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SHIʿITES IN LEBANON

SHIʿITES IN LEBANON. Shiʿites, that is, Muslims adhering to the Twelver(*eṯnāʿašari*) or Imamite persuasion of Shiʿism, form the single largest denominational community of Lebanon. Their number is estimated at 1.5 million, with 800,000 living in the southern suburbs of the capital Beirut, while the rest are mainly distributed in southern Lebanon and in the Bekáa (al-Beqāʿ) valley. In addition, they have gradually managed to occupy the place they claimed on the Lebanese political stage

From Moḥammad b. Ḥasan ʿĀmeli (d. 1693, q.v.) to contemporary authors, Shiʿite clerics the community's presence in Greater Syria *(al-Šām),* of which Lebanon is a part, to Abu Ḏarr Ḡefāri, a Companion of the Prophet and partisan of Imam ʿAli b. Abi Ṭāleb (cf. Mohājer, pp. 21-33). This allegation, however, appears not to be based on reliable historical sources, and historians are rather inclined to date the presence of Imamite Shiʿites in Lebanon to the 9th century CE. Later, up to the 12th century, these sources refer to an increase of Shiʿite groups in Greater Syria, without stating, however, whether they were Imamites, Ismaʿilis or extremist Shiʿites (*ḡolāt*). Usually, all of them were indiscriminately lumped together under the term of *arfāż* (see also Kohlberg, "al-Rāfiḍa") by Sunnite authors. Subsequently, the number of Shiʿites began to diminish, and the areas that had been inhabited by them decreased in size. This was partly the result of religious persecution by Sunnite rulers and mainly due to the fighting for the control of certain regions. This was the case of the Jabal Kesrawān, north of Mount Lebanon. Between 1291 and 1305, as a follow-up of their successful war against the remnant Crusader states in the

Levant, the Mamluks of Egypt drove out the Shiʿites in the course of three campaigns, the third of which was endorsed by a *fatwā* of the Hanbalite jurist Ebn Taymiya (d. 1328).

Later, from the 17th century onwards, during the Ottoman period, the Shiʿites were gradually ousted from Kesrawān by the Maronite Christians, who took possession of their villages, either by force or by buying their lands. Today there are thus merely small pockets of Shiʿites within mixed or predominantly Maronite villages.

The Shiʿites centered at the Jabal ʿĀmel, where they founded and kept up a tradition of erudition and transmission of religious knowledge. Shiʿism became established there in the 9th century and developed in the 11th, after which the region benefited from the population movements provoked by the withdrawal of the Shiʿites from Kesrawān. According to Antoine Abdel Nour (p. 80), there were 40,000 Shiʿites there around 1750. At the time, they had conflicting relations with Mount Lebanon, which was mainly inhabited by Druzes and Christians. Later, they went through a period of troubles, during which they suffered setbacks, which made their numbers diminish to 10,000 or 12,000 in the early 19th century. The episode which most of all impressed the chroniclers from Jabal ʿĀmel by the Ottoman governor of Acre, Aḥmad Jazzār Pasha (d. 1804) against the Shiʿites. He indeed wanted to do away with the autonomy the latter had succeeded to acquire ,and hence he began to remove all the chiefs of the Jabal ʿĀmel, after which he put down the peasant resistance and then took it out on the ulama. Local Shiʿite historiography reports that the libraries of Shiʿite scholars were pillaged and their books burnt at Acre, where they fed the bakers' ovens, providing them with fuel for several days. As a result of this repression, the region declined, as did also Shiʿite religious education, and it was not until the 1880s that at least the latter began to flourish anew.

This teaching tradition, which was remarkable in a rural region, went back to the 12th century. Later, the number of Twelver Shiʿite ulama registered in the bio-bibliographic dictionaries continued to grow. The earliest great scholar of the region, who founded a school there and had a significant number of disciples, was Šams-al-Din Makki (fl. 1333-84), known and revered to this day among Twelver Shiʿites even outside Lebanon as *al-Šahid al-Awwal*, or "the First Martyr." He was the author of famous works on Islamic law, which are still being taught (*al-Lomʿa al-demašqiya* and *al-Qawāʾed wa'l-fawāʾed*, in particular). The second stage was that of Nur-al-Din Karaki ʿĀmeli (fl.

1465-1534), who is particularly known for the part he played at the Safavid court, opening a new way in the relations between secular leaders and Shiʿite clerics. It was Karaki who inaugurated a movement of emigration of Shiʿite scholars from Jabal ʿĀmel to the Persia of the first two Safavid shahs Esmāʿil I (r. 1501-24) and Ṭahmāsb I (r. 1524-76), who were at pains to introduce Shiʿism on the state-level throughout their dominions (although initially a somewhat popularized brand of it; see Mazzaoui, 1971 and 1972, passim).

Another famous figure of Twelver Shiʿite scholarship, Shaikh Bahāʾ-al-Dinʿāmeli, better known as Shaikh Bahāʾi (1547-1621; see BAHĀʾ-AL-DIN ʿĀMELI), had emigrated to Persia with his father. Shaikh Bahāʾi spent several years traveling outside Persia, visiting Egypt, Jerusalem, and Syria before returning to Persia. He signifies thus a different brand of scholar, in particular different from Karaki, who remained closely attached to the Safavid court. Back in Lebanon, Shi'ite scholars were far away from the splendors of the court life. They were used to behave discreetly towards the Sunnite Ottoman authorities, who tolerated them but did not want them to distinguish themselves. Having thus left their villages, many of them even studied and taught Sunnite religious sciences, considering Sunnite methodology useful for their purposes. This was the case of Zayn-al-Din Jobaʿi (see Kohlberg, "al-Shahīd al-Thā nī"), among Shiʿites widely known as al-Šahid al-Ṯāni, or "the Second Martyr" (1506-58), a famous Imamite jurist of the Osuli (Oṣuli) tendency, who was well-versed in and even taught the five schools of law (i.e., the four of the Sunnites and the Jaʿfari school of the Shiʿites) at Baalbek (Baʿlabakk). In Twelver Shiʿite tradition, he became a martyr under mysterious circumstances, at a time when he had resettled in his native village Jobaʿ in order to train disciples: He never returned from a trip to Istanbul, where the sultan and his Sunnite ulama had summoned him for interrogation. This event caused certain Shiʿite scholars to Lebanon for the Safavid court.

Moḥammad b. Ḥasan Ḥorr ʿĀmeli, for his part, divided his time between the Persian and the Ottoman Empire. Born in the village of Mašḡarā, he came from a family of clerics that claimed descent from Ḥorr b. Yazid Riāḥi, a famous personality in Shiʿite historiography, who had left the Omayyad army and instead fought and was killed together with Imam Ḥosayn at Karbalāʾ. Ḥorr ʿĀmeli, who was an *aḵbāri* scholar(see AḴBĀRIYA), centered his works on Hadith. He also wrote a bio-bibliographic dictionary, the first volume of which was devoted to the scholars from Jabal ʿĀmel. Here, he reported the story of one of his masters mentioning the presence of seventy *mojtahed*sat the funeral

of a scholar from the period of al-Šahid al-Awwal Šams-al-Din Moḥammad b. Makki (fl, 1333-84). To show the importance which the region attached to doctrinal Shiʿite production, this anecdote was retold often by the men of Jabal ʿĀmel, who were proud of their scholars and of the schools they founded in the villages of Jezzin, Mays, Karak Nuḥ, Mašḡarā, ʿAynāṭā, Šaqrāʾ, etc.

Here we must point out that the Jabal ʿĀmel region had its frontiers reduced in the course of the centuries. For earlier authors, it continued from the Lake Tiberias valley up to Ḥoms, and even Damascus, on the one hand, and was bordered, on the other, by the Mediterranean. The Bekáa valley was hence also included in the Jabal ʿĀmel, which was no longer the case when Moḥsen Amin (1867-1952) and his contemporaries were writing, who more or less equaled it to the limits of today's southern Lebanon (cf. Moḥsen Amin, 1983,p. 61). That is why scholars like Karaki, who originated from the village of Karak Nuḥ, situated on the road to Baalbek, bore the *nesba* of ʿĀmeli. Yet, the tradition of Shiʿite scholarly erudition was eventually lost in the Bekáa. It is true that Shiʿite families such as the Ḥarfuš distinguished themselves in this regard and had official functions under the Mamluks, which they were able to keep under the Ottomans. In the Sunnite sources (for an overview see Abu Husayn, pp. 116-17; Mervin, pp. 24-25; Salati, p. 136; Schilcher, p. 128 and n. 110), however, they do not appear as Shiʿites, and the Ottomans may have ignored their true confessional adherence. Besides, their scholarly tradition only lasted as far as the Jabal ʿĀmel is concerned. In the Bekáa, it was a man from Jabal ʿĀmel, Shaikh Ḥabib Ebrāhim (1886-1965), who had it revived, by settling at Baalbek in the 1930s.

From the late 18th century onwards, Shiʿites in what is Lebanon today have been known colloquially as Metwalis (in Standard Arabic, *motawāli*, plur. *matāwela*; see Ende). While the exact etymology of this term remains obscure, it is connected with the relation of loyalty maintained by these Shiʿites with Imam ʿAli, who is traditionally known as the "Friend of God" *(wali Allāh).* However, the designation Metwali does not only reflect a confessional adherence, since it is merely borne by the Shiʿites of Jabal ʿĀmel, Kesrawān and the Bekáa. Besides, as already mentioned, and like the other Shiʿites of Greater Syria, they were pejoratively referred to by the term *rāfeża* or *arfāż* by the Sunnites. Under the Ottoman Empire, the Shiʿites had no special status and officially came under the Sunnite Hanafite jurisdiction. The earliest appearance of the Metwalis as a separate group goes back to the organic regulation of 1861, implemented in Mount Lebanon, as a result of the inter-

confessional battles of 1860, which caused much bloodshed in the region. An administrative council was then founded, granting a seat to the Metwalis. The latter, however, were for the most part poor and ignorant farmers, and politically weak. They were under the control of the grand families of local lords, like the Āl Ṣaġir at Jabal ʿĀmel, who acted as intermediaries between the population and the Ottoman administration. Within this setting, the Shiʿite ulama were objectively allies of these families, on which they financially depended, since they received no subsidy from the Ottoman state (On the situation of Lebanon's Shiʿites in the 19th century see Mervin, chap. 2).

After the decline due to the attacks of Jazzār Pasha in the late 18th-early 19th century, aspiring Shiʿite scholars of Jabal ʿĀmel focused their attention once more on their studies and many of them took the way to the Shiʿite holy places in Iraq, particularly Najaf, to complete their course. They returned to Lebanon imbued with the recent teachings of Shaikh Mortażā Anṣāri (1799-1864), and opened schools to disseminate them at home. The Ottoman reform period, known as *tanẓimāt*, and especially the granting of an Ottoman constitution in 1876 by the sultan resulted in social changes, the emergence of a new class of rural notables and of an urban bourgeoisie of civil servants and tradesmen. In the educational sector, this led to the opening of the first school in the Shiʿite areas of the country with a modern curriculum, which started to operate at Nabaṭiya in 1884. The school, which was founded by Reżā Solḥ, was staffed by clerics and laymen and took its roots within the Shiʿite scholarly tradition, while at the same time being open to the reformist spirit of the period. Several authors and scholars who were to play a part at the time of the emergence of modern Lebanon, such as Aḥmad Reżā, Solaymān Ẓāher, Aḥmad ʿĀref Zayn, and Moḥammad Jāber Āl Ṣafā, attended this school, either to study or to teach .They were thus influenced by the changes affecting their two poles of reference, the Ottoman Empire and the traditional world of the Shiʿite seminaries of Iraq and Persia.

In 1909, after the reinstallation of the Ottoman constitution, a Shiʿite scholar from Sidon (Ṣaydā), Aḥmad ʿĀref Zayn (1884-1960), founded *al-ʿErfān,* a review which left a profound mark on the intellectual scene of the region. This review voiced the reformist and modernist ideas of the friends of Zayn and provided a forum for the debates among the ulama. It also focused on preoccupations of the local people, and on political, social and cultural events that were liable to interest a wider audience. In fact, *al-ʿErfān* was not limited to Jabal ʿĀmel, but was meant to affect Shiʿite readers in general, as well as regional readers of all

confessions. This review contributed, among other things, to the tightening of the bonds with the Shiʿites in the holy shrine cities of Iraq. Lebanese families of the ulama, in particular, led often the way, since they already entertained close relations with their peers in Iraq, as well as with those in Persia, relations between master and disciple, affinities among students or bonds of intermarriage .

Shiʿites, in particular those of Lebanon, participated relatively little in the Arab nationalist movement, which was evolving in the late Ottoman period. This was mainly due to a lack of political maturity on their part. After the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire following its defeat in WW I, the League of Nations granted a mandate to France to administer parts of its provinces, among them the territory of present-day Lebanon. The Shiʿites of Baalbek decided to join the Arab revolt of Fayṣal, the son of the *šarif* of Mecca, who later was made king of Iraq by the British.

In the Jabal ʿĀmel region, the population was divided. The Christians, largely Maronites in union with the Roman Catholic Church, were mostly leaning toward the French. The Sunnites opted for unification with Syria, whereas the Shiʿites were divided between the two positions. In view of their hesitations, the Fayṣal's government of Damascus asked them to pronounce themselves. Subsequenty, the local population, as well as the notables and the ulama, joined on April 24, 1920 at Wādi al-Ḥojayr, the geographic center of the region, where they decided to form an allegiance with Fayṣal's Syria. This was followed by fights between armed Shiʿite and Christian groups, and finally French forces violently suppressed the Shiʿite rebellion. Finally, both the Jabal ʿĀmel and the Bekáa were joined to Mount Lebanon to form the State of Great Lebanon on 1 September 1920. Although the majority of the Shiʿites ended up accepting this situation, some of their intellectuals protested against the annexation to Syria until 1936.

In 1925, the Druzes rose up against the French. As the Shiʿites of the Bekáa had supported the Syrian revolt, the French authorities feared that those of southern Lebanon (a new term introduced for the Jabal ʿĀmel region) might join them. To make sure of their loyalty, they therefore proceeded on 17 January 1926 to grant the Shiʿites jurisdiction based on their Jaʿfari school of law, which they had demanded earlier. From then onwards, the Shiʿites formed a quasi-independent community in Lebanon and could apply their own jurisdiction in their own tribunals. This decision led to the emergence of a new Shiʿite religious class, as against the traditional one, which was

independent from the state and connected internationally with the *mojtahed*sand the *marjaʿ*sof Najaf and the other holy Shiʿite cities.

The Shiʿites of Lebanon brought their demands regularly to the attention of the government, announced them in the press, or voiced them through delegations of notables and ulama, and later through their deputies. Their areas lacked infrastructures, and they were not adequately represented in the administrative machinery and in public functions. From the 1930s onwards, a new Western-educated generation began to take part in modern political parties. In 1936, they rebelled against the mandatory authorities, against their notable personalities and other traditional political heads, as well as against their allies among the ulama. This young elite was concerned both with equal treatment of and opportunities offered to the Shiʿites in comparison with the other Lebanese communities on the one hand, and with social justice within their own community on the other (Mervin, pp. 373-80).

When Lebanon became officially independent in 1943, the Christians and Sunnites made a non-written agreement, the National Pact, completing the Constitution (see on this crucial event Zisser, chap. 3, pp. 57-67, and el-Khazen). This National Pact, as it was called, stipulated that the president of the Republic had to be a Maronite Christian, and the prime minister a Sunnite. The Shiʿites, then the country's third-largest community, did not join this pact. It was not until 1947 that they managed to impose the custom that the president of the National Assembly had to be a Shiʿite.

During this period of development of modern Lebanon, two *mojtaheds* from Jabal ʿĀmel, Moḥsen Amin and ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Šaraf-al-Din (1873-1957), who had been educated at Najaf, distinguished themselves by their teachings and by the works they wrote. The former exercised his influence from Damascus, where he lived for about fifty years and became famous through his reformist calls in favor of modern education, and pronouncements on ritual practices (he banned the rites of self-mortification and the performances of the Karbalāʾ drama during the ʿĀšurāʾ mourning ceremonies). Besides, he is the author of a well-known bio-bibliographical dictionary, *Aʿyān al-šiʿa*, and of several other distinguished works. His less prolific rival, ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Šaraf-al-Din, taught at Tyre (Ṣur), whence he exercised a political influence proceeding from the support of Arab nationalism to "Lebanism." His most famous work, translated into several languages (including Persian), is doubtless the *Morājaʿāt*, a work discussing doctrinal issues presented as a dialogue between himself and Shaikh Salim Bešri (d. 1917), the rector of Cairo's al-Azhar University, the

center of Sunnite scholarship. It is, however, quite probable that Šaraf-al-Din had made up the dialogue all by himself.

Moḥammad-Jawād Moḡniya (1904-79) was another important Lebanese scholar, who contributed significantly to Shiʿite thought. His career was cut short, however, for being imbued with a feeling for social justice and a stern critic of the affluent, he was dismissed from his post as president of the Jaʿfari court of justice by the Shiʿite notables. Thus he did not become the successor to ʿAbd-al-Ḥosayn Šaraf-al-Din. Musā Ṣadr (1928-78) was appointed instead, who belonged to the Persian branch of the Ṣadr family stemming from Jabal ʿĀmel, with whom Šaraf al-Din had relations of intermarriage. Musā Ṣadr had followed a twofold course: religious studies at Qom and Najaf, as well as economy at the faculty of law of Tehran University. He settled in Lebanon in 1959, at a time when the Shiʿite youth were tempted by nationalist ideologies, such as Nasserism and Baathism, and by Marxism, and when a new political and financial elite was emerging, supported by affluent Shiʿites who had emigrated to Africa and the Americas.

Musā Ṣadr (for the still best account of his biography and personality see Ajami) became the champion of an economically backward Shiʿite community (at the time referred to by the concept “community-class”), oppressed by their own political leaders and neglected by the government in Beirut. It was he who originally created the Superior Shiʿite Islamic Council in 1967, an organ to represent the Shiʿites, which elected him as president in 1969 and re-elected him for life in 1975. Thus, paradoxically, an Iranian cleric was working for the integration of the Shiʿite Lebanese community into the state. Musā Ṣadr was also responsible for the “Shiʿite awakening,” by mobilizing people behind himself for the defense of southern Lebanon, which was threatened on the one hand by the armed conflict between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which had made it their base since the early 1970s, and Israel, which was waging a war of attrition there. Inspired by the works of his Iranian friend ʿAli Šariaʿti, Musā Ṣadr thus referred to a re-reading of the rites of ʿĀšurāʾ, which he used as a vector for political mobilization. In 1975, he founded the Movement for the Disinherited (*Ḥarakat al-maḥrumin* and its armed branch, AMAL (an acronym for *Afwāj al-moqāwamat al-lobnāniya*, or “Lebanese Resistance Groups,” also known as *Ḥarakat Amal*, or “AMAL Movement”; *amal* means also “hope” in Arabic, another connotation it often assumed in the debates of those days). A reformist, modernist, and partisan of Islamic-Christian dialogue, Musā Ṣadr advocated non-violence at the eve of the

Lebanese civil war. In 1976, however, he broke with the Lebanese National Movement, which had regrouped the progressive leftist parties, as well as with his Palestinian allies, and thus joined the side of the Maronite Christians and that of the Lebanese state. In August 1978, he disappeared mysteriously during a trip to Libya. Although the riddle of his ultimate fate has remained unsolved, it is generally assumed that he had been killed there, perhaps as a revenge for his support of Lebanese integrity vis-à-vis armed PLO activities on her territory. Whatever the truth may be, his companion Moḥammad Mahdi Šams-al-Din (d. 2000) deputized for him and later succeeded him as president of the Superior Islamic Shiʿite Council.

Southern Lebanon was greatly affected by the large-scale Israeli invasion in 1978, known as the "Operation Litani," which caused about 2,000 deaths and displaced more than 250,000 civilians. The South Lebanon Army (SLA), a Maronite Christian militia financed and trained by Israel and led by Major Saʿd Ḥaddād (who was later replaced by Antoine Lahad), established itself in this predominantly Shiʿite region and proclaimed a "Free State of Lebanon" in 1979. These events led to an increase of politicization of the Shiʿites. In addition, the disappearance of Musā Ṣadr, who had since become known among them as the "hidden imam" (*al-emām al-moḡayyab;* note the clear analogy of this terminology to the Hidden Twelfth Imam of the Shiʿites *(al-Emām al-Ḡāʾeb),* although certainly no identification was intended), meant the beginning of a new era for AMAL. Having been directed at first by Ḥosayn Ḥosayni, a close friend of Ṣadr and a deputy of the Bekáa, AMAL was led from 1980 onwards by Nabiʾ Berri, a lawyer who was a newcomer to politics, transformed AMAL into a populist movement, led by laymen wanting to preserve their country's national integrity in these times of civil war, while at the same time calling for a reform of the Lebanese state. In the 1980s, AMAL gained in importance. In 1982, during the large showdown between the forces of the PLO and the Israeli army, Shiʿites, living in the South, were the first victims, which caused the destruction of southern Lebanon and the inflow of thousands of displaced people into the cities further north, especially into the southern suburbs of Beirut, and a massive wave of emigrations towards West Africa and Germany.

Subsequently, the Lebanese Shiʿites turned towards community mobilization, largely abandoning the secular leftist parties. The National Movement was dissolved in 1982. In 1983, after the Palestinians had been expelled from Lebanon in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of 1982, Nabiʾ Berri agreed to

join the Committee of Public Security and to participate in a "government of national union" in order to put an end to the Maronite Christian hegemony over Lebanon. In coalition with the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) of the Druze politician Walid Jumblatt (Jānbolāṭ, b. 1949), AMAL seized western Beirut in 1984, with the support of Syria. Following this incident, AMAL fought from 1985 to 1988 the "war of camps" against the PLO who tried a comeback in Lebanon. However, although the Shiʿites altogether agreed to prevent the PLO from conducting further armed operations on Lebanese soil, this position was difficult to hold against the other large Lebanese communities (Maronites, Sunnis, and Druzes), who seized the opportunity to weaken AMAL. As a result, Hezbollah (Ḥezb Allāh lit. "The Party of God"), a new Shiʿite organization, gained influence and made headlines in the international press with spectacular military actions.

Hezbollah had come out into the open in 1982, at the time of the Israeli invasion, whose target had been the stamping out the PLO presence and influence in Lebanon and ensuring a Christian political predominance over the country. Hezbollah, a staunch supporter of the Islamic Revolution in Persia, in turn, rallied groups of Shiʿite fighters who were disappointed by AMAL's legitimist position and its acceptance of a compromise with the Christians and Israel. Its members were recruited among the disadvantaged Shiʿite population, the "disinherited," and especially the displaced from the South. They were inspired by the writings of Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Fażl-Allāh, a Lebanese *mojtahed* who had been close to the Iraqi cleric Moḥammad-Bāqer Ṣadr, at Najaf, where he had joined the outlawed Daʿwa party (on this organization see Marcinkowski, 2004, pp. 27 ff.) before preaching a revolutionary Islam in Lebanon. However, Fażl-Allāh always supported the traditional religious leadership of the Shiʿite community (*marjaʿiya*) of Najaf's Grand Ayatollah (Āyat-Allāh) Sayyed Abu'l-Qāsem Ḵoʾi (1899-1991), of which he was the official agent *(wakil)* in Lebanon, against that of Ayatollah Ruḥ-Allāh Khomeini (Ḵomeyni) (ca. 1902-89). Fażl-Allāh even denied any direct relation with the Hezbollah. Nevertheless, he was said to be its spiritual leader. At any rate, scholars are divided regarding this point.

The creation of the Hezbollah (see Shapira), the result of a coalition of different political and armed groups issuing from the existing movements and parties, was particularly encouraged by Iran. The bonds between the Iranian revolutionaries and the Shiʿites of Lebanon have to be considered a result of the late 1970s, when several AMAL executives played a part in preparing the

Revolution of 1979 in Iran. Iranians, including Aḥmad Khomeini, the son of Ayatollah Khomeini, came to train with the militia in Lebanon. Others, like Moṣṭafā Čamrān (d. 1981), had been the executives of the movement before returning to Iran, where they occupied important positions. The Islamic Republic of Iran, however, could not count on AMAL to export the revolution, and hence relied on the Hezbollah. It was to the latter that Persia granted all its support, both military and financial. From 1982 onwards, it stationed "revolutionary guards" (*pāsdārān)* in Baalbek in order to provide military training to the Shiʿite militias. This was only possible with the support of Syria, which from then on continued exercising its control over the radical Shiʿite armed groups. Once the major part of the Iranian troops had left, there were to remain between 300 and 500 revolutionary guards stationed in the Bekáa. The Iranian ambassador at Damascus, ʿAli-Akbar Moḥtašami, coordinated the activities of the Hezbollah, whose aim it was to found an Islamic state in Lebanon, which was to follow the patterns provided by the Iranian example. Based on a solid and well-organized bulk of supporters at the service of a resolutely anti-Western ideology and directed against Lebanese multi-confessionalism, the Hezbollah took violent political actions, especially against the American presence in Lebanon and resorted to the taking of hostages. At the same time, Hezbollah also attempted to be of use to the population in the disadvantaged Shiʿite regions by providing social services and building hospitals and schools.

Yet, the main purpose of the Hezbollah continued to be its armed resistance against the Israeli occupation. From 1982 onwards, it was joined in this purpose by the "Islamic AMAL," which was founded by a dissident of the AMAL, Ḥosayn Musawi, in the Bekáa. In 1985, the Israeli army withdrew from Lebanon, except from a so-called "security" zone, which covered half of southern Lebanon. The Hezbollah then seriously began to resist the Israeli army and its local ally, the Maronite Army of Southern Lebanon by initiating a guerilla war with about 5,000 fighters (see Qassem; Picard; Pohl-Schöberlein; Rieck).

The rivalry between AMAL and Hezbollah has regularly provoked skirmishes between the two forces. The confrontation reached its peak in 1988, with the "war for the supremacy over southern Lebanon," which finally ended in January 1989 with the intervention of Syrian diplomats and of ʿAli-Akbar Welāyati, the then Persian minister of foreign affairs. In that year, the first congress of the Hezbollah elected Sobḥi Ṭofayli, a cleric, its general secretary.

In 1991, ʿAbbās Musawi was elected, and the Party of God began to cooperate with other political organizations. Musawi was assassinated by the Israelis in 1992, as several other leaders of the Hezbollah had been, such as Rāḡeb Ḥarb in 1984. Ḥasan Naṣr-Allāh was elected to replace Musawi. After the Taef (al-Ṭāʾef) agreement of 1989, which put an end to the Lebanese civil war, dissolved the militias, and resulted in some changes to the Constitution ,the 1990s marked a change in the policy of the Hezbollah, which was more and more recognized as a force of "national resistance" by many Lebanese from all communities. The organization strengthened its network of social aid and developed its media system (periodicals, TV and radio systems, etc.). The West was no longer seen as an enemy to destroy. There was no longer a question of founding an Islamic state, but instead to become integrated within the Lebanese state and society. This policy of accommodation provoked Sobḥi Ṭofayli and his Movement of the Famished in the Bekáa to split off from Hezbollah in 1996. Hezbollah participated even in the Lebanese legislative elections of 1992, and later in those of 1996 and 2000, and won seats in them. The Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 was followed by the break-up of the Army of Southern Lebanon, which was a victory for the Hezbollah, whose active resistance was mainly responsible for the withdrawal. Nevertheless, Hezbollah had thus lost its raison d'être, namely the notion of resistance. Two options were now available to the party, which wavered between them: to turn towards the issue of Palestine and continue the struggle against Israel, or to turn towards the interior and continue the process of the party's "Lebanization" .

In the mid-1990s, Moḥammad Ḥosayn Fażl-Allāh rejected the *marjaʿiya* of ʿAli Ḵāmenaʾi, who had succeeded Khomeini (d. 1989) as the spiritual leader of Iran and presented himself as *marjaʿ*. Advocating modernist ideas, he acquired a large number of partisans in Lebanon, in the Gulf region, and among Iraqi members of the Daʿwa party. He hence distanced himself from both Iran and the Hezbollah, whose official leader *(qāʾed)* was Ḵāmenaʾi.

Since the Taef agreements, Nabiʾ Berri, the leader of AMAL, has reinforced his position by being elected president of the parliament in 1992, 1996, and 2000. The rivalry between the two Shiʿite formations has hence only increased, even though the Shiʿites of Lebanon have managed to take their place on the country's political scene.

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