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*Understanding the Contrasting Policies of Hezbollah and  
Sadrist Movement towards the Syrian Civil War*

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## Introduction

As things began to fall apart in Syria in early 2011, the Lebanese Hezbollah was confronted by a potentially major policy problem. Syria shares long borders with Lebanon. Numerous tribes, ethnic groups and families straddle those borders, making the threat of contagion an obvious one. This is amplified by the fact that, like Lebanon, Syria is a ‘mosaic’ society, with Arab and Kurd, and Sunni, Shi‘a, Alawi, Christian and Druze communities living side by side, often in enclaves. Conflicts between communities on one side of the border always have the potential to ignite conflicts between those same communities on the other. Of course, these are problems for neighbours that complement, rather than replace, those associated with conflict societies in general; increased organised crime in border regions and potential for intervention by foreign adversaries being just the two most obvious.

The Syrian Government soon took to military action, besieging the southern city of Dara‘a with artillery and armour on 25 April. Protest became revolution, with groups such as the Free Syrian Army and various Islamist factions emerging from corps of defecting

soldiers and released or escaped prisoners. On 12 July 2012, Syria was acknowledged to be in a state of civil war by the United Nations. Hezbollah’s potential problem had become something very real.

From the very beginning, Hezbollah threw its full support behind the embattled regime of President Bashar al-Asad, starting with an information operations campaign across its various media and swiftly moving to intervene militarily.<sup>1</sup> Despite the apparent inevitability of this policy,<sup>2</sup> neither the nature of Hezbollah’s engagement nor its choice of allegiance was necessarily pre-ordained. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than by the counter-example of one of its Arab Twelver Shi‘i Islamist counterparts in Iraq, the Sadrist Movement. The Sadrists not only refused to join Hezbollah and other militias in a sectarian coalition, but even went so far as to condemn such an intervention as a gross infringement of Syrian sovereignty. This exacerbated an ongoing row between the two hitherto fraternal groups over policy towards Syria.

Yet, Iraq too shares long borders with Syria. The complications of cross border tribes, ethnic groups and families, as well as

‘mosaic’ societies, are as pressing for Iraq as for Lebanon. And of course, the general

problems stemming from civil war are a potential issue for all states and societies bordering Syria. Moreover, both Hezbollah and the Sadrist Movement are Islamist-nationalist Twelver Shi‘a Arab actors that maintain social, political and armed wings. Both have developed from resistance movements and have sought at times to surpass the state in the provision of social services such as water, electricity, and waste disposal, as well as security, and law and order. Both inhabit consociational polities, which are situated in a conflict-prone region that they share with a host of often adversarial actors. There is an important genealogical link between the two movements,<sup>3</sup> which has long been complemented by cordial political, ideological, and military relations. It was not so long ago that Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist Movement, claimed that his movement models itself on Hezbollah. How and why did two such similar actors from such comparable societies behave so differently when confronted by the same phenomenon? How is it that these self-proclaimed allies did not share the same stance, or, for that matter, why were their positions not inverted?

This paper seeks to explain how and why the policies of Hezbollah and the Sadrist Movement towards the Syrian Civil War differed so markedly. Although we might expect to see similar Syria policies from the two actors, we see nothing but difference. Nowhere is the effect on policy of the many overlooked or even unseen cognitive, ideological, organisational and contextual differences between the Sadrist Movement and Hezbollah demonstrated more clearly than in their utterly opposing policies towards the Syrian Civil War and the protests that preceded it. Whilst the Sadrist Movement holds dear the principles of state sovereignty and national popular self-determination, leading to a policy of non-interventionism, Hezbollah is compelled to engage in what it depicts as new front in the global zero-sum conflict between oppressor and resistance.

## Hezbollah and Intervention in Syria

From the first days of the Syrian protests in March 2011, Hezbollah could not have taken a more supportive stance towards the government. This was in stark opposition to the movement’s previous enthusiasm for the ‘Arab Spring’ elsewhere, particularly in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain. As the

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conflict spiralled from protests and crackdowns to low-level violence and then outright civil war, Hezbollah's policy also developed. There were two stages to it: Firstly, statements and demonstrations of support for the government and dissemination of pro-regime propaganda; secondly, active military involvement alongside the government against rebel forces. Accordingly, we see change in Hezbollah discourse over the course of the conflict. The language<sup>4</sup> in the Hezbollah representation of events helps us to understand *how* the situation could be constructed as requiring rhetorical support and then military involvement. It also reveals aspects of cognition that, with assessment of further contextual factors, aid us in completing the picture to explain *why* it was so constructed.

During the first few months of unrest, Hezbollah underplayed or even underreported the demonstrations and the crackdowns. Instead, it highlighted<sup>5</sup> the support that the regime allegedly enjoyed among a large proportion of the Syrian populace.<sup>6</sup> Hezbollah media emphasised the scale of pro-government gatherings and elucidated the reasons behind the Syrian people's loyalty to Bashar al-Asad, namely

the security that he assured them from foreign aggression and from anarchy. For example, in early February, Hezbollah claimed that Syria's "resistance dignity is the reason for immunity to revolution."<sup>7</sup> According to Hezbollah, Syria was paying "a tax for its resistance to Israel and Judaization [and][...] its support for Lebanon and Palestine".

The reason given was that "Israel and its allies want to turn the clock back, to before the victory of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions". But Hezbollah was supposed to be propagandising *against* revolution in Syria, arguing that Israel was behind it all. It seems odd to frame the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt as a 'victory', detrimental to Israel. How could it claim that Israel was at once a reactionary, counter-revolutionary force in Tunisia and Egypt *and* behind the unrest in Syria? There is an logic at play, however. The Tunisian and Egyptian regimes were represented by Hezbollah as pro-US and pro-Israeli. Their collapse was a blow to US and Israeli regional designs and a boon to the resistance against them. For Hezbollah, the Arab people stand against the US and Israel, yet their governments often betray them. Since the Syrian government *already* opposed Israel, there was no discord between the people and the regime. 'Israel and its

allies' sought to 'turn the clock back' by bringing down the Syrian regime, thereby counter-acting the loss of their allies Tunisia and Egypt but also effecting a loss in the 'resistance' camp. Hezbollah sustained this impression through reports such as that about the 'millions' of text messages sent from Israel to Syria urging an uprising ("third parties continue to broadcast lies about the situation in Dara'a, making claims about messages and pictures arriving from inside the city and the occurrence of massacres and inciting the people and intimidating them"), as well as weapons and ammunition being delivered across the border.<sup>8</sup>

This reiterated a 'bad faith model' of Israel that was already long established in Hezbollah discourse, as well as the attribution of all local and regional problems to Israel and the US. Discursive and behavioural intersubjective processes between Hezbollah and those actors engendered these impressions, but there were also very real historical precedents that make these models salient. That said, we should understand that this construction assuaged dissonance stemming from Hezbollah's support for the 'Arab Spring' elsewhere and its reticence about it in Syria. Hezbollah *needed* to perceive and depict events thus.

Syria was the 'resistance corridor' for Iranian arms to reach Hezbollah in Lebanon. Moreover, Hezbollah's prior representation of the 'Arab Spring' as a 'resistance' project would be in some ways harder to revise than simply employing this explanatory logic.

Gradually, the Hezbollah narrative established that the unrest was indicative of a 'conspiracy' against Syria.<sup>9</sup> Events in Syria were part of the US 'domino theory' approach to the region, in light of the failure of the invasion of Iraq.<sup>10</sup> Regime victory in Syria and successful revolutions elsewhere would "destroy US hegemony".<sup>11</sup> This narrative followed an archetypal pattern, namely a US-Zionist plan to spread chaos and division in Middle East, due to the influence of organisations like the Project for the New American Century and AIPAC, in order to break any resistance so that Israel could become totally dominant in the region.<sup>12</sup> Protests in Syria were linked to Israel/Zionists and the US, to conspiracy, to projects, to chaos, to division, to hegemony, and to oppression. In contrast, the regime was linked to Syria (as opposed to foreign entities), to Lebanon and Palestine, to resistance, to the people, to Arabs, to Muslims, and to freedom. Hezbollah described President Asad as a "bulwark

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against everything plotted against Syria”.<sup>13</sup> Notably, the representation of events in Syria in the movement’s English language media was somewhat muted, highlighting only the mass support that the regime enjoyed.<sup>14</sup> This indicates a different framing for the English language readership, namely the legitimacy of the majority, as opposed to resistance. Whether one or both is disingenuous or instrumental is unimportant; they either *form* and/or *reflect* Hezbollah interests.

Shortly, Hezbollah began to mobilise, using its Arabic media channels to call for massive demonstrations in Beirut in support of the Syrian regime.<sup>15</sup> The phrasing of the call is instructive, and it is worth citing in full, not least as an example of the use of internet media to influence political behaviour among supporters:

In solidarity with brotherly Syria, in the face of the Western, American-Zionist scheme to undermine the national and pan-Arab resistance axis, having the honour to meet with Lebanese national parties and forces and the Alliance of Palestinian Forces, we cordially invite you to participate in this manifestation in solidarity with Syria’s Asad.<sup>16</sup>

Note the elision of “brotherly Syria” and “Syria’s Asad”, the allusion to a “Western, American-Zionist scheme to undermine the national and pan-Arab resistance axis”. Observe also the attribution to “Western, American-Zionist” Others of causal responsibility for the problem, and the tacit analogy drawn between the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance to Israel. We should bear in mind the conjunction of national and pan-Arab. What was happening was depicted as an attack on both a pan-Arab and a Lebanese national interest. There is a definite case to be made for Hezbollah *needing* to understand and represent it in this way, but the fact remains that it is entirely comprehensible that it would also expect events to be like this, given its own historical experience.

A concerted effort was made to link Lebanese security with the situation in Syria, through phrases such as “Lebanon’s security is the security of Syria.”<sup>17</sup> This is understandable, given that this was a time of intense wrangling over the formation of a government in Lebanon following tight elections. Hezbollah’s most bitter rival, the Sunni politician Saad Hariri, was attacked rhetorically for supporting the tribunal investigating the assassination of his father,

which indicted Hezbollah and Syria, and for the UN resolution demanding the disbanding of all Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah. This was connected by Hezbollah to the Syrian civil conflict, and thus to the regional resistance war against the US and Israeli project.<sup>18</sup> Hariri was alleged to want to “depose Asad and get the Muslim Brotherhood into power”, as well as to “break the resistance” (both Hezbollah and Asad’s regime being the ‘resistance’).<sup>19</sup> This added a domestic political slant to the representation of the Syrian civil conflict. It also tinged it with a sectarian colour, linking to the Sunni Islamist group, the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, by mention of the resistance it alluded to Israel, implying that the collapse of the regime would lead to Israeli and/or Sunni domination at home. We should note how the Future Party was represented as conspiring with foreigners against the nation, against Syria, and against a wider pan-Arab cause (the resistance).<sup>20</sup> For example, the visit of US Envoy Jeffrey Feltman to Beirut, during which he met with Hariri, lending US support to his cause. This was framed by Hezbollah as an attempt to intervene in Syria using Lebanon as springboard.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, according to Nabih Berri, the parliamentary speaker and leader of the Hezbollah aligned Amal Party, “the sole purpose of visits of foreign officials

is to use Lebanon as a base to overthrow Syria”.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst the Vice President of the Executive Council of Hezbollah, Shaykh Nabil Qaouk, stated unequivocally that the “resistance rejects foreign interference”,<sup>23</sup> he also positioned Hezbollah to have legitimate grounds to intervene in response to any foreign interference. This was in direct reaction to the support afforded by Hariri’s Future Party and the Lebanon First initiative to the protesters in Syria:

What is your priority, Lebanon First? You are targeting the resistance first and Syria first and Iran first. And why is ‘The Future’ Party intentionally dragging Lebanon into a war with Syria and Iran? In whose interest? Are you in favour of the state or rather crossing into US custody of Lebanon and the region?

This text summarises Hezbollah’s dichotomous basic schema very nicely: Support for the protesters in Syria equated to war against the resistance, Iran and Syria. This could only be in the interests of the US, as opposed to the Lebanese state, with the implication being that the interest of the state was to align with Syria, Iran and ‘the

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resistance'. This further underscores the elision of the domestic and the regional in Hezbollah's representation of the situation. Again, this might illustrate how actors can both *need* and *expect* a situation to be a certain way, for its political interests in the first case and its historical experience and the precedent behaviour of other actors in the latter.

As the conflict developed into an armed uprising, it was linked to the wider struggle, with the rebels operating "hand-in-hand" with the US-Zionist enemy to "weaken the regional resistance", through the destruction of the Asad regime.<sup>24</sup> By the end of June, Hezbollah identified a "US-Israeli war on Syria"<sup>25</sup> and a US-Turkish-Israeli "trinity" conspiracy,<sup>26</sup> all linked to Syria's role in resistance against Israel.<sup>27</sup>

This was a turning point in Hezbollah discourse. It completed the linking of the regime to Hezbollah, bolstering the analogy of 'resistance' war and facilitating the attribution to 'the Other' the responsibility for all wrong. The decision of the Arab League to suspend Syria, impose sanctions, express support for the opposition and call for the army to rebel lies largely at its heart, as this was, of course, exactly what Hezbollah was expecting to happen in line with the US-

Israeli project for the region. Indeed, in late 2011, Hezbollah began to talk about "protecting" the border and cracking down upon arms smuggling, stating that it would "beat with an iron hand those who have started to tamper with stability and security in the brother country [Syria], as this has serious repercussions for Lebanon".<sup>28</sup> This underscored the notion that other actors were trying to use Lebanon as a conduit or base to attack Syria, further linking the conflict to Lebanese affairs.<sup>29</sup> By connecting war in Syria to regional war to Lebanon, Hezbollah constructed an idea that it is all connected, so that it became feasible to state openly that "perhaps Hezbollah would also feel compelled to war if things worsened in the region to the extent of threatening its fate and its resistance and its allies".<sup>30</sup>

Hezbollah began to plan overtly for military involvement, although it was framed as being reactive and defensive. In order to stop Israel, NATO and Turkey moving against Asad, Hezbollah publicised what it called a "coordinated plan to bomb Tel Aviv".<sup>31</sup> It established "red lines" related to any actual collapse of the regime, the breaching of which would make intervention possible,<sup>32</sup> even a rational and responsible thing to do in an atmosphere of "mounting pressure and violence".<sup>33</sup> This contributed to an

overarching theme that everything was building up to a massive regional war, an Israeli, US and Western invasion of Syria. It was connected to Lebanon by Hezbollah's reports on those in Syria who said that, if they won there, they would come to Lebanon and fight Hezbollah<sup>34</sup> and that the March 14 Alliance was planning with the US as part of the Syria campaign to deploy operations in Lebanon.<sup>35</sup>

By late 2011, Hezbollah was representing the situation as part of a global conflict, with a coalition that had begun to form against the US/Western plot, mainly centring on Russia and Iran.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Hezbollah even sent a delegation to Moscow<sup>37</sup> and to China<sup>38</sup> in order to shore up this coalition. We should note Hezbollah's positioning of itself as a major player, standing shoulder to shoulder with Moscow, Beijing and Tehran against Washington and Tel Aviv. This self-aggrandising even led it bizarrely to praise Syria for choosing the 'Lebanese model' rather than the 'Libyan model',<sup>39</sup> by which it meant resistance to US and Western hegemony as opposed to collusion, citing itself as the inspiration for such a choice. All this was happening in a context of continued talk of the "next war",<sup>40</sup> with the plan for Syria and Lebanon the same as that for Iraq,<sup>41</sup>

namely a "multinational attack on Syria".<sup>42</sup> In standing against this alleged intervention in Syria, Hezbollah began to outline the "need for a unified stance",<sup>43</sup> which presumably silenced dissent. Once again, Hezbollah's narrative demonstrated classic attribution error, assigning omnipotence to a perceived enemy,<sup>44</sup> and overegging its complex, multi-stage plan.<sup>45</sup>

The constant theme when it comes to external intervention was the threat to Lebanon, and the necessity of Hezbollah intervention to protect against it.<sup>46</sup> This was only bolstered by the kidnappings of Lebanese civilians from across the border that (according to Hezbollah) the international community had done nothing to stop.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, this presages its policy of open intervention, but does this reflect what they were thinking of doing or what they were *already* doing? That is to say, was its discourse constitutive or instrumental? The distinction does not necessarily matter, as it is perfectly possible that it was both at once, and ultimately even if it was initially instrumental, such discourse in itself *becomes* constitutive.

At this point, Hezbollah discourse fully entered the second stage. It began to focus increasingly on where and how every other actor was involved in Syria<sup>48</sup> and essentially

became ‘war rhetoric’. With hindsight, one can see that it was preparing its readership for the coming announcement that it had sent troops in to Syria. It reported more often on the growing *takfiri* threat, for example widely publicising the al-Qa’ida in Iraq and al-Nusra merger and their announcement that it had always been a franchise.<sup>49</sup> Notably, it began to focus more on the fighting and terrorist attacks around the Shi’i shrine of Sayyidah Zaynab in southern Damascus,<sup>50</sup> claiming that the opposition groups had stated they would destroy it if they took that area.<sup>51</sup> This was patent sectarian agitation. Moreover, it continued to talk (as it had done since 2006) about the “coming war with Israel”. This established a mind-set for war and also, when there were war, that it would be against Israel (just waged in a slightly different place).<sup>52</sup>

Of course, Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah publicly confirmed Hezbollah’s military presence in Syria in May 2013, following the instrumental role that Hezbollah fighters played in retaking the town of al-Qusayr from rebel forces.<sup>53</sup> Since then, Hezbollah fighters were reported fighting further afield as auxiliaries of regime forces, notably in/around Homs and the Lebanese border, and being particularly instrumental in the regime victory in the

battle of Qusayr. It is important to note that Hezbollah media representations of the announcement stated that Hasan Nasrallah “was careful at the same time to suggest that this intervention is still localized and confined to discrete tasks, and did not amount to the level of full participation in the fighting alongside the regime against its opponents, without ruling out this possibility if the war were to evolve”.<sup>54</sup> Namely, given the prior representations of the conflict, Hezbollah engagement was restricted in terms of legitimacy to the border and just beyond, and around Sayyidah Zaynab. Its media discourse shifted to justifying this, albeit using the prior framing.<sup>55</sup> It is worthwhile citing in full Hezbollah’s explanation of why it intervened in Syria:

Because of mutual influence, especially of the Syrian side on Lebanon, perhaps it was necessary for Hezbollah and its allies of progress to defend themselves in battle, and thus to make void the charge ‘Lebanese forces involved’, as the battleground *is* Lebanese. Now we have reached this massive and obvious conflict of international depth, there is no longer isolation according to the list of entities [meaning states/borders]. It is

a battle between global axes, the battleground is Syria, and all states are concerned, no longer does it make sense to accuse of involvement or non-involvement. So, it was obvious that not only Hezbollah is an involved party in the Syrian conflict, but also all the forces allied with it in the glorious coalition camp in the defence of strategic interests and common destiny.<sup>56</sup>

After openly admitting intervention in Syria, Hezbollah adopted a much more bullish approach in its media narratives. It praised the close working relationship and warm links and respect between Iraqi jihadis and Hezbollah,<sup>57</sup> and effectively depicted the Syrian opposition as working with Israel as part of a Zionist plot,<sup>58</sup> given Israeli air strikes on government positions.<sup>59</sup>

So, how and why did Hezbollah come to adopt a policy of intervention in neighbouring Syria? Having increasingly represented the uprisings of the ‘Arab Spring’ as analogous to its own struggle, to the Iranian Islamic Revolution, and to the Palestinian liberation cause, there was significant dissonance when the ‘Arab spring’ arrived in the heart of fellow member of the “resistance axis”, Syria. This was, of

course, because of the representation of the ‘Arab Spring’ as being part of the resistance struggle against Western-Zionist imperialism, as opposed to an instance of people against regime. The fact that Western aligned actors supported the protests in Syria, and that the regime had already been established as a resistance actor, meant that the uprisings could be represented as a tit-for-tat move. A number of Western aligned governments had fallen and so this was an attempt to strike at the vital ‘resistance corridor’. Moreover, this was a clear threat to the movement itself, with respect to resistance project on the whole and in Lebanon, and was linked to domestic threats, and thereby a *need* was constructed. In fact, Hezbollah and Lebanon, as part of the ‘resistance axis’, were represented as *already* being involved, so Hezbollah *had* to react. And, of course, it *could* countenance intervention because its construction of political reality was centred on a conflict between a resistance axis and a Western-Zionist imperialist project rather than being about states *per se*.

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## The Hezbollah-Sadrist Dispute

In direct contrast to Hezbollah's clear stance, the Sadrist Movement espoused an ambivalent stance on Syria. It generally accepted the calls of the protesters and rebels for democracy and an end to authoritarian rule in Syria as legitimate,<sup>60</sup> maintained that this was a matter for the Syrian people to resolve through dialogue and reform, but urged that they should first concentrate on defeating Israel.<sup>61</sup> That said, the movement vociferously condemned the Israeli strike on a Syrian weapons shipment in early May 2013,<sup>62</sup> sought to block the Arab League suspension of Syria, and like Hezbollah, identified foreign and Western hands at play in the Syrian conflict.<sup>63</sup> Yet, it is fair to say that its stance on the protests in Syria were largely in line with its broader support for the 'Arab Spring', in contrast to Hezbollah's rather apparent *volte-face*.

The stance taken by the Sadrist Movement led to a furious dispute breaking out between it and Hezbollah, first made public in a report in the Kuwaiti newspaper *Al-Siyassah al-Kuwaytiyyah*<sup>64</sup> but not denied by either party, and later largely substantiated. According to the report, Hezbollah levelled accusations of

treason against the Sadrist Movement, on the basis that the Lebanese actor's strategy<sup>65</sup> that all Shi'a should be involved in the defence of Asad's regime was being negatively affected by the Sadrist Movement's attempts to dissuade Iraqi militiamen aligned to the breakaway Sadrist faction Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and Prime Minister al-Maliki from supporting Hezbollah, and by its general position that Iraqis should not be involved.<sup>66</sup> This overt attack on the Sadrist Movement's policy, and (perceived) interference in its continuing domestic conflict with AAH and al-Maliki, prompted a furious response from Muqtada al-Sadr, who not only stated that Hezbollah should not make any demands of his movement, but also criticised the involvement of Hezbollah and other Shi'a militias for their support of a bloody dictatorship, claiming that Hezbollah had now killed more Syrians than Israelis. This state of affairs was broadly substantiated in an interview with al-Hayat newspaper in late 2013, in which Muqtada al-Sadr stated categorically that "[m]y official, true position — without any pretence — is this: What is happening in Syria is an internal issue and no one is entitled to interfere. The people want to determine their own fate, so what say do I or politicians have in it? [...] [Hezbollah] have their own policies and I

have mine”.<sup>67</sup> In this interview it was also mentioned that the Sadrist Movement had raised Free Syrian Army flags at least one of its rallies, which is not without significance. Al-Sadr has since called for Bashar al-Asad to step down.

In the context of two apparently ideologically aligned Arab Twelver Shi‘a Islamist movements, this represents an important development. Such movements generally maintain a united front in the public sphere. There are personal and familial links between the leadership and membership of each,<sup>68</sup> a history of Hezbollah involvement in Iraq, and a number of mutual statements of support during the years 2003-2011.<sup>69</sup> Senior cadres or leaders of the two movements have held meetings together in Iraq or Lebanon on a number of occasions and also jointly attended meetings with third or other parties, such as Syria and Iran.<sup>70</sup> The disagreement over Syrian policy and the public attacks on one other’s stance marks a significant break from precedent and is indicative of a substantial difference in political identity. The case of Syria is striking because the interests of each were so potentially at threat and also diverse that they were bound to clash. It is also of particular interest because Sadrist policy was

so at odds with that of broader Iraqi society and indeed the Iraqi state.<sup>71</sup>

## Understanding Sadrist Non-interventionism

Constancy in Sadrist policy towards the conflict in Syria was paralleled by constancy in discourse about it. Yet, in contrast to the salience of the matter in Hezbollah discourse, the Sadrist Movement appeared to want to *not* talk about Syria. Muqtada al-Sadr issued a number of communiqués and missives about the situation in Syria, in which he clearly represented as legitimate the demands of the protesters for greater freedoms, increased democracy, and less corruption. Indeed, he even used the term ‘injustice’ to refer to the situation in Syria, and stated that “we hope to be of help to all the revolutionaries/rebels in Syria or Bahrain or Yemen or Egypt or elsewhere.”<sup>72</sup> However, this apparent commitment to the rebel cause was not quite as unequivocal as it seems. In the same text, al-Sadr used the phrase “America is the sponsor of *the* injustice” (emphasis added). This puts quite a different spin on the situation definition; there is injustice in Syria (and elsewhere) ultimately sponsored by the US, and the Sadrist Movement supports all those rebelling

against it. This is an ambiguous definition of the situation and, potentially, a very good way of avoiding having to express support for one side or the other. However, whether or not it is instrumental discourse, it also represented the situation in quite a different manner to both Hezbollah and much of Western media. Like Hezbollah, it was not about democracy versus dictatorship, as it was for much Western media, but unlike Hezbollah, the grander conflict that it was a part of did not involve one side or the other. It was far more transcendental; a grand battle against *injustice* which operated on a totally different level to the conflict actually underway in Syria.

This explains how al-Sadr could also maintain that the affair in Syria is something for the people to resolve through dialogue and reform and that they should first concentrate on defeating Israel and confronting the US.<sup>73</sup> In fact, it is important to note that al-Sadr made clear that “there is a big difference between you [Syria] and the rest of the great revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and Libya and Bahrain and Yemen”. Al-Sadr presented the differences as follows: Firstly, “some of your territory remains occupied for you to liberate, or for the government to liberate in cooperation with you, oh proud and beloved people”.

Secondly, “neighbouring Iraq is still occupied[...] dragging Syria into civil war would make it susceptible to the brutal fangs of America”. As shall be seen, this self-focused Iraq-centric framework lay at the core of the Sadrist response to the events in Syria, and is of foremost importance. Thirdly, “the creation of a power vacuum would put Syria in danger of falling into the abyss of terrorism and fragmentation”. Fourthly, it was not certain that Bashar al-Asad would fall just because of the US and Israeli presence. In both these third and fourth points, we see the impact of historical experience for al-Sadr. Clearly, the terrible civil war in which he became embroiled in Iraq made him reticent to extol the virtues of societal breakdown, but the tenacity of Saddam Hussayn despite Western antipathy from 1990-2003 also appears to have played a role here. Fifthly, “there are large crowds of the Syrian people whose opinion is in favour of the survival of the government”. Al-Sadr concluded that “this requires of you as a people to engage in dialogue and leave violence behind” before finishing by saying “our enemy is Israel and no other”. But was there a *need* or an *expectation* for the issue to appear in this way? Again, as in the case of Hezbollah, there were clearly both historical reasons for expecting to see it like this, but

also contextual motivators for wanting to, not least to maintain Iraqi security and sovereignty through avoiding societal breakdown next door.

Iraq was one of the few Arab states to vote against the motion in the Arab League to suspend Syria in late 2011. Sadrist MP Uday Awad stated afterwards that “Iraq is today non-influential in the Arab world because of the domination and monopoly of the Gulf states on decisions”. He suggested that Iraq enter a coalition with Arab countries which also seek “change in authoritarian rule in the region”, such as Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Lebanon. As it stands, the Arab League is in “existence for those who want to undermine Iraq and its people”.<sup>74</sup> This is an interesting representation of the region, transcending or ignoring domestic politics and instead focusing on the regional or international. Thus, ‘authoritarianism’ did not necessarily mean of the local government, but rather an international regime. This marked a quite striking change from the usual support afforded by the Sadrist Movement to the Arab League. It should be stressed that the Movement clearly considered that intervention would exacerbate conflict and lead to problems for Iraq itself. Moreover, there was a possibility

that the concurrent adversarial relationship with Prime Minister Maliki, supported by the Arab League and international parties in general, had somewhat soured the Sadrist view at this time. Of course, it could simply be that a fit of pique lay at the kernel of this denunciation.

All in all, however, it is clear that any Sadrist interest in Syria was always rather self-focused. Indeed, it appears only to have been a salient issue at all due to the knock-on effects in Iraq. The rise of ISIS has shown that these can be very serious indeed, given the porous borders and communities which straddle them. For example, al-Sadr released a commentary on the spate of bombings in Baghdad throughout 2011, connecting them to the wider security situation in the ‘Middle East’ (meaning Syria). Al-Sadr stated that “politicians led to the deterioration of the security situation[...] with all that is happening in the Middle East there is deterioration leading to destabilization of security and safety, which affects the beloved Iraqi people”.<sup>75</sup> The attribution of blame to “politicians” should be seen as an attack on Maliki and other political elites in Iraq and farther afield, in line with the Sadrist self-conception as populist and representative of the people.

Like Hezbollah, the Sadrists framed the Syrian unrest as part of a global conflict between oppressor and oppressed. However, where Hezbollah put the government on the side of the right and the rebels, *therefore*, on the side of wrong, the Sadrists represented *both* sides as sharing the same true enemy; the problems facing each were caused by that same enemy. It was this re-allocation of the ‘true’ problems facing Syria that facilitated the Sadrist condemnation of Turkey for its ‘regional policeman’ role following its policy of support for the Syrian opposition, which it claimed was motivated by its desire to join the EU.<sup>76</sup> This is interesting because it implies a defence of sovereignty and delegitimises any intervention, on the basis that intervention is exactly what the US, UK and Israel wants, in order to gain access and colonise. Therefore, *anyone* who seeks to intervene, in this latter case, Turkey, must be in their camp.

According to Sadrist spokesman Qusay al-Suhail, “Arab society recently began to take the perspective of Iraqi politicians in how to respond to crises and of which what is going on in Syria, reflecting the success of the Iraqi experience”.<sup>77</sup> The Sadrist Movement, as an Iraqi actor, understood and empathised, but has emerged ‘better’, and therefore the Syrians would too. Still, outside these rather

self-focused statements, the movement did not really have much to say about Syria in comparison with Hezbollah. Asked for his position on the Syrian conflict in early 2012, al-Sadr replied with a platitudinous statement laying blame once again at the feet of the US, Israel and the West.<sup>78</sup> Civil war had been visited upon Syria by outsiders, in return for its “defiance”. Yet, neither the government nor the rebels was represented as siding with the outsiders. What was clear, however, through the linking of both Syrian sides with Arabs and in contradistinction to the “evil trinity” (the US, Israel and the UK), as well as through the emphasis on avoiding sectarianism and encouraging democracy, was the importance of nation and national cohesion. This was perhaps prompted by the Sadrist Movement’s own experience during the Iraqi Civil War, but we could see this as al-Sadr presciently talking about the Iraqi case *per se*, in a time in which sectarianism and sectarian division was on the rise, particularly due to Maliki’s policies in al-Anbar province (which would eventually facilitate the arrival of IS in Iraq).

Al-Sadr made a diplomatic visit to Kuwait in June 2012, during which he also spoke about events in Syria, issuing yet another hackneyed statement that opposed Western interference, and espoused a “centrist

attitude”, non-interventionism and support for popular self-determination.<sup>79</sup> There seemed only one exception to this general rule of international relations, namely, Israel. The Sadrists were able to comment much more authoritatively on the bombing of a Syrian weapons shipment by the Israeli air force in early May 2013,<sup>80</sup> condemning the “Zionist aggression against sister Syria”, by the ‘Zionist usurper’ which had resulted in “blatant suffering”. According to al-Sadr, this “emphasized the need to close ranks in this difficult phase in the life of the Islamic nation and the need to solve the problems of the brother country through dialogue[...] to spare the country from foreign intervention”. This was bolstered by the Sadrist assertion that there were Western hands at play in the Syrian conflict,<sup>81</sup> helping to construct it as a situation in which all evil was caused by the notorious Western trinity, the US, the UK and Israel.

In that vein, in a speech on the ‘Day of the Oppressed’ in May 2013,<sup>82</sup> al-Sadr used the opportunity to call for an end to an end to the ‘fratricide’ in Syria and Bahrain, demanding Islamic unity in the face of greater, universal threats like colonialism. There was a certain vagueness to the Sadrist position. It is clear enough that the movement supported the

fight of the Arab and Muslim peoples against Western and Zionist occupation, colonialism and aggression. It is equally obvious that the movement supported freedom and self-determination as well as national sovereignty. And it is apparent that the fight against Western curtailments of those concepts was the priority for all peoples of the region. But it is not at all self-explanatory where the movement actually stood on the Syrian conflict, beyond that these issues confronted all Syrians, both regime and opposition, and that it should be resolved. That is to say, it is not at all obvious which ‘side’ the movement ultimately came down on. Thus, it comes as no surprise that a follower of al-Sadr sent in a question in mid 2013, to the following effect:

On the social networking site Twitter, on the page that concerns you, appeared a statement saying that you are guiding people to the fighting in Syria and that you support Bashar al-Asad and that you say he will win. Is this really you or media against you?

Given the prevarications and ambiguity of al-Sadr over the two years of the conflict,<sup>83</sup> this seems understandable. Another follower posed almost the same question: “There is a person belonging to you and urging youth to

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fight in Syria, what do you say to him and us?”<sup>84</sup> Sadr’s replies to these are wily in the extreme. To this latter question, he replied: “Where is the evidence?”. To the former, there was no pinning Sadr down: “I have announced my position repeatedly. However, some parties want to change it falsely and slanderously”. In fact, it is hard to find much definitive about the situation at all, rather than vague and ambiguous statements such as these. For example, following the murder of Muhammed Saeed al-Bouti, the statement by Sadr mourned “another loss at the hands of wrongdoers who target clerics and moderate voices of Islam and peace”.<sup>85</sup>

Towards the end of 2013, a question was posed by Iraqi armed forces officers about their problems on the Iraq/Syria border, with respect to transgressions by parties in the Syrian Civil War and their lack of knowledge about the extent of their powers with respect to preventing or deterring them.<sup>86</sup> Sadr’s answer was that he would work for their victory through Parliament, by getting authority to strengthen and empower the border army and give them added powers in order to stave off ‘terrorism’. This implies at least a tendency towards the Asadist side; it is not the Syrian Army that Sadr is worried about, but rather ‘terrorism’. Yet, this contrasts with the presence of FSA flags at

Sadrist rallies and is far from unambiguous. Moreover, it perhaps more than anything simply demonstrates the Sadrist preoccupation with Iraqi sovereignty and security rather than events in Syria, or at least the use of such concerns as a lens to engaging with events there.

At a similar time, Sadr produced a short text about events in the Middle East.<sup>87</sup> In it, he claimed that:

[I]t has been colonialism that brought the Islamic nation and the Middle East and most of the nations to the crucible of war and poverty[...] the dissemination of poisonous ideas has made the body of Islam distracted and exhausted[...] a lethal weapon has subjected all nations having waived their religion and the foundations of their conversion to Islam, its rules and ordinances, and the clearest evidence of what happens is in the countries of Islam and the Middle East.

Sadr is arguing that secularism, caused by colonialism, is at the heart of the problems here. So why not laud opposition to a secular regime? Why not support religious opposition? Perhaps the most telling Sadrist definition of the situation was to be found in

an interview with al-Hayat newspaper in late 2013.<sup>88</sup> It is worth citing certain sections of this interview in full, such are their contribution to clarifying much of the confusion in Sadrist discourse to date. Muqtada al-Sadr maintained that: “The Syria crisis involves settling disputes in bloody ways. None of the parties to the conflict are ethical, neither the extremist opposition nor others. The only victim is the Syrian people”. Yet, he also stated quite categorically that: “What is happening in Syria is an internal issue and no one is entitled to interfere. The people want to determine their own fate, so what say do I or politicians have in it?”. This demonstrates both the ambiguous stance of the Sadrist Movement, for whilst the opposition are described as “extremist”, by implication the government and its auxiliaries (including Hezbollah) are described as ‘unethical’. It also exemplifies Sadrist non-interventionism and support for self-determination. This was further reiterated when the interviewer noted that FSA flags had been raised at Sadrist celebration rallies, and asked whether Sadr intended to engage in dialogue with them, as indeed he had done with the Bahraini opposition. Sadr was unequivocal in his response, ignoring the question about the flags and stating that: “I do not have any

intention to open a dialogue with them. The matter does not concern me. As I said, it’s a purely internal affair”. Again, this demonstrates Sadr’s unwillingness to become at all involved in the issue.

However, being pushed on the issue of which side the Sadrist Movement supported, whether or not it would engage in dialogue with involved parties, and, furthermore, the Hezbollah policy of intervention, Sadr was curt in his reply. Stating that Hezbollah “have their own policies and I have mine”, he went on to emphasise that: “There has been no dialogue [between the Sadrist Movement and Hezbollah] in regards to Syria”. However, perhaps most telling was the question he fired back: “[W]hy are all dialogues focused on Syria? Yes, it is the most dangerous issue, but it’s not the only one. There are other issues such as Iraq, Bahrain, and many other political and Islamic ones”. Here we see clearly the Iraq-centric stance of the Movement, and a reference to broader issues which would act to consolidate as opposed to divide pan-Arab and pan-Islamic political trends, probably the Israeli-Palestinian question and US involvement in the Middle East. And why is there this focus on broader issues? Almost certainly for Iraqi domestic political consensus and security.

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## Explaining Divergence

How should we explain this divergence? Turning back to Hezbollah, we must consider both the fundamental importance of the “resistance/oppressor” dyad for the party, and its espousal of the *raison de resistance* rather than the *raison d'état*. It follows that “foreign” and “domestic” lose relevance as analytic terms, as actors are principally identified according to their alignment in the global, zero-sum conflict, and the party’s relationship with each is dependent on this, rather than nationality. Indeed, everything is reinterpreted according to this overarching *raison de resistance*, including ‘nationalist’ terms, goals, and interests, such as sovereignty and territorial integrity. Syrian sovereignty cannot be infringed by other resistance actors fighting the imperialist project in Syria. The implication of this for policy is striking; all resistance actors are reconceptualised as facets of the same overarching identity, whilst all their opponents *must* be part of the imperialist project, regardless of their actual stance towards the US or Israel. The important thing is an actor’s stance towards pre-defined resistance actors. Following from the interest of pursuing resistance wherever possible, the corollary here is that a blow against any of

these enemy actors aids the global resistance, whilst aid to any resistance actor in the wider struggle – in this case Syria – effectively strikes a blow against the enemy. The fate of one is tied to the fate of all.

In contrast, it is the nationalist-populist elements of the political identity of the Sadrist Movement that really affects how it acts politically. The core interests deriving from that identity are to rid Iraq of foreign influence and to increase Iraqi self-determination, to dismantle the power of the elites, and to foster (Islamic) democracy in Iraq. The subset of interests derived from these lead the movement to invest thoroughly in the principles of state sovereignty and non-interventionism. It is not in its interests to intervene in another state’s internal conflict. However much the movement may feel an allegiance to the downtrodden people of that state, or to those fighting against Sunni extremism, ultimately its interests clearly lie in sustaining the principle of non-interventionism, insulating as well as possible from spill over, assisting Iraqi citizens to return home, and fence-sitting until relations beneficial to Iraq can be established with the winner when the dust settles. Effectively, this amounts to isolationism. With this in mind, it is

important to consider the conditions in which political calculations based on those interests are made.

These facets of identity, and the associated interests, should be considered alongside the political conditions in which each actor formulates its political calculi. Hezbollah has largely enjoyed victory in Lebanon, at least as far as it can do given the demographic situation. It is thus free to pursue political struggles “abroad” (notwithstanding that this term is not used in the same way as we may think), although it should be noted that its Syrian “Vietnam” is causing alarm in Lebanon. Moreover, it is militarily robust, and at the beginning of the conflict was possibly in the best shape it had been; with its military capability intact and with experience of victory in battle, the military option is always on the table for Hezbollah. Equally, it is the case that the material and geopolitical well-being of the movement is intimately linked to the survival of the Syrian regime. Asad’s Syria is, after all, the famed ‘resistance corridor’ and ‘pillar of the regional resistance’.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria merges resistance to the agents of the imperialist project – the proxies of the US-Zionist plot – with very real political concerns over the

survival of the resistance axis and the movement’s well-being itself (notwithstanding that the unit of analysis is not the state).

For the Sadrist Movement, unlike for Hezbollah, there is still a domestic political struggle to win. This struggle is not just framed in terms of domestic politics, but, as could be expected, in terms of the “Iraqi/foreign” and “popular/elite” dyadic arrangements at the core of Sadrist identity. It is a struggle for the people and the nation. It is therefore paramount and surely outweighs ongoing issues in other states. It is also important to address the way in which the diffuse and demilitarised organisational structure of the Sadrist Movement affects decision making. The movement is in no position to embrace the military path; its military capacity is greatly restricted. Additionally, there is enough competition from AAH, which has largely dominated the military option, without blurring the boundaries of the two movements any more; individuals have already moved from one movement to the other, and back again. Thus, the Sadrist Movement may justifiably feel that involvement in the Syrian conflict will further fragment and dissolve the movement beyond the major schism with AAH.

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According to its identity and interests, its major challenge lies at home; even if the movement were to also see a reason to be involved in Syria, it represents an enormous potential harm to be avoided.

The Sadrist Movement views the Syrian conflict through the lens of Iraqi politics and uses it as an instrument to advance the political battle against rival Iraqi actors, particularly AAH and former Prime Minister Maliki, accusing them of being pawns of Iran in bigger game that should not and does not concern them, and for allowing putting Iranian interests before Iraq's, risking spill over and Iraqi lives. This substantiates the notion of elites divorced from the people. In addition, the Sadrist Movement's fragmentation and military neutralisation restrict its capacity to even countenance the military option. Yet the overarching espousal of a nation-statist representation of global politics renders *possible* the decision to leave 'Syrian conflict to the Syrians'; Syria is "abroad", or "foreign", and the movement has invested in the concepts of sovereignty and non-interventionism, largely to protect its own political project in Iraq. Effectively, Sadrist Syrian policy is not about Syria, but about Iraq.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Muqtada al-Sadr has argued for the international relations of the

Middle East to be based upon this nationalist logic: "I would suggest developing a regional charter between Iraq [and other states], based on general common interests, without interference in internal affairs".<sup>91</sup>

Ultimately, in contradistinction to the Sadrists perception of the Syrian conflict through the lens of Iraqi politics, Hezbollah views it through the lens of the global battle against imperialism. Once external powers had clearly intervened in Syria, this is the only course of action that Hezbollah could have taken, given their political identity and associated interests. Moreover, Hezbollah's adherence to a transnationalist representation of global politics facilitates intervention; the Syrian "Civil" War is effectively the latest front of the wider global conflict. Equally, borders have never meant much in the absolute; rather, they have always been subordinated to the *raison de resistance*. For Hezbollah, then, as for the Sadrist Movement, Syrian policy is not about Syria. Unlike for the Sadrist Movement, however, it is not about domestic political struggles, but instead about transnational anti-imperialist resistance.

## Conclusion: Interventionism versus Isolationism

The difference between Hezbollah and Sadrist policies towards the Syrian Civil War is striking. Hezbollah intervened militarily whilst the Sadrist Movement did not, despite the similarity in terms of threat posed by the conflict to each of their states and societies. Moreover, the two movements disagreed publicly on what was the moral stance, marking a serious division between the hitherto congenial allies.

In order to explain how and why this came to be, I have analysed the stark differences in discourse between the two actors. Whereas Hezbollah constructed the Syrian Civil War as requiring intervention, the Sadrist Movement constructed it in a manner that deterred involvement. I sought to outline the cognitive and affective processes underlying these discursive constructions, and to highlight the contextual factors involved in the production of both. This case study is explained through the complex interplay between discourse and constructed realities, cognitive and affective processes, external domestic and regional factors, historical pathways, and intersubjectivity by which foreign policy is formulated. The analysis is

important because of what it implies about the tendencies of Hezbollah and the Sadrist Movement towards intervention and isolationism, further nuancing our understanding of these actors.

In short, Hezbollah re-articulated its *raison d'être* as fighting the US-Zionist plot for the region. This allowed it to turn *volte-face* on its previous policy of support for the 'Arab Spring' uprisings, and to facilitate a rationale – or even an obligation – for intervention. On the other hand, the Sadrist Movement re-emphasised its *raison d'être* as the true and legitimate representative of the real Iraqi people, which, notwithstanding quite severe prevarication, engendered its policy of non-intervention and even discursive ambiguity.

Although the political thought of both Hezbollah and the Sadrist Movement stems from Twelver Shi'i Islamism, they manifest profound divergences in approach to state and society. Moreover, there are far-reaching differences in organisational structure, domestic political context, and regional political environment. As a result, Hezbollah has become a transnationalist actor, in both interest and capability. In contrast, the Sadrist Movement has developed with a focus on the domestic political sphere. This is revealed in each actor's construction of global politics. A

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vision of conflict between oppressor and oppressed is common to both actors. Yet, Hezbollah's markedly transnationalist identification of the locus of symptom and cure is in stark contrast to the Sadrist Movement's siting of both in the state.

This case study has demonstrated the real-world outcomes of differences between the two actors in intellectual hinterland, organisational structure, domestic and regional political context, and construction of global politics. Whilst the Sadrist Movement emerges as a nationalist-populist actor whose foreign policies serve domestic goals, it is clear that Hezbollah's politics on every level are designed to advance its transnationalist aims.

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# Note

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<sup>1</sup> This deployment was confirmed in May 2013 by Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah.

<sup>2</sup> To most seasoned Hezbollah watchers, the announcement came as no surprise, with significant evidence of the deployment being present in Lebanon and Syria for many months.

<sup>3</sup> Both movements are products of the extraordinary activism of three cousins, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Musa al-Sadr and Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. Baqir al-Sadr was instrumental in establishing the Islamist Da'wa al-Islamiyya party in Iraq and was perhaps the major contributor to its political thought. Musa al-Sadr set up Harakat al-Mahrumin in Lebanon, which became AMAL; elements of the Lebanese wing of the Da'wa party and AMAL became Hezbollah. Baqir al-Sadr was also hugely influential in the development of Khomeinist doctrine, and Hezbollah is a Khomeinist movement. On Baqir al-Sadr's death, leadership over his followers in Iraq was taken over by his cousin Sadiq al-Sadr, and this eventually became the Sadrist Movement of today, led by Sadiq's son Muqtada al-Sadr.

<sup>4</sup> Articulations, analogies and quasi-causal arguments.

<sup>5</sup> Through public speeches, articles and interviews published through its Arabic, English, French and Spanish language media organs.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, 'Millions of Syrians rally in support of Al Assad across Syria', *Al-Ahed*, March 29, 2011, available at <http://english.alahednews.com.lb/essaydetails.php?eid=13776&cid=540>, accessed on 03/12/2013;

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<sup>7</sup> 'John Bell: Al-karamah sabab sha'ubiyyah Nasrallah al-'aramah wa-hasanah nizam suria min al-thawrah', *Moqawama.org*, February 04, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=19799&cid=209>, accessed on 10/08/2015.

<sup>8</sup> 'Musadr rasmi suri: Akthar min milyun risala "sms" min al-kharaj musadr aghalibuha "israil"', *Moqawama.org*, March 23, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20242&cid=199>, accessed on 27/07/2015.

<sup>9</sup> "'Al-ahzab" wa-"tahalaf al-quwa al-filistiniyyah": Al-asad hasan suria tajahu kul mah yahaka daduha min muamerat kharbiyyah', *Moqawama.org*, April 01, 2011, available at

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<sup>10</sup> 'Hujarah "al-duminu" al-amrikiyyah tasqat fi suria aydan... wa-al-liqa fi muhta qadimah', *Moqawama.org*, April 01, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20324&cid=324>, accessed on 10/08/2015.

<sup>11</sup> 'Fnaysh: Al-ba'ad yaqдумu nafsahu wa-yastamaru fi ta'idiyah al-dur aladi yakhdumu maslahat amrika wa "isra'il"', *Moqawama.org*, April 17, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20482&cid=114>, accessed on 11/08/2015.

<sup>12</sup> 'Khatut amirkiyyah isra'iliyyah li-nashara al-fawda fi al-sharq al-awsat', *Moqawama.org*, April 03, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20335&cid=324>, accessed on 24/12/2015; see also 'Karami

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<sup>15</sup> 'Al-ahzab wa al-quwa al-lubnaniyyah wa al-fasa'il al-falastiniyyah tanzim liqa'a tadamaniya ma' "suriya al-asad" fi bayrut', *Moqawama.org*, April 18, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20491&cid=199>, accessed on 05/06/2016.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Liqa'a tadamani ma' suriya qabal zahir al-athnin al-muqabal', *Moqawama.org*, April 17, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20479&cid=199>, accessed on 19/02/2015. This underscores the centrality and importance of online media for the movement, and therefore its worth as a data resource.

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<sup>19</sup> 'Halaqah jadidah min "wikileaks": Al-hariri talaba min al-amrikin isqat al-raisa al-suriya bashar al-asad wa ta'iyin khadam wa "al-ikhwan" bidayan 'anahu', *Moqawama.org*, April 16, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=20467&cid=99>, accessed on 08/05/2016.

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<sup>24</sup> "'Al-mu'arida al-suriyya" wa al-half al-gharbi al-sahyuni... yadan biyad', *Moqawama.org*, July 11, 2011, available at <http://www.moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=21189&cid=324&st=%D3%E6%D1%ED%C9#.UyRNQj9 tsE>, accessed on 17/12/2013.

<sup>25</sup> 'Al-harb al-amirkiyyah – al-isra'iliyyah 'ala suriya: Al-fashal hatman', *Moqawama.org*, June 27, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=21080&cid=324>, accessed on 03/05/2016.

<sup>26</sup> 'Al-thaluth al-amirki al-tarki al-isra'ili wa al-tamir 'ala suriya', *Moqawama.org*, June 29, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=21095&cid=324>, accessed on 09/05/2016.

<sup>27</sup> 'Ashraf bayumi: Jiza'a kabir min ahdath suriya murtabat bi-hazimah "Isra'il" amam hizb allah', *Moqawama.org*, October 03, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=21942&cid=324>, accessed on 04/04/2016.

<sup>28</sup> 'Yaghi: Litahfat al-hakumah al-hadud ma' suriya wa li-tadrib bayda min hadid ma' aladin ya'amidun ila al'abath istaqraraha wa amanuha', *Moqawama.org*, August 14, 2011, available at

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- <sup>29</sup> 'Qiyadat hizb allah wa "amal" fi al-biqa': Nurfidu ana yakun lubnan mamaran lil-tamir 'ala suriya', *Moqawama.org*, November 21, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22432&cid=199>, accessed on 06/06/2016.
- <sup>30</sup> 'Al-infajar al-iqlimi lan yastathani luban... ida waqa", *Moqawama.org*, November 29, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22538&cid=324>, accessed on 07/06/2016.
- <sup>31</sup> 'Al-asad: Tal abib rahinah muqabal al-natu wa yahdad bi-kharabiha khilal 6 sa'at wa isra'il taradda lan yakun masir suriya mukhtalifan 'an masir lubnan', *Moqawama.org*, October 06, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=21975&cid=209>, accessed on 28/05/2016.
- <sup>32</sup> 'Al-mu'atiyat alati tadfa' hizb allah ila istab'ad tajruu ay taraf kharabi 'ala muhajamah suriya', *Moqawama.org*, November 18, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22412&cid=324>, accessed on 07/06/2016; see also 'Sahi: Al-tadhkhal al-'askri fi suriya ya'ani infajar al-mantiqah', *Moqawama.org*, February 05, 2012, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=23178&cid=199>, accessed on 27/05/2016.
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- <sup>34</sup> 'Al-amin al-'am li-hizb allah fi al-masirah al-'ashura'yyat al-kabra fi al-dahiyah: Lidina 'ashrat alaf al-muqatalin al-qadribin al-jahazin', *Moqawama.org*, December 06, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22614&cid=138>, accessed on 29/05/2016.
- <sup>35</sup> 'Ziyarah filman al-mashuumah ila bayrut: Fatanah wa tahrid wa amar 'amaliyat li "14 adar"', *Moqawama.org*, December 11, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22688&cid=324>, accessed on 22/05/2016.
- <sup>36</sup> 'Al-shaykh yazbik: Naqadir al-muwaqaf al-rusi aladi ya'azzaz mawqa' al-ahrar fi al-'alam wa wafdana yumkin an yakun al-yawm aw ghadan fi al-sin', *Moqawama.org*, December 22, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22099&cid=118>, accessed on 08/06/2016.
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- <sup>43</sup> 'Abadi da'a li-tawhid al-mawqaf dad ma yakhtat lahu al-'adu al-sahyuni wa amirka wa shadad 'ala rafada al-tadhkhal al-kharaji fi al-shan al-suri', *Moqawama.org*, October 31, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22194&cid=199>, accessed on 03/06/2016.
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- <sup>45</sup> 'Khatah al-amirkiyyah: Isqat al-nizam al-suri... aw al-fatanah al-ta'ifiyyah al-madmarah', *Moqawama.org*, November 12, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22327&cid=324>, accessed on 04/03/2016.
- <sup>46</sup> 'Khatiba' al-jamia' talibu al-lubnaniyin bil-'udah ila al-hiwar wa ikdu an al-atfaq al-'arabi hiyal suriya yajanib al-mantiqah khatar al-tadhkhal al-ajnabiyyah', *Moqawama.org*, November 14, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22244&cid=199>, accessed on 08/06/2016; Also "Liqa' al-ahzab al-quwa al-wataniyyah" rafa' mudakarah ila al-'arabi: Li-atkhad al-mawqaf al-jaria wa al-hasam fi mana' ay tadhkhal ajnabi fi suriya', *Moqawama.org*, November 10, 2011, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=22303&cid=199>, accessed on 08/06/2016; 'Al-tadhkhal al-kharaji fi

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<sup>49</sup> 'Tanzim "al-qa'ida" fi al-'iraq ya'alan an "jabhat al-nusrah" al-suriyyah "amtadad lahu wa jiza'a minhu"', *Moqawama.org*, April 09, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27330&cid=199>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>50</sup> 'Al-majmu'at al-musalahah tastahadaf madiniyin fi dimashq... wa muqatal maslahin 'ala al-hadud al-lubnaniyyah al-suriyyah', *Moqawama.org*, March 13, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27120&cid=199>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

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<sup>52</sup> 'Tasuur isra'ili lil-harb al-muqabalah ma' hizb allah', *Moqawama.org*, February 12, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=26838&cid=209>, accessed on 08/06/2016; and also 'Al-harb al-murtaqibah: Li-haza istadam al-khatut al-hamar – ibrahim al-amin', *Moqawama.org*, April 29, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27512&cid=324>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>53</sup> Speech by Hasan Nasrallah on Hezbollah involvement in Qusayr, May 25, 2013, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ67BQBd8Pg>, accessed 07/11/2013; see also, for example, 'Min al-harb fi suriya ila al-harb 'alayha', *Moqawama.org*, May 06, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27589&cid=324>, accessed on 12/03/2015.

<sup>54</sup> 'Nasrallah yutalaq al-rasasah al-awli fi "al-harb al-waqaiyah" - 'amad marmal', *Moqawama.org*, May 03, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27554&cid=324>, accessed on 08/06/2016; see also 'Al-shaykh qaouk: 'Andama nadfa' 'an al-muqadisat nuqta' al-tariq 'ala al-fatunah al-kabra', *Moqawama.org*, July 22, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=28355&cid=199>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>55</sup> 'Min al-harb fi suriya ila al-harb 'alayha', *Moqawama.org*, May 06, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27589&cid=324>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>56</sup> 'Al-tadkhul fi suriya: Mu'arikah tahalaf wahid wa masir mushtarak – samir al-hasan', *Moqawama.org*, May 06, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=27707&cid=324>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

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<sup>58</sup> 'Fi 'antamah al-layl: Tansiq bayna al-jaysh "al-isra'ili" wa "al-ma'aridah"', *Moqawama.org*, February 28, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=26969&cid=209>, accessed on 19/02/2015.

<sup>59</sup> 'Hizb allah dana bi-shadah al-'adwan al-sahyuni al-jadid 'ala suriya', *Moqawama.org*, January 31, 2013, available at <http://moqawama.org/essaydetails.php?eid=26738&cid=199>, accessed on 29/03/2015.

<sup>60</sup> Statement by Muqtada al-Sadr on justice in Syria, *pc-sader.com*, November 24, 2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/4283.html>, accessed on 12/01/2014.

<sup>61</sup> 'Samaha al-sayyid muqtada al-sadr yah'u al-ma'arada al-suriyya ala al-tahawir ma' al-salata wa-inna yetriku al-saham kun 'ahuhum al-ihtilal al-israili', *pc-sader.com*, November 07, 2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/4135.html>, accessed 10/01/2014.

<sup>62</sup> 'Al-maktab al-khas lisamaha al-sayyid muqtada al-sadr yestankir al-'adwan al-sahyuni 'ala dawla suriya al-sha'iqah', *jawabna.com*, February 04, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/6330.html>, accessed 11/01/2014.

<sup>63</sup> 'Khitab samaha al-sayyid al-qa'id muqtada al-sadr fi yawm al-muzalim', *jawabna.com*, March 16, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/6446.html>, accessed on 15/02/2014.

<sup>64</sup> 'Charges of treason between Muqtada al-Sadr and Nasrallah', *Al-Siyassah al-Kuwaytiyyah*, May 27, 2013, available at <http://mnshoor.net/الصر-ونصر-بين-مقتدى-بالخيانة-بين-مقتدى-ونصر>, accessed on 27/05/2013; see also <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/ar/mediawatchinthepressar/الاتهامات-بالخيانة-الى-حد-الاتهامات-بالخيانة>, accessed on 27/04/2017; also [http://archive.arabic.cnn.com/2013/middle\\_east/5/28/Apprs.tues28may/](http://archive.arabic.cnn.com/2013/middle_east/5/28/Apprs.tues28may/), accessed on 27/04/2017; also <http://www.lebanonfiles.com/news/551610>, accessed on 27/04/2017; also

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<http://eldorar.com/node/11490>, accessed on 27/04/2017; also <http://middle-east-online.com/?id=156122>, accessed on 27/04/2017.

<sup>65</sup> Of course, the question is whether this is Hezbollah's strategy, or the strategy of the ill-defined muqawamah, or indeed the strategy of Khamenei, adopted by those who adhere to wilayat al-faqih. The latter seems most likely, and therefore there was always a significant chance that Hezbollah's exhortations to the SM to adopt the strategy were likely to fall upon deaf ears, given their repudiation of wilayat al-faqih.

<sup>66</sup> The Sadrist Movement vociferously and publicly criticised Iraqis who do go to Syria. Muqtada al-Sadr comprehensively rejected accusations that his movement's fighters were involved and stated categorically that he opposed involvement. Those fighters who did claim affiliation were, according to al-Sadr, "splinter elements", a euphemism for the breakaway Sadrist faction Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) and its supporters. See, for example <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/4256.html>, accessed on 12/03/2015; see also <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/5869.html>, accessed on 12/03/2015; and also <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/7353.html>, accessed on 12/03/2015.

<sup>67</sup> Mushreq Abbas and Sarmad al-Taei, 'Interview with Sayd Muqtada al-Sadr', *Al-Hayat* (December 21, 2013), available at <http://alhayat.com/Details/584527>, accessed on 05/01/2014.

<sup>68</sup> Muqtada al-Sadr, cited in Anthony H. Cordesman and Jose Ramos, *Sadr and the Mahdi Army: Evolution, capabilities, and a new direction* (Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2008), 26.

<sup>69</sup> Rola El-Husseini, 'Hezbollah and the Axis of Refusal: Hamas, Iran and Syria', *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (2010): 803-815, 176.

<sup>70</sup> For example, Hezbollah held meetings with Presidents Asad and Ahmadinejad in 2010 and 2007; both movements sent representatives to the inauguration of Iranian President Ahmadinejad in 2005; Muqtada al-Sadr visited President Asad in 2010 and 2008 and spent time in Iran post-2008; Sadr visited Hezbollah 2006.

<sup>71</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 'Making foreign policy in the midst of turbulence', in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond Hinnebusch (eds) *The foreign policies of Middle East states* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2015), 339-350, 344.

<sup>72</sup> Statement of Muqtada al-Sadr on justice in Syria, *pc-sader.com*, 24/11/2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/4283.html>, accessed on 12/01/2014.

<sup>73</sup> 'Samaha al-sayyid muqtada al-sadr yah'u al-ma'arada al-suriyya ala al-tahawir ma' al-salata wa-inna yetriku al-saham kun 'ahuhum al-ihital al-israili', *pc-sader.com*, November 07, 2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php/permalink/4135.html>, accessed 10/01/2014.

<sup>74</sup> "'Uday 'awad": 'Ala al-salatatin al-tanfidiyyah wa al-tashri'iyyah fi al-'iraq atkhad qarar bishan ijad tahalf lil'iraq dakhil al-jami'at al-'arabiyyah', *pc-sader.com*, November 13, 2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php?news=4075>, accessed on 09/08/2014.

<sup>75</sup> 'Samahat al-sayyid al-qa'id muqtada al-sadr yastankir al-taffjirat al-irhabiyah wa yuukid: Sara' al-siyasiyin ada ila tadhur al-wada' al-amani al-suri al-hash', *pc-sader.com*, December 22, 2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php?news=4897>, accessed on 09/08/2014.

<sup>76</sup> 'Samahat al-sayyid al-qa'id al-mujahid muqtada al-sadr: Inna turkiya tasa'a lil-dakhul fi al-athad al-urubi wa inna dakhulah hasib ra'i la thamrah diniyyah fihu bil mujrad iqtisadi wa i'lami', *pc-sader.com*, December 15, 2011, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php?news=4706>, accessed on 09/08/2014.

<sup>77</sup> 'Al-duktur "al-sahil" yada'u al-dawl al-'arabiyyah wa al-iqlimiyyah wa al-mujtama' al-dawli ila taghayir wa juhah nazir huma hiyal al-'iraq', *pc-sader.com*, January 17, 2012, available at <http://www.pc-sader.com/index.php?news=5348>, accessed on 09/10/2014.

<sup>78</sup> See, for example,

<https://www.facebook.com/egve3/photos/a.163635323696358.40738.143898365670054/282079715185251/?type=1>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>79</sup> See, for example,

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=406053529440328&set=a.184828651562818.41102.100001070526331&type=1&permPage=1>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>80</sup> 'Al-maktab al-khas lisamaha al-sayyid muqtada al-sadr yestankir al-'adwan al-sahyuni 'ala dawla suriya al-sha'iqah', *jawabna.com*, February 04, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/6330.html>, accessed 11/01/2014.

<sup>81</sup> 'Khitab samaha al-sayyid al-qa'id muqtada al-sadr fi yawm al-muzalim', *jawabna.com*, March 16, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/6446.html>, accessed on 15/02/2014.

<sup>82</sup> 'Nas kalimah samahat al-sayyid muqtada al-sadr fi muutamir al-sayyidah fatimah al-zahira'a 'anwan al-wahidat al-islamiyyah', *jawabna.com*, May 01, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/6471.html>, 15/03/2014.

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<sup>83</sup> This is ambiguity is perhaps best seen through the lens of the practice of *taqiyyah*, namely “precautionary (variants: pious, religious, expedient) dissimulation (of one’s beliefs) [...] self-protection through dissimulation and [...] safeguarding of secrets,” or, simply, pragmatism in expressing one’s opinions and positions: Etan Kohlberg, ‘Taqiyya in Shi‘i theology and religion’ in Hans Kippenberg and Guy Stroumsa (eds) *Secrecy and concealment: Studies in the history of Mediterranean and Near Eastern religions* (Leiden/NY/Koln: EJ Brill, 1995), 345-381, 345.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, <http://jawabna.com/en/index.php/questions-and-answers/3041-sayd-muqtada-al-sadr-replying-somebody-where-is-the-evidence.html>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, <http://jawabna.com/en/index.php/statements/3043-sayd-muqtada-al-sadr-condemns-assassinating-sheikh-al-bouti.html>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Sayyed commander answers to a question sent him by the officers and employees of the Iraqi-Syrian border’, *jawabna.com*, December 14, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/7139.html>, accessed on 09/02/2014.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Samahat al-sayyid al-qa‘id yajib ‘ala suwal hawl al-sara‘iyat wa al-ahdath alaty ya‘ishuha al-‘alam al-‘arabi’, *jawabna.com*, December 24, 2013, available at <http://jawabna.com/index.php/permalink/7172.html>, accessed on 08/06/2016.

<sup>88</sup> Abbas and al-Taei, ‘Interview with Sayd Muqtada al-Sadr’.

<sup>89</sup> Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The story from within* (London: Saqi, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the personal history of Sadr family, as Shi‘a leaders, fighting and suffering at hands of Ba‘athist regime, may well lead Muqtada al-Sadr and his senior cadres to feel a certain emotional aversion to a Ba‘athist regime elsewhere, and a sympathy with those suffering at its hands.

<sup>91</sup> Muqtada al-Sadr, cited in Abbas and al-Taei, ‘Interview’.