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The empire of Hezbollah

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When Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, I was a teenager, growing up in a peaceful household that was neither political nor sectarian. Although [Hezbollah](#) was born then as a resistance movement to Israel's presence in Lebanon, the group never interested me until much later when, as a young journalist in 1990, in my attempt to "reach out to the other side" I was granted an exclusive interview by the group's spiritual leader, Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah.

I remember spending long hours at one of the few research centers available pouring over documents, articles and books about the man and the group. The number one topic that caught my attention was the group's underlying Islamic agenda. I got to ask Fadlallah about that directly. It was perhaps the toughest of my questions as it was direct and required a direct answer. He looked me in the eye and said, "even if our agenda is that of Islamization, I can assure you and others that our rule will be inclusive to all Lebanese and will respect everybody's freedoms." Another important observation from those days was how much clout Fadlallah had as the spiritual leader of the group in comparison to its secretary general; and the enormous number of people he influenced, including a large Iranian delegation that was waiting to see him after we concluded our interview. What remains with me from that interview is a sense of what Hezbollah could be, that is very different from what Hezbollah truly was and what it has become over the years.

Military rule

Slowly but surely, the leadership became more and more about the individual leader instead of the various councils the group has originally devised. The spiritual leadership disappeared making way to a more fundamental military rule. Under the pretext of resisting Israel's occupation, Hezbollah was the only armed militia that was allowed to operate after the end of civil war was declared in 1990. This has given the group an unprecedented legitimacy that it used later to turn its arms against the very people it was supposed to protect. The leadership of Hezbollah changed the group's bylaws to allow for the secretary general to be re-elected without limits. Thus, Sayyed Hassan Nassrallah has been at the helm of the militia for at least seven consecutive terms since 1992.

During this time, he managed to alienate himself from the rest of the world, earning the group a terrorist label in the west and a badge of honor among the most extreme and fundamental groups in the region. Under his leadership, Hezbollah's agenda got more transparent by the day: A virtual blurred line separating it from Iran and Syria's extremism. He started a war with Israel in 2006 which he later declared a "Godly" victory disregarding the heavy toll Lebanon has paid and continues to pay as a result of his unilateral decisions and actions during 2006 and since. Although its main reason to exist, namely resisting Israel's occupation, should have faded away after Israel pulled out of Lebanon in 2000, the group morphed into an independent militarized entity within Lebanon with a sizeable representation in parliament and cabinet. Instead of making Hezbollah a serious partner in building the nation, this turned the group into a self-styled empire.

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Although in hiding of fear of assassination, Sayyed Nassrallah today acts and speaks like an emperor from yesteryears. He has mistaken the applause many have given him for resisting Israel's occupation as a green light to do whatever he pleases. He has also managed to stifle most opposition at the threat of turning his weapons against any critical opinion and/or personality. Without any voices within the militia but his, Sayyed Nassrallah feels unbreakable, unstoppable, unmistakable, unshakeable and untouchable. As a result, Hezbollah's role as a resistance is no longer valid. The group is now more of an instigator, an agitator, and a distractor serving the Iranian agenda of regional supremacy as it goes on. Sayyed Nassrallah knows he's an extension of that agenda and he is betting on a leading role if it succeeds.

As Arab tyrants have fallen and will continue to fall like autumn leaves and as Arab societies are

changing across the region towards more modernization, openness and dialogue, Hezbollah has chosen the narrow, clandestine and oppressive alleys of Iran and Syria to operate out of. Perhaps because after all these are the only places where the empire of Hezbollah can exist and thrive!

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english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/middle-east/2013/05/29/The-empire-of-Hezbollah-.html