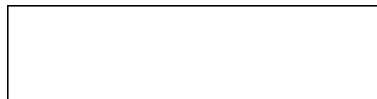


Tuesday, June 17, 2008 Tuesday, June 17, 2008

TheNational



Healing Lebanon's 'four bleeding wounds' will not be enough for Hizbollah to disarm

Nicholas Noe

Last Updated: June 16, 2008 8:47PM UAE / June 16, 2008 4:47PM GMT

[Send to friend](#)

[Print](#)

[Have your say](#)

In the wake of what some now refer to as the May "events" in Lebanon – Hizbollah's use of its weapons domestically, the Lebanese army's evident complicity and the Doha Accords – something strange seems to be happening among those who used to view Hizbollah almost monolithically, as an absolute evil to be crushed.

@body arnhem: The first stirrings of such nuance, if we can call it that, were heard in mid-May when Daniel Freedmen, a former foreign policy analyst for the Republican presidential candidate Rudolf Giuliani, wrote in the Wall Street Journal: "If Hizbollah really is on the brink of what could turn out to be a seismic change, the US should do everything to encourage this process. It should accept a greater role for Shiites in the Lebanese government as long as Hizbollah agrees to start, however gradually, decommissioning."

Two weeks later, Theodore Karasik and Ghassan Schbley of the RAND Corporation pushed the idea further, arguing that Lebanon's "four bleeding wounds" – illegal Israeli flyovers, prisoners, occupied territory such as the Shebaa Farms and the still unknown locations of Israeli mines – should be removed immediately.

"Once the four wounds are healed," they said, "Hizbollah will face increasing internal Lebanese pressure to disarm. The Lebanese people will not so willingly accept rhetoric about where weapons are pointed."

What the two RAND analysts fail to address, however, is the key factor that will determine whether or not the removal of the four bleeding wounds provides a viable roadmap for Hizbollah's normalisation: a national defence strategy.

For unless Lebanon is allowed to develop a robust national army, trusted by Hizbollah, admired by the Shiite community in particular and believed in by all Lebanese, the removal of the four bleeding wounds simply won't be enough to "normalise" Hizbollah – certainly not without violence.

This means accepting a Lebanese army that can stand as a credible deterrent force against Israel – and, by association, accepting Hizbollah's argument that Israel in fact poses a threat to Lebanon in the first place.

On this account, Sayyed Nasrallah, the leader of Hizbollah, has gone to great lengths over the years to lay out his case for precisely where the danger from Israel lies, both now and well into the future.

First and foremost, he explains, there is the issue of water. Lebanon is a water-rich country compared with Israel, which has a poor track record of fair water use, especially in the Occupied Territories. Some 20 per cent of the River Jordan's headwaters – Israel's main freshwater source – stem from southern Lebanon's Wazzani and Hasbani rivers alone, both of which feed into the strategic Shebaa Farms watershed. Underscoring Nasrallah's main point on the subject – that Israel is a bellicose neighbour unrestrained by international laws and norms – in 2002, Israeli premier Ariel Sharon went so far as to declare, unambiguously, that a small pipe installed on the Wazzani for Lebanese use had become a *casus belli* for Israel.

Second: "Who will deter the Jewish state," Nasrallah asks, if al Qa'eda or some other non-Lebanese or religious fanatics fire rockets or conduct operations across Lebanon's border with Israel? Since 2005, there have been several rockets launched at Israel which were not tied to Hizbollah, but which could provide Israel with a pretext for an attack against Lebanon, if it so chooses.

Finally, Nasrallah asks, "what about the Palestinians?" Not only the 400,000 Palestinian refugees still living in misery, for the most part, in Lebanon, but what of the Palestinians both inside Israel proper and those in the Occupied Territories? For Nasrallah the debate carries clear implications: a Palestinian-Israeli peace deal will prove impossible to reach, and at some point Israel will be forced to confront its demographic and security "time bomb" by expelling the Palestinians.

And at that point, Lebanon – rather than Jordan or Egypt with their peace agreements, or Syria with its strong deterrent capabilities – will be the final stop for most of the new refugees.

Given these arguments, what options now exist for addressing the core threats that provide Hizbollah with its indispensable "second leg" of wide public support without which, Hizbollah has publicly declared, it cannot carry out its resistance activities?

Hizbollah's number two, Shaykh Naim Qassem, recently expounded on exactly this subject – to an extent not previously seen in Hizbollah's discourse – by saying, "We agree to a defence strategy that makes our national army capable of protecting Lebanon and of preventing Israel from attacking it. At that point, a solution to the weapons situation will be part of this defence strategy... We need to confront the Israeli danger [however]. If the Lebanese state tackles it in a certain way, we are ready to be part of this solution."

Whether Qassem's comments constitute a wily ruse or not matters little; the point is that Hizbollah has publicly affirmed its understanding that the basic logic of national defence, embedded in the landmark 2006 agreement between the Christian leader Michel Aoun and Nasrallah, is fast accelerating and that public support for resistance activities over time is now especially prone to this dynamic.

In order to push this logic decisively forward, however, the US, the EU and other states invested in Lebanon's future must move quickly to help develop an overall roadmap focused on achieving Hizbollah's normalisation through a strong national defence plan for Lebanon.

As a critical first step in this regard, the US must immediately drop the badly outmoded "redline" policy which prohibits giving any strategic weaponry to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

Next, Lebanon's friends should kick-start an effort to protect cross-border water resources through international conventions, and assist in reconstituting the transparent conflict mitigation body that used to exist at the border (known as the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group).

Through these initial steps, Lebanon's friends could help to lay the critical groundwork for a durable peace.

Nicholas Noe is a PhD candidate at the Lebanese University and is the author of "Voice of Hizbollah: the Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah"

[Send to friend](#)

[Print](#)

[Have your say](#)
