

Hezbollah: A History of the “Party of God”
by Dominique Avon and Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian.
Harvard University Press 2012.

For the last thirty years, Hezbollah has been a force of growing influence and prestige in the Lebanon. A Shiite group drawing its inspiration from Iran and its support from Syria and Iran, the ‘party of god’ has moved in the decades of its existence from terrorist group on the fringes to part of the Lebanese government.

Its entrenchment in the fissiparous structures of Lebanon has been achieved by a cleverly targeted programme of social action combined with some ‘spectaculars’ which have brought it prestige and additional support from across the Middle East. These include the devastating attack on the US Embassy in Beirut in 1983, the murder of the CIA bureau chief in the 1980s, the bombing of a Jewish Cultural Centre in Argentina in 1994, and its conflict with Israel in 2006.

In Hezbollah, the academics Dominique Avon and Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian analyse this grouping, considering its history and development in all its aspects. There are two parts to the book: the first, The “Party of God”: An Itinerary (1982-2009) is subdivided into three chapters, focussing on the three main periods of Hezbollah’s development, 1982/1985-1991, 1992-2000, 2000-2009; the second is devoted to two key party documents, its 1985 Open Letter and its 2009 Political Charter.

The future role of Hezbollah in the Middle East, with its Syrian partner steadily imploding and its Iranian sponsor going who-knows-where, cannot be easily predicted, but based on its history to date it is likely to be baleful.

Hezbollah: A History of the “Party of God” is essential reading for anyone interested in the Middle East, and with its extra sections on key terminology and individuals is ideal for those beginning an engagement with the area to read as an introduction to a key player in the region.

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