

ANALYZING HIZBALLAH

Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God; From Revolution to Institutionalization, by Eitan Azani. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. xix + 248 pages. Notes to p. 285. Bibliography to p. 290. Index to p. 293. \$95.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Kristian P. Alexander

The "Hizballah model" has become synonymous with a militarily successful, politically astute, and strategically flexible organization that has managed to garner wide popular support in the Arab world, if not respect, for most of its actions and social services. Given its staying power and influence, Hizballah has been heralded as an exemplary model for others to emulate. How has this social movement-cum-political party managed to survive and morph into one of the most influential Islamic organizations over the years?

Eitan Azani traces Hizballah's evolution since its inception in the early 1980s and highlights the various stages that it has gone through, namely foundation, consolidation, expansion, institutionalization, and ascendancy. Azani points out that Hizballah operates at the intersection of three different levels of analysis, namely, the local Lebanese environment, the regional backdrop, and the broader international context, although at times these are mutually reinforcing. The crux of his argument is that "Hezbollah is a revolutionary Lebanese social movement that has been through procedures of change from a pan-Islamic revolutionary movement to a pragmatic Lebanese movement, which uses a combination of open activity within the Lebanese political system and confidential, violent terrorist activity outside this system" (p. x).

Azani is the deputy executive director of the Institute for Counter-Terrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya, Israel. He is currently a colonel (res.) in the Israel Defense Forces and was stationed as an active duty service member for many years in Lebanon where he gathered insights from "many conversations, meetings, and discussions . . . with numerous

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Lebanese figures from all sects" (p. xi). However, who these individuals are is never specified, since Azani does not make any references to specific interviews in his endnotes. The findings he presents in this book constitute the bulk of a dissertation he submitted at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Several scholars (such as Asef Bayat, Mohammed Hafez, Charles Kurzman, and Quintan Wiktorowicz) have called for the incorporation of work on Islamic activism into broader debates on social movement theory. Azani seems to have heeded their call but his conceptual discussion proves to be very disappointing. He draws from the standard social movement repertoire, using concepts such as resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and ideational framing as core elements of his framework of analysis. His first two chapters review the various approaches encompassed under the broader subheading of social movements and apply them to recent scholarship on Islamic activism. The third chapter offers an analysis of specific conditions pertinent to an understanding of the emergence of Hizballah in Lebanon. Subsequent chapters delve into Hizballah's significance at various levels of analysis.

While this is clearly a fruitful and promising approach, the way in which Azani has gone about conducting his analysis is somewhat problematic. For one, nowhere in the book does he draw upon or revisit social movement theory to interpret or situate Hizballah according to his proposed theoretical framework. There is a clear disconnect between the theoretical framework he puts forward at the beginning of the book and his historical analysis of Hizballah as a particular movement throughout the remainder of the book. Second, Azani does not produce any innovative theoretical or conceptual refinement that could add to the existent social movement literature, instead merely replicating accepted theoretical approaches.

Overall, many of the basic arguments Azani makes in this book have been previously laid out by well-known experts in this field, such as Nizar Hamzeh, Judith Palmer-Harik, and Joseph Alagha. Skimming through the bibliography section, one wonders why the author has not referenced these authors' important works, which have become standard readings on Hizballah. This apparent neglect raises the

question as to whether the author is selectively citing sources.

One could argue that Azani has contributed to the literature by expanding on the number of cases in which Hizballah should be included as an example of a social movement-cum-political party operating in a less open, non-Western polity. However, this book is basically no more than a solid, descriptive analysis of Hizballah with very little emphasis on bigger questions and debates present in the literature on Hizballah: What does the inclusion of a radical Islamic movement in mainstream politics tell us, if anything? Does inclusion lead to moderation, as is often purported? What lessons should policy-makers learn from this case study of Hizballah? Given his advisory functions on counterterrorism issues, one would have expected Azani to provide his readers with specific policy prescriptions and recommendations on how to deal with or engage Hizballah.