



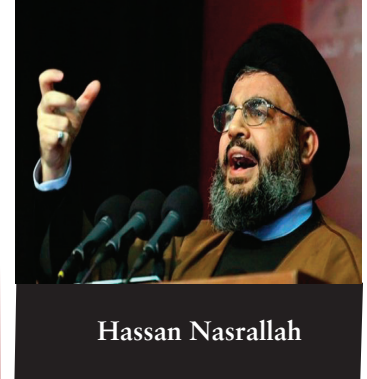
# Terrorism Monitor

In-Depth Analysis of the War on Terror

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## SAUDI SHAYKH A'ID AL-QARNI URGES ARABS TO MANUFACTURE NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Dr. A'id al-Qarni, a popular Saudi religious scholar known for his provocative observations on Islamic society and a series of best-selling books that present Islamic solutions to life's problems in the "self-help" format common in the West, has now turned his attention in an article published by a pan-Arab daily to the global balance of power, which he sees as dominated by Western nations that recognize "power is the source of all stature and grandeur... The world respects no one but the strong" (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 15).

For anyone who doubts these realities, al-Qarni points to the five major nuclear states and how they (and the United States in particular) have wielded their nuclear arsenals to achieve political power while calling on others to refrain from joining the nuclear club: "They possess the right to veto decisions and the world bows to them, fearing their reach and power. They preach to other states and advise all nations to be peaceful, transparent and hospitable, urging them not to manufacture nuclear weapons because this constitutes a global threat. In fact, the five major nuclear states do not want other nations to manufacture nuclear weapons so that they can maintain their hegemony, authority and tyranny."

Al-Qarni mocks the Arab world for appealing to Iran to abandon its military nuclear program "to have mercy on the Arabs and gain heavenly merit for doing so," saying Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons will ultimately prevent attack from the West once a bomb has been developed. These are the hard lessons of political reality in a world where Shari'a does not govern international relations:

“In this life, there is no room for integrity, for integrity and sacredness belong to the heavens, whilst the world’s laws and politics are established on deceit and cunning. As long as people accept to be ruled by current laws without divine legislation, then it is a matter of interests, manoeuvres, usurpation, arrogance, oppression and proving oneself.”

According to al-Qarni, the Arab world has misdirected its energies in cultural pursuits at the expense of its sovereignty and military preparedness: “Preoccupying the Middle East with arts, folklore, and cultural ceremonies at the expense of military factories is an open joke. To produce one tank would be better than a thousand poems, a rocket more useful than a hundred cultural shows, and a bomb more effective than a hundred epic tales to remind us of the glory of our forefathers, and what it used to be like in the old days.”

Unlike traditional Islamist statements that are built on a foundation of hadiths and quoted from the Quran, al-Qarni ventures to quote an observation from the modern Syrian poet and advocate of reform in gender relations in the Arab world, Nizar Qabbani (1923 – 1998). Noting that the West has turned to inter-continental ballistic missiles and atomic bombs to “rule the world and monopolize its wealth,” al-Qarni observes: “We in the Middle East are supposed to be content with reading history and reveling in the glories of the past, but this is only good for students in literacy classes. The poet Nizar Qabbani once said about the Arabs: ‘They have long written history books and they became convinced [of their past glories]. But since when did guns live inside books?’”

Al-Qarni urges the Arabs “to manufacture the nuclear bomb and nuclear weapons in a passage that resembles a Dadaist “anti-art” manifesto: “I urge the Arabs to manufacture the nuclear bomb and nuclear weapons. There are buildings currently being occupied by minor daily newspapers that no one reads, and ‘cultural heritage’ museums housing scrap metal, worn-out rope, blunt axes, and other artifacts. These should all be turned into factories to manufacture tanks, rocket-launchers, missiles, satellites and submarines, so that the world comes to respect us, hear our voice, and appreciate our status.” The Saudi scholar concludes his commentary with an ominous warning to the Arab world: “Do not let us be fooled by Iran’s honeyed words suggesting that Tehran seeks nuclear weapons only to burn Israel, for this is purely an illusion.”

Shaykh A’id has a doctorate in *hadith* studies and is a highly active preacher, appearing on TV regularly as well as issuing a series of audio lectures on Islamic topics. His “self-help” approach to written works has proved highly successful, resulting in bestsellers such as *Don’t Be Sad* and *You Can Be the Happiest Woman in the World*. Al-Qarni is not new to publishing provocative views on life in the Islamic world. In 2008 he issued a controversial open letter in which he strongly criticized male dominance in Saudi Arabia and the abuse and subjugation of the Kingdom’s women (al-Sharq al-Awsat, February 26, 2008)

Unsurprisingly, al-Qarni’s views on the social role of Islam and his methodology have attracted the critical eye of Saudi Arabia’s more conservative religious scholars. Earlier this year, Shaykh Abdul Aziz bin Rayis al-Rayis issued a lengthy review of his work entitled “The Statements of A’id al-Qarni: A Presentation and Critique” [1]

A’id al-Qarni experienced some damage to his reputation last year when he was repeatedly mixed-up with his cousin Awad al-Qarni in Egyptian court documents relating to a Muslim Brotherhood money laundering case. The mix-up led to the cancellation of a major lecture at Cairo’s al-Azhar University in what al-Qarni feared was a conspiracy to interfere with his preaching activities in Egypt (*al-Hayat*, April 26).

Shaykh Awad is a very different character than Shaykh A’id, and is known for his fiery denunciations of the United States and a reputed close association with the Muslim Brotherhood, an association he nevertheless downplays in a somewhat condescending manner that reveals something of the attitude of Saudi religious scholars to Islam as it practiced outside of the Kingdom: “I [previously] declared that I challenge the Egyptian regime to prove that I have any organizational relation with the Brothers. This is not disregard or contempt toward the Brothers or any of the virtuous sons of the nation. But we in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have a specific feature based on the implementation of the Islamic Shari`a in all aspects of life; therefore, we do not need the organizational work needed by the other Arab peoples to reestablish Islam in their lives” (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, April 26). Awad recently made headlines by offering a bounty of \$100,000 to any Palestinian who kidnaps an Israeli soldier. After Awad reported receiving death threats, Saudi Prince Khalid bin Talal raised the bounty to an even \$1 million in solidarity (Reuters, October 29).

Note:

1. <http://islamfuture.wordpress.com/2011/05/28/a-critique-of-the-statements-of-dr-a%E2%80%99id-al-qarni/>

SENIOR JORDANIAN MEMBER OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD SAYS “CHANGE AND REFORM ARE INEVITABLE”

A prominent member of Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood has given an interview to an Amman daily in which he discusses the differences between the struggle for political reform inside Jordan and events elsewhere in the tumultuous “Arab Spring” (*al-Dustur* [Amman], November 24). Rahil Gharayibah is the deputy secretary-general of Jordan’s largest single political party, Jabhat al-Amal al-Islami (JAI – Islamic Action Front) and a frequent spokesman on its behalf. Founded in 1992, the JAI is generally regarded as the political wing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood.

Gharayibah acknowledges that, as part of the Arab world, Jordan is experiencing a “critical stage” in its development. Sharing a common culture and system of values with the rest of the Arab nation, Jordan cannot be isolated or immune from the developments shaking the political structure of its neighbors. According to Gharayibah, however, Jordan was already ahead of other Arab nations in their pursuit of democracy by having already adopted “a model that is closer to democracy than the systems adopted by the other Arab states.” While the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Yemen and Libya have been conducted under the slogan “Overthrow the Regime,” the Jordanians have raised the slogan “Reform the Regime.”

This has not, however, precluded the participation of the Brotherhood in demonstrations calling for the dissolution of parliament and the resignation of Prime Minister Dr. Marouf Sulayman Bakhit, a former Major-General whose reform efforts were ineffective, leading to his eventual resignation in October after only 8½ months in power. Bakhit’s reluctance to reopen the constitution for major changes was a sticking point with the Muslim Brotherhood, which seeks constitutional reform.

For Jordan to move forward, all the influential parties in the process must agree that “reform and change are inevitable.” Describing Jordan’s people and political parties as “extremely mature,” Gharayibah says they are seeking “genuine reform and the establishment of a democratic, civil and modern state of Jordan under a monarchist umbrella.” The existing system is illegitimate as it is based on vote rigging and founded upon “tribal, provincial, geographical and regional bases... The number of those who were elected on political merit can

be counted on the fingers of one hand.”

Though the Brotherhood is advocating a type of constitutional monarchy for Jordan, Gharayibah has still been a harsh critic of King Abdullah II's existing powers. In a rally held in Amman in September, Gharayibah insisted that Jordanians would “not be slaves or serfs on anyone's estate... Is [Jordan] an estate owned by one person? Are its people his serfs?” (*al-Akhbar* [Beirut], September 3).

The Jordanian Brotherhood's leader, Hammam Sa'id, has demanded the cancellation of the Wadi Araba Agreement, the 1994 treaty that normalized relations with Israel and banned attacks on Israel launched from Jordanian territory (*al-Akhbar*, September 3). The Jordanian Brotherhood enjoys strong support from Jordan's Palestinian community but avoids open support for militant groups other than Hamas, the political wing of the Gazan Muslim Brotherhood. Gharayibah maintains that reform efforts in Jordan do not conflict with the Palestinian liberation project: “Indeed, the two are twins. The Jordanian national reform plan is one of the most important mainstays of the Palestinian liberation project... The birth of the Jordanian reformist national project is the most important strategic step in confronting the expansionist, colonial-style and Zionist plan.”

Regarding the movement's strategy, Gharayibah says the group will end its participation in the political reform process if it is seen as thwarting progress towards democracy or if it loses the support of the man-in-the-street. Otherwise, “the Islamic movement's methodology is to participate when that enables it to serve the homeland and the citizen.”

The Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood is considered to be closely tied to the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and has been very vocal in its support for the opposition Syrian National Council. Though it rejects Western intervention in Syria, it favors an “Arab solution,” including military operations by Arab states, to resolve the Syrian political crisis (*Jordan Times*, November 24).

## Will the Return of Ethiopia's Military to Somalia Destroy al-Shabaab or Revive It?

*Muhyadin Ahmed Roble*

Just 40 days after Kenya's military intervention against the militant al-Shabaab group began in Somalia there are indications that the Kenyan effort may become part of a joint operation with African Union and Ethiopian military forces to eradicate terrorist elements in the Horn of Africa. The African Union has backed the Kenyan invasion of southern Somalia and has also invited the Ethiopian army to join the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), currently consisting of military contingents from Uganda and Burundi.

The Ethiopia army crossed the border into Somalia on November 19, with more than 20 Ethiopian military vehicles supported by helicopters immediately seizing towns in central Somalia close to al-Shabaab bases. Ethiopian forces created a large military base on the outskirts of Guri'el, Abduqwaq and Balanbal near the Somalia-Ethiopia border (Reuters Africa, November 19; Somalia Report, November 19).

The Ethiopia intervention began before the African Union invited Ethiopia troops to join African Union peacekeepers in Somalia in stabilizing Somalia. Ethiopia's current involvement is intended to create a new front against al-Shabaab in the Ethiopia-Somalia border region by working with local clans and factions.

Knowing the results of Ethiopia's bloody invasion of Somalia in 2006, the AU's invitation to dispatch Ethiopia troops to Somalia will be another counterproductive and undiplomatic move according to Abdihakim Aynte, a Somali political analyst in Nairobi. “The African Union seems to ignore the last experience of Ethiopian's business with Somalia,” Aynte told the Jamestown Foundation. [1] The U.S. State Department also seems wary of the outcome of another Ethiopian invasion. Johnnie Carson, the State Department's top Africa policymaker, said: “Ethiopia went into Somalia some four and a half years ago and stayed for approximately two and a half to three years. That effort was not universally successful and led in fact to the rise of Shabaab after they pulled out” (McClatchy Newspapers, November 22; *The Standard* [Nairobi], November 22).



Ethiopia's military intervention in Somalia will not please the current Transitional Federal Government (TFG) president Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad, a former leader of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), ousted by the Ethiopians in 2006. Abdihakim Aynte says President Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad and the TFG do not have a choice in the matter. Somali Defense Minister Hussein Arab Isse welcomed the entrance of Ethiopian forces to eradicate al-Shabaab but warned Ethiopia against having any other objectives that damage the reputation of the country: "We welcome Ethiopian troops...and any other country that contributes forces to fight against the Shabaab militants, as long as they do not violate our sovereignty" (AFP, November 21).

However, Aynte fears that Ethiopia might strengthen al-Shabaab, which he believes is currently at its weakest point. Because of Ethiopia's bitter history with Somalia, Aynte said that al-Shabaab might start to engage nationalist fighters who consider Ethiopia an old enemy.

All foreign interventions in post-independence Somalia, including Ethiopia's 2006 invasion, have ended in a bad way. This is unsurprising as Somalis are notoriously xenophobic in terms of intervention in their own affairs, especially interference from Ethiopia, which they view inherently as their arch nemesis. Al-Shabaab has appealed to these nationalist sentiments since 2007.

Macharia Munene, Professor of International Relations at Nairobi's United States International University (USIU) said that some al-Shabaab members might raise the unforgiving and bloody wars between the two countries as a rallying point: "Somalia is currently a big mess. For me, the Somali people are wiser than that and such sentiment will not work for al-Shabaab." [2]

Admitting that Ethiopia's 2006 invasion had helped the creation of the Islamic insurgency by giving it a strong popularity, Professor Munene said the times have changed. "Since then al-Shabaab has done nothing good for Somalis other than [inflict] severe suffering. Ethiopia withdrew from the country and they still keep [mounting] suicide attacks and killing innocent Somalis and that is why Somalis will not support al-Shabaab in this war." According to Munene, the AU doesn't have a good reason to deny Ethiopia's help in improving the Somali situation because the AU does not have enough resources and manpower to confront the current situation: "Ethiopia wants to do the job as a volunteer so the AU should be happy to use the Ethiopian army

and military equipment."

However, Munene's colleague Hannah Macharia, international relations lecturer at USIU, said the Ethiopia invasion might complicate the conflict. She noted that in 2006 al-Shabaab existed mainly as a militia, but the Ethiopia invasion radicalized them as they felt that their country was under occupation. As a result of that, al-Shabaab was able to begin recruiting Somalia across the world. [3] "Partly, the Ethiopia invasion will complicate the whole process because the two-year Ethiopian presence in Somalia was unpopular and coalesced support for al-Shabaab because of indiscriminate mortar fire in the towns," she observed.

Professor Munene said that the previous aim of the AU was to maintain the position of the Somali TFG, but the common goal now is to defeat al-Shabaab militants. Munene believes the defeat of al-Shabaab will require the effort of every country and state.

Al-Shabaab responded to the Ethiopian action by saying the incursion was required after the Kenyan Army, a "non-combat tested yet highly bumptious force," had failed in its attempt to secure southern Somalia due to fierce resistance from the mujahideen of al-Shabaab. The movement further appealed to Somali nationalism to increase its numbers: "We... urge the Muslims of Somalia to set their differences aside and unite against their common enemy as they have done in the past in order to defend their country as well as their religion from the aggressive invasion of the allied African crusaders. You are facing a barbaric enemy that has no appreciation for the sanctity of human life; be firm and steadfast against them and fight them with all your might." [4]

With troops from four African nations now operating on Somali soil backed by the military power of the United States, al-Shabaab is certain to try to capitalize on traditional Somali xenophobia and nationalism to preserve and even expand the radical Islamist movement.

*Muhyadin Ahmed Roble is a Somali journalist who writes for The East African, AfricaNews and Eurasia Review as a correspondent based in Nairobi.*

## Notes:

1. Author's interview with Abdihakim Aynte, Nairobi, November 22, 2011.
2. Author's interview with Professor Macharia Munene, United States International University, Nairobi, November 24, 2011.
3. Author's Interview with lecturer Hannah Macharia, United States International University, Nairobi, November 24, 2011.
4. "A Call for Unity against Occupation of Somalia by Crusaders," Press Office, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, November 26, 2011.

## A Comparative Look at the Islamists of the Egyptian and Tunisian Revolutions

*Hani Nasira*

The October 23 elections in Tunisia and the November 28 elections in Egypt are perhaps the first indicators of the health of politics and society after the Arab revolutions that exploded in early 2011.

The elections were expected to be the beginning of a victory for Arab democracies, democracies that includes prominent Islamist forces. This was clear in Tunisia, where the Islamist al-Nahda and allied parties claimed more than 40 percent of parliamentary seats, which was more than expected. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood is also expected to get more than 40 percent of the vote; however, there are clear differences between the Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia, including their respective intellectual and political tendencies.

The Salafi organization and presence in the Egyptian political landscape came as a surprise compared with the post-revolution presence of their Tunisian counterparts. The Egyptian Salafist bloc has succeeded in forming a clear and strong coalition cutting across all Egyptian constituencies. They are competing for all seats, culminating in a presidential candidacy. In this sense they have become strong rivals to Islamist moderates such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which has pledged not to run a presidential candidate.

The Salafist bloc includes five parties: Hizb al-Nour (Light Party), Hizb al-Asala (Fundamentals Party), Hizb al-Fadila (Virtue Party), Hizb al-Islah (Reform Party) and Hizb al-Bena'a wa'l-Tanmia (Building and Development Party), the latter forming the political wing of al-Gama'a al-Islamiya (Ahrum Online, June 20; *al-Masry al-Youm*, September 20). Competing with the Salafist trend is a range of Islamist ideology represented in the fifteen parties belonging to a coalition led by the Muslim Brotherhood's Hizb al-Hurriya wa'l-Adala (HHA - Freedom and Justice Party) (*al-Hayat*, October 25). The HHA, along with the Islamic Labor Party, appeared as part of the list of the largely Islamist Democratic Alliance. Hizb al-Wasat (Center Party), a moderate Islamist group that split from the Muslim Brotherhood in 1996, did not join the coalition, choosing instead to run its own list of candidates.

They succeeded in participating in all electoral regions with the cooperation of dissidents from the Muslim Brotherhood known collectively as al-Tayyar al-Masry (Egyptian Wave) (*al-Shorfa* [Cairo], July 25; *Bikya Masr* [Cairo], July 13).

There are as well many parties with Salafist and jihadi tendencies who have joined forces in a Salafist coalition; however, as of yet, these groups have not succeeded in obtaining official licenses. The Salafist surprise was not limited to their organization and their resounding political rally in post-revolution Egypt, but was also manifested in its insistence that the Islamic Alliance [i.e. the Salafists] is more popular than the Muslim Brotherhood among the Egyptian people.

#### Between Al-Nahda and the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928, is the oldest and most organized Islamist force in both Egypt and the larger Islamic world. However, the Brotherhood and Tunisia's al-Nadha (Renaissance) movement felt the impact of their respective national revolutions in very different ways. The Tunisian movement has not experienced the same degree of internal dissent as the Egyptian Brotherhood, which has witnessed major defections since the Egyptian Revolution, most importantly among its youth and elder factions. The elder faction is represented by the Nahda (Renaissance) Party (not to be confused with Tunisia's al-Nahda), led by Dr. Muhammad Habib. The youth faction is represented by the al-Tayyar al-Masry, founded by young former Brotherhood members. These youth activists participated in the January 25 Revolution against the movement's advice and are still an active part of the Revolutionary Youth Coalition. They have continued to participate in the sit-ins following the tragic events of November 19th, when the army attempted to remove families of the victims of the Revolution by force, culminating in clashes that left several dozen dead and hundreds injured.

Both Egypt's Brotherhood and Tunisia's al-Nahda have found it necessary to enter into alliances. The Brotherhood entered the mainly Islamist "Democratic Alliance for Egypt", which began with 48 parties and ended with 11 parties following a trend of Islamic nationalism. [1] The alliance does not include the Salafist parties, which have their own "Islamic Alliance."

Tunisia's al-Nahda also entered into a coalition with the liberal Congress for the Republic Party, led by Moncef Marzouki, and the leftist Party of Popular Unity, led by Ahmad bin Saleh (al-Jazeera, November 22). Al-Nahda was subsequently accused of being too pragmatic, in that they were seen to have valued elections over their principles. Their principal accusers were Islamist groups independent of al-Nahda. After the electoral victory of al-Nahda and its allies, the government was divided between al-Nahda and the other parties, with al-Nahda taking the Prime Minister's post, Moncef Marzouki becoming head of state, and Mustapha bin Ja'afar (leader of the social democratic Ettakatol – Forum démocratique pour le travail et les libertés) taking the post of President of the Constituent Assembly (*al-Ahram Weekly* [Cairo], November 24 – 30).

While the Brotherhood maintains a largely balanced and non-confrontational relationship with the army, it seems that the movement's dissidents are more inclined to renew the intellectual rigor that once characterized the group. They are, as well, more revolutionary regarding their relationship with the army, and closer to the civil groups and the youth revolution. This alliance with civil and revolutionary groups has strengthened their legitimacy, most significantly after the March 19 referendum.

On the other hand, the Nahda movement of Tunisia did not witness the same internal and structural divisions, and were perhaps more pronounced in their criticism of the military and interim government. They were also more open to reform and compromise than the Muslim Brotherhood, as seen in their acceptance of the Tunisian Republican Covenant. Included in this covenant are the basic principles of the expected Tunisian Constitution as well as an acceptance of the Electoral Act, which provides for equal representation for men and women.

There were also clear differences between the Brotherhood and al-Nahda regarding the visit of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Egypt and Tunisia last September. In particular, the Brotherhood rejected Erdogan's statement of his faith in secularism in constructing national states. The Brotherhood issued a statement rejecting both Erdogan and secularism, but Tunisia's al-Nahda accepted his statement, and even confirmed their acceptance of it after the October 23 elections. This difference can be explained by the greater challenge posed by the Salafis to the Brotherhood than the one posed by the Tunisian Salafis to al-Nahda.

## Neo-Islamists in Egypt and Tunisia

The post-revolutionary cleavages in the Brotherhood, including the Wasat party split, are more dynamic and organized than those observed in the pre-revolutionary Nahda in Tunisia. In contrast, Tunisia's neo-Islamists, who broke away from al-Nahda in the 1980s and 1990s, have proved to be much weaker, although they remain moderate and civil. These groups include the Movement of Progressive Muslims, as well as a group headed by Abd al-Fattah Mourou, previously the second-in-command of al-Nahda. Together, these two groups fielded their own candidate lists, independent of al-Nahda, under the name of the Safe Way Coalition, but met with little success in the October polls. In Egypt, however, the Salafists and other Islamist groups less moderate than the Brotherhood are expected to gain many seats and to reap a large number of electoral benefits in the post-revolution elections.

*Hani Nasira is an Egyptian writer who specializes in ideological movements. He is the author of several books, including Al-Qaeda and Jihadi Salafism: Intellectual Streams and Limits of Verification (2008); Religious Converts: A study of the phenomenon of conversion (2009); The Crisis of the Arab Renaissance and the War of Ideas (2009); and New Liberalism in the Arab World (2007).*

Note:

1. Interview with Essam al-Erian, Cairo, November 28, 2011.

## Hezbollah Risks Regional Credibility by Its Support for the Syrian Regime

*Rafid Fadhil Ali*

In Syria, like no other country in the Middle East, the mass protest movement widely known as “the Arab Spring” could change the entire regional order if it resulted in toppling the regime. This possibility appears even clearer in the context of Syrian-Lebanese relations. For the last four decades, Syria has had a large say on the political and strategic affairs of its smaller neighbour. The Lebanese political parties' stance on Syria is the most divisive issue in Lebanese politics. The militant Shi'a Hezbollah movement leads the pro-Syrian March 8 coalition which currently dominates the cabinet. The anti-Syrian opposition, known as the March 14 coalition, is led by Sunni politician and former prime minister Sa'ad Hariri and enjoys the support of Saudi Arabia and the West.

### Absolute Support for Assad

Hezbollah has expressed its absolute support for the Syrian regime of President Bashar Assad against the popular uprising and regional and international pressure. In line, apparently, with the Syrian government's insistence that the protests that call for toppling Assad's regime are an internal issue, Hezbollah's leaders did not make high-profile comments during the early stages of the protests. When the uprising gained momentum, the party's senior command left no doubt about its support for Assad's regime. This should not be seen as a surprise, according to Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah. Speaking on May 25 to a crowd of supporters on the 11th anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Nasrallah declared his group's strong support for the Assad regime. He hailed Syria for its support for the Resistance movement in Lebanon and Palestine and warned that the United States is applying new tactics to pressure Syria, but is still pursuing the Bush administration agenda of trying to create a “Greater Middle East.” For Nasrallah, toppling Assad was in the American and Israeli interest and must be resisted (al-Manar TV, May 25).



## Hezbollah and the Arab Spring

Hezbollah has supported the protests movements in the region since they began. The movement was happy and comfortable in seeing regimes fall that had long-standing cooperation with the United States and the West. However, that support was not by any means inspired by the issue of spreading democracy. The principles of resistance and confrontation are the most vital elements in the party's view of regional changes. It was very significant that when the Arab Spring came to Syria it was described as an American conspiracy by Muhammad Yezbe, a Hezbollah senior figure: "A conspiracy is underway against Syria but the country has powerfully resisted the U.S. plots... The Arab spring means spring of resistance and uniting efforts against the U.S. plots" (Fars News Agency, November 6)

## The Question of Reform in Syria

In his speech Nasrallah called on the Syrian people to give their government a chance to carry out reforms. He said he knew for sure that Assad was determined to make reforms but would not do so under pressure. In spite of Nasrallah's popularity among the Syrians, his call did not stop the protests or reduce their intensity. Hezbollah's yellow flags and Nasrallah's picture, which have always been respected symbols in Syria, were burned during rallies in different cities in Syria (*al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 11).

Another source of the Syrian protesters' anger against Hezbollah was reports that the movement had deployed groups of combatants to aid the Syrian authorities with their crackdown (Islammemo.cc, March 22; Nahernet.com, November 24). Although the movement has clearly lost some of its appeal and popularity over its decision to take sides in the Syrian strife, for Hezbollah the whole affair was put in the context of conflict, i.e. the Syrian uprising is for Hezbollah an American conspiracy that should be confronted and defeated.

## The Power of the Resistance

Hezbollah's decades-long confrontation with Israel has provided it with considerable popularity across the Arab and Muslim worlds. The movement is proud that its appeal became international as a symbol of resistance. [1]

Hezbollah still defines itself as a resistance movement. The full name of the party is "Hezbollah, the Islamic

Resistance in Lebanon." In its literature and statements the party refers to itself as al-Moqawama (The Resistance).

In spite of the localization of the party and its increasing involvement in Lebanese politics it still makes decisions and forms strategy on the regional level as al-Moqawama. However, Hezbollah would not have gained the identity it is so proud of without Iranian and Syrian support.

Hezbollah emerged in the early 1980s at the height of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) as a resistance group targeting the invading Israeli army and the multi-national forces in Lebanon. Various Lebanese militias used to refer to themselves as al-Moqawam, a term that had been first introduced by the Palestinian armed groups that emerged in the 1960s and launched attacks against Israel using bases in neighbouring Arab countries, including Lebanon. The term had even been used by right-wing Christian militias that had mainly fought the Syrian army and Palestinian armed groups (Radar-news.net, [Beirut], November 10; al-Jazeera, July 25, 2006).

By the end of the Lebanese Civil War, Syria had universal control on Lebanon. Hezbollah was the only militia that was allowed to keep its arms to resist the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. The movement did not need to precede the term al-Moqawama by the word "Islamic" as it became the only operative militia on the ground. In Hezbollah's literature the alliance between itself, Iran, Syria and Palestinian groups like Hamas is called the "Axis of Resistance." The Axis of Resistance (or Axis of Rejection, as it is sometimes styled) in Hezbollah literature is opposite to the so-called "Axis of Moderation" that includes countries on good terms with the United States or Israel like Saudi Arabia and Mubarak's Egypt.

## The Axis of Resistance

Both Tehran and Damascus have been comfortable with Hezbollah's status as a non-state actor. Hezbollah also appreciates and understands that without the two states it would not have been in the same powerful position in Lebanese politics and, more significantly, in the regional arena.

In his justification for the party's support for Syria, Nasrallah emphasized the importance of Syria's support for the Resistance in Lebanon and Palestine: "The Syrian support has been crucial. A great part of the Iranian

support comes through Syria. If it had not been for the will of Syria even the Iranian support would have been blocked and not reached Lebanon and Palestine” (al-Manar TV, August 25; al-Jazeera, August 26).

Hezbollah is thoroughly involved in Iranian grand strategy in the Middle East. Although in recent years the party’s loyalty to Iran has not been emphasized the same way it was when it emerged in the 1980s, this development should not be misinterpreted. Hezbollah might have embraced the Lebanese identity, taken a realistic approach in dealing with the status quo in the Lebanese politics and calmly dropped its old goal of forming an Iranian-like Islamic republic in Lebanon. Nonetheless, it still completely believes in the concept of *Wilyat al-Faqih* (The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), which gives the Iranian supreme leader, currently Ali Khamenei, a great say over his Shi’a followers wherever they live (see *Terrorism Monitor*, December 15, 2009).

With the increasing Western pressure on Iran over its controversial nuclear program and on Syria over its use of violence against protesters, the alliance between the two countries will most likely grow stronger. Hezbollah’s status as a non-state actor and the spearhead of the Axis of Resistance will likely mean its mobilization in any possible confrontation. In a recent speech, Nasrallah warned America and Israel that attacks on Iran or Syria would engulf the whole region: “They must understand well that a war on Iran and a war on Syria will not be confined to Iran or Syria. This war will roll over throughout the entire region. These are realistic calculations. This is the real situation” (Daily Star [Beirut], November 12; al-Manar TV, November 11).

### The Sectarian Factor

With warnings from different parties, including non-Shi’a, of a possible Syrian takeover by Sunni Muslim extremists, Hezbollah has another reason to worry. Hezbollah publicly advocates pan-Islamic solidarity and rejects the concept of a Sunni-Shi’a divide. However, the movement has increasingly been involved in a Shi’a-Sunni conflict in Lebanon that escalated into armed clashes in 2008. The fighting ended with Hezbollah consolidating its political powers and joining the government. Although Syria is governed by the Ba’ath party which advocates a pan-Arab secular ideology, the Alawite sect, which president Assad belongs to, is over represented in the state’s administration. The top security posts are generally occupied by Assad’s relatives.

A regime in Syria based on the Sunni Muslim majority would most likely be friendly to Hezbollah’s local rivals in the March 14 coalition. Such a regime would also have good relations with regional powers that have severe disagreements with the movement over sectarian and political issues, i.e. Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Although the alliance between Iran, Syria and Hezbollah is cemented by a professed common Shi’a heritage, it is not merely a Shi’a phenomenon. It includes the Sunni Palestinian movement Hamas and it has appealed to a Sunni public in many countries across the Arab and Muslim world that was impressed by the movement’s solid confrontation with Israel and the West. As both Iran and Hezbollah are led by Shi’a clerics, Syria is much needed, in addition to its geopolitical gravity, to add the Arab nationalist factor and expand the appeal of the alliance.

### Hezbollah’s Options

Hezbollah will not stand by idly if Syria is harmed, said Hezbollah MP Hassan Hoballah. He added that in that case all options were open (NOW Lebanon, October 17). Considering the nature of the relations between Hezbollah and Syria, the movement will do all it can to prevent the fall of Assad, which would be catastrophic for the movement. There are two fronts for possible action by Hezbollah:

- In Lebanon the tension between Hezbollah and its political adversaries has intensified over the Syrian uprising. Both political coalitions are accusing each other of involvement in Syria. When the Lebanese March 14 coalition government tried to dismantle Hezbollah’s communications network in 2008, the party did not hesitate to act. Hezbollah fighters invaded the Sunni areas of Beirut and forced the government to drop its plan. For two days the party entered into a brief civil war in which it abandoned a long-observed commitment of not using the movement’s arms in internal conflicts. The possible fall of Assad would represent a far more serious danger for Hezbollah. A civil war in Lebanon could complicate the situation in the region and might give both Damascus and Tehran greater room to manoeuvre in dealing with external military and political pressure.

- The other front that the party might consider moving on is Israel. In 2006 Hezbollah critics accused the movement of inciting the war with Israel to serve Iranian and Syrian agendas. The two countries were then under immense pressure by the Bush administration over their alleged support for Iraqi insurgents, the Iranian nuclear program and other issues. Although Israel could not make significant inroads in its ground assaults, the damage its air force inflicted on Lebanese territory was enormous. Though Nasrallah called the result of the war a “divine victory,” he later admitted that if he had known the scale of the devastation caused by the Israeli attack he would not have ordered the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers that led to the Israeli operation (New TV [Beirut], August 28, 2006).

Under the current circumstances a Western attack on Syria or Iran would raise serious questions for the movement regarding the nature of its bond with those two nations. A war on the Lebanese-Israeli front could not be ruled out if the West’s confrontation with Syria and Iran moved to a higher level. Such a war would test Hezbollah’s combat capabilities and challenge the balance between its local and regional commitments. In these conditions, the question facing the region is what takes priority; preparing for an impending confrontation with Israel or the struggle for political reform?

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Note:

1. See the full text of Hezbollah’s manifesto, al-Jazeera, November 30, 2009; al-Manar.com, November 30, 2009.