to its portrayal of the Syrian armed opposition as mainly consisting of "*takfiri*

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<sup>145</sup> B. Haddad, 'Change and Stasis in Syria: One Step Forward...', *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Vol. 29, 1999, <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer213/change-stasis-syria-0> (accessed 19 May 2015); For an in-depth study of Syrian state-business relations see B. Haddad, *Business Networks in Syria: The Political Economy of Authoritarian Resilience*, California, Stanford University Press, 2012.

<sup>146</sup> M. Jubin, 'Syria and Iran: Alliance Cooperation in a Changing Regional Environment', *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol. 4, No. 2, January 2013, p. 39, [http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/enUploads/Article/Files/201331\\_makale2.pdf](http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/enUploads/Article/Files/201331_makale2.pdf) (accessed 19 May 2015); J. Cole, 'Juan Cole: Syria Yemen conflicts only seem to be about Sunni-Shiite from 30,000 feet', *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, April 17, 2015, <http://www.juancole.com/2015/04/conflicts-sunni-shiite.html> (accessed 19 May 2015).



terrorists”.<sup>147</sup> Hence, despite the pan-Arab and pan-Islamic discourse in Hezbollah’s statements and speeches it seems that these ideological principles are contradicted by the movement’s actual behavior in choosing to side with a sectarian state.

The deepening of the sectarian divide can furthermore be connected to another justification Hezbollah used for its intervention, namely, the defense of Lebanon. As Hezbollah since the 1990s increasingly has viewed itself as a national Lebanese resistance movement,<sup>148</sup> its involvement in Syria has, contrary to supposed Lebanese national interests, amounted to increased sectarian violence threatening to spark another Lebanese civil war.<sup>149</sup> To complicate matters, the sectarian divide is connected to the Palestine issue as the majority of Palestinians belong to the Sunni sect and the Islamic Jihad movement in Lebanon, the head of which is a Palestinian and also one of the most influential preachers in Lebanon’s largest Palestinian refugee camp Ain al-Hilweh, has warned of a looming armed conflict between Palestinian refugees and Hezbollah over the latter’s position on Syria.<sup>150</sup> Tensions have simmered in the camp for a long time and Hezbollah has by establishing contacts with certain groups there tried to affect the balance of power in its favor between the camp’s many factions which range from “moderate” Islamist groups such as Hamas, and Salafi jihadist factions Osbat al-Ansar and Jund al-Sham, to secular groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and Fatah.<sup>151</sup>

Over the last two years or so a number of Hezbollah members have been assassinated in the camp, the most recent of whom was the Hezbollah-linked Resistance Brigade member Mujahed Ibrahim Balous who was shot dead outside his home in early May 2015. He was the fifth Resistance Brigade member this year falling victim to such an attack and it is believed

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<sup>147</sup> International Crisis Group, *Lebanon’s Hezbollah turns eastward to Syria*, Middle East Report No. 153, May 27, 2014, p. ii, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/153-lebanon-s-hizbollah-turns-eastward-to-syria.pdf> (accessed 19 May 2015); H. Nasrallah, speech delivered August 6, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9ov6uMk30M> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>148</sup> Chapter II, Section 1: “Lebanon” and Section 2: “The Resistance,” ‘New Manifesto,’ in Alagha, *Hizbullah’s Documents*, pp. 122-25.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Sectarian Violence in Lebanon’, *Council on Foreign Relations*, <http://www.cfr.org/global/global-conflict-tracker/p32137#!/?marker=15> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>150</sup> M. Zaatari and W. Mrouehl, ‘Palestinians fear war with Hezbollah’, January 9, 2014, *The Daily Star*.

<sup>151</sup> A.M. Luca, ‘The Dilemma of Ain al-Hilweh’, April 17, 2015, *NOW*, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/565138-the-dilemma-of-ain-al-hilweh> (accessed 19 May 2015).

that one of Ain al-Hilweh's jihadist groups is responsible for the murder.<sup>152</sup> This increase in violence has added fuel to the already burning sectarian fire and is very much connected to Hezbollah getting sucked into the Syrian imbroglio. Nevertheless, the notion that Hezbollah intervened in Syria in order to protect Lebanese interests — it initially claimed that it intervened to defend Lebanese citizens in Qusayr — has been severely undermined as Hezbollah now even openly claims that it operates “wherever we are needed”.<sup>153</sup>

Finally, although its regional legitimacy has been undermined as a result of its policy on Syria, it seems that Hezbollah is still capable of mobilizing a large number of fighters for its cause. While critics of the movement claim that it is suffering a severe shortage of manpower<sup>154</sup> due to its presence in at least two other countries outside Lebanon (Syria and Iraq), a Lebanese military source recently relayed to the online magazine *al-Monitor* that:

The organization is becoming bigger, and therefore there are no indications that the number of forces deployed in South Lebanon [the front with Israel] is being affected ... Hezbollah is witnessing one of its fastest-growing periods in its history. Each month it is mobilizing around 500 new fighters.<sup>155</sup>

This signals that Hezbollah's framing and discourse are still resonating with a fairly large number of people, at least among its core social base, the Shi'a. As long as the movement is able to disseminate the message that Lebanon, Muslims, and peace-loving people wherever they may be are engaged in an existential battle of epic proportions this trend is not likely to be reversed. This is especially so when the fighting is occurring along the Syrian-Lebanese border, which is the case presently, as thousands of Syrian rebels are trying to take control over the strategically important Qalamoun mountain range.<sup>156</sup> This is taking place within the context of recent rebel gains in northwestern Syria attributed to the Assad regime's mounting structural problems (economic dysfunction, manpower shortage, and intra-regime discord);

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<sup>152</sup> M. Zaatari, 'Specter of assassinations revived in Ain al-Hilweh', May 5, 2015, *Daily Star*, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/May-05/296842-specter-of-assassinations-revived-in-ain-al-hilweh.ashx> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>153</sup> H. Nasrallah, interview on *Al Ekhbariya Al Soriyah*, April 6, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3yKJuUiHII> (accessed 19 May 2015); H. Nasrallah speech delivered May 5, 2015, <http://www.english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=29326&cid=385#.VVRDAhfroQQ> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>154</sup> M. Abdallah, 'Hezbollah's desperate recruiting in the Bekaa', May 8, 2015, *NOW*, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/565242-hezbollahs-desperate-recruiting-in-the-bekaa> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>155</sup> A. Hashem, 'Iran's new strategy in Syria', May 13, 2015, *al-Monitor*, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/iran-new-syria-strategy.html> (accessed 19 May 2015).

<sup>156</sup> V. Soughom, 'How far is Hezbollah willing to go in Syria?', April 20, 2015, *Syria Comment* [web blog], <http://www.joshualandis.com/blog/how-far-is-hezbollah-willing-to-go-in-syria/> (accessed 19 May 2015).

the formation of a new rebel coalition, Jaish al-Fatah, bringing together some of the most prominent opposition factions, including Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham and Jund al-Aqsa; in addition to shifting regional priorities reflected in the alignment of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey who are supporting the new rebel alliance.<sup>157</sup>

#### 4.6.1 Image and reality of Hezbollah's engagement in Syria

Based on what has been discussed so far it seems warranted to state that Hezbollah used its ideology to frame the Syrian uprising-cum-civil war in a way that served its own particular interests. In line with the materialist conception of ideology, which holds that ideology's role is to conceal the actual social relations of society whenever they contradict the interests of those at the top of the social strata, as well as being used as a tool for *presenting* the dominant group's narrow interests as being the interests of all, Hezbollah utilized various collective action frames to identify problems, present solutions, and mobilize support. In the case of Syria those frames not only contradicted the reality on the ground but also in some critical respects the movement's very own ideology. Hezbollah portrayed its relationship with Syria as fundamentally based on resistance on behalf of the Palestinians whereas Syria in fact historically not only had had problematic relations with the Palestinians but also committed heinously violent and morally abhorrent crimes against them. Additionally, Hezbollah prioritized the protection of a state over the protection of a people while *claiming* to protect the latter through the use of various types of symbolic language and discourses found in its ideology. In this sense, ideology became a powerful tool for Hezbollah to conceal the reality in Syria, to further its own narrow interests, and to legitimize its hegemony in Lebanon and its regional influence and ambitions. This makes the concept of *ideological instrumentalization*, meaning, to make ideology an instrument for other purposes than accomplishing the ideology's goals, particularly useful for understanding the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice. Hezbollah's stance on Syria is a testament to the

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<sup>157</sup> C. Kozak, "An army in all corners", p 11-12; A. Lund, 'Is Assad Loosing the War in Syria?', May 13, 2015, *Syria in Crisis, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=60074> (accessed 19 May 2015); R. Ford, 'The Assad Regime: The Beginning of the End?', April 24, 2015, *Middle East Institute*, <http://www.mei.edu/content/at/assad-regime-beginning-end> (accessed 19 May 2015); 'Syria's Assad depending on Iranian financial aid', 30 December, 2014, *Middle East Eye*, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/syrias-assad-depending-iran-financial-aid-392275455> (accessed 19 May 2015); K. Sengupta, 'Turkey and Saudi Arabia alarm the West by Backing Islamist extremists the Americans had bombed in Syria', May 14, 2015, *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-crisis-turkey-and-saudi-arabia-shock-western-countries-by-supporting-antiassad-jihadists-10242747.html> (accessed 19 May 2015).

movement's pragmatism in terms of ideological conformity and shows that it more often practices *realpolitik* than follows its doctrinal edicts when its interests and principles clash.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to examine the way in which Hezbollah's ideological principles relate to its practical behavior with regard to the movement's response to the Arab revolts of 2011 and beyond. I was particularly interested in investigating the extent to which Hezbollah's actions during the upheavals, as well as its portrayal of them, reflected the movement's ideology. The situation during the first five uprisings (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain) is clear. Hezbollah's unwavering support for the popular mobilizations to a large extent reflected the movement's ideology: it sided with the peoples that for decades had lived under entrenched US-backed authoritarian dictatorships that had avoided confrontations with Israel, it emphasized the protesters' right to democratic change, it called for sectarian and Arab unity, and it invoked religious concepts such as *jihad*, martyrdom, and sacrifice when describing the events and motivating the protesters to collective action. At that stage in the regional transformations it seemed like Hezbollah's actions in fact were driven by its ideology.

But as the uprisings spread to Syria — a key pillar in the Iran-led regional alliance, of which Hezbollah is a part — the equation became complicated and Hezbollah was suddenly faced with a dilemma: continue to ride the wave of revolution and cash in on the movement's increased popularity among the regions Arab publics — or side with its indispensable strategic partner Syria and keep the “axis of resistance” intact. Hezbollah chose the latter alternative. With this priority in mind it is obvious that Hezbollah deviated from some of its core ideological beliefs. It claimed to be a champion of the oppressed while it supported the autocratic dynastic regime of Bashar al-Assad. It portended to be part of the “resistance” when in reality the credentials of its Syrian ally on that issue is nothing less than bleak. Even the major Palestinian factions did not side with Assad and warnings of a looming clash with Lebanon's Palestinian refugees does not make Hezbollah's pretext for intervening in Syria look much better. Furthermore, siding with an Alawite government, which has a record of privileging its own family clique and the business elite while discriminating against the working Sunni-dominated classes, gives Hezbollah the image of basing its policies on sectarian loyalties and contradicts its anti-sectarian and anti-capitalist ideology. The very fact that it allied with Syria *at all* seems to contradict the movement's ideology.

In the case of the pre-Syria uprisings, Hezbollah's framing techniques turned out to be rather effective, much because the movement's ideology did not clash with the demands of the protesters' (regime change, social and economic justice, dignity, democratic governance, etc.). It managed to link those demands to its own resistance agenda and thereby created a narrative that incorporated the struggles of the revolting publics with its own struggle against western imperialism. Nevertheless, when it came to Syria, Hezbollah's framing processes came to distort the reality on the ground and were marred with contradictions. The result was a deepening of the regional and domestic sectarian divide which helped fuel the already devastating proxy conflicts all over the Middle East that are occurring within the context of the Iran-Saudi cold war over regional dominance. In line with the Syrian president's narrative of the conflict, Hezbollah's describing of the armed Syrian opposition as simply being "takfiri terrorists" has led to further polarization, and one might argue, a self-fulfilling prophecy reflected in the emergence of reactionary Islamist groups such as al-Qaida's Syrian franchise Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS.

In the final analysis then, and based on the investigation I have pursued, I find that the most appropriate way for understanding the relationship between Hezbollah's ideology and practice in the context of the Arab revolts is that the movement in large part instrumentalizes its doctrinal principles through the use of sophisticated legitimation strategies to justify its actions, which are rooted in deeply rational strategic interests and considerations. For the last decade, from a regional standpoint, those interests have been to extend the movement's influence among Arab publics and to assist Iran in taking advantage of the power vacuum emerging from the post-2003 decline of Iraq as one of three aspiring hegemon — the third being Saudi Arabia — in the Gulf regional system and the Middle East writ large.

And so, considering the rationality and pragmatism that characterizes Hezbollah I find it to be incorrect to designate this self-proclaimed resistance movement as simply being a "terrorist organization," at least in the conventional sense of the term. For instance, the movement's use of violence is not, as with other violent groups such as al-Qaida, an end in itself. Hezbollah's ultimate priority is to achieve its objectives and goals and if it perceives violence as the best means to that effect the movement will not shy away from using it. However, it is not *looking* to engage in violence and especially not against civilians, it rather sees it as a legitimate tool to attain its objectives and goals, thus making it very different from nihilistic groups such as al-Qaida or ISIS, which sees the killing of civilians as a purpose in and of

itself. However, if we were to accept the designation of Hezbollah as a “terrorist organization” based on the general understanding of the definition of terrorism as “the intentional targeting of civilians to achieve political ends,” it would not only be possible to designate a large number of *states* as “terrorist” but several of them could likely be considered to be the leading international organizations engaged in terror activities in the world if we take into account the flagrant crimes committed by states since the colonial era till today. As such, if the “terrorist” label is to be used at all, it should be used in a consistent fashion and be applied across the board — whether it be state or non-state actors — which could bring the possibility of making perpetrators of terror, be held accountable for their crimes and bring justice to the victims subject to these atrocious acts of violence and cruelty. Furthermore, until the current international system, which is shaped by state interests, state security, and state power, is reformed, or preferably dismantled and transformed, civilian populations will likely continue being targeted whenever a state or non-state entity is faced with the decision of conforming to its principles or pursuing its interests.

As for Social Movement Theory, it appears that frame analysis is still relevant for understanding the character and development of social movements despite it having been around for over four decades amid considerable theoretical developments within the field. As have been demonstrated in this study, modern social movements, such as Hezbollah, articulate and deploy collective action frames in order to affect people’s interpretations of the world around them and to incite them to act collectively towards realizing the goals and objectives that the social movement organization has put fourth. With the assistance of materialism, I have shown that the concepts of legitimization and ideological instrumentalization are important for understanding the drivers, motives, and rationales of social movement organizations. To some extent, this aids in the effort to “normalize” a movement such as Hezbollah in a social context that tends to gravitate towards explaining actors of this kind in terms of their *Islamic* character which however easily turns into neo-Orientalist/culturalist explanations of phenomena that I believe are better understood using the universal tools of social science such as sociological theory, as has been the case throughout this thesis.

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