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## HEZBOLLAH, AL-MANAR, AND THE ARAB REVOLTS DEFIANCE OR SURVIVAL?

Zahera Harb

It was a fine summer's day on August 15, 2013, when a loud explosion echoed across the Lebanese capital Beirut. The civilian neighborhood of Ruweis in the southern suburb of Beirut was hit by a car bomb. Soon, the scenes of destruction and violence filled the screens of local and international television stations. Twenty-two civilians were killed, and more than 290 injured. An unknown Syrian Sunni group named after one of prophet Mohammad wives, *Aisha Umm-al Mouemeneen*, claimed responsibility for the bombing. They were sending a message to Hezbollah.

The southern suburb of Beirut contains several strongholds of Hezbollah (the mostly dominant Shi'a group the Party of God), and the televised message clearly indicated that the bombing was a response to Hezbollah participating in military activities in Syria in support of the Syrian regime. Sectarian tension was on the rise in Lebanon. The Ruweis bombing came within less than a month of another bombing that hit another neighborhood in the southern suburbs of Beirut—an area highly populated with Shi'a Muslims—injuring more than fifty people, with no fatal casualties.

Hezbollah rushed to contain the sectarian discourse that began surfacing in the Lebanese media. Through its affiliated channel, Al Manar TV, Hezbollah managed to channel the angry voices away from targeting the Sunni community in Lebanon towards the *Tekfirees*—Salafi Jihadist extremist groups affiliated to Al Qaeda. Hezbollah announced that these attacks would not stop it from battling these *Tekfirees* in Syria. A day after the bombing, the Secretary General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah announced in a live televised speech on Al Manar TV that Hezbollah's battle in Syria will continue, and that its fight alongside Assad's regime is far from over. He said that he personally was ready to join forces in Syria if necessary.<sup>1</sup> For Hezbollah, the battle in Syria has become a battle of existence—a battle against what it identifies as “the Zionist, imperialist anti resistance project” in the region. Hezbollah has proved again that it has become fundamentally a non-state regional actor and player, and a fully-fledged partner in the *Jabhat al-Mumana*, the anti imperialist anti Zionist rejectionist front that includes Syria and Iran. Some political analysts came to see it as a regional actor stuck in the Lebanese politics and not vice versa.<sup>2</sup> Hezbollah has always emphasized the role that Syria and the Syrian regime have been playing in supporting the “Islamic resistance” fight against Israeli occupation and aggression. Nasrallah has always referred to Syria as “the friend” that has never let Hezbollah and the resistance movement down. The strong bond between Hezbollah and the Syrian regime goes back to the early days of the party's existence.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter argues that Hezbollah has been consistent in its message of “resisting the oppressor” from the early days of the group's emergence up until its

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan Nasrallah, *AL Manar*, Televised speech on 16.08.2013. URL: <http://english.almanar.com.lb/seccatpage.php?frid=23&seccatid=14&thirdcatid=101> (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013).

<sup>2</sup> (Hokayem, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> For more on the history of the relationship see David, Hirst, *Beware of Small States*, (London, Faber and Faber, 2011).

controversial participation in the Syrian war. This chapter assesses Hezbollah's politics during and post the Arab revolts. It explores the role that Al Manar TV, the station affiliated with the party, played in disseminating the party's political stand, sentiments, and activities. To explore the argument, this chapter starts by giving a brief history of Hezbollah and its relationship to Al Manar TV. It investigates Hezbollah's positions towards the Arab revolts, with more attention given to the conflict in Syria and its implications on Lebanon, and how those positions were translated into Al Manar TV's coverage. The chapter highlights Al Manar's coverage of the Ruweis bombing as a case that demonstrates how the coverage mirrors the consistency in the political and ideological position of Hezbollah. The Lebanese 'Party of God', like other Lebanese parties realised the importance of disseminating its messages through dedicated channels and founded its own media platforms. They started Al Nour Radio station in 1988, then Al Manar in 1991. They own *al-Intiqad* weekly publication (formerly, *al-Ahd*). Both Al Manar and Al Nour are available to Arab Audiences via satellite, in Lebanon overland and to the world via the worldwide web in three different languages Arabic English and French. It also uses other traditional methods of communications like billboards, posters, murals<sup>4</sup> and organizing rallies. All these communication tools mirror the same political and ideological message. They tend to serve audiences inside and outside Lebanon. The most prominent platform among those listed above is Al Manar. This chapter focuses on Al Manar coverage. However, before delving into discussing the coverage of the Arab revolts and Syria it is necessary to understand the ideology behind the party and

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<sup>4</sup> Zeina Maasri, 'The Aesthetics of Belonging: transformation in Hizbollah's Political Posters (1985-2006)', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 5 (2012) 149-148

its evolving identity, which reflect the type of messages Al Manar is disseminating to its audiences

### **Hezbollah's Evolving Identity**

In the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion into south Lebanon, Hezbollah, the Shiite Islamist "Party of God," was formed. Resisting the occupation was one of the main causes that brought several members and religious leaders of different Shi'a political movements and groups together to form one party under the auspices of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hezbollah, told the party's paper *Al Ahd* on November 21, 1997, that "had the enemy [Israel] not taken this step [the invasion], I do not know whether something called Hezbollah would have been born. I doubt it."<sup>5</sup>

A few months after the Israeli invasion, the Shi'a of South Lebanon, who constitute the majority of the population there, became aware that the Israelis had come to stay, and that they would not leave until they had achieved what they claimed to be their objective at the time: uprooting the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) from South Lebanon.<sup>6</sup> Poignantly, the Israelis initiated a plan, similar to that used in the West Bank, to administer the area through committees that were run by their proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).<sup>7</sup> The Israeli army and its allies began pressuring prominent figures within the local population to join the scheme by taking their relatives as hostages in a camp in the Ansar village near Sidon.<sup>8</sup> The Ansar camp, known as a concentration camp because of its tents and surrounding barbed wire, was used to detain without trial those suspected of aiding and abetting

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<sup>5</sup> Cited in Amal, Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizb'llah*, (London, Pluto, 2002), 11.

<sup>6</sup> Hala, Jaber, *Hezbollah, born with a vengeance*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997), 15 and Magnus, Ranstorp, *Hizb'ullah in Lebanon*, (Basingstock, Palgrave, 1997), 30.

<sup>77</sup> Jaber, *Hezbollah, born with a vengeance*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*

members of the underground resistance movement that was sweeping the villages of South Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> What started as a small group of resistance fighters became a mass resistance movement that led to the 1985 Israeli withdrawal from major cities and towns in South Lebanon.

In the same year, Hezbollah issued its mission statement, known as “the open letter,” officially announcing the emergence of this new party. In this open letter, it argued that its friends were the oppressed of the world irrespective of their race, colour, or religion.<sup>10</sup> Hezbollah expressed clear commitment to the concept of the *welayet al faqih*—the Shi’a jurist-theologian who is considered to be the successor to the Prophet and the twelfth Imam—introduced by the Islamic revolution of Iran and Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>11</sup> However, Hezbollah made it clear in its open letter and later in its political publications that the party is a Lebanese party and not a foreign Iranian body by all means, from its framework to its members.<sup>12</sup> Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Naim Qassem clarifies in his book, *Hezbollah: the Story Within*, that the commitment to *welayat al-faqih* does not strip Hezbollah of its independence:

Such commitment to Jurist-Theologian and his jurisprudence does not limit the scope of internal work at the level of forging relations with the various powers and constituents of Lebanon. It further does not limit the sphere of regional and international cooperation with groups with whom the Party’s strategic direction or concerns meet.<sup>13</sup>

One of Hezbollah’s main objectives stated in the open letter was resisting Israeli occupation until it withdrew from the southern Lebanese territories. However, it was not until the late 1980s that the Hezbollah’s Islamic resistance gained the upper hand

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<sup>9</sup> Clive, Jones, “A reach greater than the grasps: Israeli intelligence and the conflict in South Lebanon 1990-2000”, *Intelligence and National Security*, 16:3 (2002): 1-26.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph, Alagha, *Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto*, (Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>11</sup> Naim, Qassem, *Hizbullah, the Story Within*, (London, Al Saqi books, 2005), 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*: 57

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*: 56-57

in fighting the Israelis<sup>14</sup>. By the early 1990s, Hezbollah's "Islamic resistance" became the sole force that had the logistic and military capabilities to fight the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon.<sup>15</sup> In 1989, Hezbollah changed its original motto displayed on the party flag from "the Islamic Revolution in Lebanon" to the "Islamic Resistance in Lebanon."<sup>16</sup> Two years later, Hezbollah entered the Lebanese political scene taking part in parliamentary elections with an election program that emphasized its diverse Lebanese cultural and religious identity. The party won 12 seats in the parliament.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, Israel was finding it difficult to stop the Hezbollah fighters from targeting its troops in the occupied zone of South Lebanon on a daily basis. "The Islamic resistance," which was attracting growing support and popularity among the local Lebanese population, became Israel's primary target. Israel's war against the Hezbollah resistance fighters took various shapes and forms: commando operations, incursions, and mini-invasions.

The "Seven Days Operation" of July 1993—code-named "Operation Accountability"—and the "Grapes of Wrath" Operation of April 1996 were two major attacks Israel launched on the Lebanese territories, targeting Southern villages and

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<sup>14</sup>With direct political support from the Syrian regime. Syrian regime had its upper hand in Lebanese politics post the Lebanese civil war.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the emergence, structure and objectives of Hezbollah see Jaber, 1997; Ranstorp, 1997; Saad Ghorayeb, 2002; Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, (New York, Syracuse University Press, 2004); Judith, Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah, the changing Face of Terrorism*, (London, IB Tauris, 2004) Qassem, 2005; Richard, Norton, *Hezbollah, A Short History*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2009); Hirst, 2011

<sup>16</sup> Maasri (2012).

<sup>17</sup> For more on Hezbollah decision to participate in the Lebanese parliamentary elections see Augustus Richard Norton (2007).

cities outside the occupied zone and the main power stations in the capital, Beirut.<sup>18</sup> These two events took place in the aftermath of the fifteen-year Lebanese civil war when all the Lebanese factions had agreed to put an end to the internal hostilities. They met in the Saudi city of *Taef* and agreed on Lebanon's right and legitimacy to resist the Israeli occupation forces in South Lebanon until Israel implemented UN resolution 425.<sup>19</sup> The Lebanese political leaders participating in the meeting also agreed in what became later known as the *Taef* Accord that Lebanon was to be a united Arab state where Muslims and Christians share similar powers. They equally rejected all tendencies and attempts towards dividing Lebanon into mini religious states,<sup>20</sup> and declared Israel a state enemy and those who establish contact with the Israelis traitors.

Lebanon's official/political institutions thus regained their unity and power. The Lebanese government declared its support for the Lebanese resistance against the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon. It also announced its support for the Palestinians' right to establish a sovereign state in Palestine, and for the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.<sup>21</sup> All the Lebanese governments that took office after 1990 recognized the "Islamic resistance" armed struggle against the Israeli occupation as a "national resistance."<sup>22</sup> Syria, which was given the upper political hand in Lebanon to see this agreement through, offered Hezbollah all the

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<sup>18</sup> See Zahera, Harb, *Channels of Resistance, Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and the Media*, (London, IB Tauris, 2011)

<sup>19</sup> On March 19<sup>th</sup> 1978 United Nation Security Council adopted Resolution 425, which calls upon Israel to withdraw immediately from all Lebanese territory. It also calls for strict respect for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon within its internationally recognized boundaries. The UN Security Council also decided to establish a peace-keeping interim force for Southern Lebanon for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security and assisting the Lebanese government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area (Tuani, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> Aref, Al Abed, *Lebanon and Al Taef*, (Beirut, Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2001)

<sup>21</sup> See Aref, Al Abed, *Lebanon and Al Taef* and Elisabeth, Picard, *Lebanon: A Shattered Country*, (New York, Holmes & Meier, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Judith, Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah, the Changing Face of Terrorism*.

logistic and political support it needed in its struggle to resist the Israeli occupation.<sup>23</sup>

After twenty-two years of occupation, Israel made a unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000. On the July 24, 2000, the United Nation Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) finally certified Israeli compliance with UN Security Council 425. However, there was a small number of issues still unresolved when the verification process came to a halt. Among those problems was the issue of Chebaa Farms. This was a small piece of land that Israel claimed to be Syrian land according to UN resolution 242, yet which Lebanon believes is Lebanese and therefore should be liberated from Israeli occupation according to Resolution 425. The resistance declared the continuation of its military struggle until such time that Israel withdraw from Chebaa Farms, release all Lebanese detainees from Israeli prisons, and stop violating Lebanese airspace.<sup>24</sup> An attempt for prisoner exchange between Israel and Hezbollah was the main aim behind capturing two Israeli soldiers from the border line between Israel and Lebanon on July 12, 2006.<sup>25</sup> On the same day, Israel launched a disproportionate war against Lebanon claiming that it wanted to destroy Hezbollah.<sup>26</sup> However, Israel's war objectives were not met. Instead, Lebanon's civil infrastructure was destroyed, and Hezbollah and the "Islamic resistance" gained more popularity among the Lebanese and Arab populations.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See David, Hirst, *Beware of Small States*.

<sup>24</sup> Brendan, O'Shea, "Lebanon's 'Blue Line': a new international border or just another cease-fire zone?", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 27 (2004), 19-30.

<sup>25</sup> Nasrallah, Hassan, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah speech at the divine victory rally held in Beirut, moqawama.org, 22.09.2006. URL: <http://www.english.moqawama.org/essaydetailsf.php?eid=709&fid=11> (accessed 25 April 2012).

<sup>26</sup> See Jeremy Sharon, "Lessons of the 2006 Lebanon war", *The Guardian*, 12.07.2010. URL: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jul/12/lessons-second-lebanon-war/print>. Accessed on 21 January 2014).

<sup>27</sup> According to a poll released by the Beirut Centre for Research and Information, 87 percent of Lebanese support Hezbollah's fight with Israel, a rise of 29 percent on a similar poll conducted in February. However, the level of support for Hezbollah's resistance from non-Shiite communities has

## **The July 2006 War as a Turning Point**

On February 14, 2005, Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated in a car bomb in Beirut. Blame was immediately targeted at the Syrian regime. Hundreds of thousands of Lebanese from different religious sects and political affiliation took to the streets of Beirut demanding the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. They occupied Martyr Square in downtown Beirut as the center of their protest. Hezbollah alongside Syria's allies in Lebanon arranged a large demonstration under the banner "Thank you Syria," and marched to the adjacent Riyad AL Soluh Square. The two squares witnessed substantial demonstrations—one pro-Syrian on March 8, 2005, and the other anti-Syrian on March 14, 2005. Hence, the political scene in Lebanon was divided into two major alliances known as March 8 and March 14. The predominantly Sunni Future Movement headed by Saad Hariri, son of the late Prime Minister Rafic Hariri was the driving-force behind the March 14, alliance, and the predominantly Shi'a Hezbollah was the driving-force behind the March 8, camp.

This division grew more intense in the wake of the July 2006 war. Although the thirty-three days of war showed solidarity among Lebanese people against Israeli aggression, the March 14 alliance believed that Hezbollah was acting as an Iranian and Syrian proxy agent, and was leading Lebanon into destruction. On the other hand, Hezbollah and the March 8 alliance believed that the March 14 group was acting as a proxy for Saudi Arabia and liaising with Israel and the United States to destroy Hezbollah,. Any trust between the two camps was shattered. Political tensions grew

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increased. Eighty percent of Christians polled supported Hezbollah along with 80 percent of Druze and 89 percent of Sunnis (Nicholas, Blanford, "Israeli Strikes May Boost Hizbullah Base", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 28.07.06).

and sectarian discourses surfaced in the Lebanese media<sup>28</sup>. Hezbollah's efforts to portray a pan-Lebanese, pan-Islamic image were failing. Hezbollah was being portrayed as a Shi'a movement and was faced with anti-Shi'a sentiments. Hezbollah fighters marching through the streets of Beirut on May 7, 2008, to stop the Lebanese government from destroying Hezbollah's private underground telecommunications network set to protect its leaders and its Islamic resistance military activities against any Israeli military or intelligence intrusion, fuelled the sectarian sentiments in the country.<sup>29</sup> Domestic political rivalry in Lebanon took the form of Shi'a-Sunni rivalry. Indictment of four members of Hezbollah in the assassination of Rafic Hariri by United nation backed special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) put Hezbollah in a defensive position<sup>30</sup>. The group denied all allegations. Hezbollah believes that it is being targeted in an Israeli-US plot to demonize the party and what it stands for.

The Future Movement used Future TV and Radio Orient as their media tools in the conflict, and Hezbollah used Al Manar TV and Radio Al Nour.<sup>31</sup> Hassan Nasrallah, on more than one occasion, praised the role "the resistance media" played in portraying "the correct image of the resistance and its fighters."<sup>32</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the July 2006 war, Nasrallah spoke of the successful psychological war

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<sup>28</sup> See Harb in Matar and Harb (2013)

<sup>29</sup> Marius, Deeb, *Syria, Iran, And Hezbollah: The Unholy Alliance And Its War On Lebanon*, (U.S. Hoover Institution Press, 2013); See Deeb 2013 to read more about what 14 March alliance called 'Hezbollah occupation the streets of Beirut.'

<sup>30</sup> The STL trial into Hariri's assassination started in the Hague on the the 16<sup>th</sup> of January. For more on the trial see Al Jazeera, Hariri assassination opens at the Hague, 16.1.2014. URL

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/hariri-assassination-trial-opens-at-hague-201411684455392827.html> Accessed on 18.1.2014.

<sup>31</sup> See Zahera, Harb, "Mediating internal conflict in Lebanon and its ethical boundaries," in Dina, Matar and Zahera, Harb, *Narrating Conflict in the Middle East, Discourse Image and Communications Practices*, (London, IB Tauris, 2013).

<sup>32</sup> See Nasrallah's speech, *Al Manar website*, 9.5.2013. URL:

<http://english.almanar.com.lb/seccatpage.php?frid=23&seccatid=14&thirdcatid=101> (accessed: 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013).

Hezbollah led against Israel. Al Manar and other media platforms affiliated to Hezbollah were central to that success.<sup>33</sup>

### **Al Manar, the “Channel of Resistance:” Carrying the Message of Defiance**

Al Manar started its transmission on June 4, 1991, from a small apartment in the southern suburbs of Beirut. According to former Al Manar’s head of news, Hassan Fadlallah, Al Manar started transmitting six hours a day at most through a small transmitter that covered the southern suburbs of Beirut.<sup>34</sup>

The channel was brought to life by a group of Hezbollah enthusiastic young men,<sup>35</sup> with the aim of spreading the resistance’s message and accomplishments among the Lebanese public. As stated by both Nayef Krayem (former chairman of Al Manar) and Muhamad Haidar (former chairman of Al Manar and member of Hezbollah’s Political Bureau), those enthusiastic young men started thinking of the Al Manar project as early as 1986:

In the late eighties the Islamic resistance carried out operations that proved painful to Israeli positions in south Lebanon. The media coverage of these operations was weak, and the Israelis kept the killing of their soldiers in south Lebanon away from the Israeli and international media. They used to announce these killings after a day or two, saying that the soldiers had, for instance, died in a car accident. It was then that we decided that we needed our own publicity tool to uncover the Israeli lies. Thus, we started thinking of establishing our own television and radio stations.<sup>36</sup>

Hassan Fadlallah revealed that the first resistance videotape was broadcast on Tele Liban’s Channel 7 in 1986. However, as soon as Al Manar was launched, the tapes

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<sup>33</sup> For more information and illustration of this psychological war See Zahera, Harb, *Channels of Resistance*

<sup>34</sup> Doha, Shames, ‘Al Manar: from the southern suburb to the southern suburb, a channel that disturbs the Israelis and the Americans’, *Assafir*, 24 December 2004, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Nayef, Krayem, ‘Al Manar: Qusat al Tassis...’ [‘Al Manar: the story of its establishment ...’], *Assafir*, 28 December 2004, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Mohammad, Haidar, Al-Manar former Chairman, Interview with author, Al-Manar headquarters, Haret Hreik, Beirut Southern Suburb, 01.09.2004.

were sent to the newly established channel. From then on, Al Manar gained its reputation of being the “resistance channel.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, this reputation was confined to the small area its broadcasts then reached, which were mainly Greater Beirut and parts of South and East Lebanon.

Between 1991 and 1996, Al Manar developed its technical abilities and transmission powers. In September 1996, the government granted Al Manar a temporary licence as “the resistance station.” As such, the duration of the Al Manar license was tied to the ending of the Israeli occupation. According to Krayem, this was an official admission by the government of the important role Al Manar was playing, and of the need for such a channel to portray resistance heroism and achievements until the liberation of the occupied territories in south Lebanon.<sup>38</sup>

There had to be a TV station that committed itself to bringing out images of the suffering of our people in the occupied territories, the victims of Israeli arrogance, and that of those living in areas bordering the occupation who suffer its semi-daily aggressions, besides focusing on the resistance activity and establishing its role, hoping to formulate a resistant nation governed by justice and equality. Thus, Al Manar saw the light of day.<sup>39</sup>

The Al Manar mission statement indicates the “propagandistic nature” of the channel. It was founded on the basis of propagating resistance activities and displaying images of Israeli atrocities in south Lebanon<sup>40</sup>. Thus, Al Manar TV was established as the resistance’s media tool in its fight with the Israeli army. Television is a popular media form and fits with Al Manar’s mission to make resisting the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon part of Lebanese people’s everyday lives.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Doha, Shames, *Assafir*, 24 December 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Nayef, Krayem, *Assafir*, 28 December 2004.

<sup>39</sup> Al Manar Mission Statement cited in Zahera Harb, *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon*, Liberation Propaganda, Hezbollah and the Media.

<sup>40</sup> See Zahera Harb *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon*

<sup>41</sup> Bernadette, Casey, Neil, Casey, Beb, Calvert, Liam, French, and Justin, Lewis, *Television Studies: The Key Concepts*, (London, Routledge, 2002), 88.

Meanwhile, Al Manar worked on fulfilling the legal, structural, financial, and technical demands needed to obtain a licence to operate as a privately owned commercial general television station. The Lebanese Communication Group (LCG) was established, with shareholders from different Lebanese religious sects including Muslims and Christians.<sup>42</sup> In July 1997, Al Manar and Radio Al Nour were granted full licences under the LCG name,<sup>43</sup> but were not legally registered until November 1998.<sup>44</sup>

After it was granted an official licence, Al Manar began several training workshops to equip staff with the most developed techniques in media production. Many Al Manar journalists and technicians were sent on training courses in France, Syria, Iran, and Egypt. Later, the television station signed an agreement with the French Thomson Company to equip Al Manar with the latest technologies.<sup>45</sup>

By 1997, Al Manar's terrestrial channel was broadcasting 18 hours a day, and was able to reach Lebanon in its entirety, as well as parts of Syria and occupied Palestine..<sup>46</sup>

Accordingly, the government granted Al Manar a licence as a "national resistance channel in 1998."<sup>47</sup> Between 1993 and 2000, Hezbollah led a very successful media campaign against Israel and its occupying forces in south Lebanon

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<sup>42</sup> Al Manar, according to its licence application, is run by an independent board of directors. This board has members (mainly businessmen and bank managers) who have no organisational ties to Hezbollah. However, they support the resistance's operations in south Lebanon.

<sup>43</sup> Al Nour, a radio station established by Hezbollah, was later run by a separate board of directors.

<sup>44</sup> Nayef, Krayem, *Assafir*, 28 December 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Mohammad, Haidar, Al-Manar former Chairman, Interview with author, Al-Manar headquarters, Haret Hreik, Beirut Southern Suburb, 01.09.2004.

<sup>47</sup> Zahera, Harb, *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon*.

and Al Manar was a key institution in conducting what I identified in an earlier study as “Liberation Propaganda” against Israeli occupation of south Lebanon.<sup>48</sup>

On 25 May 2000 (the day South Lebanon was liberated), Al Manar began broadcasting via satellite and its audience grew, especially with the channel’s extensive coverage of the second Palestinian *Intifada*.

Since obtaining its licence from the government in 1998, the channel has increased its audience share to more than 15 percent of the Lebanese population. By 2004, Krayem and other Lebanese officials stated that the channel was the third most-watched television channel in Lebanon.<sup>49</sup>

By welcoming speakers from all sectors of the Lebanese population onto its programs, Al Manar has tried to identify itself as a television channel fostering inter-sectarian collaboration. Of importance when taking into account the television ratings for the whole of Lebanon is the predominance of Al Manar as a substitution channel not constantly watched by non-Hezbollah viewers, but frequently consulted for specific programs, especially the news and mainly during times of crisis or military escalations.<sup>50</sup>

A 2008 Zogby poll puts the viewership of al-Manar at 2% of the Arab world, which translates to about \$10 million. By comparison, al-Arabiya had 9% and one of the most popular Lebanese stations, Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation, 3%.<sup>51</sup>

Al Manar succeeded in achieving this position by portraying a television message of inter-sectarian collaboration against a common Israeli enemy.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Victoria, Firmo-Fontan, “Power, NGOs and Lebanese television” in Naomi, Sakr, *Women and Media in the Middle East*, (London, I.B. Tauris, 2004: 162–79), 177–8.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*: 178

<sup>51</sup> Ann Marie, Baylouni, “Not Your Father's Islamist TV: Changing Programming on Hizbullah's al-Manar”, *Arab Media and Society*, 9, Fall (2009). URL: <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=728> (accessed, 14 January 2013).

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*: 179

Throughout the years that followed, Al Manar remained true to its mission statement to propagate and defend the Islamic resistance project in protecting the nation (*the Umma*) by confronting and resisting the “Zionist enemy and its imperialist friends” plans in the region. As a result Al Manar was listed as a terrorist organisation on the US State Department list of terrorist organisation. The act followed a study conducted by Avi Jorisch of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy claiming Al Manar incites violence and anti-Semitic sentiments in its programming.<sup>53</sup> On similar grounds Al Manar was later banned in France, Spain and Germany.

### **Hezbollah, Al Manar, and the Arab Revolts: Supporting the “Oppressed” Against the “Oppressor”**

Richard Norton states that the ruling elite in the Islamic world “find Hezbollah so worrisome, namely that it may inspire copycat dissent movements in their own societies.”<sup>54</sup> He expressed his belief that this would be the case especially when sectarian divisions become less significant, and as pan-Islamic sentiments grow.<sup>55</sup>

In Saudi Arabia, during the July war, in an attempt to forestall Shi’s-Sunni solidarity, the regime reiterated the admonition of some anti Shi’i clerics that Saudi Muslims were not permitted to pray for Shi’i Hezbollah.<sup>56</sup>

During, and in the aftermath of, the July 2006 war, Nasrallah was celebrated as a latter-day Salah al-Din (Saladin).<sup>57</sup> In the minds of many Arabs and Lebanese at the time, Nasrallah occupied a “larger than life image.”<sup>58</sup> His speeches broadcast on Al Manar during the war played a pivotal role in bringing people from across the Arab

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the US decision to list Al Manar a terrorist organisation and Jorisch study see Harb 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Richard, Norton, *Hezbollah: a Short History*, 148.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

<sup>56</sup> *ibid*

<sup>57</sup> The Kurdish general widely seen in the Arab world as a great Arab hero for his liberation of Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187, *ibid*: 149.

<sup>58</sup> Lina, Khatib, *Hizbullah’s Image Management Strategy*, (Los Angeles, Figueroa Press, 2012), 36.

world in solidarity with the Hezbollah resistance fighters.<sup>59</sup> Al Manar enjoyed a boost in viewership during that period.<sup>60</sup> The television moved from “83rd to 10th watched in the Arab world during the war, according to Israeli sources”.<sup>61</sup> According to Anne Marie Baylouny Many polls list al-Manar as “one of the top stations in the Middle East, particularly for news on Palestine”<sup>62</sup> She states that many list al-Manar among the top influential outlets in the Arab world. Al Manar and Hezbollah’s increase in popularity across the Arab and Muslim world during time of crises crossed the sectarian affiliations. Other than Egypt’s success in 1973, “the Party of God” was the only player (state or non-state) to have defeated Israel in such a way.<sup>63</sup> Following the Shi’a school of thought within Islam has always been central to the party’s identity. However, it has never been demonstrated in the party’s literature or general statement to have an exclusive Shi’a policy. As Naim Qassem, deputy secretary general of Hezbollah, wrote:

Following Islam requires a detailed understanding and adoption of a context for interpretation. Given the number of Islamic schools of thought, patterns chosen by their originators to express their views of the appropriate means for achieving abundance by Islamic Sahri’a, one is prompted to follow a specific path. The Party thus choose to follow that of the prophet’s descendents; such is the general direction of faith adopted by the shi’is.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See Dina, Matar, “The Power of Conviction: Nasrallah Rhetoric and Mediated Charisma in the Context of the 2006 July War”, *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, 1 (2008), 122-137.

<sup>60</sup> Richard, Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History*.

<sup>61</sup> Ann Marie, Baylouni, “Not Your Father's Islamist TV: Changing Programming on Hizbullah's al-Manar.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid*

<sup>63</sup> Emile, Hokayem, The 8th IISS Global Strategic review, ‘Global Security Governance and The Emerging Distribution Of Power’, Stockholm, 9 September 2010. URL: <http://www.iiss.org/en/events/gsr/sections/global-strategic-review-2010-946c/keynote-address-and-opening-remarks-94d4> (accessed, 12 October, 2013).

<sup>64</sup> Naim, Qassem, *Hizbullah*, 32.

Aiming towards an Islamic order is part of the party's commitment to Islamic thought and Shi'a ideology, however, its position evolved to one that does not seek to implement such order by force.

The creation of an Islamic state is thus not a function of adoption by one group or branch and a subsequent imposition on other groups. Such a path is refused both for this project and others, irrespective of who its organisations are... The message is clear, and beckons the creation of an Islamic state based on free public choice.<sup>65</sup>

On these bases, Strindberg and Warn differentiate between Hezbollah and other Islamist parties and groups; they recognize that Hezbollah endorses the idea of political pluralism and differences of opinion.<sup>66</sup> They quote Hassan Nasrallah affirming that Hezbollah "do not seek status" and that the "fundamental and central cause is that we are fulfilling a duty and that is what governs our conduct."<sup>67</sup>

It was this "fundamental and central cause" that guided Hezbollah's response to the Arab revolts. The party offered support for every uprising in the region except for the one taking aim at the Syrian regime.

Indeed, Hezbollah's overall response was to not only welcome the uprisings, but encourage them. In late April, Ali Fayad [Hezbollah Member of Parliament] noted that the events in Tunisia and Egypt were 'very important mixtures of democracy and resistance... revolutions based on demands for accountability, transparency.'<sup>68</sup>

This support follows the dichotomy of the "oppressor" versus the "oppressed," which Amal Saad Ghorayeb identified as central to Hezbollah's political stand and action:

Central to Hizbu'llah's notion of political action is the division of the world, formulated by Khumayni, into 'oppressors' (mustakbirin) and 'oppressed' (mustad'afin). So pivotal is this conceptual dichotomy to Hizbu'llah political thought that it is invoked in almost every official's speech.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid: 31.

<sup>66</sup> Andres , Strindberg and Mats Warn, *Islamism*, (USA, Polity Press, 2011), 130.

<sup>67</sup> Hassan, Nasrallah cited in ibid, 130.

<sup>68</sup> Ali, Fayed cited in ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Amal, Saad Ghorayeb, *Hizbu'llah*, 16)

*Mustakbirin* has always been a term affiliated in the party's literature and statements made to the United States and Israel. The support that the party expresses is towards the oppressed (*Mustad'fin*) uprising in these countries against the oppressor that is supported by Israel and the United States.

Al Manar dedicated airtime to broadcast and cover the protests on the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, and Libya. With the crackdown on Bahraini protesters, and the absence of coverage from the main Arab satellite news channels,<sup>70</sup> Al Manar became the screen of refuge for Bahraini activists. The Bahraini accusations against Hezbollah's interference in Bahraini internal affairs surfaced along with stories of Iranian plots to control the region. Central to these accusations was the Shi'a-Sunni divide. Bahrain petitioned the Arab State Broadcasting Union to stop the transmission of Al Manar TV and radio Al Nour on the Arabsat satellite transmitter. This was in response to what Bahrain and other Gulf states said was Hizbollah's and Al Manar's role in provoking violence and sectarian hatred. The Lebanese government interfered and asked Arab ministers of information meeting in Cairo not to ban Al Manar TV and radio Al Nour, stating that both channels operate under Lebanese law, which prohibits inciting sectarian or religious hatred.<sup>71</sup> Hezbollah had been making political alliances with other sects since it entered parliamentary elections in 1992, and Al Manar reflected this multi-sectarian, multicultural approach in its programming and news coverage.

Such programming, diametrically opposed to popular and Western images of Hizbullah as a terrorist organization and its media as a propaganda outlet for

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<sup>70</sup> For more on coverage of the Arab revolts see Zahera Harb, Arab Revolutions and the Social Media effect, *M/C Journal*, Vol.14, 2 (2011). URL: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjjournal/article/viewArticle/364>.

<sup>71</sup> *Al Manar website*, 6 January 2013 URL: <http://www.almanar.com.lb/adetails.php?eid=398966&cid=21&fromval=1> (accessed, 1<sup>st</sup> November 2013).

violence and Shi'a exclusivism, is a result of Hizbullah's increasing Lebanonization or nationalization[...] Al-Manar is a window into these changes, for some more dramatic and perhaps convincing than the organization's political statements and alliances. The television demonstrates Hizbullah's desire to broaden its support and assure its future domestic legitimacy within the Lebanese multi-religious community.<sup>72</sup>

On November 8, 2012, Al Manar broadcast a statement by Hezbollah denying accusations of involvement in Bahraini events.

Commenting on the accusations levelled by Samira Rajab, Bahraini state minister for media affairs, against Hezbollah, the Hezbollah Media relations Department issued a statement noting that the Bahraini authorities continue the episode of their accusations and false claims. ... Hezbollah denounced "any direct or indirect reference to it with regard to this issue."<sup>73</sup>

Al Manar did not depict its dedication of air time to support the Bahraini protesters as a support based on sectarian affiliation; it was a support based on Hezbollah's binary understanding of the world in terms, of the "oppressor" and the "oppressed." However, during the 90<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) in Tunis in December 2013, Bahrain requested the union cancels the membership of Al Manar.<sup>74</sup> LCG, the parent company of Al Manar and radio Al Nour, Chairman Abdullah Qasir rushed to issue a formal apology to Bahrain over its news coverage<sup>75</sup>. The apology confirmed LCG "commitment to adopt objectivity in future coverage of news in the Arab world as well as ongoing events and respect professional standards". ASBU members including Bahrain accepted the apology. Bahrain News Agency leaked the apology and Arab news networks picked on the contradiction between what Al Manar and Hezbollah claim to stand for and the reality of its actions.

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<sup>72</sup> Ann Marie, Baylouni, "Not Your Father's Islamist TV".

<sup>73</sup> *Al Manar TV*, Hezbollah denies accusations of involvement in Bahraini blasts, 19.30pm News Program, 8 November 2012.

<sup>74</sup> *Daily Star*, Hezbollah media apologises for Bahrain coverage, 08 December 2013.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*

Hezbollah did not take long to issue a statement renouncing the apology.<sup>76</sup> The statement said that the stance was taken without consultation with the party leadership. Almost two weeks later Qasir quit his post as Chairman of LCG. Despite that Al Manar apology was not withdrawn hence avoiding, in an act of political pragmatism on behalf of both Al Manar and Hezbollah. Dismissal from ASBU and losing access to a large number of its own audiences is what Al Manar tried to avoid. Al Manar did not stop from hosting Bahraini opposition activists on air, but at a lesser scale. By that time news on Syria has had dominated Al Manar news agenda. Al Manar moved from being media sympathiser to being a media activist.

### **Hezbollah and Syria's War: A Consistency in the Discourse**

The media and political support Hezbollah, and consequently Al Manar, offered to protestors and activists in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain came to a halt when demonstrations calling for reform began in Syria. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's speeches at the beginning of the protests called for a dialogue between the opposition and the government to address political and economic reforms.<sup>77</sup> However, two years into the conflict, Hezbollah emerged as a central political and military ally to the Syrian regime. Criticism and condemnation of Hezbollah's role in Syria dominated the political scene in Lebanon. In an interview with the Lebanese daily *Assafir*, Lebanese President Michael Sulyman warned that Hezbollah was exposing Lebanon to internal tensions and Israeli aggression by continuing its military campaign in Syria.

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<sup>76</sup> Rayane Abou Jaoude, *Daily Star*, Hezbollah disavows Al-Manar 'apology', 10 December 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Al Jazeera, Nasrallah calls on Syrians to Support Assad, 25 January 2011. URL <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2011/05/2011525174748827942.html> Accessed: 4 November 2013.

Hezbollah is a resistance and this resistance has a national day [in Lebanon] and it is referred to in the Cabinet's Ministerial Statement under the 'Army, people and resistance' slogan. How can Hezbollah therefore act unilaterally, leaving the army and people?<sup>78</sup>

Similar voices of opposition to Hezbollah's involvement in Syria occupied spaces in anti-Syrian regime media platforms in Lebanon and the Arab world like Future TV, Murr TV, Al Arabyia and Al Jazeera Arabic, and sectarian tensions grew on the streets of Lebanon. For Hezbollah, the battle in Syria was a battle of existence—one that involves the existence of the *Jabhat al-Mumana*, the anti Zionist anti Imperialist rejectionist front in the region led by Syria and Iran, which Hezbollah has emerged as a fully-fledged partner.<sup>79</sup>

Today, it is widely assured that any success in the dissociation operation of the axis of resistance on the military level, by toppling the Syrian regime, won't exclude Hezbollah and some other sides, especially after some previous diplomatic efforts to exclude Syria from this axis didn't bear fruits. Hezbollah's followers are aware the battles trends and its background. This is represented by the popular consent about the death of Hezbollah's martyrs who fought off military operations that targeted their villages and properties on the borderline.<sup>80</sup>

Hezbollah and Al Manar stress that the struggle in Syria has an international trend related to the choices adopted by the Syrian regime on the level of resistance and reluctance. They keep emphasizing that the battle in Syria is not about sectarian motivation, and that Hezbollah has been the subject of media agitation in Lebanon and the Arab world.<sup>81</sup>

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah assured that Syria's friends in the region and the world will not let it fall in the hands of America, Israel, and Takfiri groups. In a statement via Al-Manar TV Channel, in which

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<sup>78</sup> *Daily Star*, Lebanese president urges Hezbollah to end Syria "ventures", 20 June 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Emile, Hokayem, The 8th IISS Global Strategic review.

<sup>80</sup> Israa, Al Fass, Why Hezbollah 'Is Fighting' in Syria, *Al Manar website*, 9.5.2013. URL: <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?eid=92809&cid=23&fromval=1> (accessed 25 October 2013).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

he tackled the latest, most significant developments, Sayyed Nasrallah renewed his call for everyone to find a political solution for the Syrian crisis.<sup>82</sup>

Stories about the numbers of fighters Hezbollah was sending into the Syrian battle emerged in several media outputs in the region and internationally. The British daily *The Times* reported the presence of 10,000 Hezbollah fighters in Syria, with 1,200 of them fighting in Qusayr.<sup>83</sup> *The Guardian* reported Israeli military intelligence chief Aviv Kochavi claiming that Iran and Hezbollah “have built a 50,000 strong force to help Syrian regime.”<sup>84</sup> Articles doubting and denying the achievements of Hezbollah in its war with Israel began dominating spaces in some of the Arab press. Abdallah al Rashid, wrote in *Al Sharaq- al Awsat*, the pan-Arab Saudi paper:

what is going on in Al Qusayr is only another chapter in Hezbollah bad history...calling it Iranian brigade used in Iran’s conflict with the countries of the region, including Lebanon... it was media propaganda that made Hezbollah look victorious on its battles with Israel, the truth is Israel was the victorious one.<sup>85</sup>

Demonizing Hezbollah as a resistance movement was topped by the decision of the European Union to classify the “Hezbollah military arm” as a terrorist group.<sup>86</sup> Hezbollah was accused of bombing a bus of Israeli tourists in Bulgaria. Hezbollah denied all allegations and accused Israel of running a “global terror campaign to isolate the party.”<sup>87</sup> The Gulf States warned against the consequences of Hezbollah military interference in Syria, and announced that they would take measures against the residency permits and financial and commercial transactions of Hezbollah

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<sup>82</sup> Al Manar.net, Sayyed Nasrallah: Syria’s Friends won’t Let It Fall in US, Israel, Takfiri Hands, 8 May 2013. URL: <http://english.almanar.com.lb/adetails.php?fromval=3&cid=101&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=92729> (accessed, 1 November 2013).

<sup>83</sup> Nicholas, Blanford, *The Times*, Hezbollah cut back on troops fighting for Assad, 4 October 2013.

<sup>84</sup> Julian, Borger, *the Guardian*, Iran and Hezbollah ‘have built 50,000 strong force to help Syrian regime’ 14 March 2013.

<sup>85</sup> Abdallah, al Rashid, *Al Sharaq- al Awsat*, “Hezbollah: the Arab Media Lie”, 26 May 2013.

<sup>86</sup> Alastair Dawber, *The Independent*, Hezbollah: EU bows to pressure and declares military wing of Lebanese party terrorist organisation, 22 July 2013.

<sup>87</sup> *Daily Star*, Hezbollah slams Israel’s ‘Global Terror Campaign’ against Party, 8 February 2013.

members.<sup>88</sup> Those measures were directed mainly at Lebanese Shi'a. Stories also emerged about Hezbollah's involvement in terrorist plots in Nigeria and Cyprus.<sup>89</sup> Such stories were followed by news on Hezbollah's intentions to wage attacks on countries in the Gulf region. The Kuwaiti newspaper *Al Siyasa Kuwaitiya* reported that plans have been put in place to build camps for Hezbollah party members on the border with 'Sunni strongholds' and on the border with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.<sup>90</sup> Al Jazeera led a story on Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr El Qirbi, reporting that Hezbollah supported former south Yemeni President Ali Salim al Bid by providing him with protection in Beirut. Links were made in the story between the transmissions of Al Bid satellite channels to that of Al Manar.<sup>91</sup> These claims were unfounded, but an atmosphere of resentment in the region towards Hezbollah as a "destructive regional power" was growing. Hezbollah's responses to all political and media pressure was channelled in the speeches of its secretary general, which has, since the July 2006 war, been treated by Al Manar as media events.<sup>92</sup>

When there is an efficient and serious resistance devoted to confronting the enemy, it is natural that it gets targeted. From now on, no one can impose its projects and conditions on Lebanon, and Lebanon is no longer a pleasant bite for the enemy... no matter who the enemy is.<sup>93</sup>

The discourse of resistance and anti-US and Israeli imperialism and occupation was consistent and dominant in every speech Nasrallah made throughout the Syrian crisis, and was reflected in Al Manar's coverage of events in Syria. Al Manar had its reporters embedded with the Syrian army and would broadcast special reports on the

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<sup>88</sup> *Al Jazeera*, Behind the Story, 18.30pm, 12 May 2013.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew, Levitt, *Newstatesman*, Hezbollah's next move, 16 September 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Basil, Muhammad, *Al Siyasa Kuwaitiya*, A leading Sadrist figure reveals to Al Siyasa that "part of Hezbollah's leadership moved to Southern Baghdad", 4 August 2013.

<sup>91</sup> *Al Jazeera Arabic TV*, News program, 18.00pm, 5 October 2013.

<sup>92</sup> See Dina, Matar "The Power of Conviction: Nasrallah Rhetoric and Mediated Charisma in the Context of the 2006 July War" and Zahera, Harb, *Channels of Resistance in Lebanon*.

<sup>93</sup> Hassan, Nasrallah Televised speech, *Al Manar website*, 25 July 2013.

Syria army's 'advancement' against what Al Manar refers to as 'armed and militant groups' threatening 'the stability and security of Syria'<sup>94</sup>.

On July 9, 2013, a car bomb exploded in Bir el Abed in the southern Suburbs of Beirut—a Hezbollah stronghold—injuring 53 mostly Shi'a civilians.<sup>95</sup> Hezbollah blamed Israel for the car bomb and avoided accusing Sunni jihadist groups involved in the fighting in Syria.<sup>96</sup> Al Manar coverage of the explosion and its aftermath reflected this stand. "Israel is the only party benefiting from such atrocity" was a statement that was featured in all Al Manar news and current affairs programs at the time. Hezbollah, through Al Manar, was able to restrain the reaction of its supporters. A message of resistance was re-enforced by a speech Nasrallah gave on August 2, 2013:

We the Shiites of Ali bin abi Taleb will not abandon Palestine, will not abandon Jerusalem... say whatever you want, say rejectionists say terrorists say criminals we won't abandon Palestine... We Hezbollah the Islamic, Shia, twelver party will not abandon Palestine, will not abandon Jerusalem, won't abandon the people of Palestine and won't abandon the sanctities of this Ummah.<sup>97</sup>

Nasrallah, for the first time in a televised speech, called for the annihilation of the state of Israel. It was a message to indicate that Hezbollah was still faithful to its mission statement, and that fighting in Syria was part of fulfilling that mission. Hezbollah was soon hit badly on the home front. The conflict in Syria has clearly and

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<sup>94</sup> Soumar Hatem, Al Manar, Al Manar camera first to wander Tabaqa military airport in Raqa, 26 January 2014. URL: <http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=20&frid=23&seccatid=20&eid=132790> Accessed 26 January 2014.

<sup>95</sup> *Al Jazeera.com*, Car bomb rocks Shia suburb in Beirut, 9 July 2013. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/07/2013798847609199.html> (accessed, 1st November 2013)

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Hassan, Nasrallah speech Jerusalem day with subtitles, *Al Manar website*, 2 August 2013. URL: <http://english.almanar.com.lb/adetails.php?fromval=3&cid=101&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=105169> (accessed 1 November 2013).

violently spilled over into Lebanon. On August 15, 2013, a huge car bomb exploded in the civilian neighbourhood of Ruweis in the southern Suburb of Beirut killing 22 civilians, and injuring more than 290.<sup>98</sup> In contrast to the first explosion in Bier Al Abed a month earlier, an unknown group called *Aisha Umm-al Mouemeneen* claimed responsibility for the bombing in a videotaped message. The name of the group and the content of the video indicated affiliation to Sunni Jihadists groups fighting in Syria. Al Manar rushed to call it a terrorist attack<sup>99</sup>. Israel was not reported as the direct perpetrator, but as the beneficiary of such attacks. Al Manar gave airtime to live coverage from the targeted area. Al Manar reporters interviewed people in the neighborhood, and phrases like “we don’t want to be dragged into a sectarian strife;” “Lebanon is for all Lebanese;” and “the resistance project is the target, but they will not be able defeat it,”<sup>100</sup> were repeated by the survivors. The reporters took part in delivering political statements. “Whoever the perpetrators are, they are playing in the hands of Israel, they are Zionist collaborators” said an Al Manar correspondent at the scene Abbas Fniesh.<sup>101</sup> Another reporter, Hamza Al Haj Hassan,<sup>102</sup> stood amid of the destruction the bomb had caused and announced that those “who plotted the crime will not win over the resistance.”<sup>103</sup> Hezbollah was referred to as “the resistance,” and no distinctions were made between the two. There was emphasis on the fact that the targeted neighbourhood has residents from different sects, and not just those that follow Shi’a Islam. Al Manar reporters conducted interviews in hospitals with victims

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<sup>98</sup> *Al Jazeera.com*, Car bombing rocks Hezbollah bastion in Beirut, 16 August 2013. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/08/2013815152140188564.html> (accessed, 1st November, 2013).

<sup>99</sup> Al Manar, News at 7.30 pm, 15 August 2013.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Al Manar TV News, Live Coverage, 16 August 2013

<sup>102</sup> Ibid

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

that are of different sects and come from other Arab countries.<sup>104</sup> Ziad Waked, a Christian and the head of the Haret Hriek municipality, which Ruweis is part of, was a guest on several Al Manar shows. He spoke of in the aftermath of the bombing, assessing the damages, and what needed to be done to help people get back to their homes.<sup>105</sup> Having Waked as a repeated guest, emphasized the multi-sectarian affiliation of the neighborhood. On the morning after the explosion, Al Manar broadcast a detailed coverage of how the Israeli press covered the attack. The channel reported the joy Israel experienced at having Hezbollah and the “resistance being hit by Arab hands.”<sup>106</sup> Most of those interviewed on the streets of Ruweis, or in the hospitals, sent a message of defiance to the perpetrators. The message was clear: this was a terrorist attack conducted by “the terrorists” (the *tekfires*). The coverage reflected clear commitment to the anti-occupation, anti-imperialism discourse and to the dichotomy the oppressed versus the oppressor.

The same anti-sectarian discourse was dominant when Al Manar rushed to cover another car bomb that hit Tripoli in north Lebanon. Two car bombs exploded outside two Sunni mosques in the city. At least 47 people died, and more than 500 were injured.<sup>107</sup> Hezbollah was quick at denouncing the “crime,” and Al Manar had similar intensive live coverage on the scene as that conducted in Ruweis. Messages of solidarity started pouring from Ruweis via Al Manar to the people of Tripoli, and a logo with the phrase “eternity for the martyrs and prayers for the injured” appeared on Al Manar screen.

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<sup>104</sup> Meli Ali, Al Manar TV, 19.30pm News program, 16 August 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Al Hadath talk show is one of them, presented by Manar Sabag, 17 August 2013.

<sup>106</sup> Al Manar TV News, Live Coverage, 16 August 2013.

<sup>107</sup> *Al Jazeera.com*, Scores dead in north Lebanon twin blasts, 24 August 2013. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/08/201382311249855388.html> (accessed on 14 November 2013).

## Conclusion

Hezbollah has emerged as the most influential and most vocal non-state actor in the Middle East. Syria's crisis has shown that Hezbollah has become a regional player and, as Hokayem points out, a fully-fledged partner "and not a proxy"<sup>108</sup> in the rejectionist front.

In all its actions and public discourses, Hezbollah has been consistent about its image and intentions as a resistance movement that supports the oppressed against the oppressors—terms that have been used in Iranian discourses since the Islamic revolution of 1979. In the regional power struggle, Hezbollah does not see the Assad regime as "the oppressor," but, along with Syrian people, as "oppressed" by groups of *takfiris* trying hard "to bring Syria and its people to a submissive state in the hands of Israel and the Americans." Throughout its output, Al Manar has been consistent in disseminating this message.

Fighting the military battle in Syria has not proved to be a difficult task for Hezbollah. The difficult task is to regain its reputation and position among the Lebanese and Arab populace as the movement of resistance, and the freedom fighter model that many Arabs believed in in the wake of July war 2006. The most difficult battle that Hezbollah is currently fighting is to de-label its motives in Syria as that of national interests (in the interest of the *Umma*) rather than a sectarian one. Al Manar has proved to be an effective medium to disseminate Hezbollah's anti-sectarian and multi-sectarian message. Meanwhile, serious efforts are being made to disseminate a message of the need to fight on the side of the Syrian regime "in the interest of the *Umma*" and in support of the 'oppressed' against the 'oppressor'.

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<sup>108</sup> Hokayem (2009)

