

Hizbulah : Party of God

By a Correspondent

Much has been written about Hizbulah, 'The Party of God', the Lebanon-based resistance movement. Yet, as the editor of this *book, Abdar Rahman Koya, points out, most of this has been by Western writers, who represent a distinctly Western and, therefore, biased, perspective. This book, a collection of essays that originally appeared in the columns of the Toronto-based monthly *Crescent International* provides an alternative perspective on the movement.

In his editorial note, Koya focuses on Hizbulah's consistent opposition to Zionist aggression and Western imperialist designs in the Middle East. Despite this, he remarks, pro-Western Arab regimes have either remained studiously silent on the movement or else have sought to actively oppose it, buying into the baseless Zionist/Western argument of it being a 'terrorist' movement. This shows, he argues, that their 'piety is selective'. He berates Saudi mullahs for issuing fatwas, at the behest of the Saudi rulers, denouncing Hizbulah as 'wrongdoers' and 'Satans'. Panic-stricken by Hizbulah's growing popularity as a resistance movement and the threat that it poses to pro-American Arab regimes, Koya says in this regard that 'the Wahhabi fatwa-factory seems to be working overtime, much to the delight of the Zionists and of their Western backers'.

In his paper, Iqbal Siddiqui, editor of *Crescent International* describes the unique features of Hizbulah that sets it apart from most other Islamic movements. He sees it as, in a sense, a model for these movements to emulate. In this regard, he critiques the way in which the Western media has sought to present Islamic movements, making unwarranted generalizations on the basis of a few instances. 'Thus', he writes, 'marginal and extremist movements such as al-Qaida, and misleaders such as Usama bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi are promoted as the real face of the political Islamic movement, while Islamic movements and leaders that have far stronger roots in Muslim societies and Islamic political culture, and have far greater credibility and potential as forces for the liberation and transformation of Muslim societies, are disparaged and demonised'.

Allegations against the Hizbulah of being 'Shia' and 'sectarian' abound in the Arab and Western media, Siddiqui notes. He argues that this charge is baseless and is geared to malign the movement. While Hizbulah did emerge from among the Shias of southern Lebanon, and while most of its leaders are Shia ulema, it nonetheless has, Siddiqui states, consider credibility and popularity among Lebanon's Christians and Sunnis, too. In fact, this is a distinction that few other political movements in Lebanon, which is wracked by sectarianism, have achieved. Hizbulah, says Siddiqui, is one of the few Islamic movements that have 'genuinely managed to rise above petty local concerns' to address issues such as Western imperialism and Zionism, clearly steering away from narrow sectarianism.

Another aspect that distinguishes Hizbulah from many other Islamic movements, Siddiqui argues, is that it has a 'sophisticated and nuanced political vision of how Muslim societies should be governed in the modern world'. It is

actively engaged in the social, cultural, educational and welfare fields. It runs scores of schools, clinics and hospitals, has built numerous power stations, and offers aid to farmers, the poor and war victims. Its welfare services are available not just to Shias, but to Christians and Sunnis, too. Siddiqui contrasts this model of working with that of the Taliban, who, he says, caused immense misery to the Afghans with what he calls their 'limited and rigid understanding of Islam'. Like Koya, Siddiqui also lauds Hizbullah for superseding pro-American client regimes in the Arab world and for consistently opposing American and Israeli hegemony.

Three articles by Khalil Osman discuss the origins of Hizbullah in 1982 as a resistance movement struggling against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and its modus operandi, examining both its military engagements as well as its social involvement in a diverse range of fields. Osman remarks how Hizbullah has consistently sought to promote a Lebanese national consensus, uniting the different confessional communities in the country against the Israelis. He thus dismisses charges of it being a sectarian Shia movement, as is generally alleged by the Western press and by certain Arab governments, most notably Wahhabi Saudi Arabia. He notes how the Americans have unsuccessfully tried to tame Hizbullah and reduce it to a mere political party by offering millions of dollars in the guise of rebuilding south Lebanon, but how Hizbullah has consistently rebuffed such overtures. Stressing Hizbullah's record in opposing Zionist aggression, he writes that in the face of Arab regimes' slavishly following American diktats, Hizbullah has brought back 'the logic of resistance in the Arab world', exposed the bankruptcy of the American-sponsored 'peace process' and shattered the myth of the invincibility of Israeli arms.

In their articles Zafar Bangash, Shameema Ismail and Mansour Ansari cover much the same grounds as the previous contributors, focusing on different aspects of Hizbullah's resistance to Israeli aggression and the various social services that it is engaged in. The book ends with three speeches by the head of Hizbullah, Shaikh Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, where he outlines the ideology of the movement, focusing particularly on its anti-imperialist agenda and its advocacy for a united opposition to American and Israeli aggression, warning against consistent American efforts to pit Shias and Sunnis, and Arab Christians and Muslims, against each other.

This slim and immensely readable book is a good introduction to a unique Islamic movement and a welcome counter to much Western writing on the subject. □□□