

Preface

This is not just another book on Hezbollah. This is the answer to the question that has been asked for years by the average Westerner: who are those people over there and do we really need to be scared of them?

For every book written that denounces Hezbollah and warns of its threat to the Western world, there is another book that extols the virtues of what Hezbollah is and what it has accomplished. And for every author who highlights Hezbollah's accomplishments, there is another author ready to challenge Hezbollah's motives and ultimate goal. How can the average concerned citizen of the Western world know what to believe?

Hezbollah: An Outsider's Inside View is an opportunity for the Western reader to see for himself what this headline-grabbing group is all about. This book focuses on primary sources of information, from the people of Hezbollah themselves to a wealth of supplementary information derived from a variety of sources to offer a full breadth of validation. In presenting an inside view, I have challenged the statements from Hezbollah representatives to establish consistency (1) within Hezbollah itself and (2) between Hezbollah's stance and external records of the context from which Hezbollah has developed. I have thus summarised and cited documentation derived from international ngo's, from the United Nations, from the governments of Lebanon, Israel, the US and the UK, and from historically contemporary news media.

This book recreates my own experience as a Westerner getting to know Hezbollah. In circumstances when its character is perhaps culturally foreign to the average Westerner, then, I have provided analytical commentary throughout to explain from the Western sensibility. In order to benefit from this *Outsider's Inside View*, the reader should note that, regardless of any personal religious faith he may or may not have, Hezbollah is by definition a religious system. An overview of that system does not require its rejection or acceptance.

The reader will note the general, sometimes vague, use of the label "Western." This is deliberate. The term is not meant to indicate a specific country. The label "Western" here implies a wide spectrum of qualities that have in common parlance become associated with not only Western Europe (notably the British Isles), but also with the United States, Canada, and Australia. The people within these countries, even within a given country, of course can vary greatly from one another. The label "Western" indicates those characteristics that make these people more alike than different. The label may therefore be understood to include populations outside of these countries who share a similar set of qualities or values. While labels cannot accurately be affixed to a physical populace, they can be used effectively to designate a conceptual populace. Please note the distinction.

Given this use of labels, it should be underscored that in referring to the "average Westerner" this book is referring to a general, cultural identity. This includes aspects of political, economic, social and religious characteristics. It is readily acknowledged that there are many philosophical strains contributing to this Western identity. While presenting the Western political-economic system, for example, as being "democratic" or "capitalist," this in no way implies that there are not varying, even competing, factors, many of which actively affect this identity: socialism, communism, and so on. Likewise, while presenting its predominant religious system as Christianity, it is readily acknowledged

that there exist significant differences between Catholicism and Protestantism, and also that there exist many other religious systems (including agnosticism and atheism) within Western culture.

Similarly, Lebanon as a culture is multi-faceted. But dissimilarly, Hezbollah is a clearly defined entity within that culture. In this book, therefore, when the label "Hezbollah" is used, it refers to the Party and its members, both of which are defined by a specific set of principles. This usage should be distinguished from references to "Hezbollah supporters," whether casual admirers or avid followers. These supporters will vary in the degree to which they themselves reflect the principles of Hezbollah. Lastly, this book in part will look at Western perception of Hezbollah. When the label of "Hezbollah" is used in this context, it refers only to that perception. In each of these three categories, the reference will be clearly indicated.

The phrase "inside view" refers to my eight years of being able to see, to study and to question their culture. Far from being the clandestine figures portrayed in Western media, representatives of Hezbollah have been open and accommodating. I have visited their offices, their homes, their battlefields and their underground barracks. I have come to know the administrators and the sheiks, the politicians and the fighters. Chapter 2 "Impressions" elaborates on why and how I first approached representatives of Hezbollah. From those whom I have met only briefly, to those whom I have come to know as friends, their personalities are frankly portrayed in this book.

I feel that it is significant to underscore the nature of the cooperation I have received for this project. While they have been openly generous in fulfilling my requests for information, no one from Hezbollah has ever urged me to include or to exclude any topic. This project has been at my sole discretion. They have never attempted in any fashion to influence any facet of what was written. It says a great deal when an organisation is that comfortable with an outsider looking in.

If you would like to understand the people of Hezbollah, then I invite you to share my experience in getting to know them. I invite you to expand your Western perspective to include the perspective of those who are Hezbollah. As a Westerner who has already done so, I welcome you to this outsider's inside view.