

Hezbollah and the New Levant



Lebanese women wave Hezbollah flags while holding a picture of the movement's chief Hassan Nasrallah in Mashghara in the western Bekaa Valley on 25 May 2013 during a ceremony marking the 13th anniversary of Israel's military withdrawal from Lebanon. (Photo: AFP - Mahmoud Zayyat)

By: [Ibrahim al-Amin](#) ^[1]

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A great number of Hezbollah's opponents have transformed into sworn enemies bent on the group's destruction. This could signal a confrontation, whose theater will be my small country or my bigger one.

Many victims could fall. And since the situation is extremely dangerous, I find myself, once again, compelled to attempt an explanation of Hezbollah's current reality.

Those who want to act rationally will hopefully understand and listen to what I say, even if they decide to go ahead with the final confrontation.

Today, Hezbollah is a major regional power. It has been so for the past decade. With the liberation of 2000 and Israel's defeat in Gaza, then the US defeat in Iraq, followed by the failure of the plan to control Lebanon after the assassination of Rafik Hariri, then the July 2006 war, Hezbollah went through – or was forced into – several trials and theaters. It expanded its expertise, increased its influence, and doubled its capacity.

Today, Hezbollah is abhorred by a not-so-small number of Arabs and Muslims. Yet it does not worry about its popular legitimacy. Knowingly and unknowingly, Hezbollah became synonymous with the rejection of all things US and Europe, whether Arab or not.

In addition, Hezbollah has institutions comparable to those of states, not local organizations. It has a structure allowing it to function in all aspects of life. Notwithstanding its ability to succeed here or there, Hezbollah is now a security and military force, which represents a fulcrum in the axis against the West and its acolytes in the region.

With the expansion of its multifarious capacities, Hezbollah is now a source of power for all those who stand by it. This is what the Palestinians realized in their conflict with the Israeli occupation. It is what the Iraqi resistance against the US occupation found out. And now, it is what the Syrian army is experiencing against the armed groups.

In each experience, Hezbollah, which learned and absorbed a great deal of the Israeli enemy's experience, knows how to recast a threat into an opportunity and a crisis into an opening for a new reality.

What is most important in those experiences is Hezbollah's ability to produce the appropriate political discourse for each stage. Therefore it can introduce mechanisms allowing it to continue mobilizing a new generation for its forces. After a quarter of a century of military experience, its fighters are still in their early twenties.

Does anyone who wants a feud imagine what it means in real life, being able to maintain the ability to renew one's human military capacity? And what if this went hand in hand with an enormous burgeoning at the level of military systems, security capabilities, and logistical capacity?

Today, Hezbollah is abhorred by a not-so-small number of Arabs and Muslims. Yet it does not worry about its popular legitimacy. It never linked its struggles or position with obtaining prior approval from those who everyone knows are not fit to hire a government employee, let alone make a strategic choice.

This issue helped the party avoid the kind of collapse that faces political forces based on such calculations. They wither as soon as the cover of this or that state is lifted.

However, when Hezbollah decided, openly and blatantly, to penetrate the heart of the battle against the armed groups in Syria, it did so with awareness of its new role. It is not an objective reaction or a tit-for-tat service provided to the Syrian regime after a quarter century of support.

Common sense says that this mission seeks to regain the individual and collective rights of Arabs to resist the occupation of the US, Israel, or their agents in the Levant.

The new role of Hezbollah is to lead a Levantine – if not Arab – current, aiming to redraw the political, economic, and social map of a country of 75 million Arabs. Hezbollah can be a lever, but cannot produce a complete transformation and never claimed so.

Common sense says that this mission seeks to regain the individual and collective rights of Arabs to resist the occupation of the US, Israel, or their agents in the Levant. The mission aims to revive the real national identity of all Arabs.

In the first phase, it requires the elimination of all narrow viewpoints, whether we call it "an independent national decision" or "my country first." This means all of the people of the Levant, from Palestine and Jordan, to Lebanon and Syria, to Iraq, Turkey, and the Arabian Gulf.

As a consequence, I advise anyone who wants to get rid of Hezbollah to start acting as if the issue is no longer related to military and security groups, a neighborhood or two, or a border strip monitored by an international police force or the like.

I am speaking of a current with a mix of leftists and Syrian and Arab nationalists. It has a tremendous base of poor who aspire for full independence that protects their cultural and social diversity, before the political and the administrative. It is this diversity that will eliminate the thought of *takfiris* led by the Saudis and their relatives.

This is Hezbollah's new address. Get to know it well – God forbid – before you begin fighting it.

This article is an edited translation from the Arabic Edition.