

# **Hezbollah (Lebanon): “Nasrallah and his political and military choices cannot be seen in black or white”**

Thursday 10 October 2024, by [ACHCAR Gilbert](#), [EZZAT Dina](#) (Date first published: 9 October 2024).

**We reproduce below part of an interview with Gilbert Achcar by Dina Ezzat, for arham online, concerning Lebanon. This part is largely devoted to Hezbollah. The full interview is available on ESSF (article 72206), [One year after 7 October, Gilbert Achcar discusses the future of Gaza, Lebanon, and the regional conflict.](#)**

Regarding Lebanon, however, the question of the future of the resistance is much more layered, according to Achcar. This question has become even more pressing with the assassination of Nasrallah.

Nasrallah and his political and military choices, Achcar argued, cannot be seen in black or white. He agreed that while some people might think of Nasrallah as the man who shored up the oppression of the Syrian people by supporting the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, others might see him as the “sayyed al-mokkawama” (the head of resistance), who was arguably Israel’s worst nightmare for three consecutive decades.

During this period, he imposed defeats on the Israeli Army, including making it withdraw from the south of Lebanon in 2000 which it occupied since the 1982 invasion executed by Sharon, as chief of the Israeli military at the time.

“Nasrallah was [all of the above]; he meant different things to different people,” Achcar said.

“To his base in Lebanon, to his allies in the region, and to [many Shia], he was surely the sayyed al-mokkawama,” Achcar said. If one were to examine the reaction to the Israeli assassination of Nasrallah, one would find that the sense of devastation and loss was not confined to those who subscribed either to Nasrallah’s base or his ideology.

Many in Lebanon, he said, thought of Nasrallah and will continue to think of him as a “strong leader who imposed the Israeli evacuation and who dared to stand up to Israel.”

However, he added that it is hard today to think of Nasrallah without thinking of the fact that when he got involved in Syria, “he and Hezbollah were perceived as an Iranian proxy,” without excluding their role in forcing the Israeli evacuation of south Lebanon.

In the final analysis, Nasrallah’s dominant image is that of the man who forced the Israeli evacuation from south Lebanon, resisted the Israeli onslaught in 2006, and who over the past year has forced a large number of Israelis to leave their homes in the north of Israel on the borders with Lebanon as an act of solidarity with Gaza.

“This is why his assassination is a major victory for Israel, and this is why so many Lebanese,

including myself, who stand clearly on the left and who disagree with much of the ideology of Hezbollah, found his assassination really saddening,” Achcar said.

He added that it is hard to think of Hezbollah as it has become, either in political or military terms, without thinking of Nasrallah. With close to 30 years at the helm, he argued, Nasrallah was the one who made Hezbollah the way it has become. He was arguably, “in relative terms, the best possible leader of Hezbollah, given that while he was willing to fight, he had the intelligence and sensitivity to preserve lives,” especially of civilians.

Achcar recalled the famous interview that Nasrallah gave after the Israeli war against Lebanon in July 2006 that came in the wake of Hezbollah’s abduction of Israeli soldiers. Nasrallah said that had he anticipated the huge damage that Israel would inflict on Lebanon, his calculations would have been different.

In August 2006, a few weeks after the end of war, Nasrallah said that had he known that Israel would inflict such a huge damage on Lebanon, he would not have ordered the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in an operation that Hezbollah fighters conducted during a secret crossing into the north of Israel.

This statement, Achcar said, was a message to the Lebanese people, “and Nasrallah had the courage and the conscience to make it.”

While he might not have been the major strategist that some people thought he was, during his years at the top of Hezbollah Nasrallah refrained from abducting or harming Israeli civilians because he did not want to subject Lebanese civilians to harm at the hands of Israel.

“This was part of his popularity... and this is why his death is a major loss for the country and not just for Hezbollah,” he added.

Such cautious and calculated political perceptions were perhaps shared with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh “and this was one of the reasons why Netanyahu decided to assassinate these two leaders,” Achcar said.

Netanyahu did not want resistance leaders with political sensibility and with the courage and weight to pursue political settlements.

“Netanyahu is like Sharon,” Achcar said. Neither of these two men, he added, wanted or want to engage politically, and this is why Netanyahu does not want leaders with the ability or the intention to reach political settlements on any issue. He added that the replacement of Haniyeh with Yehiya Sinwar, who is much less inclined than his predecessor to consider pragmatic political compromises, is perhaps useful for Netanyahu’s on-going war against Hamas.

Speaking before the speculation over the Israeli assassination of Hashem Safieddine, the potential successor of Nasrallah, Achcar argued that whoever the replacement of Nasrallah might be as leader of Hezbollah, Israel is unlikely to have anything but an easier way ahead because it is unlikely that any of the potential successors will be able to deliver the kind of complex performances that Nasrallah did, no matter their flaws.

“I just don’t think that there will be another Nasrallah,” he stated. This is partially why the Lebanese resistance will also need to think of alternatives that are much more political, progressive, and inclusive and are less militant and sect-based, he added.

Israel

Not excluding the Israeli losses during its recently initiated ground operation in the south of Lebanon, Achcar argued that as a result of its year-long genocidal war on Gaza and the assassinations of the leaders of Hezbollah, Hamas, and commanders of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, Netanyahu can now claim he has managed to regain the Israeli deterrence that was compromised with the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation and, before it, by the performance of Hezbollah as it redeployed in southern Lebanon after 2006.

In the eyes of Netanyahu, Achcar argued, “the fear of Israel is there again.” He added that there are now concerns about the Israeli retaliation to the Iranian missile attacks on Israeli targets on 1 October.

Another emboldening fact for Netanyahu is that US President Joe Biden has been mostly supportive of the Israeli wars waged to destroy Hamas and Hezbollah. “Irrespective of whatever he has said when the world was outraged at the horrors of the war over the past year, the Israeli war on Gaza is arguably the first fully joint US-Israeli war,” Achcar said.

Consequently, he argued that Netanyahu, who is not sure that former Republican US President Donald Trump will find his way back to the White House in November, will not want to take the risk of waiting for the expiry of such US support in case Democratic Party nominee Kamala Harris wins the November elections.

“This is especially so with regards to Netanyahu’s plans against Iran. Netanyahu would not want to face the pressure for self-restraint that Harris might impose,” Achcar said. He added that Netanyahu will remember that former US President Barack Obama, “prioritised the nuclear deal with Tehran,” over Netanyahu’s strong objections.

**Gilbert Achcar interviewed by Dina Ezzat**

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