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In the Path of Hizbullah, By Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, Syracuse University Press, New York, 2004, pp. x plus 196, Price not mentioned.

Reviewed by S. A. M. Pasha

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Of late, much academic attention has been geared towards understanding the meaning of Islam for contemporary life. Excepting a few scholarly works, such a focused attention has resulted in creating a constructed image of Islam. Happily deviating from such a reigning trend, the book under review, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, deconstructs Islamic phenomenon, unveiling it from the cobwebs of tendentiousness.

The volume's author, Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, who teaches political science at the Beirut-centered American university, is well-positioned to write it because of his in-depth knowledge of Lebanon and the countries neighbouring it.

The book under consideration is organised into six insightful chapters buttressed by an analytical rigour, which involved the employment of Western social scientific tools and the indigenous ones of Islamology/Islamic methodology. This unique synergistic endeavor amply informs this volume. Themes incorporated in these chapters are the factors that contributed to the rise of Hizbullah, the Weltanschauung of Hizbullah, and its structural dimensions with emphasis on its clerical and non-clerical leadership, and its functional styles. Each one of these chapters is engrossing and deserves a reading with an open mind. The reviewer's perusal of the volume has convinced him that there is more to Hizbullah than what is attributed to it by tendentious Western media, political class, and some sections of the academia. According to them, Hizbullah is a "terrorist organisation", pure and simple.

The political landscape of Lebanon is characterised by an ubiquity of Hizbullah. The latter morphed into its present enviable status leaving behind its recent history of trials and tribulations. To top them all, it led a successful campaign of the Israeli military withdrawal from South Lebanon on 25 May 2000. This becomes all the more salient when viewed in perspective: the state of Lebanon, as it stands fragmented, has not had any role to play in this Israeli denouement. In the world of the author: "Hizbullah has done more to combat Israel than any other force in Lebanon or even in the Arab world" (p.90).

The research base for this work is primarily drawn from English and Arabic sources. The insights drawn from the author's interviews of apex functionaries of Hizbullah are incorporated into the analytical frame of the work. Arabic newspapers and journals are made use of in ample measure, thereby drawing into the work's vortex the impulses of the Arab populace and elite.

In the opinion of the author (with which the reviewer concurs), it is difficult to designate the Hizbullah as the political party, *stricto sensu*, following the Western classificatory system. It is

an Islamist movement; a liberation/resistance movement; a social service (civil society) entity; a politico-economic and a moral force; a state within a state, all at once. To subsume all these diverse roles within the confines of a political party is to do injustice to it.

Media descriptions of the Hizbullah as terrorist are a commonplace occurrence; in contradistinction to this constructed image, its other identity, to borrow the author's coinage, is reflected also in its "Gradualist Pragmatist" nature. Both the postures/tactics unveil its *modus vivendi*. Its "Gradualist Pragmatist" rule, *inter alia*, is reflected in its propensity to contest election, both at the national and local levels: Lebanese parliament and municipalities respectively. At both the levels, Hizbullah registered significant gains, thus making it a political force of a significant import. To wit: "Hizbullah was the first Islamist bloc in the history of Lebanon to enter Parliament" (p.113).

In effect, the present study, in a consistent fashion, "liberates" Hizbullah from its demonic portrayals, which characterise the existing literary gloss on the subject, barring a few. However, the author would have done well to situate the Hizbullah, in an analogical milieu, by drawing upon the track records of other Islamist movements and organisations that straddle the political map of Islamism beyond Lebanon. However, this is not true to detract from the volume's merit.