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IN THE NAME OF MUQAWAMA:
THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF HEZBOLLAH'S SUPPORT
FOR THE ASSAD REGIME

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The landscape of the Middle East changed in December 2010 as Tunisians rose up in protest against the dictatorial Ben Ali regime. Protests quickly spread throughout the Middle East, rising up against regimes in Egypt, Bahrain, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. Beginning in March 2011, the Syrian protesters engaged in conflict with the violent and brutal Assad regime. Although protests did not spread to Lebanon, the ongoing conflict in Syria affected its neighbor. As the protests became protracted it was clear that Hezbollah would have to publicly address the issue of the Syrian conflict. On May 25th 2011, nearly four months after the Syrian uprising began, Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah gave a speech on the regional unrest in the Middle East, in which he backed the Syrian regime over the fledgling opposition.^{1, 2}

Many within Lebanon and throughout the region found Hezbollah's stance on the Syrian uprising hypocritical when compared to the party's support for the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Libya.³ Nasrallah responded to the accusations of hypocrisy by providing four primary reasons for Hezbollah's continued support for the government of Syria; Syria is a regime of resistance against western imperialism, Syria has always supported, not just Hezbollah, but Lebanon as a whole, Syria's resistance towards US Middle East peace plans imperial adventures in the regions, and finally, Syrian leadership's demonstrated genuine determination for

¹ Hezbollah Media Relations. "His Eminence Sayyed Nasrallah's Full Speech Resistance & Liberation Day 2011." *Al-Manar*. 30 May 2011. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

<<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=3&cid=33&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=17623>>

² Nasrallah became the head of Hezbollah in 1992 after Israel assassinated the previous leader Abbas Musawi. Nasrallah made it a priority to acquire long-range rockets, which allowed Hezbollah to hit northern Israel even while the IDF occupied southern Lebanon. He also played a major leadership role in a 2004 prisoner exchange in which hundreds of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners were realized from Israeli prisons including the remains of his son. Upon his ascension to the position of Secretary General, Nasrallah was viewed by many as unqualified and untested for such a prestigious position within Hezbollah. He won major grassroots support by the expansion of Hezbollah's social welfare programs such as hospitals, schools, and housing for the traditionally lower class Shia of Lebanon. After Syria withdrew from their 15-year occupation of Southern Lebanon Nasrallah enjoyed a massive swell of popular support within Lebanon that crossed sectarian lines. Norton, Augustus R. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009. 4-5-99,106. Print.

³ Slim, Randa. "Hezbollah's Most Serious Challenge." *Foreign Policy*. (2011): n. pag. *The Middle East Channel*. Web. 20 Nov. 2011.

reform.^{4,5} Nasrallah continued to elaborate on these positions in a multitude of speeches throughout 2011.

Hezbollah's opponents continued to use Hezbollah's support of Assad for political gain. The Lebanese majority political alliance, March 14th stressed the Sunni nature of the uprising in Syria to galvanize its' Sunni constituency against Hezbollah's "blatant sectarian policies," simultaneously stressing the humanitarian nature of the conflict and their own sectarian interests.^{6,7} However, the viability of this strategy is questionable in the highly sectarian Lebanese system.

⁴ *Ibid.*, par 15

⁵ Starting in 1976 Syria sent troops to Lebanon at the request of then president Suleiman Frangieh. The troops were deployed to protect Christians from Muslim and Palestinian militias during the Lebanese Civil War. In the 1980s the Syrian occupation became more contentious, culminating in a war between the Lebanese Forces and the Syrian troops in 1989. Following the end of the civil war, Lebanon and Syria signed a treaty of "Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination" in May 1991, which called for joint committees to be formed and legitimized the Syrian presence in Lebanon. This allowed Syria to continue to have a significant influence over Lebanese politics. In 2004 tensions rose between former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who was against the Syrian presence in Lebanon, and then pro-Syria President Emile Lahoud. The UN Security council adopted Resolution 1559 calling for the withdrawal of all remaining Syrian forces from Lebanon, however, the next day the Lebanese parliament, under suspected pressure from Syria, voted to extend President Lahoud's term by three years. Prime Minister Hariri disagreed with the decision and resigned his office in October 2004. In February 2005 Rafiq Hariri was killed when his motorcade was bombed, sparking widespread protests against Syria, which was suspected of perpetrating the attack. On April 26, 2005, under strong international pressure, Syria withdrew its forces from Lebanon, complying with UN Security Council Resolution 1559. Congressional Research Service, *CRS Report for Congress: Lebanon*, Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011, 17-18.

⁶ Muhanna, Elias. Personal interview. 12 Feb. 2012

⁷ March 14th alliance is named after the date of the Cedar Revolution, which started, with the assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, and sparked mass protests, which led to the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon. The alliance is made up of 18 different political parties, the largest of which is the officially secular but dominantly Sunni, Future Movement led by Saad Hariri, the son of the assassinated Rafic Hariri. They hold 58 seats in Parliament as of the 2009 elections. March 14th continually battles rumors of corruption amongst its ranks, especially with its de facto leader Saad Hariri. Rafic Hariri continually battled accusations of cronyism as his wealth skyrocketed since 1991 when his company Solidere was given the majority of the contracts to rebuild Beirut, by 2002 80% of the government revenue was spent on paying off foreign debt accrued by these projects. Nuemann, Jeff. "Hariri Assassination Still Clouds Lebanese Politics." *Voice of America* ®. 26 Oct. 2011. Web. 22 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/middle-east/Hariri-Assassination-Still-Clouds-Lebanese-Politics-132621773.html>>.

"Profile: Former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri." *BBC News*. BBC, 30 June 2011. Web. 22 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13978635>>.

Through an analysis of Sayeed Hassan Nasrallah's speeches and the Lebanese media's response to them, this paper seeks to show that Hezbollah's foreign policy toward the Syrian conflict has little effect on its popular support in Lebanon. Furthermore, this paper seeks to prove that despite the efforts of Hezbollah's opponents to portray Hezbollah's position within Lebanon as isolated and weakened by the situation in Syria, Hezbollah's domestic popular support remains relatively stable due to the deeply rooted sectarian nature of Lebanon.

In order to achieve this we examined the Lebanese media as a whole and its collective reaction to statements made by Hassan Nasrallah, as well as official Hezbollah press releases from the start of the Arab spring in December of 2011 to April of 2012. Juxtaposing the reactions of pro-Hezbollah and anti-Hezbollah media outlets with the opinions of regional observers' reiterated differences of opinion amongst the sectarian print media, and thus by extension, the political positions of the parties they represent. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the gradual evolution of Hezbollah's stance on the crisis in Syria as well as its' capital within the domestic political scene.

Due to our limited access to Lebanese televised media, our discussion focuses mainly on print and online media, with the exception of a few highly circulated transcripts of televised interviews with Hezbollah officials on the Hezbollah owned *al-Manar*. Supplementing the media analysis, we draw upon personal interviews conducted in Lebanon from March 9th 2012 to March 16th. The interviews consist of a number of activists from the March 14th and March 8th alliances as well as journalists.⁸ Furthermore, we consulted local regional observers such as the

⁸ March 8th is named after popular rallies in downtown Beirut on March 8th 2005 to demonstrate their support for Syria's occupation of Lebanon and that the departure would not be "humiliating" to Syria. Many consider the original protests a failure as it was a catalyst for the opposing side, what would become March 14th, to mobilize the largest popular and political protests, which led to the toppling of the pro-Syrian government. March 8th currently only holds 29 seats in the parliament but is in a coalition with Michel Aoun's Change and Reform bloc which holds 27 and 12 seats are held by Pro-Government independents, notably Walid Jumblatts Progressive Socialist Party. Together they form the government while March 14th forms the opposition. Within March 8th Hezbollah, or Loyalty

former spokesperson for UNIFIL Timur Goksel, and political writer and activist Bilal al-Amine as well as Levant regional experts in the US.⁹

This paper is broken up into four main sections; the first is a fundamental survey of Lebanese print media and a discussion of the sectarian nature of the discourse therein. The second chronicles in detail the Lebanese media's response to Hezbollah's evolving position on Syria. The third section analyzes the strategic consequences of Hezbollah's support for Assad and attempts to explain its evolving position. Finally, the fourth section outlines predictions on the future of the Syria-Hezbollah relationship and Hezbollah's standing in Lebanon.

Limitations

Originally we set out to discover the effect of Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime in terms of concrete political capital. There were many factors which led to our abandonment of this guiding principle, but the research utilized in pursuing this question provided a foundation for our eventual realization of our final conclusion. The majority of the research for this paper focuses on Lebanese print and online media as they were the most accessible given our short time in country. Television is the most abundant medium in Lebanon but was the most difficult to obtain. Over 90% of the population of Lebanon has access to satellite television and it is the main avenue in which Lebanese receive their news.¹⁰ However, due to the sectarian nature, and the connection of many of the stations to political movements, the views expressed are mirrored

to the Resistance as it's referred to in Parliament has 12 seats. They have been a part of the government since November 2005. The 27 seats allocated to Shia are split between Hezbollah and their ally Amal who holds thirteen.

⁹ The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon was created by the UN on March 19th 1979 to confirm Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon. After Israel invaded on March 14th, UNIFIL was tasked with restoring international peace and security and restoring the Lebanese government's authority over the area. They also play an integral role in clearing landmines, assisting refugees, and providing humanitarian assistance. After the July 2006 War, UNIFIL's mandate was expanded to include a maritime force, a restructuring of their rules of engagement (allowing them to open fire for self-defence), and also allowed up to 15,000 personnel.

¹⁰ Sakr, Naomi. *Arab Television Today*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007. Print.

in the print media. Therefore, our use of print media, lacking some coverage, includes the same sectarian tint as the televised media. The television stations and programs that we have included are stations that have corresponding online print sources that are widely circulated.

While using news media to ascertain public opinion in Lebanon has some inherent flaws, we believe it is the best method given the constraints on our research. While the assertion can be made that the representation of ideas and positions of politicians and political parties in the media does not necessarily correlate to the perceptions formed by the populace, during our time in Lebanon we found this to be generally the case. While it may not represent the most comprehensive segment of Lebanese population, it does allow us to observe how March 14th and March 8th supporters repeat the talking points and the established rhetoric of their political organizations verbatim to defend their positions. Also, supporters for a particular party were adamant that they only read news sources from their party or international news while the competing media sources were viewed as comical and inaccurate.

Discourse in Sectarian System

Lebanon's deeply sectarian political system is expressed in a confessional government.¹¹ According to a Congressional Research Service report, "Confessionalism," or the distribution of governmental posts by religious sect, is a long-standing feature of Lebanese political life.¹² In fact it has been a significant part of Lebanese politics, in one form or another, since the 1943

¹¹ Lebanon's confessional political system is based on the sectarian composition of the society. Although, the government composition is based on the last census, which was taken 1932, recent estimates put the sectarian divisions at 59.7% Muslim, with the majority being Shi'a, 39% Christian, with the majority being Maronite, and 1.3% other religious affiliations.

Congressional Research Service. *CRS Report for Congress: Lebanon*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2007. 3.

¹² *Ibid.*

National Pact that established the confessional nature of Lebanon's government.^{13,14} However, the sectarian nature of politics in Lebanon extends past the ballot box and halls of parliament. The Lebanese media sphere reflects the social and political situation in which it operates, and it therefore reflects the same sectarian system as Lebanese politics.¹⁵

Sectarianism of the Lebanese media is a well-known and accepted fact in Lebanon. According to an interview with Habib Battah, Managing Editor of the Beirut-based Middle East Broadcasters Journal, "Every Lebanese TV channel has a propaganda leaning. Some try to be balanced, but all have their agendas. It's pretty clear from the content they produce,"¹⁶ It is clear that media sources, despite their claims of non-biased reporting, have significant sectarian and political bias. Political parties and sectarian organizations that dispense biased information to support their particular opinion, while operating under the guise of balanced and non-biased reporting, now control Lebanese media.

Integral to understanding and analyzing Lebanese media is an understanding of media bias. According to communications scholar Richard Alan Nelson, "bias is the predisposition for or against a particular point of view. Whenever the positions or interests of a portion of the audience are overlooked, distorted, or censored the problem of bias is found."¹⁷ Furthermore,

¹³ Fisk, Robert. *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon*. New York: Atheneum, 1990. Print, 66.

¹⁴ The 1943 National Pact is the unwritten agreement that established Lebanon as a multi-confessional state which is the foundation for the Lebanese government and society. The agreement stipulated that the Maronite community recognize Lebanon as an Arab affiliated country and not seek foreign intervention. The Muslim community agreed to not aspire to unite with Syria. The agreement laid the framework for the President to always be Maronite, the Prime Minister always be Sunni, the President of the National Assembly (Parliament) always be Shia, the Deputy Speaker always be Greek Orthodox and the Chief of General staff always be Druze. The structure of this agreement was founded on a 1932 census, which heavily favored the Christian majority at the time. The dissatisfaction with the government structure exacerbated sectarian tensions is considered one of the main factors which led to the Lebanese Civil War

¹⁵ El-Richani, Sarah. "The Lebanese Media Landscape." *Muftah*. Muftah, 27 Aug. 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://muftah.org/?p=1454>>.

¹⁶ Paul, Cochrane. "Are Lebanon's Media Fanning the Flames of Sectarianism?" *Arab Media and Society* Summer 2 (2007).

¹⁷ Nelson, Richard Alan. "Tracking Propaganda to the Source: Tools for Analyzing Media Bias." *Global Media Journal* 2.3 (2003): n. pag. *Global Media Journal*. Web. 17 Apr. 2012.

bias can be both intentional and not, but in any case presents a distorted reality to its viewers.¹⁸

Defining bias as a distortion of reality through a predisposition toward a certain view helps to understand biased media. However, to accurately analyze and assess media bias there must be some measures to categorize something as biased.

In a sectarian media system, as in Lebanon, bias is important to determine. While bias is subjective, there are some methods that are used uniformly determine media bias. According to the Media Awareness Network, there are eight main ways to determine media bias.

1. Bias is identified through the selection and omission of facts in reporting.
2. Bias can be determined through placement in a paper, for example, the most important stories are placed first.
3. Bias can be shown in headlines, as they set the tone for the reader to view the rest of the article.
4. Bias is identified in photos and in captions explaining photos. The photo's can give a skewed view of the events which the story is reporting on, as well as the captions can skew the facts shown in the photos.
5. Bias is easily determined in the use of names and titles. The way in which people are referred to frames the way in which the reader views the piece. For example, referring to people as terrorists or freedom fighters, are both biases.
6. The presentation of statistics can present bias. For example the language used to describe statistics, or inflated numbers themselves can imply bias in reporting.
7. Bias is easily detectable in the sources of reporting, both in where the facts are being attributed, as well as who is doing the reporting. The affiliations of those associated with the facts and reporting of the article can show a clear bias in reporting.
8. Major bias is shown in the word choice and language used in reporting. Language of a particular connotation can influence the tone of an article and perception of the reader.¹⁹

Through the use of these eight methods of determining bias, this paper categorizes the Lebanese media through its bias towards sectarian issues. Moreover, his paper will highlight the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ "How to Detect Bias in the News." *Media Awareness Network* .N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Apr. 2012.
<http://www.mediaawareness.ca/english/resources/educational/handouts/broadcast_news/bw_bias_in_the_news.cfm>

aforementioned bias hallmarks when discussing the media response to Nasrallah's statements on Syria.

Since 1989 the Taif Accords codified the Lebanese media's confessional representation, furthering the bias already inherent in the media. According to Sarah El-Richani, "the 1994 Audio-Visual Media Law 382 granted six new licenses to political/sectarian groups, reinforcing the country's confessional system."^{20,21} While this law did not create the sectarian nature of the Lebanese media, it does help reinforce it. Although Lebanon contains a vast number of political, social, and religious confessions, many analysts argue that Lebanese media can be split into two camps, those that are pro-Hezbollah, and those that are not.²² However, this project chooses to take a slightly less simplistic view and divides the Lebanese media into a spectrum on political bias from very pro-Hezbollah to very anti-Hezbollah, with a few relatively balanced media outlets in the middle (see table 1.0).

The polarization of the Lebanese media reflects the current political landscape of Lebanon, consisting of two major political alliances, the March 14th and March 8th coalitions. Logically, media outlets that are owned by, or affiliated with either coalition will reflect the opinions of that coalition. However, in a time of political crisis or turmoil opinions in a coalition change and their controlled media may reflect the opinion of their specific confession, and not

²⁰ El-Richani, Sarah. "The Lebanese Media Landscape." *Muftah*. Muftah, 27 Aug. 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2012. <<http://muftah.org/?p=1454>>.

²¹ The Taif Accords or the National Reconciliation Accord was an agreement that began the process of ending the Lebanese civil war and establishing normalcy in Lebanese domestic politics. The accords are named after Taif, Saudi Arabia where the surviving members of Lebanon's 1972 Parliament met to negotiate political reform, the end of the Lebanese Civil War, establishing special relations with Syria, and the foundation for Syria to withdraw from Lebanon. The agreement restructured the aforementioned National Pact and transferred some of the disproportional power Maronite Christians enjoyed. The accords stipulated that all non-state militias had to disarm. A major contention between March 14th and March 8th is the reality that Hezbollah has not yet disarmed. Much of March 14th's rhetoric revolves around promoting the Lebanese Armed Forces as united fighting force to protect the country from outside threats. While all the militias have officially disarmed it is an accepted reality that many of the militias have kept their weapons even if they don't actively use them. The Taif Accords also identified the abolition of sectarianism as integral to the survival of Lebanon and to the efficiency of the Lebanese government. The agreement was signed on November 4th 1989.

²² Cochrane, "Are Lebanon's Media Fanning the Flames of Sectarianism?"

the coalition. In some cases, as this paper will illustrate, during these crisis moments, journalists may be fired or resign due to a change in personal opinion that clash the with editorial policies of their perspective media outlet

Following the July 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah's popularity was on at an all time high, however, the sectarian divide in Lebanon was exacerbated by this rise in popularity.²³ In a discussion about the aftermath of the rise in Hezbollah's popularity, Paul Cochrane, a journalist and media analyst, states, "Lebanon's media has long reflected the country's political and religious divisions, but sectarianism has arguably become more pronounced following the war between the militant Shiite group Hizbullah and Israel last year."²⁴ Conflict exacerbates the sectarian tensions in politics, and in turn in the media. The most recent crisis in Syria further exacerbated the political and sectarian divide between the supporters of the Assad regime, Hezbollah and its allies, and those taking a pro-Syrian opposition, or anti-Assad stance.²⁵

The change in coverage by the media during times of international crisis can show a reflection of the specific confessions views on a topic outside of a political coalition. However, this change may or may not occur, depending on the severity of the crisis. Furthermore, the extent of change in media coverage may suggest a change in public opinion; however, the extent

²³ The 2006 Lebanon War was a 33 day armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon following rocket attacks into northern Israel and Hezbollah raid which killed 3 Israeli soldiers. Israel retaliated with airstrikes and eventually invading southern Lebanon with the goal of destroying the military capabilities of Hezbollah. The conflict ended with a ceasefire which Hezbollah took credit for not only not being destroyed but also for literally resisting the Israeli invasion. Many in the Arab world considered the war a major victory for Hezbollah and Nasrallah in particular enjoyed widespread popular support within the Arab world. The security situation post ceasefire agreement stipulated that both sides respect the territorial integrity of the respect country. Within four months of the ceasefire, Lebanon officially complained to the UN that Israel had invaded their airspace or crossed the border illegally 420 times.

²⁴ Cochrane, "Are Lebanon's Media Fanning the Flames of Sectarianism?"

²⁵ Bashar al-Assad took power of Syria in June 2000 following the death of his father, Hafez al-Assad. Hafez al-Assad took power in Syria in 1970 after a Ba'athist coup in 1963. He began grooming his son to take over the presidency in 1994 following the death of his older son Basil. Hafez al-Assad died on June 10, 2000, following which Bashar al-Assad took the office of President. Bashar originally avoided any change in the government of his father, but began in 2003 to enact limited social reforms, including the removal of mandatory school uniforms. Zisser, Eyal. "Bashar Al-Asad and His Regime- Between Continuity and Change." *Orient* 45.2 (2004): 239-56. Print.

that public opinion matters in the Lebanese political realm is subject to argument. This paper will analyze the change in coverage of Hezbollah and the party's rhetoric in regards to the Syrian uprising in the Lebanese media. The analysis will utilize the full spectrum of Lebanese media in order to fully ascertain Hezbollah's domestic standing and its strategic consequences for continued support for Assad's regime rather than the uprising.

The Spectrum of Media

This paper classifies Lebanese media in three categories, pro-March 14th, relatively balance reporting, and pro-March 8th, with a spectral range of opinion within each category.²⁶ Specific examples of the views of each of the classification will be examined in later sections. However, it is first important to map the range of media sources in Lebanon. The pro-March 14th category encompasses sources that are supportive of particular parties or confessions associated with the March 14th coalition, as well as sources that are the mouthpiece of parties. The range of views of the media outlets in this category contain two main political views that place them in the March 14th camp, anti-Assad and anti-Hezbollah. On the far end of the spectrum, media outlets such as *al-Mustaqbal*, which belongs to the Future movement and is owned by the Hariri family, expel a very anti-Assad and anti-Hezbollah view.²⁷ This is one of the farthest from center media outlets on the March 14th side, which is also the direct voice of the Future Movement, associated with its FMS media service.²⁸

Moving toward the middle of the March 14th spectrum, the daily newspaper *an-Nahar*, which not associated with a specific political party, expresses less severe views on Assad and

²⁶ See Appendix A

²⁷ Sakr, Elias. "Experts Lament Bias of Lebanese Media." *The Daily Star*[Beirut] 9 June 2008: n. pag. *The Daily Star Lebanon*. Web. 25 Mar. 2012.

²⁸ "Al Mustaqbal About Us." *FMS website*. Future Media Services, n.d. Web. 10 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.fmslebanon.com/inner.aspx?href=about&id=4>>.

Hezbollah. However, it is still strongly in the March 14th camp. Founded by the Orthodox Christian Tueni family, *an-Nahar* is expressively anti-Syria and anti-Hezbollah, in its views, but not to the same extent as *al-Mustaqbal*.²⁹ According to media researcher Lorenzo Trombetta, *an-Nahar* became the voice of the popular campaign against Syrian interference in Lebanon and started to express criticism towards Hezbollah and its main regional supporter, Iran.^{30,31} Former *an-Nahar* managing editor, Lebanese MP, and member of the Tueni family, Gibran Tueni, was assassinated in 2005.³² According to the BBC, his assassination is tied to Syria due to Tueni's adamantly anti-Syrian views, and was followed by the assassination of another *an-Nahar* journalist, Samir Kassir, the following June.³³ However, this is not to say that *an-Nahar*'s bias is equal to that of *al-Mustaqbal*, the Future Movement mouthpiece.

In the middle of media spectrum are news outlets that are viewed as relatively unbiased. These outlets include online sources such as *Naharnet*, as well as tabloid sources, such as *al-Balad*. However, one the most prolific unbiased sources is the Beirut based, English language newspaper, The Daily Star. Although The Daily Star was founded in 1952, its publication halted during the tumultuous Lebanese civil war, and did not begin publishing again until 1996.³⁴ Although unbiased news sources in Lebanon are not the norm, they do exist, and tend to give reasonably balanced coverage of events in Lebanon, based on an understanding of the

²⁹ Trombetta, Lorenzo. "Media Landscape - Lebanon - European Journalism Centre." *European Journalism Centre*. European Journalism Centre, 8 Nov. 2010. Web. 10 Apr. 2012.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hezbollah is ideologically and spiritually tied to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's revolutionary doctrine of *Velayat-e faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist), and the current Iranian regime. In the 1980s Iran recognized Hezbollah's potential and began intense support for the party. Currently estimates of material support vary, however, Iran continues to be a major supporter of Hezbollah, both strategically and ideologically.

Rabil, Robert, "Hezbollah: Lebanon's Power Broker," *Journal of International Security Affairs* 15 (2008): 1-2.
³² BBC News. "Beirut bomb kills anti-Syria MP." *BBC News* [London] 12 Dec. 2005: n. pag. *BBC News Middle East*. Web. 18 Apr. 2012.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ "About US." *The Daily Star*. 11 Oct. 2011. Web. 03 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/AboutUs.aspx>>.

identification of media bias expressed by the Media Awareness Network, as previously mentioned.³⁵

On the opposite end of the spectrum from the March 14th camp, the pro-March 8th media outlets, are equally prolific and varied in their support. Like those in the March 14th camp, media sources in the March 8th camp range from those that are merely supporters of particular parties or ideals, to those that are owned and operated by particular political parties or confessions. On the far end of the March 8th spectrum is the *al-Manar* website. Founded in 1991 as a television station, it branched out to include a website that posts daily news related material, as well as stories and videos associated with its televised content.³⁶ Although, it may appear to be similar in content to stations such as *al-Jazeera*, *al-Manar* is Hezbollah's mouthpiece. It is extremely biased in its coverage of events that pertain to Hezbollah. According to former American University in Beirut professor Judith Palmer Harik in an interview with NPR, "for much of the day... *al-Manar* looks like CNN or Fox News. Headlines. Graphics. Embedded reporters. Opinionated commentators. But unlike the Arab world's best-known TV station, *al-Jazeera*, *al-Manar* also airs blatant propaganda."³⁷ Although this paper will not examine the televised content of *al-Manar*, only that which is posted on its website, the analysis of *al-Manar*'s coverage applies to the website as well as the televised content.

In the middle of the March 8th spectrum are media sources such as the relatively new, *al-Akhbar*. Founded in 2006, the Beirut based daily is published in Arabic, but also has an extensive English language website.³⁸ *al-Akhbar* has a clear leftist political bias, and is

³⁵ "How to Detect Bias in the News." *Media Awareness Network*

³⁶ "Al-Manar TV Lebanon." *Al-Manar News*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/main.php>

³⁷ Par 10 Harik, Judith P., and Bob Garfield. "Inside Al-Manar." *On the Media*. NPR. 26 Jan. 2007. 27 Jan. 2007. Web. 10 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.onthemedial.org/2007/jan/26/inside-manar/transcript/>>. Transcript.

³⁸ "ذ ح ن من." *Al-Akhbar*. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. <<http://al-akhbar.com/about>>.

adamantly pro-Hezbollah, but maintains significantly more journalistic integrity and respect than the clear propaganda sources like *al-Manar*. According to a New York Times article, “They are a remarkable blend: the paper champions gay rights, feminism and other leftist causes, even as it wholeheartedly supports Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shiite movement.”³⁹ Although clearly in the March 8th camp with its support for Hezbollah, *al-Akhbar* is far less biased than any of the party affiliated media outlets.

The Evolution of Hezbollah’s Rhetoric and the Lebanese Media

Prelude to Syria, The Rhetoric of the Arab Spring and Lebanon

During the beginning weeks of the Arab Spring, Lebanon was in the midst of its own political crisis due to the upcoming submission of the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL)⁴⁰ indictment over the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, which implicated several Hezbollah members. After a concentrated effort by Hezbollah to discredit the tribunal and its eventual findings, the Hezbollah led parliamentary opposition withdrew from the

³⁹ Worth, Robert. "Rarity in Region, Lebanese Paper Dares to Provoke." *The New York Times* 29 Dec. 2010: A4. *Nytimes.com*. 28 Dec. 2010. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/29/world/middleeast/29beirut.html?_r=1>.

⁴⁰ The Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) is designed to hold trials for the people accused of carrying out the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, which also took the lives of 22 other people, on February 14, 2005. The STL was established by the United Nations at the request of the Lebanese Government, but was never ratified by the Lebanese government, but was brought into force by UN Security Council Resolution 1757. The tribunal is comprised of international and Lebanese judges, but is neither part of the Lebanese judicial system nor the UN. Currently funding for the STL comes 51% from voluntary contributions, and 49% from Lebanon. Almost immediately Hezbollah launched a media campaign through Nasrallah’s speeches and official statements in an attempt to delegitimize the STL for what they saw as foreign intervention. Issues with how the STL operated within Lebanon and the political motives of the tribunal were emphasized to the point that many Lebanese, even those who support March 14th, view the STL as a farce. Hezbollah’s official policy, in 2011, was to not provide their portion of the domestic funding for the tribunal but in November of 2011, secretly acquiesced and provided their portions of the funds. This backtrack was taken as a sign of Hezbollah’s weakness politically by March 14th, United Nations, "About the STL." *Special Tribunal for Lebanon*, United Nations, 2012, Web, 22 Apr. 2012, <<http://www.stl-tsl.org/en/about-the-stl>>. Nashabe, Omar. "STL President Cannot Confirm Tribunal’s Legitimacy." *Al-Akhbar English*. 06 Apr. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/stl-president-cannot-confirm-tribunal%E2%80%99s-legitimacy>>.

coalition government on January 12th ahead of the indictment.⁴¹ On January 17th, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri was in Washington, DC meeting with US President Obama, bolstering support for the legitimacy of the tribunal and his coalition government. Simultaneously Nasrallah gave a speech juxtaposing Hariri's blatant act of submission to the west, by attending the US meeting, to the Tunisian revolution and its rejection of the President Ben Ali's policies of submission to the same Western powers that Hariri was bound to.⁴² Lebanese media, while preoccupied by the crisis in Lebanon, picked up on Nasrallah's use of the Tunisian uprising.

March 14th backed news outlets criticized Nasrallah for using the fall of the crony government of Tunisia to prove a point when Hezbollah itself was on the verge of operating outside the limits of constitutional powers.⁴³ In order to illustrate Hezbollah's dictatorial ways, they attempted to capitalize on the popular movement in Tunisia and Lebanon's own "Day of Rage". On January 25th protests broke out in the Sunni stronghold of Tripoli over the Hezbollah backed premiership of Najib Mikati. The legitimate anger of the Sunni population over the appointment of Mikati to the premiership demonstrated, at least for March 14th media outlets, the hypocrisy of Hezbollah's rhetoric against unpopular Arab regimes.

On the opposite side of the spectrum an *al-Akhabar* op-ed by Pierre Abi Saab, chastised the Sunnis in northern Lebanon who violently reacted to the news of the appointment of Najib Mikati by saying "The Tunisians were calling for a just ruler for everybody; and the Sunnis in

⁴¹ Blanford, Nicholas. "Hezbollah-led Pullout Brings down Lebanon's Government." *Csmonitor.com*. The Christian Science Monitor, 12 Jan. 2011. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0112/Hezbollah-led-pullout-brings-down-Lebanon-s-government>>.

⁴² "Appointed PM...: Priority for Reconciliation, Reform, & Appointments" *As-Safir*. MiddleEast Wire, 26 Jan. 2011. Web. 04 Apr. 2011. <<http://assafir.com/Article.aspx?EditionId=1755&ChannelId=41177&ArticleId=2524&Author=%DB%C7%D5%C8>>.

⁴³ Hazbun, Waleed. "From Lebanon, with Pessimism and Hope." *Nytimes.com*. 03 Mar. 2011. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/03/from-lebanon-with-pessimism-and-hope/?gwh=DF61DBAC9F5F18DA7D35343C405B44B5>>.

Tripoli were clinging to its sheikh [Saad Hariri], whether he is right or wrong, in order to impose him on everybody regardless of the constitutional game.⁴⁴ The media outlets sympathetic towards Hezbollah highlighted the constitutionality of Hezbollah's actions while also calling the competing viewpoint of hypocritical given the legality of March 8th pull out. Even at the start of the Arab Spring, domestic Lebanese politics was being digested and understood within the broader context of the Arab Spring. The competing sectarian media sources were spinning the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt to suit their own political outlook. The extent of the Arab Spring was yet to be known but Hezbollah had already begun to echo its own interpretation of the meaning of the revolutions to suit its agenda; the Arab Spring represented the Arab peoples' embrace of resistance and the rejection western puppet governments which Nasrallah had been waging a war of words for decades against.

Syria Starts

Even before Hezbollah officially weighed in on the situation in Syria Lebanese media began to frame it within their own particular sectarian agenda. Media supportive of March 14th framed any protests as an existential threat to the relative stability of Lebanon and the fragile state of negotiations over a coalition government. They had begun making explicit comparisons between the events in Syria and the entrenched revolutions of the region such as Libya and Egypt. On March 24th, the popular March 14th supported website NOW Lebanon activated an archive of sources on the "Syrian Uprising" entitled "NOW Syria" with the goal of chronicling

⁴⁴ Abi Saab, Pierre. "الطوائف مملوكة في الكاميرا اب تلعت مهزومة قديلة." *Al-Akhbar*. 26 Jan. 2011. Web. 15 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/2722>>.

new media and news articles about the protests from within Syria in real time.⁴⁵ This is an excellent example of the use of word choice bias, as well as bias in names and titles, as Syrian opposition is being compared to the Libyan revolutionaries. On March 30th, *al-Mustaqbal* ran two front-page stories about how any instability in Syria would cause the fall of the Lebanese system of government and reiterated the calls for a “Syrian revolution.”⁴⁶ While these stories are examples of bias through placement, as they were on the front page, they are also bias through source, as they come from the newspaper of a political party, and express that party’s particular views. Contrary to the polarity and bias of Lebanese media, international newspapers were weary of describing the protests in Syria as a revolution or even an uprising; a New York Times headline from March 17th reads, “In Syria, Demonstrations are Few and Brief.”⁴⁷ The protests in Syria were infantile and isolated, not only geographically but demographically as the movement had yet to gain traction with the majority of the public.

Throughout February, while championing other protests and revolts in other countries in the region, March 8th media outlets concluded that the events in Syria were not comparable to the other protests because of the stability and support of Assad’s government amongst the population. They echoed the rhetoric of Bashar al-Assad in blaming the unrest on foreign saboteurs and terrorists, going so far as to implicate Palestinian radicals, al-Qaeda, Israel, and the U.S. in fomenting violence in Daraa and other early opposition strongholds.⁴⁸ In an editorial in *al-Akbar*, Khaled Saghleh struck a far more cautious tone when he chastised other Arab

⁴⁵ Various. "NOW Syria." *NOW Syria*. NOW Lebanon, 24 Mar. 2012. Web. 18 Mar. 2012.

<<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=254235>>.

⁴⁶ "Syrian Television Reiterates the Position of Hezbollah." *Al-Mustaqbal Newspaper*. 20 Mar. 2011. Web. 18 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.almustaqbal.com/PDFversionv4.aspx?PDFType=asis>>.

⁴⁷ "In Syria, Demonstrations Are Few and Brief." *The New York Times* 17 Mar. 2011: A18. *Nytimes.com*. 16 Mar. 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/17/world/middleeast/17syria.html?_r=2&scp=7&sq=syria&st=nyt>.

⁴⁸ Moshen, Ahmed. "آذار 14 لـ كـ ثيف بـ حضور الأرض تحت «رمزي تـ ضامن»" *Al-Akhbar* 25 May 2011, 1420th ed. *Al-akhbar.com*. 24 May 2011. Web. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/13256>>.

governments for calling protesters “Islamists...gangs...and even rats.”⁴⁹ However, he concluded that the isolated events in Syria could be the work of gangs taking advantage of pan-Arab sentiment that should be arrested, and brought to justice in accordance to Syrian law. March 8th media was unsure how to react to the fledgling protest movements.

Nasrallah speaks on Syria for the first time

It was not until May 25th in a speech commemorating the withdrawal of Israel from southern Lebanon, that Nasrallah addressed the unrest in Syria. Nasrallah began by first detailing his grievances against Arab regional media that were spreading lies about the situation in Syria, and more specifically about Hezbollah’s active role in sending fighters into Syria.⁵⁰ Both accusations would become popular refrains from both parties in the debate over Syria. He continued to outline Hezbollah’s position on the uprising in Syria, and the Arab Spring as a whole;

“As for the Arab situation, on the political level, yes, we in Hezbollah adopted clear positions on the side of the revolutions and peoples in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain. We held a special celebration to support the Arab revolutions... We cannot forget how Syria embraced Lebanon, its resistance, and the Lebanese people who were displaced to Syria. Syria—regime, Army, people, kinsfolk, and homes—embraced us. This is why when we worry about Syria, we worry about its regime and its people...No one denies that Syria made mistakes in Lebanon. President Al-Assad said this at the People's Assembly, but what Syria achieved for Lebanon was historic and fateful on the national level... So we are talking about a resisting and opposing country - regime, leadership, Army, and people.”⁵¹

For Nasrallah, the role of Syria as the only Arab country that championed resistance to Israel and the United States legitimized not only the government of Syria, but also Hezbollah’s support for

⁴⁹ Saghieh, Khalid. "عصا بة عن ال بحث." *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut] 24 Mar. 2011, 1371st ed. *Al-Akhbar*. 23 Mar. 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/7420>>.

⁵⁰ Hezbollah Media Relations. *His Eminence Sayyed Nasrallah’s Full Speech Resistance & Liberation Day 2011*. Al-Manar, 30 May 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2011. <<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=3&cid=33&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=17623>>.

⁵¹ Par, 27, *ibid*

the regime. In the worldview of Nasrallah, the other Arab governments fell because they had become corrupted by western imperialism, unlike Assad who governed in accordance with the principles of resistance was “committed to reform.”⁵² Given the isolated nature of the protests in May of 2011, the purely theatrical steps made by Assad to appease those protests, and the strength of the Syrian army, Nasrallah’s speech was far from groundbreaking.

The speech stressed the unity of the Syrian people and the connection all Lebanese shared with their Syrian counterparts, while refraining from utilizing the divisive rhetoric implemented by the pro-Assad and pro-Hezbollah media. In an interview with the authors, the former head of UNIFIL Timur Goksel commented that the speech “was a safe bet, it didn’t call out anyone for misdeeds or wrong doing, and recommitted Hezbollah’s support to the regime. Besides, Nasrallah knows that Assad can crush these protests and doesn’t need the help of Hezbollah.”⁵³ This is the only speech that Nasrallah kept his analysis of the domestic political situation in Lebanon completely separate from his critique of the situation in Syria.

The Lebanese press largely ignored the sections of Nasrallah’s speech that outlined their position on Syria and instead focused on the parts of the speech that revolved around the domestic issues of the STL indictment and the debate surrounding building a coalition government. This is a clear case of bias through omission, as the press focused on one specific aspect of the speech and ignored the rest. The *Kateeb Party*, belonging to the March 14th coalition, went so far as accusing Nasrallah of shifting the Lebanese media’s attention away from Syria and back onto Israel by giving the speech on resistance day.^{54,55} In an op-ed in the

⁵² Par 28, *ibid*

⁵³ Goksel, Timur, Personal interview. 27. May. 2011

⁵⁴ Dukrab, Hussein. "Nasrallah’s Speech Draws March 14 Ire." *The Daily Star* [Beirut] 27 May 2011: 2. *TheDailyStar.com/lb*. 26 May 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/May-27/Nasrallahs-speech-draws-March-14-ire.ashx#axzz1rk03Pc37>>.

independent *al-Anwar*, Palestinian theologian Rafiq Khoury addressed Nasrallah's speech by discussing issues with celebrating Resistance Day. He stated that while the removal of Israel from Lebanese lands is something that should be celebrated, the liberalization of the land has not come with "liberalization" of the Lebanese system.⁵⁶ Without specifically naming any political party he stresses that the state of sectarianism in Lebanon, the ideology of resistance, and religious ideology has weakened Lebanon as a state.

Nasrallah's points on Syria were heavily scrutinized by the regional press, in an editorial in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, the paper chastised Nasrallah for not playing a more active role in mediation between the protesters and the Syrian regime writing, "the Syrian authorities need the advice of the friends and allies more than their open support."⁵⁷ Echoing that sentiment in an op-ed on NOW Lebanon, entitled "Liberation, except if you're Syrian" Michael Young suggested that Nasrallah came off as alienated from the "spirit of the moment" and that it is hard to make the case to the region that resistance justifies human rights abuses by authoritarian regimes.⁵⁸ Young commits a bias by headline, by skewing the perception of the reader through a suggestive headline. The reaction in the Lebanese press to Nasrallah's first address on Syria illustrates a trend that continues to dominate the discourse to this day; while the events in Syria are important, Hezbollah's position is always understood and discussed in relation to long standing domestic political issues. Hezbollah's foreign policy views of are secondary to domestic

⁵⁵ Known as the Phalange, the Kataeb party is a Maronite Christian political party that began as a paramilitary youth organization in 1936. During the civil war Kataeb was one of the strongest of the Christian forces, with up to 65,000 members and a militia of 10,000 men. The party lost much of its prestige in the 1980s, however, Kataeb still operates as a political party in Lebanon.

Thomas Collelo, ed. Lebanon: A Country Study. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987.

⁵⁶ Khoury, Rafiq. "On Liberation Day." *Al-Anwar*. 27 May 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2012.

<<http://archive.alanwar.com/new/article.php?categoryID=3&articleID=123250>>.

⁵⁷ "القدس رأي سورية من الموقف الله صر ال سيد" *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*. 25 May 2011. Web. 26 Mar. 2012.

<<http://alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=today25qpt999.htm&arc=data201155-2525qpt999.htm>>.

⁵⁸ Young, Micheal. "Liberation, except If You're Syrian." *NOW Lebanon*. 27 May 2011. Web. 27 Mar. 2012.

<<http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=275326>>.

governmental issues.⁵⁹ However, the regional and international press largely ignores why the Shia population of Lebanon supports Hezbollah and stresses what they view as the hypocrisy of Hezbollah's policies

Nasrallah's Unwavering Position

Hezbollah's position on Syria remained unchanged when Nasrallah gave a speech addressing the infiltration of Hezbollah by U.S. spies a month later on June 24th 2011. Briefly mentioning Syria, Nasrallah first accused the March 14th block of betting on the fall of the Assad regime, not for the betterment of the Syrian people but as a domestic political ploy to undermine Hezbollah's position.⁶⁰ He ended the speech by reiterating the need for dialogue in Syria and praising Assad's "serious steps towards reform," stressing the need for unity to combat foreign intervention in Syria.⁶¹ The majority of the speech was a self-congratulatory message to the members of Hezbollah that reinforced the victimization of Hezbollah by the U.S. and European powers given the recent discovery of alleged foreign moles within the party. Even within this context Nasrallah was able to integrate the party's message on Syria with their position within the domestic politics of Lebanon.

The pro-March 8th media was spilt over Nasrallah's speech, with some blatant support for Nasrallah's position and some opinions meekly questioning his leadership. *as-Safir's* front page led with commentary on Nasrallah's speech calling the speech "transparent and clear" and

⁶⁰ "Hezbollah Defeated the World's Most Powerful Intelligence Agency, The CIA." *Al-Manar*. Hezbollah Media Department, 24 June 2011. Web. 27 Mar. 2012.
<<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=14&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=19866>>.

⁶¹ transcript

briefly mentioned that Nasrallah supports Assad in facing his “domestic conspiracy.”⁶² While, an op-ed in *al-Akhbar*, entitled “Hezbollah Breaking”, Lebanese journalist Fida Itani, questioned Nasrallah’s handling of the infiltration and warned against rumormongering at the expense of resistance and its ideals.⁶³ Both responses to the speech use bias of word choice and tone, by selecting language that influences the perception of the articles. Furthermore, the *as-Safir* article used position bias, by posting the story on the front page insinuating importance over other issues.

On the other side of the spectrum the sentiment toward the speech was generally negative. *al-Mustaqbal* framed the content of the speech as an affront to the security of Lebanon and reported heavily the proceeding Hezbollah orchestrated security clamp down of Dhiayah, the Shi’a majority suburb of Beirut.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the front page ran two stories connecting Hezbollah to the deteriorating situation in Syria, citing the French newspaper Le Figaro’s sources that Hezbollah was moving weapons into Syria and one about reports of Hezbollah fighters infiltrating Syria.⁶⁵ In an opinion piece in *an-Nahar*, Ahmad Ayyash wrote that Hezbollah’s internal investigation of the infiltration illustrated that the party was the “the party of the Iranian regime 100%” given that they didn’t immediately hand over the case to Lebanese investigators.⁶⁶ This instance is a bias of word choice and tone, as it is attempting to portray Hezbollah as an

⁶² "As-Safir." *The Daily Star Newspaper*. 25 June 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2012.

<<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Jun-25/Lebanons-Arabic-press-digest---June-25-2011.ashx>>.

⁶³ Itani, Fida. "مخترقاً الله حزب." *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut] 27 June 2011, 1447th ed. *Al-Akhbar*. 26 June 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/15509>>.

⁶⁴D.A. "Hizbullah’s Ranks Infiltrated, Security Measures in Dahieh." *Future Movement*. Al-Mustaqbal, 25 June 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2011.

<http://www.almustaqbal.org/news_details.php?lang=en&id=MjA0NDkwhttp://www.almustaqbal.com/PDFversionov4.aspx?PDFType=a4&issuenumber=4037&pagenumber=1>.

⁶⁵ D.A. "Hizbullah Moves Its Weapons from Syria." *Al-Mustaqbal*. 25 June 2011. Web. 10 Apr. 2012.

<http://www.almustaqbal.org/news_details.php?lang=en&id=MjA0NDky>.

Ayyash, Ahmad. "The Party of the Iranian Regime 100%." *An-Nahar* [Beirut] 26 June 2011. *Annahar.com*. Archived, 25 June 2011. Web. 07 Apr. 2012.

<<http://www.annahar.com/content.php?priority=16&table=makalat&type=makalat&day=Mon>>.

Iranian party through its use of specific wording. Once again Hezbollah's position on Syria was in the background compared to the domestic issues that were addressed in the speech. The major points taken from the speech were over domestic issues, the internal situation of Hezbollah and its activities inside of Lebanon, rather than Nasrallah's comments on the growing conflict in neighboring Syria.

On August 26nd Nasrallah gave a speech on al-Quds day, a holiday meant to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, in which he further explained Hezbollah's support for the regime in Syria. Nasrallah explicitly linked Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime to its support for the Palestinian cause;

“The Syrians remained steadfast while the Palestinian track was being fragmented in the negotiations. Imagine if the Syrians made concession; imagine if the Syrians solved their problems with the Israelis and left the Palestinian cause and Palestinians to meet their fate... Therefore, I am right when I say that this Syrian leadership has greatly contributed to preserving and upholding the Palestinian cause and to preventing the liquidation of the Palestinian cause, which has always been the target of all US and Western invasions and conspiracies against our region.”⁶⁷

Once again Nasrallah's speech was meant to bolster his logic of resistance and make a plea for the Arab world to support the Syrian regime. Nasrallah weaved an argument that warns that without resistance, the international powers that have been trying to destroy the Palestinians, Hezbollah, and Syria, will triumph, especially in light of the changing Arab world. In doing so he linked the plight of the Palestinians with the plight of the Assad regime that was being threatened by outside agitators.

For Nasrallah, Assad's legitimacy as a ruler was never threatened or questioned because it is an integral ally in resistance. In these aims Nasrallah is trying to illustrate that resistance and the Palestinian cause are bigger than the trends of the Arab Spring. Furthermore for

⁶⁷ Wehbe, Batoul. "Al-Quds Day in Hezbollah's Memory (video)." *Al-Manar*. Hezbollah Media Department, 26 Aug. 2011. Web. 05 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?eid=25816&st=al-quds&cid=36&fromval=3&frid=23&seccatid=14>>.

Nasrallah, the collective will of the Arab people are for a free Palestine, and that reality wasn't changed by wave revolutions sweeping the Middle East. He warned that Syria has been the only country to continually resist the enticements of the West and Israel, allowing the Assad regime to be removed by the western sponsored internal forces would doom the resistance.

March 14th supportive media outlets quickly portrayed the speech as grandiose, whose logic had no bearing on reality. Future bloc PM Nohad al-Mashnouq noted that the speech "does not imply seriousness" and was a tacit admission of Hezbollah's failing policy on Syria.⁶⁸ The newspaper *al-Mustaqbal* completely ignored the portions of the speech pertaining to Syria and accused Nasrallah of encouraging the Lebanese Armed Forces to turn against March 14th.⁶⁹

The Daily Star, reporting on the speech, pointed out that it was originally the Future movement who believed the head of the military Gen. Jean Kawagi was encouraging the military intelligence to intimidate Sunnis and Christians in Northern Lebanon who supported March 14th.⁷⁰ Nasrallah was simply confronting prior accusations. While pro-March 14th media attempted to spin the speech to suit the current tense political atmosphere, it was the independent news organizations that maintained that Nasrallah's remarks simply stressed that "the army is the one guarantee for Lebanon's stability."⁷¹

The pro-Hezbollah media brushed aside the fears of March 14th and emphasized Nasrallah's message of resistance and commitment to Palestine. *al-Manar* stressed that the

⁶⁸ Staff. "Mashnouq Slams Nasrallah's Statement about Reform in Syria." *NOW Lebanon*. 28 Aug. 2011. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <<http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=306185>>.

⁶⁹ Staff. "Another Nasrallah Speech." *Al-Mustaqbal* [Beirut] 28 Aug. 2011. *Al-Mustaqbal*. 27 Aug. 2011. Web. 05 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.almustaqbal.com/PDFversionv4.aspx?PDFType=asis>>.

⁷⁰ Dakroub, Hussein. "Nasrallah Voices Support for Assad, Urges Talks." *The Daily Star*[Beirut]. *TheDailyStar.com/lb*. 27 Aug. 2011. Web. 10 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2011/Aug-27/Nasrallah-voices-support-for-Assad-urges-talks.ashx#axzz1rk03Pc37>>.

⁷¹ Naharnet Newsdesk. "Nasrallah: We're Counting on Public Opinion to Overcome STL Conspiracy." *Naharnet*. 26 Aug. 2011. Web. 05 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/13714-nasrallah-we-re-counting-on-public-opinion-to-overcome-stl-conspiracy>>.

remarks illustrated that Lebanon, with the support of Syria, was stronger than ever, and that Nasrallah's points about a strong unified Lebanese government undermined all of the points made by March 14th.⁷² *al-Akhbar* chose to emphasize the symbolism of giving the address on the site of the "heroic battle" of Maroun al-Ras during the 2006 and how the message of Hezbollah's triumph and support of the Palestine cause was clear, in both the setting and the substance of the speech.⁷³ Like the *al-Mustaqbal* statements, the statements from *al-Manar* are a case of source bias, as they come from mouthpiece of a political party. On the other hand, the statements of *al-Akhbar* show another instance of bias of selection by choosing to focus on the significance of the spot of the speech, and not the speech itself.

The setting of the speech for March 8th coverage was a psychological coup for Nasrallah, as no political party, let alone individual figure in March 14th, could recreate a platform that glorified the political figure, message, and history of the party so succinctly. In *as-Safir*, Nabil Haitham offered the most thorough analysis of Nasrallah's remarks on Syria. He concludes that while the logic of resistance is sound, the speech marked a stark position of absolute support for Syria.⁷⁴ In Haitham's words, such pronouncements are rare for a man known for his calculating nature, and March 14th has continually tried to simplify Hezbollah's support for Assad into sectarian platitudes. Juxtaposed to the imagery and themes of Palestinian struggle, Nasrallah's al-Quds speech must then be understood as acknowledgement that the situation in Syria is manageable.

⁷² Hezbollah Media Relations. "Sayyed Nasrallah: Lebanon Became Trap for Israel." *Al-Manar*. 26 Aug. 2011. Web. 02 Apr. 2012.

<<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=14&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=25896>>.

⁷³ Staff. "إسرائيل: يل يخدمون الأمقاومة على المحرضون: الله ن صر." *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut]: 1497. *Al-Akhbar*. 28 Aug. 2011. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/20012>>.

⁷⁴ Nabil, Haitham. "ال سوري؟ الموضوع في والواضح الام باشر الله ن صر ك لام لماذا." *As-Safir*. Beirut, 29 Aug. 2011. Web. 05 Apr. 2012. <<http://khiyam.com/news/article.php?articleID=12214>>.

Hezbollah's Expanding Position

Hezbollah's position on Syria was not expanded until October 24, when Nasrallah gave a lengthy evening interview with *al-Manar*. During the interview Nasrallah attempted to clarify his position on Syria and how it differed from Hezbollah's position on other Arab countries' situations. He classified Syria as a resistance regime ready for reform, and that the alternative to reform, the toppling of the regime at the hands of "so called moderate Arab regimes," would not only be playing into the hands of the US, but be going against the will of the Syrian people.⁷⁵ Nasrallah further reinforced this argument by stating that in most areas of Syria there are no protests, and that the few protesters there are, are violent. According to his statement, this needlessly exacerbates the situation, and that the situation could be made much worse due to the violence of the protesters if it wasn't for the "accurate tackling by the Syrian leadership"⁷⁶ Nasrallah ended by pointing out that the official policy of Lebanon is to have a friendly relationship with Syria. He reiterates that political factions in Lebanon who assert otherwise are "superimposing their convictions on the state."⁷⁷ This expansion of Nasrallah's position on Syria did little to waiver the sectarianism discourse coming from March 14th press.

Lebanese media's reaction to Nasrallah's new defense of Syria was little more than a side note to the debate that raged in the press over Hezbollah's non-commitment to the STL. NOW Lebanon reported that Lebanese Forces bloc MP Antoine Zahra responded that, the interview clearly demonstrated that "Hezbollah's great cause is not Lebanon, but the whole Islamic nation.

⁷⁵ Al-Manar. Beirut, 24 Oct. 2011. *Interview with Sayyed Nasrallah*. 24 Oct. 2011. Web. 25 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ncgggb9deE>>.

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ *ibid*

Lebanon's sovereignty is an unimportant detail for it."⁷⁸ Moreover, a sprawling article in *al-Mustaqbal* lambasted Nasrallah's position on refusing to fund the STL, highlighting the dangers to national sovereignty and then in an almost flippant, cursory fashion added that Nasrallah still supports the Syrian regime.⁷⁹ *al-Liwa* circumvented both of those issues, deeming the speech "comprehensive" and while the editorial focused on the coincidental timing of the speech with inflammatory remarks made by the US ambassador. All of these statements use a bias of selection as they skew the readers' opinions to one specific part of the interview, while ignoring or downplaying the others.

In one of the more thorough commentaries on the interview, *al-Akbar* editor Ibrahim al-Amine, observed that Nasrallah's remarks on the possibilities of reforms on Syria and the evolution of the situation in Syria represent a clear understanding not only of Syria's adherence to resistance but also a sincere hope that the west wouldn't contaminate and contain the reforms in Syria.⁸⁰ Amine also highlighted that the interview was also more directed at the region than previous appearances.

Nasrallah's pan-Arab appeal is something that other Lebanese politicians don't enjoy and thus aren't burdened with when making policy decisions. "Nasrallah's position is high... a partner on a regional level with Iran and Syria, and he expresses his views on resistance but unlike the other two, Nasrallah isn't owned by the other partners in the axis"⁸¹ While the position allows for Nasrallah to express his views more clearly and concisely than Iran or Syria, or the factions of resistance in Iraq that the editorial mentions, it puts him at a greater risk for

⁷⁸ Staff. "Zahra Responds to Nasrallah's Interview." *NOW Lebanon*. 25 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArchiveDetails.aspx?ID=325798>>.

⁷⁹ Staff. "Nasrallah Refuses to Fund Tribunal." *Al-Mustaqbal* [Beirut] 25 Oct. 2011, 4155th ed. *Al-Mustaqbal*. 25 Oct. 2011. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.almustaqbal.com/PDFversionv4.aspx?PDFType=a4&issuenummer=4155&pagenumber=1>>.

⁸⁰ Al-Amine, Ibrahim. "الامقاومة تبنّي طريق خريطة يرسم الله نص." *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut] 25 Oct. 2011, 1546th ed. *Al-Akhbar*. 25 Oct. 2011. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/24398>>.

⁸¹ *ibid*

criticism not only on the regional level but also by those personalities and political parties within Lebanon who are free of liability. However, Nasrallah's risk of criticism only grew as the conflict in Syria progressed and Hezbollah's position toward the Assad regime continued to evolve.

Nasrallah's Ashura address, traditionally one of his most widely covered speeches in both Arab press and international media, marked a shifting of Hezbollah's rhetoric on Syria. The major change in Nasrallah's overview of Syria was not in the general content or in the theme of resistance, but in his treatment of the Syrian opposition. "We are with reform in Syria. We stand with the regime, which resisted.... We say yes for addressing all reasons and aspects of corruption or disorder, we say yes to all forms of reform which the Syrian leadership accepted."⁸²

Unlike the pro-Hezbollah media's descriptions of the Syrian opposition as terrorist and infiltrators, Nasrallah gave his respects and warned them to be weary because they would be exploited to attack the resistance. In doing so he did not discredit their reasons or motives behind protesting, but warned that their actions may lead to destabilization of the resistance. Nasrallah's harshest attacks were not leveled at the internal opposition or the Syrian regime, but at the Syrian National Council, which he viewed as a puppet of the west and an inherent enemy to resistance. He underscored his commentary on Syria with multiple accusations that March 14th continued to take advantage of the situation in Syria in order to shift the blame for their political failures onto Hezbollah.

Once again, both sides of the media were quick to spin the speech in accordance with their competing sectarian and ideological prisms. Exacerbating this well-established process was

⁸² Marusek, Sarah. "English Translation of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's Speech 6 December 2011." *Middle East Blog*. 9 Dec. 2011. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <http://amiddleeastblog.blogspot.com/2011/12/english-translation-of-sayyed-hassan_09.html>.

the fact that Nasrallah took the opportunity to make his first public appearance since 2008, introducing his traditional televised speech in person with a short defiant message to “those conspiring and hoping and betting on change”⁸³ The competing analyses were diametric opposites. Both agreed the move was meant to project Nasrallah’s strength and security, but March 14th sources claimed it was sparked by the lack thereof, while Pro-Hezbollah sources claimed that it was proof an abundance of confidence.

As the situation in Syria deteriorated even further in the first months of 2012, Nasrallah and the communications department of Hezbollah kept a low profile in regards to Syria. Only two relatively short speeches mentioned Syria in any substantial detail and the points made reiterated the nuanced Ashura speech. When a car bomb killed 25 Syrians on January 6th Hezbollah released a statement condemning the attack. While blaming Israel and the United States, Hezbollah continued to preach reform, “it is also evidence that these forces’ [reject] any reformatory measures that could save the Syrian people from being dragged towards bloodshed.”⁸⁴ In a speech to Hezbollah supporters in February, Nasrallah spoke candidly about the need for political reform in Syria stating, “So we are before a regime of this kind [resistance]. This regime needs reform. Everyone is calling for reforms including the people in power themselves.”⁸⁵ Even though his treatment of the opposition had evolved, the principle of

⁸³ Bakri, Nada. "Hezbollah Leader Backs Syrian President in Public." *New York Times* 07 Dec. 2011: A10. *Nytimes.com*. 06 Dec. 2011. Web. 24 Mar. 2012.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/07/world/middleeast/hassan-nasrallah-hezbollah-leader-showcases-defiance-in-rare-appearance.html?_r=1&scp=2&sq=nasrallah%20ashura&st=cse>.

⁸⁴ "Hezbollah Blames US, Brotherhood Lashes Regime for Syria Bombing." *Al-Akhbar English*. 06 Jan. 2012. Web. 28 Mar. 2012. <<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/hezbollah-blames-us-brotherhood-lashes-regime-syria-bombing>>.

⁸⁵ Marusek, Sarah. "English Translation of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's Speech 16 February 2012." : *English Translation of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah's Speech 16 February 2012*. 25 Feb. 2012. Web. 26 Mar. 2012. <<http://amiddleeastblog.blogspot.com/2012/02/english-translation-of-sayyed-hassan.html>>.

resistance remained integral to his thoughts on a solution to Syria, worrying if political solution in Syria would bring a political solution to Palestine, in the eyes of the Syrian opposition.

Refining Hezbollah's Position

On March 14th, the March 14 coalition held their annual convention, coinciding with the seven-year anniversary of the Cedar Revolution. While past anniversaries were marked by conventions described as “electric” and “vibrant” rallies, 2012’s convention was decidedly more subdued than previous years.⁸⁶ The convention’s purpose was to highlight and promote the coalition’s political agenda for the coming year, and the crisis in Syria by introducing a manifesto based upon “the peace of the Arab Spring.”⁸⁷

In an extensive speech the next day, Nasrallah addressed the issues brought up against Hezbollah at the convention with yet again, another explanation and refinement on Hezbollah’s position on Syria. He opened the speech by nearly admitting that it was a mistake to ignore the Syrian protesters for almost a year, stating “Since the events started we bargained and hoped that Syria would be able to overcome this ordeal to the interest of its dear people and its regional post”⁸⁸ He continues by admitting that Hezbollah is worried that the situation may turn into a civil war, and that both sides must simultaneously lay down arms.

What is remarkable about this speech is Nasrallah continually recognizes the severity of the crisis in Syria, highlighting the same points March 14th used in many of their attempts to discredit every speech he had previously given on Syria. Nasrallah’s logic of resistance is still

⁸⁶ Sison, Michele. "Lebanon: March 14 Convention Reinvigorates The Movement." *Cable Reference Id: #08BEIRUT392*. 01 Sept. 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.cablegatesearch.net/cable.php?id=08BEIRUT392>>.

⁸⁷ "March 14th Convention." *Al-Joumhouria*. 15 Mar. 2012. Web. 29 Mar. 2012. <http://www.aljoumhouria.com/breaking_nws/view/7640>.

⁸⁸ Haidar, Marwa. "Sayyed Nasrallah: Let Those Who Feel Capable of Disarming Resistance Try!" *Al-Manar*. 15 Mar. 212. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.almanar.com.lb/english/adetails.php?fromval=2&cid=14&frid=23&seccatid=14&eid=49269>>.

paramount in the speech and the paradigm in which he dissects the situation. However, he admits there is popular division in Syria, a point he railed against until December, when it was absent in his Ashura address. Nasrallah states, “The political level, political performance, and political mind which exist in the country are really hectic. There’s a true problem.”⁸⁹

While the speech served as a rebuttal to the March 14th convention, it truly was a plea to the opposition in Syria that they understand the banner of resistance as not antithetical to their political demands in Syria, and should be viewed on a moral high plane rather than secular political level. The speech is a call to end the bloodshed, not an abandonment of the Assad regime. Nasrallah was careful to avoid any admission that the ideals of resistance were challenged by the crisis.

The media’s response to the March 14th convention and the subsequent rebuttal by Nasrallah reflected the highly charged political atmosphere that resulted not only from the annual political pageantry of March 14th but also from increased violence from Syria. Both sides of the spectrum began framing Syria not just with the vocabulary of ‘civil war’ but also relating it to Lebanon’s experience with civil war. *As-Safir* reiterated that Hezbollah had moved from “secretly advising the Syrian regime and president” to public declarations of support for a political solution “out of concern for Syria—the state and its people.”⁹⁰ In addressing Nasrallah’s comments, *ad-Diyar* claimed “the Syrian regime remains at full strength militarily, politically and diplomatically, unlike what happened to similar regimes that witnessed political splits or diplomats joining the opposition”⁹¹ The newspaper continued by highlighting the fragmented

⁸⁹ *ibid*

⁹⁰ Salman, Talal. "Hezbollah Chief Shifts Public Stance toward Assad." *As-Safir* [Beirut] 19 Mar. 2012. *Al-Monitor*. 20 Mar. 2012. Web. 05 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/03/nasrallahs-advice-to-bashar-al-a.html>>.

⁹¹ في لمدن ي بين أمن لملاد: وت رك يا مفتوحاً الحوار ب اب يُبقي أذان / ل ل أسد تأييداً سوريا في مليونية مسد يرات . داث الأ ح على عام" *Ad-Diyar* [Beirut] 16 Mar. "أراض بها إلى الإ سلامة العدو ان ت قال من وت خشى ت عرقل روس يا: جوب /ه / ال سوري ال داخل

nature of the domestic opposition in Syria and claiming that even a year after the uprising there was a million man march in support of Assad.⁹² Both of these examples use bias of word choice and bias of selection, focusing on certain aspects and skewing the perception of others, as well as bias of tone, attempting to represent the Syrian regime and Hezbollah in a positive light.

The apparent shift in Hezbollah's position on Syria received very little outright criticism from March 8th sources, as demonstrated most of the debate centered on the situation within Syria. Nasrallah's shift was viewed as an acknowledgment that the protracted situation in Syria had grown into a budding civil war and if the situation continued to deteriorate the effects on Lebanon would be far reaching.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, *al-Mustaqbal* criticized Nasrallah for ignoring March 14th's "outstretched hand" that was detailed in the March 14th convention.⁹³ On the front page the coordinator for the March 14th convention, Dr. Faris Saeed said, "Nasrallah appeared weak and confusing, calling for dialogue on rotten meat⁹⁴ and deferring dialogue on weapons."⁹⁵ While *al-Mustaqbal* focused on what they deemed a confusing response to their political convention other anti-Hezbollah, establishments focused on what they considered to be his substantial policy shift on Syria.⁹⁶ *An-Nahar* stressed that the shift was a message of political weakness, especially in dealing with March 14th considering the timing of the announcement

2012. <http://diyar.charlesayoub.com/>. 16 Mar. 2012. Web. 06 Apr. 2012.
<<http://diyar.charlesayoub.com/index.php/article-details/114501>>.

⁹² *ibid*

⁹³ Staff. "البرلمان في 'يشبّحون' وذوابه.. الممدودة باليدي سد تخف ن صر الله." *Al-Mustaqbal* [Beirut] 16 Mar. 2012, 4286th ed. *Al-Mustaqbal.com*. 16 Mar. 2012. Web. 06 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.almustaqbal.com/storiesv4.aspx?storyid=513088>>.

⁹⁴ The issue of Hezbollah's weapons is a point of contention for the leadership of March 14th who support a unified Lebanese military and the disarming of all militias, Hezbollah in particular, as per the Taif Accords.

⁹⁵ *ibid*

⁹⁶ "Lebanon's Arabic Press Digest - March 15, 2012." *The Daily Star Newspaper*. 16 Mar. 2012. Web. 04 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Mar-15/166753-lebanons-arabic-press-digest---march-15-2012.ashx>>.

with the convention.⁹⁷ While pro-March 14th establishments viewed the speech as a triumph for their political position most unbiased media outlets, such as *The Daily Star* and *Naharnet* emphasized in their reporting that Nasrallah admitted that cooperation and dialogue between the two parties were needed but “building the state doesn’t mean eliminating the other.”⁹⁸

Nasrallah’s rhetorical pivot was seen in the eyes of March 14th as a vindication of their year-long position on Syria, even though Nasrallah didn’t come out in support of regime change nor deemed the situation a civil war. March 8th backed media sources saw it as a strategic move that was couched in an appropriate assessment of a complex situation. Both ends of the spectrum left little room for agreement on the issue of Syria, Hezbollah’s position on Syria, or Hezbollah’s handling of domestic issues. As highlighted throughout this paper the sectarian nature of the media’s discourse was only exacerbated by the situation in Syria and the responses to Nasrallah’s public change in position in his March 15th address emphasize that divide. The gradual evolution of Nasrallah’s position on Syria had been occurring since the start of the violence in Syria. As demonstrated in this paper, while this evolution culminated in Nasrallah’s March 15th address, the shift wasn’t as substantial March 14th media outlets portrayed it. While on the other hand, March 8th backed media outlets praised Nasrallah for his keen assessment of the situation in Syria without offering very much criticism for maintaining such a divisive stance on Syria for so long.

⁹⁷ "March 14th's Convention." *An-Nahar* [Beirut] 15 Mar. 2012. *Annahar.com*. 14 Mar. 2012. Web. 06 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.annahar.com/article.php?t=mahaly&p=3&d=24682>>.

⁹⁸Naharnet Newsdesk. "Nasrallah to March 14 Camp: Building the State Doesn't Mean Eliminating the Other." *Naharnet*. 15 Mar. 2012. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/33486-nasrallah-to-march-14-camp-building-the-state-doesn-t-mean-eliminating-the-other>>.

⁹⁸ Dakroub, Hussein. "Nasrallah: March 14 Can't Build Strong State Alone." *The Daily Star* [Beirut] 16 Mar. 2012: 3. *The Daily Star*. 16 Mar. 2012. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Mar-16/166852-nasrallah-march-14-cant-build-strong-state-alone.ashx#axzz1sKTeXLqt>>.

The official position both pro-March 14th and pro-March 8th media organizations took on Syria and Hezbollah changed very little for the entirety of 2011. Lebanese press treated each statement from Nasrallah as they had previously. With Hezbollah's subtle shift in position came a noticeable shift in how pro-Hezbollah outlets described the situation in Syria. While they still framed it in the paradigm of resistance, their treatment of the protesters became far more nuanced. Before 2012 many articles in *al-Diyar*, *al-Akhbar*, and *as-Safir* would refer to the protesters using the same language as Bashar al-Assad, blindly calling the armed resistance "terrorists", "infiltrators", and "foreign agitators."⁹⁹ The shift away from such extreme terminology represents the gradual acceptance of the legitimate grievances of the Syrian opposition.

Talal Salman, founder of *as-Safir*, penned an editorial in which he compared the heartless bloodshed in Syria to that of the Lebanese Civil War, expressing brotherhood and solidarity with the Syrian people.¹⁰⁰ He blamed Assad for not peacefully confronting the protesters, which led to "developments" that led to the explosive situation. While the editorial represents an acknowledgment of the severity of the crisis, Salman ends the article by chastising March 14th for employing the Syrian crisis for sectarian gains. However, the adjustment in the treatment of the Syrian crisis did not equal an adjustment in Hezbollah's established position toward a solution to the crisis.

Pro March 14th organizations were the most consistent in their vocabulary and descriptions of the situation in Syria as it related to Nasrallah's speeches. The biggest variable in

⁹⁹ As-Safir. "The Daily Star Newspaper. 25 June 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Local-News/2011/Jun-25/Lebanons-Arabic-press-digest---June-25-2011.ashx>>. Itani, Fida. "مخترقاً الله حزب." *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut] 27 June 2011, 1447th ed. *Al-Akhbar*. 26 June 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/15509>>.

¹⁰⁰ Salman, Talal. "Hezbollah Chief Shifts Public Stance toward Assad." *As-Safir* [Beirut] 19 Mar. 2012. *Al-Monitor*. 20 Mar. 2012. Web. 05 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/03/nasrallahs-advice-to-bashar-al-a.html>>.

their coverage was how they described the situation in Syria overall. They alternated between describing the situation as a protest movement, armed opposition, or a civil war depending on how much Nasrallah attacked or belittled the opposition. While pro March 8th outlets tended to down play and minimize the opposition in Syria while exaggerating the support for Assad, pro-March 14th emphasized every unsubstantiated rumor linking Hezbollah to the atrocities of the Assad regime or instability within the Assad regime.

As aforementioned, the editorial policy of these papers maintained that the position of Hezbollah or the position of March 14th while not immune to criticism would generally be the compass to which editors, contributors, and reporters could orient themselves when reporting or writing editorials. For the most part these rules weren't tested over the Syrian issue, at least not publically. The largest scandal involving this reality was when the managing editor of *al-Akhbar*, Khaled Saghieh resigned over the paper's policy on Syria. In a lengthy and honest letter to the readers of *al-Akhbar* the editor Ibrahim al-Amine describes how the situation in Syria and how to cover it created rifts between the editorial staff of *al-Akhbar*.¹⁰¹ Al-Amine describes that Khaled had always been "frank and clear" that the revolution in Syria was a popular one and that the logic of resistance could not justify Hezbollah's support, and *al-Akhbar's* support, for the Syrian regime.¹⁰² In response frequent *al-Akhbar* contributor As'ad Abu Khalil praised Khaled Saghieh and also praised *al-Akhbar* for what he saw as a triumph for the paper and the "open horizons of free expression" of Arab media.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Al-Amine, Ibrahim. "صاغية خالد غادر لماذا؟" *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut] 20 Aug. 2011, 1492nd ed. [Http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/19445](http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/19445). 20 Aug. 2011. Web. 19 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/19445>>.

¹⁰² *ibid*

¹⁰³ Abu Khalil, As'sad. "مول صاغية، خالد عن." *Al-Akhbar* [Beirut], 1495th ed. *Al-Akhbar.com*. 24 Aug. 2011. Web. 18 Apr. 2012. <<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/19685>>.

Strategic Considerations: Domestic Popularity

Since the beginning of the protest movement in Syria every political party in Lebanon has had to adapt to significant political, economic, and social disruptions. In numerous interviews with the authors, activists from both March 14th and March 8th recognized that the crisis gave March 14th a platform, which provided them with renewed political rhetoric. A Sunni activist articulated this point to Lebanese scholar Elias Muhanna in December of 2011 saying, “Until the Syrian revolution, the March 14th movement was a political corpse. The situation in Syria has given Hezbollah’s opponents new life.”¹⁰⁴ In an interview with the authors a month later in January of 2012, Mr. Muhanna reiterated that while the sectarian nature of the political rhetoric coming from March 14th may be popular with their constituents it didn’t necessarily translate into more domestic political capital.¹⁰⁵

As this paper has demonstrated, Nasrallah’s public statements on Syria were the backdrops for many of the controversial domestic political debates. Not only were his individual speeches cited when discussing specific political issues but also Hezbollah’s entire policy on Syria was used to frame existential debates about Lebanon and its place not only in the changing Middle East but the international community as a whole.

The aforementioned revival of March 14th’s rhetoric was explicitly linked and opposed to Hezbollah’s position on Syria. For March 14th their interpretation of the ideals of Arab Spring, western democratic norms, freedom from human rights abuse, and freedom of press, constructed their moral authority in regards to Syria. However, as discussed in the previous

¹⁰⁴ Muhanna, Elias. "Nasrallah’s Fighting Words." *Latitude*. NY Times, 14 Dec. 2011. Web. 30 Mar. 2012. <<http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/14/nasrallahs-fighting-words/?scp=1>>.

¹⁰⁵ Muhanna, Elias. "Elias Muhanna Interview." Telephone interview. 12 Feb. 2012.

section, media outlets that are on the pro side or the other, continue to remain of the same viewpoint regardless of Hezbollah's policy toward Syria.

Strategic Considerations: Operational Stability

The strategic considerations of Hezbollah's evolving position on Syria will focus on foreign policy strategy. As shown in the previous section, Hezbollah's domestic popular support did not change any significant amount from their support for Assad, however, Hezbollah's position toward the Syrian opposition continued to change. This section seeks to explain Hezbollah's changing position through its long-term strategic concerns.

Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime does not have significant immediate effects on its strategic standing, but has the possibility for long-term effects. Currently, Syria provides Hezbollah with logistic, political, and military support, including a supply line for weapons.¹⁰⁶ All of which are dependent of Hezbollah's good relationship with its neighbor. According to an interview with Nicholas Blanford, Hezbollah is concerned with its "strategic depth."¹⁰⁷ In that, Hezbollah will incur significant strategic ramifications if the Assad regime falls. As Blanford states, "If Syria falls, Hezbollah will be cut off."¹⁰⁸ Although wildly popular in the Arab world following the 2006 war, Hezbollah's only true allies are Syria and Iran. Losing its nearest ally could potentially put Hezbollah in a strategic quagmire.

Although Syria is an important military ally of Hezbollah, it has further strategic importance. According to former UNIFIL spokesman Timor Goksel, Hezbollah's military and

¹⁰⁶ Congressional Research Service. *Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011.4

¹⁰⁷ Blanford, Nicholas. "Nicholas Blanford Interview." Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Blanford, Nicholas. "Nicholas Blanford Interview." Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2012.

economic relationship with Syria is far from the most important aspect of its strategic relationship. In an interview with the authors he states, “He [Hassan Nasrallah] Needs the Syrians for contact with the outside world, especially Iran.”¹⁰⁹ Without Syria, Hezbollah will be left without a strong regional ally. As Goksel asserted, Hezbollah’s concern with Syria is what it will mean for their ability to maintain relationships with international actors, especially Iran. There is not the idealistic concern over the preservation of the Assad regime as is argued in Nasrallah’s speeches. Strategically, according to Goksel, “what worries Hezbollah is if there is a regime change in Syria, what does that mean for Hezbollah?”¹¹⁰ Hezbollah’s logic of support for the Assad regime is a duality. On one side there is the aforementioned, and drastically more emphasized, political and popular support for the regime based on the ideology of resistance to Israel, and on the other side there is the concern over strategic considerations.

Economically, Hezbollah uses its relationship with Syria as a source funneling its funding from Iran. Annually Hezbollah receives anywhere from \$100 to \$200 million in funding from Iran.¹¹¹ If Hezbollah loses a positive relationship with Syria, the source of funds from Iran may be interrupted. However, this is low on Hezbollah’s strategic radar. Nicholas Blanford contends that an interruption in funding from Syria and Iran, will not be as much of an issue as it may seem. He believes that due to Hezbollah’s diversification of its economic portfolio, any temporary loss of funding from Iran will be less noticeable than many believe.¹¹²

Strategic Concerns: Shi’a Stability

¹⁰⁹ Goksel, Timor. "Timor Goksel Interview." Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2012.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Congressional Research Service. *Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011.4

¹¹² Blanford, Nicholas. "Nicholas Blanford Interview." Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2012.

Although the duality of Hezbollah's reasons for supporting the Assad regime splits the political and strategic rhetoric, the sectarian nature of the support and the Syrian conflict intertwines both reasons for support. Hezbollah, while flying the banner of Islamic resistance to Israel, is a Shi'a organization, and must look out for its Shi'a interests. This notion ties back to the sectarian nature of Hezbollah, and its understanding of the Syrian revolution. Not only is Hezbollah supporting the regime over the revolution, but is framing the revolution as being bad for the Shi'a. However, this is not necessarily a mere rhetorical or political consideration, but a broader strategic consideration for the movement. According to activist and writer Bilal Al-Amine, the Syrian conflict is an existential issue for the Shi'a. He states, "Hezbollah and the Shi'a were condemned from the very beginning. Before Hezbollah even commented [on the Syrian conflict]." ¹¹³ Despite the popular uprising and brutal tactics used by the regime, the opposition is viewed as being anti-Shi'a. While this is a political and rhetorical argument Hezbollah uses to justify its support for the Assad regime, it has real strategic consequences.

Hezbollah needs its regional ally, Syria, for strategic military reasons, but also as a friend to the Shi'a. If Assad were to fall Hezbollah would lose its only pro-Shi'a ally in the region, and would be isolated on a ideological and religious front, especially following a long standing support for the regime against the Sunni-backed opposition. While the sectarian nature of Hezbollah may be overlooked in the resistance to Israel, it is not overlooked in other matters, and can be a point of contention for Hezbollah on an inter-Arab level, and isolate the Shi'a movement further. However, on a domestic level the sectarian nature of the conflict works in Hezbollah's favor. While it may lose a strategic and pro-Shia ally in Assad, domestically being isolated as the representation of Shi'ism in the region can strengthen the movement in Lebanon.

¹¹³ Al-Amine, Bilal. "Bilal Al-Amine Interview." Personal interview. 12 Mar. 2012.

According to Nicholas Blanford, Hezbollah could emerge stronger in Lebanon, due to a Sunni majority in Syria. They would be able to capitalize on the sectarian divide and gain more support in Lebanon.¹¹⁴ Strategically this would not help on an international scale, but could domestically strengthen Hezbollah.

The strategic considerations of Hezbollah reach beyond the material and operational discussion. Moreover, it is in Hezbollah's decisions that their strategic proficiency is shown. With each decision, whether concerning a strategic material factor or a political factor, Hezbollah carefully calculates its moves. Each decision not only factors in the current climate, but focuses on long-term goals and survival of the movement.

Hezbollah's strategic calculation during the Syrian crisis clearly reflects clearly their careful calculation. Each of Nasrallah's speeches, while adjusting in language to fit the escalation of the Syrian crisis, were strategically crafted to gain support for the overall position of Hezbollah's support for the Assad regime. Furthermore, the very decision to support the Assad regime followed a carefully calculated decision both for the material and operation considerations previously discussed, and the long-term survival of the movement, as it is supporting its ally in resistance and rhetoric and not merely providing material support.

Implications for U.S. Policy

Our findings throughout this paper illustrate that Hezbollah's foreign policy does little to affect its domestic standings amongst its supporters in Lebanon. US foreign policy makers must ignore Syria as it relates to Hezbollah's domestic political standing. As previously mentioned

¹¹⁴ Blanford, Nicholas. "Nicholas Blanford Interview." Personal interview. 16 Mar. 2012.

the current discourse assumes that Hezbollah's strategic relationship with Syria inherently affects its domestic popularity in Lebanon. While Hezbollah's strategic standing in the region will be affected by the situation in Syria, Hezbollah popularity within the established Lebanese sectarian system allows a degree of stability for the group. While it may be tempting to 'kill two birds with one stone' in regards to the Assad regime and Hezbollah, US policy makers must differentiate between the two and establish a specific policy which seeks to undermine Hezbollah's domestic standing. The destabilizing effect the situation in Syria has on Hezbollah's strategic capabilities should not be looked at as an avenue to destabilize Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, any policy choices toward Hezbollah must consider its domestic situation in Lebanon, in the long-term.

Conclusion

In the wake of the Arab spring protests, Hezbollah's seemingly contradictory position on the conflict in Syria suggested that there would be a shift in its popular support in Lebanon. However, from an analysis of Hassan Nasrallah's speeches, and the Lebanese media's response to them, it is clear that the sectarian nature of Lebanon leaves little room for shift in popular support of Hezbollah. Due to the bleeding of the sectarian system into the media, there is little change in the view of Hezbollah in both outlets that support it, and outlets that oppose it. However, the position of Hezbollah toward the Syrian opposition continued to change throughout the conflict.

Many observers are quick to point out that the protests of the Arab Spring didn't materialize in Lebanon for various sectarian, historical, and societal reasons.¹¹⁵ It is hard to deny

¹¹⁵ Lynch, Marc. *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2012. 123. Print.

that the Arab Spring hasn't affected the political dynamics within Lebanon. As demonstrated in this paper, Nasrallah attempted to capitalize on the rhetoric of the popular protest movements that swept the region. His interpretation, while based on a pan-Arab sentiment of discontent failed to fully explain the unrest and his seemingly hypocritical stance on Syria was taken as an affront to the principles of the protest movements.

The changing position of Hezbollah toward the Syrian opposition has little to do with the popular opinion of Hezbollah in Lebanon, but all to do with international strategic considerations of the party. Hezbollah's evolving position is a clear strategic decision, with the implicit purpose of protecting the long-term strategic situation of the party. Although, there is no way to measure the effectiveness of the shifts in Hezbollah's policy at this early stage, it is clear through and observation of the evolving policy that the shifts are purposeful.

The effects of Hezbollah's support for Assad are yet to be determined, with the ongoing Syrian conflict evolving daily. However, it is clear the domestically Hezbollah lost little support, and March 14th is unsuccessful is siphoning support away from Hezbollah by purely championing the rhetoric of the Syrian uprising. Yet, Hezbollah's changing position toward the Syrian opposition is an ever-present fact that displays the intense strategic concerns of the 'Party of God'.

Lebanon Media Spectrum

	<u>News Outlet</u>	<u>Language</u>	<u>Political Bias</u>
<u>March 14th Affiliated</u>	an-Nahar	Arabic	Anti-Assad
	al-Mustaqbal	Arabic	Future Movement Paper
	al-Joumhouria	Arabic	Pro-March 14th
	NOW Lebanon	English	Anti-Hezbollah
	Ya Libnan	English	Pro-March 14 th ,
	<u>Unbiased</u>	al-Balad	Arabic and French
The Daily Star		English	Mostly Unbiased
al-Anwar		Arabic	Mostly Balanced Coverage
Naharnet		Arabic and English	Balanced
<u>March 8th Affiliated</u>	al-Diyar	Arabic and English	Pro-Syria, Close ties to SSNP
	al-Akhbar	Arabic and English	Pro-Hezbollah , Independent, Leftist
	as-Safir	Arabic	Pro-Hezbollah, independent
	Aztag	Armenian, Arabic, and English	Armenian Revolutionary Federation Paper
	al-Manar	Arabic, English, French, Spanish	Hezbollah's News Network

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أمن لملاذ: وت رك يا مفتوحاً ال حوار ب اب يُبقي أذان / لا لاسد تأييداً سوريا ف ي مليونية مسيرات ..الأحداث على عام"
إلى الإ سلامية ال عدوى ان تقال من وت خشى ت عرقل روسيا:جوب يه / ال سوري ال داخل ف ي ل لمدن ي بين
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