

## Hezbollah: We don't have Shia agenda

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**Beirut, Aug.16:** "The greatest leader for us is Mr Chavez (President of Venezuela), he is closer to us than Arab leaders," said a high-ranking member of the Hezbollah. He is not being identified not because he did not want to be named, but because others later said that Israel was expected to follow its old policy of what is described here as "targeted assassinations" and it "is better for us if you do not name the leaders". But the following that Mr Chavez has within the Hezbollah is amazing and an indication that the organisation might have drawn its cadres from the Shia community but has long overtaken its own roots.

The Hezbollah leader said that it was an organisation with a Shia majority but its ["political programme is not a Shia agenda. We can now say we are a Sunni party because we support the Palestinians, a Christian party because we admire Mr Chavez, you can term us as you want."](#) He said that Hezbollah drew a distinction "between Judaism and Zionism as historically there [is no problem between the Jews and Muslims.](#)" He made it very clear, "we are [not against Israel because it is a Jewish state but we are opposed to it because it is a Zionist state.](#)" This leader himself was from the south of Lebanon, his home had been completely demolished, his family was living with friends in Beirut with the house next to theirs bombed, but he had not lost his sense of humour and his quiet, calm manner made it difficult to believe that Lebanon was just coming out of a devastating war.

The Hezbollah leadership has been making it repeatedly clear to the people of Lebanon that it should not be regarded as a Shia organisation. Significantly, despite the propaganda outside, it is seen in Lebanon as a nationalist group with its secretary-general Syed Hasan Nasrallah having proved his credentials through a deep personal tragedy. His 18-year-old son died a few years ago while resisting the Israelis along the border and now south Beirut has a road named after him. This was targeted by Israeli war planes and the street was bombed mercilessly for the past one month. The Hezbollah leader who is close to Syed Nasrallah, told this correspondent that the organisation was keen to join with resistance movements around the world. "If we consider this resistance to Israeli aggression as a turning point, then we ask all resistance movements to join hands in taking the resistance against imperialism to a new level", he said.

He was very categorical that the social programme of Hezbollah ["is close to the left parties"](#) and was optimistic that the forces resisting the US and Israel across the world would come together on a [common platform](#). Hezbollah might be drawing its cadres with a strong element of religious motivation but this war against Israeli invasion has definitely given it the status of a focal organisation to bring about Shia-Sunni unity. The leaders are visibly conscious of this responsibility and take pains to point out that the political agenda was very wide and far reaching and definitely not bound by religious considerations.

There is a commonality with the Hamas that the Hezbollah leader does not hesitate to share. We have common goals, he said. We support them politically as a resistance movement, two, we have the same enemy and three, we are both under severe attack, he said. He pointed out that in both cases the entire fight was against civilians with the single intent of destroying the social fabric in the hope that this would lead to a collapse of the social structure. Hezbollah is now fighting to preserve the unity of Lebanon that is going to be the single toughest task before it. The Communist party of Lebanon, Amal and several other groups are broadly supportive but as Syed Nasrallah indicated in his first speech to the people after the cessation of hostilities, "there are many who will now try to break the unity and this must not be allowed."

Interestingly, there has been a [conscious effort by the Hezbollah not to project the victory over Israel as a Shia victory or even a religious victory](#). His speeches are highly political with no references to religion, the stress remaining unity of the people. The arguments being forwarded by the Hezbollah borrow heavily from the progressive and even communist jargon with the resistance being projected as a secular, progressive, educated fight against imperialism. The Hezbollah leader said that the US design for a "new West Asia" was for transforming the entire region into a "US controlled region with no opponents." Others in Beirut laugh derisively about the phrase pointing out, almost to the last man on the street, "we have shown them what the new West Asia is."

The Hezbollah cadres are very disciplined and highly motivated. Syed Nasrallah has been able to bring his quiet, calm approach to his leaders who are highly intelligent, quiet and understated in their views, but with a sense of purpose that is difficult to miss. There are political and military wings, but working independently of each other with strategy being formulated by the top leaders and passed down till the cadres. The loyalty to the organisation is intense, as is visible during the reconstruction work with Hezbollah soldiers and workers joining the civilians in rebuilding their homes. The cadres have been involved in relief work through out the war, with no difference being made between the Shias, Sunnis or Christians. Old timers in the communist party of Lebanon recall that this level of unity was visible in the country after a long time. They were also confident that Hezbollah would not allow the unity to sink into sectarian or religious differences.

The Hezbollah, according to its leaders, is clear that it will one, not destabilise the balance of forces inside Lebanon. "On the contrary we will continue to work for the unity and solidarity of the people and all the political parties," he said. Two, the victory over Israel will be used to cement unity in the Arab world as "we are clear that this experiment (of success) must be studied so that others can benefit from it," he said. He pointed out "we are thinking now of a scheme of cooperation between movements of resistance in the world, and as I said Mr Chavez is closer to us than other Arab leaders and we all now should work together."