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Hizballah and Wilayat al-Faqih

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Background

One of the characteristics of the Shiite Muslim world is pluralism of religious authority. A Shiite believer is entitled to choose a figure of religious authority, follow his rulings and turn to him with any questions pertaining to Islamic law. Sometimes, the believer chooses a religious authority who is not affiliated with his country of residence or national identity. For example, an Iraqi or Lebanese believer can choose an Iranian religious authority, or vice versa. However, due to reasons of national affinity, convenience and accessibility (the ability to communicate in the same language, the possibility of direct access to the religious authority), most Shiites prefer to choose a local religious authority from their own country and sometimes even one who lives nearby.

In addition, there is no organized system in Shiite Islam that evaluates, ordains and ranks religious sages. A person who studies at one of the prominent Shiite centers of learning (and particularly in Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran) is likely to receive various titles, depending on the type and length of study. An extended period of study in Islamic law bestows upon the student the formal title of *Mujtahid* – someone who is authorized to interpret Islamic law in a way that obligates the believers. When a scholar reaches the level that entitles him to authorize others as *Mujtahidun*, he receives, through broad yet informal recognition, the title of *Ayatollah*. The highest rank is *Ayatollah 'Uzma* (Grand Ayatollah), which is also considered a source of emulation (*Marja' Taqlid*) for his followers.

As noted, the entire process of bestowing authority is amorphous and based on the success of the religious sage to create for himself a wide community of believers, or an image of himself as someone who enjoys such support. Sometimes, a person who calls himself (and is called by his supporters) *Ayatollah 'Uzma* is not defined as such by others. Usually, there are more than ten religious sages in the Shiite world who receive this title.

It is also important to note that the overwhelming majority of Shiite religious sages – until the Islamic Revolution in Iran – believed that they should focus solely on religious matters and leave the political rule in the hands of the “secular” rulers (that is, secular in the sense that they are not religious figures), while making an effort to convince them to avoid crossing certain “red lines” on issues of religion and Islamic law. This approach is based on the fundamental Shiite outlook of anticipating the return of the hidden imam, who, upon his return, will lead the *Umma* [the Islamic community] in all aspects. And until then, there is no one who can “step into his shoes.”

The Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979) introduced a new outlook into the Shiite world, inspired by Ayatollah Khomeini, whose famous work *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih)* argued that it was no longer necessary to wait for the return of the hidden imam and that religious sages should take the reins of government into their own hands, in accordance with the model the Prophet Muhammad himself established: a combination of religious and political leader at one and the same time.

According to Khomeini, there should be no separation between religion and state (the separation is an imperialist plot) and “Islam is political or is nothing at all.” Khomeini placed himself at the top of the pyramid as *Wali Faqih* [supreme jurist], also bearing the title of “the leader” (*Rahbar* in Farsi).

Khomeini also instituted a revolutionary change in Iranian Shiite thought on the subject of nationalism. While the traditional approach was closely linked to Iranian nationalism, Khomeini formulated an approach that denies the existence of peoples and states in Islam, and aspires to implement Islamic unity on the basis of “the Muslim *Umma*” – as in the days of the Prophet Muhammad. He defined himself, first and foremost, as a “Muslim” and not as an “Iranian” or as a “Shiite,” and also regarded the revolution as an Islamic revolution rather than an Iranian or Shiite one. According to Khomeini, the concept of nationalism is contrary to Islam, which is designed to rise above feelings of local affinity and create a united Islamic world. He argued that it was Western imperialism that introduced the national idea in order to divide the “Islamic homeland” into “ephemeral states.” The principle of “exporting the revolution” (*Sudur Inqilab*) also derives from this teaching, because seizing control of the government in Iran was no more than a starting point for a comprehensive Islamic revolution that will lead to the liberation of the oppressed (*al-Mustaz’afin*) in all of human society.

And indeed, Shiite believers outside of Iran also began to regard the Iranian *Wali Faqih* – Ayatollah Khomeini and subsequently his successor Khamene’i – as the surrogate for the hidden imam and also, in this capacity, as the successor to ‘Ali (around whose heroic image Shi’ism developed) and the twelve imams who succeeded him. Since ‘Ali and the imams are defined as “infallible” and are accorded a degree of sanctity, the attribution of such qualities to contemporary leaders, who are mortal human beings, is problematic. This is controversial even in Iran itself, and all the more so outside of Iran.

This issue became even more problematic following the death of Khomeini (in 1989), who enjoyed a status of holiness among a large part of the public in Iran, and the appointment of Khamene’i to the role of leader (and *Wali Faqih*). Khamene’i was chosen for the position by his colleagues in the religious leadership primarily because of his political skills, and less for his religious qualifications as an arbiter of Islamic law. During the ensuing years, an ongoing effort has been made to improve Khamene’i’s image as a religious adjudicator worthy of the title of *Wali Faqih*, and the list of his writings on religion and Islamic law grew much longer. Nonetheless, his lack of charisma enabled other religious sages in Iran and throughout the Shiite world, including Lebanon, to free themselves from the “shadow” of Khomeini and present themselves as an alternative Islamic authority to the Iranian leader.

Hizballah and the Wilayat al-Faqih: The Early Years

The success of the Islamic revolution in Iran instilled a new spirit among the Shiites in Lebanon. However, there were many differences in approach between the Iranian revolutionary

leadership and Amal, the main group that represented the Shiites in Lebanon during that period. Most importantly, Amal did not recognize the notion of *Wilayat al-Faqih* and opposed the vision of exporting the Iranian Revolution. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982 destabilized the balance of power within the Shiite community as well, and Iran began to regard Lebanon as the ideal place to realize its vision. Inspired by Iran, which operated in Lebanon primarily via the Revolutionary Guards, a new echelon of clerics arose who were not dependent on the Shiite establishment. This new echelon felt and acted like representatives of the Imam Khomeini. This was the foundation upon which the Hizballah movement was built.

And indeed, from the outset, Hizballah developed a pan-Islamic ideology that called for a state in Lebanon that would be based on the *Shari’a* [Islamic law] and would be an integral part of an all-embracing Islamic state, centered in Iran and ruled by the *Wali Faqih* – Ayatollah ‘Uzma Ruhollah Khomeini. This scenario includes discarding the Lebanese national identity and adopting the Iranian flag as the movement’s flag.

This approach is expressed in the movement’s first manifesto (in February 1985) in the form of a public letter (An Open Letter – The Hizballah Program) published by the organization. The letter states unequivocally:

- “We are often asked: Who are we, the Hizballah, and what is our identity? We are the sons of the *Umma* [Muslim community] - the party of God (*Hizb Allah*) the vanguard of which was made victorious by God in Iran. There the vanguard succeeded to lay down the bases of a Muslim state, which plays a central role in the world. We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and *Faqih* [jurist] who fulfills all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini. God save him!
- By virtue of the above, we do not constitute an organized and closed party in Lebanon, nor are we a tight political cadre. We are an *Umma* linked to the Muslims of the whole world by the solid doctrinal and religious connection of Islam, whose message God wanted to be fulfilled by the Seal of the Prophets, i.e., Muhammad. This is why whatever touches or strikes the Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines and elsewhere reverberates throughout the whole Muslim *Umma* of which we are an integral part. Our behavior is dictated to us by legal principles laid down by the light of an overall political conception defined by the leading jurist (*Wilayat al-Faqih*).
- As for our culture, it is based on the Holy Quran, the Sunna and the legal rulings of the *Faqih* who is our source of imitation (*Marja’ al-Taqlid*). Our culture is crystal clear. It is not complicated and is accessible to all.”

This public ideological stance was possible as long as Hizballah maintained its pure jihadist identity, focused primarily on the struggle against “the Zionist enemy,” and as long as the fervor of the Iranian Revolution was at its peak and the revolutionary shock waves also echoed outside of Iran, including in the Lebanese Shiite community (which was already in the midst of an ongoing civil war that severely eroded the sense of Lebanese national identity).

The Gradual Change in the Public Stance

However, a series of developments subsequent led Hizballah to gradually blur its declarative stance on this issue. Eventually, for example, the Open Letter from 1985 could no longer be found on the movement's Internet sites. Instead, Hizballah gave prominence to its election platforms for the Lebanese parliament, which refrained from mentioning the *Wilayat al-Faqih*. There were various reasons for this change:

- A gradual reduction in revolutionary fervor in Iran itself, Iran's recognition of its lack of success in "exporting the revolution" to the Muslim world, which, in general, overwhelmingly rejected the notion that a Shiite, non-Arab religious sage would serve as a spiritual authority – and even a political authority – for the entire Muslim nation. (Iran did not succeed in gaining real influence in any Sunni state. And even in the Shiite world, Hizballah constitutes the only significant success.)
- The death in 1989 of Khomeini – the symbol of the revolution – and the appointment of Khamene'i as his replacement. Khamene'i, as noted, did not enjoy a lofty religious status.
- The gradual change in Hizballah as it began to operate in areas other than jihad, including its entry into political life in Lebanon, which led it to gradually adopt national Lebanese symbols and rhetoric (the process of "Lebanonization" of the movement).

The Challenge of Fadlallah

In addition to these substantial reasons, the movement was forced to contend with a challenge "from within" – by Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, based on the fundamental Shiite principle of pluralism of religious authority. Fadlallah, born in 1935, is the son of a Lebanese scholar who emigrated to Najaf in Iraq to pursue religious studies. He was born and grew up in Najaf in an ascetic and scholarly atmosphere, was identified as a prodigy at a young age, and displayed unusual interests for an Islamic cleric – writing poetry and reading Western and secular Arab literature. He returned to Beirut in the mid-1960s and began to establish the *da'wa* network (health clinics, youth clubs, schools) and to establish his religious authority among the Shiite population in Lebanon. The Islamic revolution in Iran presented a dilemma for him. On the one hand, he expressed great excitement over the precedent of the rise of an Islamist force to power. On the other hand, the pretension of Ayatollah Khomeini to serve as a religious and political authority for all Muslims and, even more so, for all Shiites, hurt his growing status as an arbiter of Islamic law.

Against this background, Fadlallah – who was identified in Lebanon and elsewhere as the spiritual mentor of Hizballah in its early years – preferred to maintain his independence and to express ideas that were not acceptable to Iran. Among other issues, he defined the idea of a single Islamic state headed by Khomeini as impossible: "The modern circumstances in which we live today as Muslims ... have made the idea of a single global state irrelevant."

As long as Khomeini was alive, Fadlallah operated in the shadow

of a higher religious authority. Khomeini's death in 1989 freed him from this and he began to prepare himself to join the small list of grand (*'Uzma*) ayatollahs – the handful of Shiite clerics to be able to claim worldwide support. Fadlallah's supporters began to hint that he was no lesser than Khamene'i from a religious perspective, and he himself expected Khamene'i's religious authority to reign only within the bounds of Iran. When this failed to occur, he announced that the *Marja'iyya* is not a monopoly of Iran and that he recognizes the authority of 'Ali al-Sistani from Najaf (today the predominant religious figure in Iraq).

However, Fadlallah later began to also criticize the large Shiite academies in Najaf and Qom. In 1995 (about ten years after his followers began to call him "ayatollah"), he advanced another step when he published a thick volume (1,200 questions and answers on a variety of religious issues) that is considered an essential condition for being recognized as a *Marja'*. A year later, the Masjid al-Imamayn mosque was inaugurated in the Harat Hreik neighborhood, financed by a rich Kuwaiti donor, and Fadlallah began to conduct mass prayer services on Fridays. From this point, he worked to position himself as one of the two or three great lights of Shi'ism in his generation, whose influence extended beyond Lebanon and embraces half of the Shiite world (that is, outside of Iran).

Fadlallah's decision to become a *Marja'* is explained on his Internet site as follows: "...following the deaths of the great Islamic leader, Sayyid al-Khoei and Imam Khomeini, and after the passing away of all the symbols of the first generation [of *Maraji'*] such as Sayyid al-Kalbakani, who undertook the task of issuing *Fatwas* as a religious authority, a great **vacuum** was left. People from various regions came to the Sayyid and asked him to undertake this task."

(See: <http://english.bayynat.org.lb/biography/index.htm>). This clearly indicates that according to Fadlallah, the leader of Iran, Khamene'i, was unable to fill the vacuum his predecessors left behind. Later, Fadlallah has also developed the idea that religious authority should not be embodied in a single personality but instead should be expressed by establishing an institution of Islamic law that comprises a collective of clerics.

Over the years, Fadlallah has come under attack for these and other views he holds. Proclamations have been issued against him in Lebanon and elsewhere, and he has consistently refrained from visiting Iran. Nonetheless, Fadlallah, until his death in July 2010, had a large community of supporters in Lebanon, apparently also among those who define themselves as supporters of Hizballah. (We lack data that would enable us to assess this.) Consequently, Hizballah showed great sensitivity on this issue and refrains from emphasizing its disagreements with Fadlallah, who was once considered to be the spiritual mentor of the movement. Thus, for example, the code of behavior for Hizballah activists explicitly stipulates that they refrain from any attack, even an implicit one, against the religious sages (*'Ulama*), and that it is forbidden to even engage in arguments that are liable to lead to this.

The Art of Mixed Messages

In light of all this, the movement developed a vague declarative policy, which could be based also on the Shiite principle of *Taqiyya* – the possibility of concealing or blurring the message if it has the potential of endangering the interests of the Shiite community.

Thus, on the one hand, in the mass demonstrations the movement occasionally organizes, the flag of the Lebanese state is prominently displayed alongside the Hizballah flag. The secretary-general, Nasrallah, and the rest of the movement's spokesmen frequently portray Hizballah as an organization working on behalf of the Lebanese national interest, and the struggle against Israel is presented as designed to liberate the Lebanese lands occupied by Israel (today, after the Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon, The Shebaa Farms). The Iranian directive to fight in the name of Islam against "the Little Satan" (i.e. Israel) until its destruction, is generally downplayed in favor of the "national" arguments especially in Hizballah public statements.

Similarly, the notion of absolute loyalty to the Iranian *Wali Faqih* (Khamene'i) is also downplayed. It is almost never mentioned in the speeches of the secretary-general, Nasrallah. When he deviated from this practice and declared in May 2008 that, "I declare today, and there is nothing new in this, that I am proud to be a member of the party of *Wilayat al-Faqih* – the Lebanese newspaper *al-Nahar* expressed surprise (on June 12, 2008) about the timing of this explicit and direct statement "for the first time in the 25-year history of Hizballah."

Nonetheless, in the movement's ideological literature and periodicals (*al-Bayan*, *Baqiyyat Allah*, *Sada al-Wilaya*), and also on its Internet sites, the absolute loyalty to the Iranian leader is not concealed at all, though there is no longer a call for abolishing the Lebanese political entity, as there was during the initial years. The loyalty to the leader is presented in classical Shiite terms: The leader is the successor of 'Ali and the surrogate for the Imam al-Mahdi. Therefore, loyalty to Khomeini in the past and to Khamene'i today is the natural continuation of the loyalty (*Wilaya*) to 'Ali that is required as an institutional basis for Shi'ism and for which Shi'ism finds support in the Koran itself.¹

Moreover, the obedience to the *Wali Faqih* is a continuation of obedience to Allah. This is because: "Obedience to the *Wali Faqih* is the driving force of the life and activity of the resistance [Hizballah] and the factor that gives it strength and security. If not for this obedience, the movement would not have achieved its holiness, would not have mobilized the holy fighters [*Mujahidin*] and would not have reached the banks of victory."²

The *Sada al-Wilaya* [Echo of Governing] periodical, published by Hizballah's main cultural unit, mainly focuses on the current Iranian leader, 'Ali Khamene'i, who is referred to as the *Wali Amr al-Muslimim* – that is, the leader of all Muslims. The aim of this periodical, which primarily includes articles, speeches, memoirs and rulings by Khamene'i, is to instill in the consciousness of the activists the character of the leader as a source of authority and as a pan-Islamic leader.

In Hizballah's publications, Khamene'i is portrayed as a teacher of religious law in regard to both global and everyday issues, responding to the religious questions of the believers. Occasionally, other Islamic sages are also mentioned, such as Musa Sadr – the leader of the Shiite in Lebanon during the 1970s and the founder of the Amal movement (who, as a martyr, cannot pose a threat to the leader's standing) – or Iraqi sages. However, on the other hand, Fadlallah and his lofty religious status are completely ignored.

In Hizballah's publications, the words of praise for the religious-legal abilities of the leader Khamene'i are designed also, to contend with the prevailing views regarding his weaknesses in these areas. Thus, one of the leading religious sages in Iran - Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi - after listening to the Iranian leader's words at a religious conference, is quoted as saying: "The words of the leader lasted two hours, but were so comprehensive and complete that the listener might assume that, despite the heavy pressures he bears in his position, he did nothing else for two months other than prepare this lecture."³

The art of mixed messages is prominently expressed in a book by Na'im Qasim, the deputy secretary-general of the movement, entitled: *Hizballah – The Path, the Experience and the Future* (published in Beirut in 2002). On the one hand, Qasim argues that any Muslim who is committed to his Islamic faith and its *Shari'a* necessarily incorporates the goal of establishing a single Islamic state as one of the natural expressions of his faith. Thus, there is no alternative to adopting a general plan for linking the parts of the nation to each other.⁴ This can be possible only through the rule of the *Wali Faqih*. The idea of *Wilayat al-Faqih* represents continuity with the rule of the Prophet and the Imams, and the *Wali* is the deputy of the Imam or his surrogate in leading the nation.⁵

The Muslim person needs a religious mentor (*Marja' Taqlid*) to guide him in all things pertaining to the religious commandments and rules of behavior in his everyday life, and he also needs a leader (*Wali Faqih*) to set the general policy of the nation's life, including issues of war and peace. Since it is impossible to separate everyday issues from the general issues the nation faces, the *Marja' Taqlid* and the *Wali Faqih* merge into a single person – the Iranian leader. This *Wilaya* is essential for preserving and implementing Islam, and it is impossible to pursue the completion of the grand Islamic plan via private initiatives or separate action.⁶

In addition, according to Qasim, there is no connection between the national origin of the *Wali Faqih* and his rule, just as there is no connection between the national origin of the *Marja' Taqlid* and his *Marja'iyya* (field of religious authority). He can be Iraqi, or Iranian, or Lebanese, or Kuwaiti, or from any another origin – the main thing is that he acts on behalf of Islam. The areas of his rule are limited by the extent of his support from the believers.⁷

On the other hand, Qasim argues, one must distinguish between an ideological outlook and its implementation in practice: Ideologically, one should call for the establishment of the Islamic

.Al-Bayan, June 2004 1
.Baqiyyat Allah, Volume 125, February 2002 2

.Baqiyyat Allah, Volume 160, 2005 3
.Qasim, al-Minhaj, al-Tajruba, al-Mustaqbal (Beirut, 2002), pages 38-39 4
.Qasim, pages 80-81 5
.Qasim, pages 68-72 6
.Qasim, page 75 7

state and encourage others to accept it. However, on the practical level, this requires the agreement of the Lebanese people and an Islamic state cannot be established by a particular group that imposes its view on the other groups.⁸

Moreover, Qasim argues that the loyalty to the *Wali Faqih* is an obligation of every Muslim, including those who affiliate themselves with another *Marja' Taqlid* in regard to everyday matters. This is because the reins of governance in all things pertaining to the general Islamic destiny are in the hands of the *Wali Faqih*.⁹ Thus, Qasim contradicts his previous argument that the *Marja' Taqlid* and *Wali Faqih* merge into a single person – the Iranian leader – and grants indirect legitimacy to Shiites in Lebanon to choose a *Marja' Taqlid* who is not Khamene'i. In our view, what stands behind these verbal acrobatics is Qasim's recognition of the fact that there are Shiites, even within the Hizballah movement itself, who regard other religious sages (such as Fadlallah) as their *Marja' Taqlid* on everyday questions of Islamic practice.

In regard to the decision-making process in the movement, Qasim makes it clear that Hizballah basically adheres to the *Wali Faqih*. However, the ongoing management of affairs in the various areas (the Lebanese political arena, the struggle against Israel, culture and society) are in the hands of the elected leadership in Lebanon – the consultative council (*Majlis al-Shura*) – headed by the secretary-general, who derives his authority from the *Wali Faqih*. The council has broad decision-making authorities and there is no need for the *Wali Faqih* to supervise it on a daily basis.¹⁰

Teaching the Idea of Wilayat al-Faqih

In contrast to the cautious, vague and downplayed public position, documents captured during the Second Lebanon War indicate that Hizballah never ceased to inculcate the idea as a basic ideological concept, as part of the indoctrination administered to those who join the organization.

Hizballah already begins to instill the idea in its "Imam al-Mahdi Scouts" Association, whose publications state that one of the objectives of the youth movement is "to build an improved Islamic generation, based upon the principle of *Wilayat Faqih*".

During the stage of recruitment for the movement, the candidates who are in the "preparation" stage (a one-year preliminary stage for acceptance into Hizballah) are asked about their current views. This includes such questions as: "Define the religious leadership that constitutes a continuation of the rule of the Imams, peace be upon them?" "Is obedience to *Wilayat al-Faqih* mandatory or optional, and on which issues?" "Who constitutes the religious leadership in Lebanon?" "Do you think that it is an obligation to establish the Islamic state, and when?" In addition, the candidates are asked: "Who is the source of emulation for you, in the past, in the present and from which point in time?" These questions are designed to probe the internal makeup of those wishing to join the organization. It is possible that in the early stage there are no "wrong" answers to any of those

questions for new comers, which would disqualify them.

Subsequently, however, as part of the educational program the trainees undergo, they need to internalize the organization's views. And among the subjects taught during the "preparation" stage are, for example, "the role of the blessed Islamic Republic (Iran) in motivating Muslims," "granting refuge to the Islamic resistance [that is, Hizballah] and supporting it," "the biography of Imam Khomeini," and "The question of the source of authority of Imam Khamene'i."

In order to verify the success of the indoctrination on these topics, a reassessment of the recruits' abilities and beliefs is conducted every few months. Thus, a document from Hizballah's personnel administration unit in Jabal 'Amil on the subject of "Setup and Program – The Preparation Stage," which discusses the training program for the candidates, explicitly defines loyalty to the *Wali al-Faqih* as one of the four mandatory conditions for acceptance into the organization. The three other conditions are: faith, the spirit of jihad and the spirit of mission. Loyalty to the *Wali al-Faqih* is defined as "the continuation of loyalty to the imams." Thus, obedience to the *Wali al-Faqih* is obligatory.

It should also be noted that those who have worked for at least a year in an organized framework (including as a volunteer) at institutions that operate under the patronage of the *Wilayat al-Faqih* (Iranian-sponsored institutions in Lebanon) even receive an exemption from the "preparation" stage and can immediately join the organization.

Ramifications for the Status of Secretary-General Nasrallah

The fact that the Hizballah movement instills in its personnel the principle of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, according to which the supreme authority on religious and political matters is in the hands of an ostensibly "foreign" leader (the ruler of another state, and even a non-Arab one), was liable to hurt the standing of the movement's leader. However, this did not happen and Hassan Nasrallah became a symbol of success even beyond the borders of Lebanon and one of the most admired figures in the Arab world.

In our view, a central reason for this is the fact that Nasrallah heads a movement and is not a head of state. As such, the support of a regional power actually strengthens rather than weakens him. The fact that a regional power stands behind the Hizballah movement and provides military, financial and moral assistance empowers it with state-like capabilities, while at the same time enabling it to maintain "ideological purity" as a "revolutionary" movement.

In addition, Nasrallah, despite the fact that he does not refrain from speaking on religious topics and incorporates Islamic motifs in his speeches, does not present himself as a senior authority on questions of Islamic law, but primarily as the movement's political and military leader. Consequently, his subordination to the Iranian *Wali Faqih* on religious issues cannot harm his status

(as opposed to the status of Fadlallah, who constituted before his death a challenge to the very notion of *Wilayat al-Faqih*).

An additional factor, of course, is Nasrallah's natural charisma

.Qasim, page 38 8
.Qasim, page 75 9
.Qasim, page 76 10

(which sharply contrasts with the lack of charisma of the Iranian leader, Khamene'i). This has enabled Nasrallah to turn himself into an impressive public "brand name," without seeking refuge in the shadow of the leader.

Summary

The Hizballah movement's absolute loyalty to the idea of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, which subjects it to the authority of a non-Lebanese figure (the Iranian leader), was and remains a central element in the movement's life. During its early years, it proudly emphasized this idea. Subsequently, however, a variety of reasons (the death of Khomeini, Hizballah's entry into political life in Lebanon, the challenge of Fadlallah) led the movement to downplay this idea in its public statements and to make relatively scarce mention of it.

Nonetheless, in its internal publications and ideological periodicals, expressions of absolute loyalty to the Iranian leader have continually appeared. Adherence to this principle is presented as a basic tenet of belief that is incumbent upon all Shiite believers.

Moreover, documents captured during the Second Lebanon War indicate that contrary to the cautious public position, which blurs and downplays the issue, Hizballah has never ceased to instill the idea as a fundamental ideological concept in its indoctrination process for those joining the organization. The idea is already inculcated in Hizballah's Scouts movement ("Imam al-Mahdi Scouts" Association) and among older recruits, and the extent of its assimilation is periodically assessed.

The fact that the Hizballah movement indoctrinates its personnel with the principle of *Wilayat al-Faqih*, according to which the supreme authority on religious and political matters is in the hands of an ostensibly "foreign" leader (the ruler of another state, and even a non-Arab one), was liable to hurt the standing of the movement's leader. However, this did not happen and Hassan Nasrallah became a symbol of success even beyond the borders of Lebanon and one of the most admired figures in the Arab world.

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In summary, Hizballah has succeeded in enjoying both worlds – operating as a legitimate Lebanese movement, while continuing to regard the Iranian leader as the supreme authority and to receive religious, political, economic and military backing from a strong regional power.

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