

Hezbollah's Autonomy and the Lebanese State

Since its independence in 1943, the Lebanese state's authority has been continuously challenged by different factors and actors. In light of these challenges and along with the process of consolidating the state after the end of the civil war (1975-1990) and what has been called the process of moving from 'mini-states to the state' (Mennassa 2002), this article will explore the extent to which Hezbollah, the party of God, considered by many a 'state-within-a-state' or at least as holding an autonomous status of its own (Sharara 2006), threatens the centrality of the state or not. Is Hezbollah completely autonomous from the state, and if so, to what extent?

I would like to argue that Hezbollah has not only been legitimized by the Lebanese state but also remains dependent on the state. All post Taëf governments including post 2005, have agreed and granted the party the right to resist against Israel. At the same time the party has always sought the official recognition of the government.

Building upon the concept of 'governmentality' (Foucault 1978) and the fact that social sciences tend nowadays to study and reaffirm the boundaries between the state and society (Mitchell 1991) as a reaction to a pluralist approach (Almond 1988) in contradiction to a statist approach (Evans et al. 1996), the paper will question the autonomy of the state vis-à-vis society (Mann 1984; Migdal 1988). It will try to briefly analyze the process of consolidation of the state in Lebanon as a 'social engineer' (Picard 2006) in continuous negotiation with different 'imagined communities' (Zubaida 1989).

The paper will thus empirically explore how Hezbollah was legitimized by successive post-Taëf governments. It will analyze the process of power negotiation between the Hariri project for the economy and Hezbollah's resistance project. It will closely examine the ministerial statements and the behavior of both parties in parliament. I would like to argue based on different incidents and facts (May 8th, recent withdrawal from the government etc.) that Hezbollah needs the state and thus its power relies primarily on the process of legitimization of the Lebanese state.

In conclusion, this article aims to elucidate the validity of the 'state-within-a-state' in today's Lebanon, and to question whether a model of state/resistance can be developed.

References

Almond. G. (1988) "The Return to the State" *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82, No. 3. (Sep., 1988), pp. 853-874.

Foucault M. (1991) Governmentality, in: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, & Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 87-104

Mann M. (1984) "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results" *European Journal of Sociology* Vol. 25. No. 2. 185-213

Mennassa K. (2002) *Elias Al-Hrawi: Awdat Al Joubhouriya Mina Al Doumylat Illa Al Dawla* (Elias Al-Hrawi: The Comeback of the Republic From mini-states to the state). Dar Annahar.

Migdal J. (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mitchell T. (1991) "Beyond the Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics" *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 1. (Mar., 1991), pp. 77-96.

Sharrara W. (1996) *Dawlat Hizballah: Loubnan Moujtamaan Islamiyan* (The State of Hezbollah: Lebanon as an Islamic Society). Dar Annahar.

Zubaida, S. (1989) *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East*. London: Routledge.