

# In the eyes of Hizbullah

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**Hanady Salman** reflects on six fateful days in the streets of Beirut

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So, it finally happened. They pushed so hard that they dragged Hizbullah into the streets of Beirut. It's the sixth day since 7 May.

Everybody's Beirut turned, overnight, into a Sunni city, "under attack", and later "invaded" by a "Shia/Iranian-backed militia".

For Hizbullah, the facts do not matter anymore. It did not matter how many times the secretary-general of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, asserted he did not want an Islamic republic in Lebanon. It did not matter how many times he explained that his party's sole aim was to have a fair share in the decision-making of the country. He repeated his patience had an end vis-a-vis the government's decisions that were alienating both the party and its followers. It did not matter how many times he assured his sole *raison d'être* is fighting Israel, that he cannot endlessly refrain from taking action, that the government was abusing the party's self-restraint.

Finally, they pushed him into the corner.

Last week, the government issued two decisions, one removing a high ranking Shia lieutenant from his post in the airport. They considered the communication network owned by the party as illegal, and asked to prosecute anyone involved in it in any way.

This network is what dazzled the Israeli army in July 2006, and allowed Hizbullah to push them back.

From the party's view, one should not read the two decrees from a short sighted, local perspective, trying to prove that what happened is a Sunni-Shia power struggle in Lebanon.

Hizbullah reads it in a different way. For them, it is a struggle between a group that would never give in to Israel, versus another group, one that would do anything to stay in power, no matter what happens to their country and people. And we are not short of such groups in the Arab world.

Had the two government decrees passed without objection, it would not have stopped there. For Hizbullah, moving against the decrees was a matter of life and death.

It had tried demonstrations, sit-ins, threats and endless calls for resumption of dialogue. But this time, the government's move was of different nature. Now, the threat was too big. The decrees were not a mere trap.

Hassan Nasrallah once said that "our weakness is caused by our strength", meaning that because the party is the "strongest" militarily, their hands are tied. Did not Nasrallah pledge his party's guns will never be turned against fellow Lebanese?

Well, how do they justify what had happened now?

The answer comes quickly: the act was quick, with the minimum possible losses, and the streets were in the hands of the Lebanese army the next morning.

But mostly, Hizbullah considers that their weapons did not turn against their fellow Lebanese, but against traitors, a la Saad Haddad -- Israeli proxies inside Lebanon.

Should Hizbullah not have entered the streets of Beirut? Of course it shouldn't have. But what choice was left? Even now, after the show of force, the government is still ignoring the calls to start a serious dialogue that would end the political stalemate the country has been stuck in for the last three years.

Did Hizbullah lose popularity in both the Sunni and the Druze streets? Of course it did, but the loss was big before the recent events anyway. Will the wound take ages to heal? Of course, but it was already there.

Here you have a party that, in the summer of 2006, defeated Israel. Yet, it did not abuse that victory to push aside its partners in the nation. For three years, the party has been trying not to act irrationally internally, despite what the other side does: tightening their grip on power, isolating Hizbullah politically, socially and economically, and ignoring its protests.

And how was that possible? Support from the outside. Unbelievable but true.

So true that even after the past four or five days, we are still stuck in the same stalemate.

What now?

Hizbullah would answer: now someone has to convince Saudi Arabia that they should stop trying to replace the lost Sunni influence in Iraq by strengthening Sunni influence in Lebanon. Lebanon will vanish the minute it loses its diversity.

And someone has to convince the US that it cannot keep supporting a group of Lebanese politicians that cannot deliver the way US-backed Iraqi politicians did when the US invaded Iraq. Does the US really want another Iraq?

Today, it has become even clearer to Hizbullah that winning in a war with Israel is a piece of cake compared to avoiding the traps of the streets of Beirut.