

Syria Conflict Is Dividing Shiites in Lebanon

By: **Mohammad Qawwas** posted on Thursday, Oct 11, 2012

Shiites in Lebanon are following the Syrian crisis on a daily basis as they believe it reflects to a large extent their fate and their existence in the upcoming sociopolitical map. Some Shiites believe that the [situation in Syria] is a security concern that not only affects politics, but also their existence. Regardless of the relevance of such claims, Shiites — in general — are [supportive of the Syrian regime](#) and are defenders of its virtues and actions in response to the "US-Western-Zionist conspiracy targeting the regime of resistance" in Syria.

About this Article

Summary:

Long regarded as a fairly united group, Lebanon's Shiite community is straining because of the neighboring Syria conflict. While some are steadfast Hezbollah supporters, Mohammed Qawwas writes that others are becoming more moderate.

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However, defending the regime has become a difficult endeavor. There is no longer any justification for the massacres and violations [taking place] within the framework of trite rhetoric about nationalism and treason.

For the "[people of the resistance](#)," which is the label used to camouflage the ambiguous sectarian aspect of Hezbollah, the countdown to the "end" of the Shiite tide in Lebanon has begun. This tide was born with the establishment of an Islamic regime in Iran. The excess of power that has emerged through Hezbollah's weapons was the reason behind the demise of the [party's] lasting political force. In other words, Hezbollah no longer has any strategic impact on Lebanon and its particular political system.

Shiites are furtively wondering about their future in light of the Syrian regime's inevitable fall. Any new regime in Syria — whether it was the result of a coup d'état against the former regime or the product of a settlement with its remnants — will be removed from the expedient ideology linking Iran to Lebanon. Furthermore, the escalating Sunni rhetoric against Hezbollah and Iran has caused Shiites to worry about reprisals against them. Some Shiites, who prided themselves on the power of their weaponry, used to pompously say: "What will we do to them [in reference to Sunnis]?" Yet today, in light of the Syrian developments, the pertinent question is: "What will they do to us?"

The "luster" of Hezbollah's weaponry has begun to fade away. In light of the Syrian crisis, and the will of the party's opponents to fight back [against the Shiite tide], Hezbollah's fierce rhetoric has begun to grow fainter. Thus, the opposition's voices within the party's own ranks have started to rise. These are the voices of prominent religious and civil figures of different backgrounds within the Shiite sect, who could represent a very serious crack inside the unbreakable "party of resistance." Although this opposition movement does not pose a serious threat to the party, there are some figures within Hezbollah who are voicing concern in this regard. This has paved the way for an open debate between the resistance Shiites and "Feltman Shiites," as described by *Al-*

Akhbar newspaper, which is affiliated with Hezbollah.

In response to the accusations made by *Al-Akhbar* against Shiite figures “of conspiring and communicating with Washington against the resistance,” the targeted Shiite figures challenged these claims with bold language. The temperament of these responses reflects an open revolt against the traditional demagogic submission to the will and behavior of Hezbollah.

Observing the debate in this regard is useful in terms of gauging the party’s activity and its margin of maneuvering. It is also promising since the debate has moved to the Shiite community itself, which has not seen any pluralistic debates in recent decades.

But the state of confusion has become embarrassingly clear and is evident in the security chaos, which Hezbollah admits has gotten “out of control.” Although the Lebanese army has contained the Mekdad clan and freed the abductees held by the family, the step was undoubtedly made under an implicit blessing by Hezbollah.

However, the unprecedented move of the army carrying out military and security operations in the southern suburbs of Beirut (a stronghold of the party and its leaders) — with the support of the people in the area — constitutes a critical juncture. The party has made a concession to the state after being left with no other option. This may also be an indication that major concessions are coming in the future. The party has continuously stressed its independence [from the state] and unwillingness to recognize it as a solution for the party in the internal Lebanese crisis.

It is noteworthy that a [new] social class is emerging and being noticed within the Shiite community. It is being pointed out due to its financial affluence and business prosperity, the spread of corruption within the party’s ranks, or as a result of investments pumped by Shiite expatriates into the country's economy.

The existence of this class has produced a new culture that objects to the prospect of war which [the party] promotes, and expresses its rejection to [the idea of] waging wars at the expense of the Shiite community for the benefit of foreign agendas (Iran) or issues that transcend the borders of Lebanon (Palestine). This is a new remarkable phenomenon that exceeds the previous slogan [adopted by the majority of Shiites]: “For the sake of the Sayyed.”

For the sake of accuracy, these controversies, debates and criticisms do not represent a real coup against Hezbollah’s leadership among the Shiites in Lebanon, and its supporters do not represent a significant current within the Shiite community.

Some believe that the Shiite community will hold on to the party and its weapons to protect the Shiites from the implications of future developments in Syria.

However, it is a fact that a flexible [current] has emerged within the Shiite community, one which is preparing the Shiites to pragmatic adaptation (without contradicting the party), through retreating toward the Lebanese internal [political sphere] and abiding by the conditions of the Lebanese state, government, parliament and army.

This may be overly optimism. The culture, education and mobilization being used to “demonize” the state requires [counter] slogans, programs and [an alternative] culture, which would bring self-confidence back [to the Shiite sect] in the absence of arms and would make engagement with the state equivalent to sharing the homeland rather than seizing it.