



Reports

Hezbollah in Syria: Gains, Losses and Changes

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Hezbollah's losses in Syria go beyond just soldiers killed in battle - its involvement in Syria will have long-term implications for the group's standing in the region, particularly after years of being hailed as a resistance group by large segments of the Arab population [EPA]

Abstract

It has been three years since the Lebanese Hezbollah group publicly announced its military involvement in the Syrian war, leading to major changes in its role in the region and its stance with regards to other regional developments, particularly the Arab revolutions. Any gains or losses from its involvement in Syria will reflect on Hezbollah's future and its standing on a number of levels. This report outlines the group's stance towards Arab revolutions, major gains and losses from its involvement in Syria, and how this will impact the group's future trajectory.

Introduction

During the May 2013 siege of the Syrian town of al-Qusair adjacent to the Lebanese border, Hezbollah publicly announced its military involvement in the Syrian war as an ally of President Bashar al-Assad. This was in line with the group's previously expressed reservations about the Arab revolutions. Since 2013 (according to conservative estimates), the party has sustained losses of over 1,000 fighters in Syria. On the other hand, the group's own media has claimed significant achievements against what it terms 'takfiris' across Syria. This report argues Hezbollah has lost its position as one of the key resistance movements on both a national and pan-Arab level, steadily sinking into a sectarian war against the region's majority. The path it has chosen will likely lead to a re-definition of the Shia community as a Lebanese sectarian minority rather than as part of the Muslim majority in accordance with the Taif agreement, which had stipulated that power be equally shared between Muslims (Sunnis and Shias as one group) and Christians.

Hezbollah is one of the key non-state actors in Syria, making it part of the larger problem of foreign fighters and Iranian meddling in the region. Any discussion about a solution towards achieving stability in Syria now relies, in part, on the party's retreat from this track, voluntarily or involuntarily.

On the other hand, what cannot be ignored is that before the Syrian revolution, Hezbollah was considered a 'resistance' party by large segments of the Arab population who supported it because it fought several wars against Israel and its political program was based on the key priority of 'resistance against the occupier and internal reconciliation'. Thus, its military intervention in Syria can be interpreted as placing a regional priority (in this case, the Iranian axis' interests), above its former priorities.

There are other, related developments that seem to have caused the party to undertake measures to prioritize regional political interests, particularly given its affiliations in Lebanese affairs and the party's sense of responsibility towards the Shia sect. In the eyes of the party, this further necessitated Hezbollah's involvement in Syria to date.

This report analyses Hezbollah's major gains and losses and the changes it is undergoing as a result of the path it has followed in Syria, which in turn is bound to significantly impact its future role and standing, whether in the domestic Lebanese arena or within the larger regional and Arab context. While this report will focus on three key outcomes relating to Hezbollah's intervention in Syria – namely, gains, losses and changes – it should be noted that Hezbollah's position on the Syrian revolution was not different from its position on the Arab revolutions in general. In fact, their position on the Arab revolutions was the starting point that paved the way for their relatively speedy military involvement in Syria, which was simultaneous with a restructuring of the group's religious discourse and political orientations.

Hezbollah and the Arab revolutions

In 2011, Hezbollah chose to monitor and assess the Arab revolutions from a distance, its attitude reflecting its traditional stance. But with the continued development of events, Hezbollah interpreted that while the slogans and demands of the revolutionaries were understandable, they did not represent an ultimate aspiration with which it could align, based on its definition of a 'revolution', which Hezbollah classifies on two dimensions:

- The first dimension classifies countries by those that have witnessed 'a revolutionary movement', or the so-called Arab Spring countries. From among

these countries, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah has classified some of these regimes as pro-USA, namely the Egyptian, Tunisian, Yemeni and Bahraini regimes, in addition to the Libyan regime in its final days. By contrast, he classified the Syrian regime, which belongs to the resistance axis, as 'not loyal to the US'. In his assessment, it is one of the Arab countries that borders Israel and is targeted because of its alliance with Iran, which heads the 'axis of resistance'.(1)

- The second dimension parses the phases of revolution, and whether developments represent 'a true national movement in every nation', meaning a national popular will that is not an 'American plot'. Nasrallah's assessment is that America has simply 'jumped on the bandwagon', signalling support to revolutionary demands in order to 'deviate the revolution from its course', and improve the US' image abroad, minimise its losses and have a hand in at least shaping the new regimes in the event they are not pro-US.(2)

Hezbollah's assessment of the first dimension differed with a large sector of the Arab 'resistance masses' (those supporting resistance against Israel). The masses did not differentiate between any of the Arab Spring countries and their regimes as Nasrallah did; rather, their sympathy with and support for the Syrian revolution increased as killing and repression by the Assad regime and its allies intensified.(3)

Iran, meanwhile, was easily satisfied with the symbolic reforms implemented by Bashar al-Assad, its ally in Syria, relying on these reforms in its media and political discourse to bolster its assertions that change was occurring under the Assad regime. In fact, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah drew a parallel that earned the title of sectarian analysis when he declared that events in Bahrain under its ruling regime were worse than those in Syria.(4)

On the second dimension, Hezbollah did not differ greatly with the masses, given that warnings regarding the US' role came from both revolutionary activists themselves and from intellectuals supporting the revolution. Soon after the revolutions broke out, al-Qaeda warned of an American attempt to circumvent them.(5) This was a common analysis at the time and Hezbollah not only adopted it, but also recycled it, claiming that the revolution was deviated from the path of demanding change to directly targeting the existence of the Syrian regime.(6)

While Hezbollah acknowledged that the people sympathise and express solidarity with the revolution, the group did not see this as precluding the possibility that the

revolutions were part of a 'US-Israeli strategy for division of the region'.(7) Nasrallah described it as 'the new Middle East whose advance guards we destroyed during the 2006 July war, and whose advance guards were destroyed by our brothers in Gaza during the 2008 war, and now it is coming back in new garb with new arguments'.(8)

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria

Hezbollah did not hesitate to militarily engage in the Syrian war, but publicising this move was gradual, with Hezbollah first justifying its military intervention as being necessary for 'the protection of Lebanese villages' on the border with Syria, and later for the protection of Shia holy shrines. Eventually, a clear announcement of Hezbollah's total alignment with the Syrian regime was made at the start of the al-Qusair battle on 19 May 2013. Hezbollah, prior to that announcement, warned the Syrian people against falling into the trap of an overthrow of the Syrian regime, stressing the need to protect 'the achievements of the resistance' there. Furthermore, the party launched what appeared to be a media and information campaign in which the Hezbollah Secretary-General appeared repeatedly to confirm that the Iranian axis has a clear vision and full confidence that it knows what it is doing in Syria and the region.(9)

Given Hezbollah's clear push to strengthen its influence in Lebanon after 2011, it is safe to say that Hezbollah had prepared itself to intervene militarily in Syria as soon as the revolution there started. The announcement of Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government on 16 June 2011 facilitated this intervention, particularly given that his government was accused by its rivals of being dominated by Hezbollah in an attempt to tighten its grip on the Lebanese government apparatuses, especially those responsible for controlling the borders with Syria. The irony was that Mikati then resigned in March 2013 over differences with the party, and in May 2013, Hezbollah announced its first military assault across the Lebanese border on the nearby Syrian town of al-Qusair.(10)

Hezbollah also took advantage of the vacuum created by the vacant presidential seat in Lebanon when President Michel Sleiman's term in office ended on 25 May 2014. Moreover, Hezbollah's alliance with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) founded by General Michel Aoun, secured control of foreign affairs into the hands of Hezbollah leader Jibril Bassil under the Lebanese government of Prime Minister Tammam Salam. This has allowed the group to extend its influence in Lebanese diplomacy, bringing it to loggerheads with Saudi Arabia.(11) Regardless of the reasons cited by Hezbollah for its engagement in Syria, the party has become part of an alliance with Syria's Assad, Iran and Iraq, as well as Russia on an international scale. Hezbollah is waging a war in Syria

that is bound to have an immense impact on its organizational structure and strategic position in the region, as well as its internal ethics. Of course, this in turn is based on the gains it reaps or the defeats it sustains by its involvement in Syria.

Major Hezbollah gains

Following Hezbollah's discourse on gains in Syria does not provide a true picture of their extent or their significance to the party, because Hezbollah doesn't have the ability to capitalize alone on any victory it achieves on Syrian land. Since it is a local group playing a regional role, it needs a sponsor state that is active in the region in order to achieve both its local and regional goals. It is quite evident that Lebanon cannot play that sponsor role, even if the party has control in Lebanon, given that Lebanon has virtually failed to run its own affairs. Thus, since Hezbollah belongs, in strategic terms, to the Iranian axis, it is accurate to say that it has been pushed into this war by 'geopolitical motives of a sectarian nature'.⁽¹²⁾ Therefore, any gains reaped by Hezbollah must be measured in the context of advantages that are gained or will be gained by the axis to which it belongs. These gains can be summarised as follows:

1. The continuation of active Iranian presence in Syria, particularly given the 'legitimacy' it has gained by using the narrative of fighting 'takfiris' and 'terrorists' (terms used by Assad's allies to refer to all the Syrian opposition factions opposed to the rule of Bashar al-Assad, regardless of their ideological affiliations). This extended Iranian influence is a gain because Tehran's military elite are now close enough to offer substantive backing to Hezbollah in neighbouring Lebanon, meaning Syrian, regional and possibly international circumstances have allowed for increasing the number of Iranians in the region, albeit temporarily.
2. Geographical contiguity may be ensured, though with difficulty, between Iran and Lebanon, if Hezbollah succeeds in creating empty demographic spaces across Syria and Iraq along the border with Lebanon, especially in areas close to its sectarian strongholds. Such an achievement would ensure Hezbollah's safety and bestow confidence in the face of any attempts to uproot it or limit its influence. Socio-economic, cultural and religious interests would be built along this line in favour of its ideological prosperity. Most importantly, such a development would ensure Hezbollah gains the upper hand in Lebanon as a dominant and influential group on all levels, enjoying the support of its sect.
3. Hezbollah would maintain its Lebanese role as a defender of the country's borders, whether against Israel or any armed Syrian groups. As a result of its confrontation with the latter, Hezbollah has also won implicit international recognition, especially from America, as one of the pillars confronting 'terrorism'

extending from Syria to Lebanon. Two factors helped Hezbollah to achieve this. Firstly, international concern for the protection of Lebanon from the potential repercussions of the Syrian crisis, because they see in the country a last resort for Christian and non-Christian minorities in the Mashreq (Levant). This may have led countries to condone Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria, perhaps because they were unable to prevent it at first, but also because they were keen to limit any repercussions of the Syrian crisis on the Lebanese situation, especially with regard to security, which continues to be a key consideration.⁽¹³⁾ The second issue lies in the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) and Nusra Front groups, especially on the border with Lebanon, both internationally billed as extremist groups. In addition, bomb attacks carried out by Syrian groups opposed to Hezbollah ⁽¹⁴⁾ have forced international powers to accept its role as indispensable in protecting Lebanon's borders unless the status quo changes.

4. The forthcoming settlement in Syria could spell significant gains for Hezbollah, based on its experience of emerging from the Lebanese civil war and the Taif accord. These gains could see Hezbollah maintaining its military power once the stability sought by the superpowers is achieved, in order to keep military ascendancy out of the reach of 'Sunni extremist groups'. The movement will then be able to maintain a share in any peace settlement in Syria in addition to any other effects that might consolidate its roots in the Lebanese balance of power. It is worth noting that Hezbollah, by way of Nasrallah, has called more than once for a new constituent conference to redraft or modify the Taif accord, which prompted its rivals to accuse it of seeking greater power-sharing, with the Shia sect forming a third party ⁽¹⁵⁾ alongside Sunni Muslims and Christians. The accord had stipulated that power be equally shared between Muslims (both Sunni and Shia) and Christians. Thus, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian war is, in fact, a fight to politically further its sectarian existence, community, axis and allies in Lebanon's state.

Major losses

If Hezbollah's gains cannot be measured without reference to the axis to which Hezbollah belongs, the calculation of its losses, whether in its structure or values, or given the consequences of its intervention in Syrian affairs, must also be measured the same way:

1. Hezbollah has thousands of fighters on which it depends and any losses among them could be significant, given that conflict in Syria is dragging on with no end in sight. It is not similar to the war that was fought against Israel, where battles had clear beginnings and ends, especially after the liberation of Southern

Lebanon in 2000. According to the most conservative estimates, the number of the party's fighters killed in Syria have exceeded one thousand, with many others wounded or debilitated.(16) As the war timeline stretches on, Hezbollah's ability to continue fighting recedes, because the war requires fighters and firepower in volumes that sometimes even exceed the capabilities of superpowers. With its limited number of fighters, Hezbollah, in a bid to avoid such a situation, has opted for a 'pro-rata' strategy,(17) selecting and focusing on the most important Syrian locations to the party. Thus, it protects strategic interests with a reasonable number of fighters, with tolerable losses, in addition to command experts providing guidance in battles the party believes it can fight successfully.

2. Any further review of the gains that Hezbollah might obtain in Syria indicates that they are not proportionate with the cost it is paying now and will pay in the future. The size of the Syrian majority that it has been fighting will not be significantly affected by killing or displacement. Nothing will ensure continued support for Hezbollah by some of its groups, especially those, who in lower numbers, continue to back Assad. Those who oppose him will eventually become strategic opponents to Hezbollah and other militias, especially since foreign fighters committed criminal acts during the war with no justification. This is such a large problem to be inherited that it will not disappear even with the removal of the Assad regime. Hezbollah and its allies will consequently suffer from this a great deal and for a long time.
3. Unlike its past situation against Israel, Hezbollah is fighting a war in Syria with no real incubator or environment that could be described as friendly. It represents a religious party that follows the Shia Twelver doctrine and the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists (Velayat al-Faqih), which has a relatively small number of adherents in Syria. Furthermore, forming alliances with minorities, as happened in Lebanon, would be difficult to apply in Syria due to the existence of a large (Sunni) majority in the country. On the other hand, Syrian minorities are not confident that any geographic or demographic changes at the expense of the majority will last long, as they might collapse as a result of new developments on the ground. In fact, some of them would prefer to be identified on a nationalist basis rather than in terms of a sect or ethnicity.
4. Any assessment that Hezbollah will achieve gains in the Lebanese system or in the region through its military involvement in Syria's war has no guarantees. Lebanon is a fragile state that has not recovered fully from its civil war, and could experience another flare-up that would change the status quo and keep Hezbollah busy at the domestic level. In fact, the entire region lacks stability, with on-going potential for confrontation with Israel or sectarian conflict between Sunnis and

Shias as a result of the deterioration of conditions between them. Thus, when the party exits the Syrian war, there could be other wars waiting to be waged, which could prevent Hezbollah from reaping in Lebanon the fruit of that which it sowed in Syria.

Ethical and political changes

The most significant ethical and political loss Hezbollah could sustain is the loss of its popular legitimacy as a resistance movement in the Arab and Islamic worlds. The party has paid in blood at certain times for asserting this fact, such as its stand with the Palestinians against the Lebanese Amal Shia movement during the so-called refugee camps war in 1985-1988, holding on to the slogans of 'Islamic unity', 'Islamic movement' and 'Islamic peoples'. At that time, the party sought to emphasise its status as a resistance movement beyond denominational lines. It has also managed to successfully maintain a position within the group of Lebanese sects making up the societal fabric, reshaping its political and media discourse to correspond with its role as a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon.

Moreover, the party avoided any involvement in internal corruption or political conflicts, and with the liberation of Southern Lebanon in 2000 under a national slogan, the Islamic Shia Hezbollah liberated the area as part of a national partnership without claiming goals or privileges for the party.

The party efficiently managed to draw benefits from the legacy built by the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon and the region, asserting its position as part of a chain of resistance against Israel. Its legitimacy emanates from its commitment and adherence to its principles, which positioned it as the sole option of the Arab and Islamic peoples. It was aided by Iran positioning itself with the Palestine cause, with its leadership designating the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan as the Islamic Unity Day as well as the International Day of Jerusalem. This strategy enabled Hezbollah to gain the legitimacy it needed to be part of the region's culture and part of the resistance in the Arab region against the Israeli occupation.

However, the core of this legitimacy changed with its involvement in the Syrian war. The resistance was turned into a sectarian issue, invoked by a sectarian discourse with slogans such as 'O, Zainab, you will not be held captive twice', and other historic images that would inevitably provoke sectarian conflicts.

The change that occurred within the state of Iran, to which Hezbollah is affiliated, (despite its insistence that it is premised on resistance), plunged the party into killing and large-scale displacement on a sectarian basis in both Syria and Iraq. The ethical dimension of this legacy will be associated with the Hezbollah party forever, especially in an Arab environment that is mostly Sunni. Worst of all is that Hezbollah is directly linked to the political goal of this operation in Syria, which involves the Iranian and Syrian axis redrawing Syrian demographics to connect the so-called 'useful' state, predominantly Alawi, with well-secured Shia towns and villages on the Lebanese border. This requires population displacement to bridge the gap between the two geographic regions, and Hezbollah has actively participated in this process.

This proposed regional shift has catalysed a change locally, no less dangerous, with Hezbollah acquiescing to a track it had launched and cannot afford to stop, i.e. redefining the Shia community in Lebanon as a 'minority', rather than as part of the Muslim majority. One of the consequences of this is that it restricts Hezbollah to building influential 'political Shiism' in Lebanon rather than building a unified Islamic movement.(18) Given that the international community has calculated the country's sectarian makeup to 'allocate minorities with regional prerogatives' for fear of the tyranny by the majority, Hezbollah has now placed itself as caretaker of the region's Shias.

In line with such a characterization, Hezbollah would be able to bring to its side the entirety of the 'Shia public' (and other minorities), ensuring their security in face of a Sunni majority in the region.(19) Meanwhile, the party would, by virtue of this new definition, gain a stronger regional role. This could explain visits by Iraqi leaders Moqtada al-Sadr and Nouredin al-Maliki to Lebanon, in the context of mutual interests that Nasrallah can guard, including protecting the existence of the region's Shias.(20) It is similar to the role which Phalange and Lebanese Forces played on behalf of Lebanese political Maronitism in various historical phases, on the grounds of responsibility towards the Mashreq Christians and with implicit recognition from the West.

Finally, even partial military victories achieved by Hezbollah in the Syrian war alongside the Iranian axis could be faced by other defeats and an inability to tolerate the continued loss of lives among its fighters. On a strategic level, the party has entered a war against the majority in the region by adopting sectarian slogans, and consequently losing its position as one of the resistance movements. Moreover, its current dominance of decision-making within the Lebanese state has no guarantee of longevity, which means

that in the domestic arena Hezbollah is in constant confrontation with other Lebanese political factions, and within the foreign arena, it is confronted with the Sunni majority – a heavy dual burden to shoulder.

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References

1. Al-Manar, "Interview with Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah" [Arabic], al-Manar TV, (Bayna Qawsain Programme), 24 October 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAKGyV6jtXQ>.
2. Ibid.
3. Hezbollah's relations with Hamas deteriorated specifically over its position on Syria, with the latter refusing to support al-Assad and declaring its support for the will of the people. It is worth noting that Hamas did so even given its keenness not to interfere in internal Arab affairs.
4. Al-Manar, speech by Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in which he described the 'revolution' in Bahrain as 'peaceful' but is met with 'violence' and that the Syrian President had decreed pardons twice for revolutionaries but was met with 'violence', Al-Manar TV. 24 June 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmrXP5OHUmo>.
5. Al-Qaeda regularly adopts this analysis. See: "The Arab revolutions and the Season of Harvest", by Jamal Ibrahim Shatiwi, also known as Atiyatullah al-Libi. He warned against a 'counter-revolution' and Washington's support for it in order to choke revolutions. Atiyatullah al-Libi was killed in August 2011 by a drone in Waziristan, Pakistan. This article can be found on pro-Qaeda internet forums.
6. Talk of America 'riding the tide' of revolutions was common at the time, based on mistrust by its opponents such as the Islamists and on estimates by analysts and media personalities analysing the American stance. Some sources that included such an analysis include: Mohammad Kamal, "Al-Ikhwan Bayna Marhalatyan" [Arabic], Ikhwan Online, 1 March 2011. Samih Saab, "The American-Iranian Conflict Over Revolutions", Annahar-Lebanon, 5 March 2011; Arab East Centre: <http://www.asharqalarabi.org.uk/m-w/b-waha-1396.htm> ; Zain al-Abideen al-Rikabi, "America: Making the News or Riding the Tide?" Al-Sharq al-Awsat, 30 April 2011, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=15&article=619454&issueno=11840#.Vx8HPPnRiUk>.
7. Speech by Nasrallah on 24 June 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmrXP5OHUmo>.
8. Speech by Hassan Nasrallah on 1 June 2011 on the 22 anniversary of the death of Khomeini, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I88IxyQ-6GA>.
9. Nasrallah delivered a speech at a conference on Imam Khomeini's thoughts on revival in June 2011, in which he spoke about the Imam's analytical capability and his awareness of the region's situation and conditions in Lebanon as being better than that of its people, adding that trust in Khomeini has led to victory. This was one of rare times where the Hezbollah Secretary-General declared his adherence to Khomeini's vision with respect to the 'resistance' in southern Lebanon, although he and his party used to have a different vision and assessment. Nasrallah's comments came while talking about Arab revolutions and the Syrian situation to indicate that al-Wali al-Faqih (Guardian of Islamic Jurists) could see things better than others, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yxkrmwu0t_Bc.
10. It is believed that Hezbollah took part in military operations in various areas prior to al-Qusair battle, some of them in Damascus under the pretext of defending the shrine of Sayyeda Zaynab and on the side of the Syrian regime in attacks on Daraa governorate and Eastern Ghouta in the Damascus rural area. (See Geoffry White, "Hezbollah's War in Syria: Military Implications", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 May 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/Hizbullahs-declaration-of-war-in-syria-military-implications>).
11. In a rare diplomatic stand, Lebanese foreign minister Jibril Bassil twice declined to condemn attacks on the Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran, first during an Arab ministerial meeting in Cairo and later during a meeting of the Islamic Cooperation Organization in Jeddah. His position angered Saudi Arabia, but there have been no further consequences yet.
12. Expression borrowed from Dr. Bashir Nafi, see: Ali al-Thofeiri, "Hezbollah's Future", AlJazeera, In Depth Programme, 11 June 2013, <http://aljazeera.net/programs/in-depth/2013/21/6>.
13. Ibrahim Darwish, "Obama Administration Fearful Battle Could Move to Lebanon, Asks FSA not to Attack Hezbollah Fighters on Their Land", al-Quds al-Araby, 23 May 2013, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=47056>.
14. Chafic Choucair, "Lebanon's Explosions: Implications of the Syrian Crisis or Signs of a Security War?" [Arabic], 3 October 2013, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2013/10/201310174929157964.html>.
15. Ghassan Hajjar, "Muthalatha, an Old Shia Demand", Annahar-Lebanon 10 June 2014. <http://newspaper.annahar.com/article/140282-> . According to writer Ghassan al-Hajjar in this article, the idea of a third party included in the power-sharing was an old one in Iran. His comments were in protest against an article published in the Iranian Kayhan newspaper, known for being close to Ayatollah al-Sayyed Ali Khamenei, on 8 November 2006, which said that 'in light of the new strategic order in the Middle East, it has become imperative for the Shias in Lebanon and not the Lebanese Shia to have the largest share in official and public departments. We should watch and follow how things will develop...the first thing that should change is the Taif accord'. The article stated, 'Shias constitute 40 per cent of the Lebanese population and occupy 40 per cent of its land. They are the most united and their military power is the strongest in that part of the Arab world. Therefore, they should have the widest representation in the government and parliament and in all Lebanese institutions'.
16. Ali al-Fonah, "Hezbollah's Dead in the Syrian War", Washington Institute, 22 February 2016, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/Hizbullah-fatalities-in-the-syrian-war> . See also the first page of al-Safir newspaper on 29 January 2016, which included an article referring to a speech Nasrallah delivered to his supporters and an admission that a thousand of

Hezbollah's men were killed and thousands of others wounded or debilitated in an existential battle that would be the cornerstone of rebalancing power in the region. See: <http://mobile.assafir.com/Article/470862/ref=Hyperlink>.

17. Wafik Kansouah, "Hezbollah Fighting Limits in Syria", Middle East Panorama, 29 May 2013, <http://www.mepanorama.net/293856>.
18. Chafic Choucair, "Lebanon's Border Under the Syrian Hammer: Risks and Implications" [Arabic], AlJazeera Centre for Studies, 16 October 2014, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/reports/2014/10/2014101684155185597.html>.
19. The Hayya Bena (Come Together) Society, opposed to Hezbollah, conducted a public survey with the Shia community in Lebanon. Results showed that nearly 80 per cent of Shia respondents support Hezbollah's intervention in Syria. The group explained this percentage by saying that Shias are afraid. See Annahar newspaper, "78.7 per cent of the Shia Community Support Intervention in Syria but are Afraid" [Arabic], 14 July 2015, <http://newspaper.annahar.com/article/251945>.
20. See the Kuwaiti al-Qabas newspaper, "Al-Maliki Follows al-Sadr to Beirut to Reconcile at Nasrallah's" [Arabic], 14 April 2016.

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