

Middle East

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Hizbullah, Iran and the Intifada

'We share the same destiny with the Palestinian Intifada till the liberation of Jerusalem.' With these words Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, the Hizbullah's Secretary General, opened the Solidarity Convention for the Support of the Intifada in Beirut on 22 May 2001. Rooted in the successful resistance against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, the Hizbullah continues to be very vocal in its support of the Palestinian cause.

► **Nasrallah delivering a speech in support of the Intifada, 28 September 2001.**

Twenty-one years ago, Imam Khomeini was the first to inaugurate the last Friday of the month of Ramadan as 'Quds Day' or 'Jerusalem Day', calling for the support of Palestinians in any possible way and the establishment of a Muslim army to liberate Jerusalem. He referred to Israel as the 'rapist entity' (*al-kiyan al-ghasib*), the 'Zionist entity' (*al-kiyan al-sahyuni*) that is a cancerous gland in the region and should be uprooted at all costs. In Lebanon, on 22 December 2000, the commemoration of 'Quds Day' had a new flavour because it was the first to be held after the Israeli withdrawal, and because it coincided with the second Palestinian Intifada that was characterized by suicide missions causing heavy casualties on the Israeli side. Also, it was the first time that the Lebanese state sent an official representative – along with a minister and a representative of the general of the Lebanese army – to attend 'Quds Day', thus sheltering the Hizbullah with the Lebanese government's legitimacy.¹

Conferences in support of the Intifada

From 28 to 30 January 2001, the 'First Quds Conference' was held in Beirut to support the Palestinian Intifada. It led to the establishment of the 'Quds Foundation' with temporary headquarters in Beirut, the 'capital of liberation and victory'. The final resolutions included the following: severing any engagements with the Middle East Peace Settlement; calling for jihad and resistance as well as political, economic, diplomatic, and media support for the Intifada; boycotting American goods; using oil as a stick policy; refusing to naturalize the Palestinian refugees in any country; the right of return and self-determination to the Palestinians; stopping all normalization procedures with Israel; affirming that Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine; lobbying in order to revive the UN Resolution 3379 that stipulates that Zionism is a form of racism; filing litigations and preparing the required files concerning Israeli war criminals; extolling the decision of the Palestinians not to take part in the upcoming Israeli elections; total support for Lebanon in the continuation of the Resistance until the Shiba Farms – a 220 square kilometre Lebanese territory still under Israeli occupation – are regained; and the release of all detainees from Israeli prisons. The primary speakers were Nasrallah and Ali Akbar Muhtashami, an Iranian reformist and an ally of Khatami. Muhtashami, the secretary general of the International Committee for the Support of the Intifada, urged everyone to supply the Palestinian people with arms, so that they can defend their legitimate rights. He also reiterated the Islamic Republic's solution to the Palestinian crisis, namely, a general referendum that includes the 'indigenous Palestinian people' composed of adherents to the three Abrahamic religions – who are spread worldwide and inside the Occupied Territories – in order to determine their future and the type of government to which they aspire. On his part, Nasrallah affirmed that the Intifada, resistance, and jihad should go hand in hand in order to achieve victory, rather than futile



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negotiations. Nasrallah called on the participants to adopt Khomeini's injunction of celebrating the last Friday of the month of Ramadan as 'Quds Day'. Indeed, both his calls were adopted in the final resolutions.²

After a lapse of ten years, Tehran hosted the second Intifada Conference (April 2001). Most Palestinian opposition groups attended this International Conference of Support for the Intifada and the Islamic Revolution in Palestine, along with representatives from 37 Arab and Islamic countries. Like the 'First Quds Conference' resolutions, the final resolutions of the second conference contained a clause affirming that the Lebanese victory over the Israeli army in southern Lebanon had opened new horizons with respect to the Palestinian cause. It also legitimized the continuation of the Lebanese resistance until the liberation of the Shiba Farms and the release of all the detainees in Israeli prisons. In the wake of the Conference, while receiving Nasrallah, Imam Khomeini argued that the Aqsa Intifada is the result of the Hizbullah's struggles and devotion, and that the current Intifada in Palestine is awakening the sense of dignity and strength among Palestinian Muslims through the achievements of the Lebanese Islamic resistance that materialized in liberating Lebanon from the 'small Satan' (Israel) after 22 years of occupation. He hailed the Hizbullah's efforts in Lebanon, which exhorted the Palestinian people to rise up. Khatami affirmed that the 'Zionist entity' is the biggest threat posed to the Islamic and Arab world. Referring to the Hizbullah's victory over the Israeli army in Lebanon, Khatami held that '[s]hould the Zionist entity be defeated once, surely it will be defeated another time.' He added that Muslims should defend the rights of the Palestinians and mobilize their capabilities for the return of the Palestinian refugees and their rights of self-determination. Nasrallah stated: 'In the name of Hizbullah and the Resistance, we shall not stay idle; we shall assume our moral, religious, and legitimate responsibilities, and prove to the Zionists that the Palestinians are not alone. We tell the Zionists: "Be prepared to face us in places you expect or do not expect to find us."³

The status quo

The Hizbullah's ideological stance on the continuation of the resistance and the liberation of Palestine after the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon is based on the distinction

between the Hizbullah's political ideology (*al-fikr al-siyasi*) and political programme (*al-barnamaj al-siyasi*). The Hizbullah honoured, and still honours, its ideological programme (commitment to the liberation of Palestine, and no recognition of Israel) and its political programme, namely that 'socioeconomic, intellectual, and cultural work is concomitant with resistance and should go hand in hand with it.' As Nasrallah puts it: 'It is our "legitimate and religious responsibility" [*al-mas'uliyya al-shariyya wa al-taklif al-shari al-Ilahi*]' to buttress the Palestinian Intifada in any way we find fit.⁵ In actual practice, the Hizbullah's support for the Intifada is limited to political, moral and psychological measures. Nasrallah exhorted the Palestinians to keep the initiative in their own hands and to depend on no one except themselves. Nasrallah said unequivocally that the Hizbullah does not have a branch in Palestine or in any other country: 'There is no Palestinian Hizbullah.' He added that all of the Hizbullah's rank and file are honoured to be soldiers fighting under the banner of Hamas, of the Islamic Jihad, or any Palestinian jihad organization.⁶ Thus, liberating Palestine is not an aim; rather, it is a doctrinal-ideological commitment. Since Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon is incomplete because of its refusal to relinquish the Shiba Farms, the Hizbullah's resistance continues because it is not a militia, but rather the Lebanese resistance par excellence; this is one of the main sources of the Hizbullah's political legitimacy. It is important to note that all of the Hizbullah's operations in the Lebanese Shiba Farms were a show of solidarity dedicated to the Palestinian people. By the end of 2001 seven of the Shiba operations were carried out by the 'Battalion of the Aqsa Martyrs' of the Islamic Resistance – the Hizbullah's military wing, and the kidnapping of the three Israeli soldiers was carried out by the 'Battalion of the Martyr Muhammad al-Durra' (one of the most well-known Palestinian child martyrs).

After September 11

In the aftermath of September 11, US policy concerning the Hizbullah remained unchanged. In April 2001, it had been classified by the US State Department as a 'terrorist organization'. After September 11, three additional lists were issued, which either included Hizbullah members or asked the Lebanese government to freeze the Hizbullah's assets. In response, a national consen-

sus emerged expressing that Hizbullah is not a terrorist organization.

No alterations have been made in the Hizbullah's doctrines as a result of September 11, although some manoeuvres and camouflage tactics were modified. On 28 September 2001, the first anniversary of the Intifada, Nasrallah threatened – behind bullet-proof glass (see photo) – that '[w]e are ready for direct military intervention in the Intifada when the benefit of the Palestinian resistance really dictates recourse to this option.' With these words, Nasrallah qualified his threat and rendered his statement ambiguous. On 2 October 2001 Nasrallah reiterated that 'nothing has changed since September 11: 'Our culture is that of jihad, resistance, and martyrdom.' He added that the Hizbullah still opts for the 'military, jihad option' to liberate Lebanon from Israeli occupation and to support the Palestinian Intifada with all its might.⁷ On 22 October 2001, while commemorating the 'Day of the Wounded of the Islamic Resistance' Nasrallah affirmed that '[t]hose who killed Za'ifi [Israeli Minister of Tourism] are the most noble members of this *umma*. Nothing will change at all for us after 11 September 2001; the resistance continues as long as Shiba is occupied, our prisoners of war are detained in Israeli prisons, and the Palestinian people are slaughtered. The Great Satan [the US] that issues terrorist lists is a terrorist state that has no right to classify people as terrorists or not.'⁸

Notes

1. Al-Manar and Al-Nour, 22 December 2000; *DailyStar* and *Al-Safir*, 23 December 2000.
2. *Al-Ahd*, no. 887 (2 February 2001); *Al-Safir*, 31 January and 1 February 2001; *Al-Afkar*, no. 965 (12 February 2001).
3. Al-Manar and Al-Nour, 24–25 April 2001; *DailyStar* and *Al-Safir*, 24–25 April 2001.
4. On 17 May 1995, Imam Khomeini appointed Nasrallah and Shaykh Muhammad Yazbik, Hizbullah's Shura Council member, as his 'religious deputies' (*wakilayn shariyyan*).
5. Al-Manar, 3 April 2001; Al-Manar, 7 June 2001.
6. Nasrallah's speech at the 'Solidarity Convention for the Support of the Palestinian People' on 22 May 2000; reiterated on Al-Manar, 7 June 2001.
7. Al-Manar; Al-Nour; and *Al-Intiqad* no. 921 (5 October 2001) 6–7.
8. Al-Manar; Al-Nour; and *Al-Intiqad* no. 924 (26 October 2001) 5.

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