

## The Hezbollah Manifesto: Business as Usual for Israel?

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On November 30, 2009, Hezbollah announced the release of a new comprehensive ideological and political platform, the 2009 *Manifesto*.

Issued twenty-four years after the 1985 “Open Letter”—the group’s first public ideological document—the Manifesto’s significance lays in the fact that it reflects Hezbollah’s political and military evolution since 1985, and it conveys the group’s strategy and long term objectives for the future.

On the one hand, the document discloses Hezbollah’s domestic transition from being an extra-institutional armed group that opposed collaborating with the state, to becoming a highly-entrenched, popular, and mainstream political party. On the other hand, the Manifesto also highlights continuity in the organization’s foreign policy, as well as in its assessment of its main enemies, and on the primacy of the “resistance” agenda. Hence, from the point of Hezbollah’s main enemy—the State of Israel—the Manifesto represents a confirmation of both the group’s increased domestic power and continued hostility.

In terms of domestic policy, the Manifesto—in stark contrast with the 1985 Open Letter—affirms the group’s intention to be an active part of the Lebanese political system, and omits any reference to Hezbollah’s earlier calls to create an Islamic State within Lebanon. These statements only confirm a trend that had begun as early as 1992, with Hezbollah’s first participation in the Lebanese legislative elections: the recognition of Lebanon’s political reality and of the unfeasibility of creating an Islamic Republic, and, along with this realization, the progressive integration of the party in the Lebanese political system and its increased domestic power.

In fact, while accepting the current Lebanese political system, Hezbollah also reiterates its interest in increasing its domestic power and influence, for example by advocating for the abolition of the current sectarian system (which still leaves the Lebanese Shia community under-represented at the political level), or by suggesting to govern by applying a model consensual democracy.

[i](#)

Indeed, a national-unity, consensual formula

*de facto*

places Hezbollah and the other opposition forces on equal footing with the ruling March 14 coalition; similarly to the current power distribution in

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the “national-unity” Cabinet created by PM Saad Hariri in the aftermath of the last legislative elections.

In addition to affirming its enhanced political status, the Manifesto also reiterates that the Hezbollah’s political power is connected with the group’s “resistance” agenda, stressing the organization’s intention to maintain its armed wing and weapons and to continue to engage in its “resistance” against Israel autonomously from the State. <sup>1</sup> In turn, these statements dismiss the option of a military integration into the Lebanese army, let alone disarmament.

From an Israeli perspective, the Manifesto represents a useful reminder of Hezbollah’s powerful and entrenched role within the political system, of its increased domestic influence, and of its continuous commitment to maintain an armed wing and engage in “resistance.” In other words, if Israel expects any political party (or the Lebanese Army) to attempt disarming or dismantling Hezbollah, it should understand that these hopes are extremely unrealistic, as the party is both too entrenched and powerful to be coerced into relinquishing its military apparatus.

Similarly, Hezbollah’s continuous commitment to armed “resistance” is clearly expressed in the Manifesto’s sections on “foreign policy.” In this sense, there is a great degree of continuity between the 1985 Open Letter and the Manifesto, albeit the 2009 platform is generally more politically sophisticated in its description of the “West” and the world in general, and it also adopts the language of the “anti-globalization movement,” to be perceived as part of a larger international political and social alliance.

In contrast, the group’s language and rhetoric regarding its main enemy, the State of Israel, has not changed dramatically, and Hezbollah maintains its absolute rejection of both recognizing Israel, as well as of the principle of settlement or negotiation with the Jewish State. For example, in the Manifesto, the group clearly states: “Israel represents an eternal threat to Lebanon,(...) The role of the Resistance is a national necessity as long as Israeli threats and ambitions to seize our lands and waters continue. <sup>2</sup>

These comments were positively received by both Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, confirming these groups’ ideological closeness to the Lebanese Hezbollah when it comes to dealing with the State of Israel.

Again, from an Israeli perspective, both the language and the content of the “foreign policy” sections of the Manifesto confirm that Hezbollah’s political and military agenda with respect to Israel remains unaltered. In this sense, just as Hezbollah continues to describe Israel as its “eternal enemy,” Israel can safely assume that Hezbollah will remain its “absolute” foe, without short term expectations of appeasement.

In short, the 2009 Manifesto represents an important insight into Hezbollah’s current role within Lebanon and in the Middle East, and it stresses the group’s political and military evolution since its founding in the early 1980s.

First, Hezbollah is no longer a marginal “outsider” to Lebanese politics; it is now highly entrenched in the Lebanese political system, and its domestic power and influence have been rising exponentially in the past decades. At the same time, also thanks to its domestic political power, the group has both the strength and the will to remain a separate and autonomous armed group, and to retain its weapons and “resistance” agenda.

Second, Hezbollah shows a high level of consistency with its 1985 Open Letter both when it comes to assessing its external enemies, especially in the case of Israel, and in reiterating its opposition to any negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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From an Israeli perspective, this means that they should expect Hezbollah to maintain the same level of hostility with respect to the Jewish State, while acting to stall any advances in the direction of reaching a negotiated agreement to the conflict, whenever possible. Similarly, the domestic strength and influence of the group lead to assert that either military integration or disarmament appear unfeasible and unlikely, at least in the short-term.

[The Political Document \(Manifesto\) of Hezbollah 2009](#)

[Ibid.](#)

[Ibid.](#)

["Palestinian Faction Back Lebanese Hezbollah's Political Document," Al-Masara TV, December 1, 2009 \(provided by BBC Worldwide Monitoring\).](#)

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A longer analysis of Hezbollah's Manifesto can also be found [here](#).

Nasrallah presented Hezbollah's Manifesto via videotape [AFP]