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Exporting the Iranian Revolution: Ecumenical Clerics in Lebanon

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Abstract

From the dawn of the 1978–79 Iranian Revolution until the consolidation of Hizbullah in the late 1980s, a network of Iranian, Lebanese, and Palestinian clerics played a crucial role in spreading the revolution to Lebanon and laying the groundwork for Hizbullah. Whereas the historiography of the post-1979 Iran–Lebanon relationship is overwhelmingly focused on Hizbullah, the present study, by drawing on oral history interviews with these clerics and archival materials, contends that the Iranian Revolution came to Lebanon primarily through these Shiʿi and Sunni clerics, who joined ranks and established the Association of Muslim ʿUlamaʾ in Lebanon in the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion. This study argues that these clerics modeled their struggle on the ʿulamaʾ-led and mosque-based example of the 1978–79 revolution, which this paper describes as the Khomeinist script, to transcend sect to seed a revolution in Lebanon and mass mobilize against the invasion. This article concludes that the ecumenical script was highly appealing to non-Shiʿi Islamists, a key factor in the success of exporting the revolution and the rise of Hizbullah in Lebanon.

Keywords: Hizbullah; Iranian Revolution; Lebanon; sectarianism; ʿulamaʾ

> When we showed Imam [Khomeini] the photos of the large solidarity rally in Beirut, his face lit up and he asked, "Is this all against the Shah?" "Yes," we said. He began to count the shaykhs at the rally and noticed with a beaming smile that the number of Sunni shaykhs in the photo exceeded the number of Shiʿi shaykhs by one.[1]

This conversation took place in the waning days of Iran's Pahlavi monarchy when a group of Lebanese clerics paid a solidarity visit to Ayatollah Khomeini in Paris. Shiʿi cleric Sayyid Hani Fahs, who recounts the story in his reminiscences, along with other Lebanese clergy, was visiting Khomeini in his Paris exile to express support for the growing protests in Iran. In the wake of the 1978–79 Iranian Revolution, these clerics emerged at the heart of an ecumenical network of Sunni and Shiʿi ʿulamaʾ from Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine who sought to spread the revolution to Lebanon.

By conceptualizing revolution as an international and ideological force, this paper argues that these ʿulamaʾ utilized the pan-Islamic and anti-imperial ideas of the 1978–79 revolution to transcend sect and seed a revolution in Lebanon.[2] They adapted the ʿulamaʾ-led and mosque-based model of the 1978–79 revolution, which I call the Khomeinist script, to establish the Association of Muslim ʿUlamaʾ in Lebanon (Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlamaʾ al-Muslimin fi Lubnan, hereafter AMUL) to rally the masses against the Israeli invasion.[3] This ecumenical script was seminal in the spread of the Iranian Revolution to Lebanon and in laying the foundation of Hizbullah, which relied, especially during its 1982–85 formative stage,

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[1] Hani Fahs, *Madin la Yamdi*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dar al-Mada li-l-Thaqafa wa-l-Nashr, 2008), 238.

[2] For a discussion about culture and ideas as important forces for social change, see William Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Jennifer Heuer, "Liberty and Death: The French Revolution," *History Compass* 5, no. 1 (2007): 175–200.

[3] On the history and activities of the association, see ʿAli al-Khazim, *Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlamaʾ al-Muslimin fi Lubnan: Tajriba wa-Namudhaj* (Beirut: Dar al-Ghurba, 1997).

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on AMUL's network to publicize, recruit, and mobilize against the invasion. In the second half of the 1980s, AMUL gradually lost its initial central role, due in no small part to clerical factionalism within the Islamic Republic and the removal of Ayatollah Husayn ʿAli Montazeri from the position of Ayatollah Khomeini's designated successor in 1989.

After 1979, Lebanon was central to the Iranian internationalists who were in pursuit of establishing the "Islamist International," asserting that the revolution did not recognize borders and belonged to the downtrodden and all Muslims, irrespective of their sects.[4] The internationalists' effort to export the revolution to Lebanon began as early as spring 1979 and transpired against the backdrop of revolutionary sentiments and activism that flared up with the overthrow of the Shah. Given the strategic location and sizable Shiʿi population of Lebanon, which hosted the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palestinian refugees, the country was, in the words of Sayyid ʿAli Akbar Muhtashami, the former Iranian ambassador to Damascus, "the primary launching pad for the revolution" and central to these internationalists' endeavor to forge an alliance with Palestinians and revolutionary groups in the Arab world.[5] The internationalists sent delegates to Lebanon to assess the situation and cultivate relations with pro-Khomeini factions. The first people the Iranians contacted and offered assistance to were Sunni and Palestinian activists.[6] To further cooperation, the Lebanese and Palestinian activists and clerics began to visit Iran and attend conferences that gathered liberation groups and Muslim ʿulamaʾ from across the world to enhance Shiʿi–Sunni unity.[7] At the heart of the activities to export the revolution to Lebanon lay the burgeoning network of Sunni and Shiʿi clergy, who sought to foster a united front against the Israeli occupation and overthrow the sectarian political order of the country.

AMUL was established against this backdrop, in response to the June 1982 Israeli invasion, by several Shiʿi and Sunni clerics. The latter included Shaykhs Mahir Hamud, Ahmad Zayn (both from Sidon), ʿAbd al-Nasir Jabri, and Salim al-Lababidi.[8] They also coordinated with Shaykh Saʿid Shaʿban, who was an influential Sunni cleric and the leader of the Islamic Unification Movement (Haraka al-Tawhid al-Islami) in northern Lebanon.[9] Within a year, by May 1983, this nucleus expanded to contain more than twenty Lebanese and Palestinian clerics, who embraced Islamic unification as an "identity" and a "strategy" to mobilize against the invasion and the "Maronite-dominant" political order of Lebanon.[10] This loose-knit network of religious leaders was supported primarily by Ayatollah Montazeri, who was a key advocate of exporting the revolution and was Khomeini's heir designate between 1984–89, and Sayyid ʿAli Akbar Muhtashami, who was the Iranian ambassador to Syria between 1981–84.[11] Linking cities, villages, neighborhoods, and the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, the north, the south, and Bekaa, AMUL did not have a highly centralized structure. AMUL's clerics held weekly meetings to coordinate their activities, using "mosques, *ḥusayniyāt* [the Shiʿi social and religious centers, sing.; *ḥusayniyya*], and streets as loci for popular activism" to spread their message and agitate against the Israeli invasion.[12] They viewed their activism as in line with the Iranian Revolution and coordinated on key issues with the Islamic Republic.

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[4]On the Islamist international (*Baynul Millal-i Islami*) advocated by Shaykh Muhammad Montazeri, see Anonymous, *Farzand-i Islam va Quran*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Vahid-i Farhangi-i Bunyad-i Shahid, 1983), 68.

[5]Author interview with Sayyid ʿAli Akbar Muhtashami, Tehran, Iran, 18 July 2010.

[6]Author interview with Sayyid ʿAli Hashimi, Isfahan, Iran, 25 February 2017; author interview with anonymous interlocutor via Skype, Wisconsin, US and Dubai, UAE, 12 May 2018. Both interviewees were members of the IRGC's Liberation Movements Unit.

[7]One example of such events was the weeklong "meeting of Liberation Movements" on 3 January 1980 in Tehran. Along with Shiʿi and Sunni clerics, Islamist and pan-Arabism factions from Lebanon attended. See *Subh-i Azadigan*, 6 January 1980; and *Payam-i Inqilab*, no. 2, 21 February 1980.

[8]Jabri, who was a strong advocate of Sunni–Shiʿi rapprochement, agitated against the Israeli occupation from his mosque in Beirut. Al-Lababidi was a Palestinian member of the Islamic Combatant movement (al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Mujahida), a Palestinian group associated with the PLO led by Shaykh Abu Bakir al-Hafi, which fought against the Israeli occupation in Sidon and at the ʿAyn al-Hilwa refugee camp in the city. Author interview with Shaykh Salim al-Lababidi, al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, Lebanon, 14 July 2009.

[9]On the history of the movement, see Raphael Lefevre, *Jihad in the City: Militant Islam and Contentious Politics in Tripoli* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[10]*Al-Wahda al-Islamiyya*, February 1984, 3; al-Khazim, *Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlamaʾ al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*, 25.

[11]Montazeri was elected by the council of experts in 1985 as Khomeini's successor and remained in the position until March 1989.

[12]Al-Khazim, *Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlamaʾ al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*, 51.

Drawing on oral history interviews with these clerics and archival research in Iran and Lebanon, this paper explores what motivated Shiʿi and Sunni ʿulamaʾ to establish AMUL. How did they describe their narrative of Islamic solidarity? Extensive interviews I conducted with Iranian, Lebanese, and Palestinian clerics, current and former members of AMUL and Hizbullah, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) helped both overcome the challenge posed by the lack of available written sources on the Iranian Revolution's internationalism and provide insight into the worldview of these internationalist ʿulamaʾ.[13]

The transnational network of these Shiʿi–Sunni ʿulamaʾ was the ideological and organizational product of the internationalism of the 1978–79 revolution, indicating that they acted within a supranational context to achieve their goals.[14] The logic of revolutionary ideology is universalist, because revolutions legitimate themselves by an appeal to general, abstract principles such as freedom and independence.[15] The ideology of the 1978–79 revolution was not sectarian and not merely confined to Shiʿi traditional discourse. Alongside its Shiʿi and nationalist components, the revolution's worldview emphasized the unity between different Islamic sects and, particularly through support for the Palestinian cause, sought to create a united Islamic front against the common enemies of the umma (the Muslim community), primarily US imperialism and Israel.[16]

Central to the revolution's internationalism was the ʿulamaʾ-led and mosque-based Khomeinist script. Informed by the concept of revolutionary script as a framework for political action, this study argues that the Khomeinist script inspired many Shiʿi and non-Shiʿi ʿulamaʾ and lay Islamists outside Iran. A script "constitutes a frame within which a situation is defined and a narrative projected; the narrative, in turn, offers a series of consequent situations, subject positions, and possible moves to be enacted by the agents within that frame."[17] The Khomeinist script exalted the virtues of clerical political engagement, assertiveness, agitation, and leadership, which Khomeini exemplified. It stipulated that the ʿulamaʾ should rise against tyrants and imperial powers and lead the masses toward establishing an Islamic political order. Enacting this script entailed turning mosques into locations of collective action, following the example of the popular mobilization against the Shah.

The scripting concept also underlines the self-conscious awareness of actors who transform and adapt the script to their purposes—in the Lebanese context, to fight the Israeli occupation and overthrow the sectarian political order of Lebanon.[18] After the downfall of the Shah, to many clerics in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Muslim world the elixir for success of popular uprisings and winning power appeared to be vanguard ʿulamaʾ. Yet the Palestinian and Lebanese ʿulamaʾ who modeled their actions on the Khomeinist script were not passive receivers of the revolution's example and ideas. Indeed, this research seeks to show the multiplicity of voices among Shiʿi and Sunni religious leaders and highlight the agency of AMUL ʿulamaʾ, who viewed their relationship and cooperation with Iran as a resource for their own

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[13]I conducted 86 oral history interviews between 2005 and 2020 for my master's thesis ("Syrian–Iranian Relations and the Creation of Hezbollah in Lebanon") at the American University of Beirut and PhD dissertation ("Exporting the 1978–79 Revolution: Pan-Islamic or Sectarian?") at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Since I worked as a freelance journalist for Iranian publications in Iran and Lebanon, I was able to secure interviews with principal actors who were involved in the internationalism of the 1978–79 revolution.

[14]On analyzing revolutions and their ramifications in a global or international context, see David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., The Age of Revolutions in a Global Context (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010); Suzanne Desan, The French Revolution in Global Perspective (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013); and David A. Bell, "Global Conceptual Legacies," in The Oxford Handbook of the French Revolution, ed. David Andress (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[15]Fred Halliday, Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 59–60.

[16]See Ervand Abrahamian, Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 1–38; and Hamid Dabashi, Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 1–37.

[17]Keith Michael Baker and Dan Edelstein, eds., Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 3.

[18]Baker and Edelstein, Scripting Revolution, 4. This also is informed by David Armitage, "Every Great Revolution Is a Civil War," in Scripting Revolution, ed. Baker and Edelstein, 57–58.

national struggle.[19] This research asks how these ʿulama' shaped their self-image and explained their role in the Khomeinist script they were propounding. How did the trans-sectarian script unfold in the Lebanese context, especially following the 1982 Israeli invasion?

It is important to note that the Khomeinist script was by no means the only model of activism in the 1978–79 revolution. Marxist, nationalist, and liberal ideas and forces also played out in the revolution against the Shah. However, as the Islamic Republic consolidated and suppressed these rival forces, the Khomeinists came to prevail in the revolutionary regime.[20]

Alongside the international impact of ideas and example, revolutionary regimes tend to use domestic resources to export revolution through ideological, political, and military means.[21] The present study shows that it was first and foremost the anti-Israeli and anti-imperialist ideas of the 1978–79 revolution that influenced Lebanese and Palestinian ʿulama.' Attempts to export the revolution to Lebanon began shortly after the overthrow of the Shah and gained ground in the wake of the June 1982 Israeli invasion, when the IRGC forces arrived in Lebanon to train in coordination with pro-Khomeini clerics, the embryonic forces of Hizbullah, ushering the revolution's armed internationalism into Lebanon. AMUL and then Hizbullah, both rooted in the revolution's internationalism, emerged out of the devastating invasion and evolved, as this paper explores in the Iranian and Lebanese contexts, along two diverging paths in the 1980s.

This article contributes to the historiography of how the Iranian Revolution came to Lebanon in two ways. First, whereas the scholarship is overwhelmingly focused on Hizbullah, the present study illuminates how AMUL's network played a core but overlooked part in exporting the 1978–79 revolution and in Hizbullah's later formation and success. H. E. Chehabi, Joseph Daher, Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, and Richard Norton highlight the role of the religious leadership in the emergence of Hizbullah, but do not discuss the role of AMUL and its trans-sectarian network.[22] Hassan Fadlallah only briefly touches upon the role of the clerical network in spreading the revolution to Lebanon, and works by Masʿud Assadullahi, Eitan Azani, and Magnus Ranstorp pay little attention to the role of AMUL in the formative stage of Hizbullah and in launching the "Islamic resistance" in 1982.[23] Rodger Shanahan and Waddah Shararah explore the role of clerical leaders and seminaries in spreading the ideas of Khomeini to Lebanon, but with only a passing discussion of AMUL's activities after 1982.[24]

Second, this research challenges the Shiʿi-centric and sectarian narratives that either question the exportability of the 1978–79 revolution (because of the specifically Shiʿi and Persian identity of Iran) or confine its internationalism to Shi'i communities outside Iran. The dominant historiography ignores or downplays the revolution's influence on Sunni movements. For example, the collection of articles in *The Shiʿa Worlds and Iran* analyzes the internationalism of the revolution in a Shiʿi context. In one of the articles, Olivier Roy asserts that the revolution failed to transcend the Shiʿi–Sunni divide to any substantial degree.[25] Rainer Brunner also asserts that the impact of the revolution on Sunni movements was ephemeral, and that its reach was limited to "a small number of Sunnis."[26] Likewise, Shaul Bakhash states

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[19]This view is informed by Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, *Shiʿite Lebanon: Transnational Religion and the Making of National Identities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[20]On the influence of the Marxist, nationalist, and liberal ideologies on the revolution and on shaping Khomeini's radical rhetoric, see Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 3; Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 7; and Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 130–63.

[21]Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics*, 18.

[22]Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2004); H. E. Chehabi, "Iran and Lebanon in the Revolutionary Decade," in *Distant Relations*, ed. H. E. Chehabi (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 201–30; Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Joseph Daher, *Hezbollah: The Political Economy of Lebanon's Party of God* (London: Pluto Press, 2016).

[23]Hassan Fadl Allah, *al-Khyar al-Akhar: Hizb Allah al-Sira al-Datiya wa-l-Muqif* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 1994), 14–15; Magnus Ranstorp, *Hizballah in Lebanon: The Politics of the Western Hostage Crisis* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997); Masʿud Assadullahi, *Az Muqavimat ta Piruzi* (Tehran: Muʾasisi-yi Mutaliʿat Andishisazan-i Nur, 2008); Eitan Azani, *Hezbollah: The Story of the Party of God; From Revolution to Institutionalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[24]Waddah Shararah, *Dawlat Hizb Allah, Lubnan Mujtamʿan Islamiyyan* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1996); Rodger Shanahan, *The Shiʿa of Lebanon: Clans, Parties and Clerics* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005).

[25]See Olivier Roy, "The Impact of the Iranian Revolution on the Middle East," in *The Shiʿa Worlds and Iran*, ed. Sabrina Mervin (Saint Paul, MN: CPI Mackays, 2010), 29–44.

[26]Rainer Brunner, "Sunnis and Shiites in Modern Islam," in *The Dynamics of Sunni–Shia Relationships: Doctrine, Transnationalism, Intellectuals and the Media*, ed. Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni (London: Hurst, 2012), 25–38.

that "age-old Arab-Iranian and Sunni-Shiʿi animosities" limit the Iranian example to Shiʿa in the region.[27] Vali Nasr argues that a Shiʿi–Sunni divide forms the undercurrent of politics in the Middle East and the regional consequences of the Iranian revolution should be analyzed in the context of the "old feud between Shias and Sunnis."[28] Aside from these scholarly works, there is a plethora of journalistic and nonacademic writings that portray the international ramifications of the 1978–79 revolution and the formation of Hizbullah in sectarian terms and in the context of a Shiʿi–Sunni schism.[29] The present study argues that the Khomeinist script was in both content and implementation ecumenical and highly appealing to Shiʿi and non-Shiʿi Islamists, enabling Iran to gain a trans-sectarian legitimacy and successfully export its revolution to Lebanon. By shedding light on AMUL, this paper also seeks to further understanding of revolutionary Iran's regional policies and connection with Lebanon beyond the cliché, prevalent in many popular writings, of Iran's pursuit for a "Shiʿa Crescent" in the region.

I start by exploring the ideological impact of the Iranian revolution on Shiʿi and Sunni actors who used the Khomeinist script as a model to establish the AMUL ʿulamaʾ vanguard. I then investigate how the 1982 Israeli invasion became the decisive push toward the military export of the revolution to Lebanon, setting the stage for the rise of AMUL and Hizbullah. Then I will examine how AMUL's structure and role evolved in the context of developments in Lebanon and Iran.

The Unfolding of the Khomeinist Script in Lebanon

The symbolism of revolutionary ʿulamaʾ standing at the vanguard of the uprising against the Shah was an inspiring model to clergy and Islamist lay activists outside Iran.[30] Following the overthrow of the Shah, the revolutionary ayatollahs promulgated this cleric-led and mosque-based script for activism, similar to their own anti-Shah activities between 1963 and 1979. They advocated for uprisings in other countries in the manner of the 1978–79 revolution, which in their view had proved the crucial role of clerical leadership in mass mobilization.[31] This script transcended sectarian divides, offered an Islamic framework for political action under the guidance and leadership of the ʿulamaʾ, and envisioned establishing an Islamic Republic.

Ayatollah Khomeini argued that mosques and Friday congregational prayer were locations of politics and advocacy and exhorted clergy to be at the forefront of spreading political awareness and activism.[32] Similarly, before a gathering of Iranian and non-Iranian Shiʿi and Sunni clerics who visited Qom to attend the Global Assembly of ʿUlamaʾ and Friday Prayer Leaders, Ayatollah Montazeri remarked, "Today the East and West superpowers are fearful of you clerics, of you yourselves! You, spiritual leaders! You, ʿulamaʾ, should realize what [influential] status you have" (Fig. 1).[33] Montazeri told a visiting

[27]Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 5.

[28]Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006), 24, 82. See also Maryam Panah, *The Islamic Republic and the World* (London: Pluto Press, 2007); and Genieve Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shiʿa–Sunni Divide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 149. Abdo contends that "sectarianism in the Arab world remains an inescapable presence that ignites whenever there are social or political upheavals, such as the Islamic Revolution, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, or the more recent Arab uprisings and the resulting Syrian and Iraqi civil wars," 7.

[29]For example, Mike Shuster, "As Iran Exported Its Shiite Revolution, Sunni Arabs Resisted," *Morning Edition*, NPR, 14 February 2007, https://www.npr.org/2007/02/14/7392405/export-of-irans-revolution-spawns-violence; Claude Moniquet and Dimitri Dombret, "Is Iranian Shiite Expansionism a Threat to the Arab Countries?" European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, 8 July 2009, http://www.esisc.org/publications/analyses/is-iranian-shiite-expansionism-a-threat-to-the-arab-countries; Jonathan Marcus, "Why Saudi Arabia and Iran are bitter rivals," BBC News, 16 September 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-42008809.

[30]For a discussion about the revolutionary doctrine and character of Iranian Shiʿi clerics and the reaction of Sunni ʿulamaʾ, see Nikki Keddie, ed., *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1995).

[31]For example, see Ayatollah Montazeri's message to the people of Iraq; *al-Shahid*, no. 73, 11 November 1981, 10–11.

[32]See Khomeini's message to the ʿulamaʾ and seminaries, released a few months before his death; Ruhullah Khomeini, *Manshur-i Ruhaniyat: Payam-i Tarikhi va Muhimm-i Hazrat-i Imam Khomeini* (Tehran: Muʾasisi-yi Nashr va Tanzim Athar-i Imam, 1999).

[33]Ayatollah Husayn ʿAli Montazeri, "Sukhanrani Dar Kungirih-yi Aʾimi-yi Jumʿih va Jamaʿat," MP3 audio recording from private collection, Qom, n.d.

Figure 1. Ayatollah Montazeri speaking to a group of Iranian and non-Iranian Shiʿi and Sunni clerics at his office in Qom in 1984. From private collection of author.

delegation of Hizbullah and AMUL in Qom that "had ʿulamaʾ led the Muslim nation of Egypt, the Egyptian regime would have surely collapsed."[34] And in a message for International Quds Day he proclaimed: "The Muslim nation of Palestine should . . . be aware that the experience of the revolution in Iran shows that Islam and religion, in contrast to the Eastern and Western colonial myths of nationalism and racism, are able to mobilize [the masses] and lead [them] to victory."[35] This line of argument influenced, to various degrees, major transnational Islamic forces, from the Muslim Brotherhood (especially its younger generation) to the al-Daʿwa party and the Shirazi movement.[36] It inspired the founders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad to speak of "Khomeini as the alternative solution" and kindled popular rallies around the spiritual leader of the Iraqi al-Daʿwa, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and the leader of the Shirazi movement, Sayyid Muhammad Shirazi—their supporters spoke of them as "the Khomeini of Iraq."[37] It roused the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood to appeal to Syrian ʿulamaʾ to wage an Islamic revolution against Hafiz al-Asad and the Lebanese and Palestinian ʿulamaʾ to organize a joint popular campaign against the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.[38]

At the time of the 1978–79 Iranian Revolution, the Lebanese Shiʿi community suffered from sectarian discrimination, internal disunity, and external aggression.[39] Upon the disappearance of Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, the founder of the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council and Amal (Ḥarakat Amal, lit. Hope Movement, aka Movement of the Dispossessed), in August 1978 in Libya, the community had split in

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[34]*Al-ʿAmal al-Islami*, no. 194, 11 May 1986.

[35]*Payam-i Shahid,* no. 11, 13 August 1979.

[36]The al-Daʿwa party and the Shirazi movement had their roots in Karbala and Najaf, respectively, and had branches across the region. On the impact of the revolution on these two groups, see Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[37]ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Shiqaqi, *al-Khumayni, al-Hal al-Islami wa-l-Badil* (Cairo: al-Mukhtar al-Islami, 1979); *al-Shahid*, no. 20, 27 June 1979; T. Aziz, "The Role of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr in Shii Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 2 (1993): 207.

[38]Umar Abdallah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1983), 118–19, 128–29.

[39]Fadl Allah, *al-Khyar al-Akhar*, 19–26; Tawfiq al-Madini, *Amal wa-Hizb Allah fi Halabat al-Mujabahat al-Mahalliyya wa-l-Iqlimiyya* (Damascus: al-Ahali, 1999), 59–73.

different directions.[40] In the absence of a unifying religious-political leadership, many young Shiʿi elites regarded the community's leaders as incompetent and "lagging behind their ambitions and goals."[41] The Lebanese Shiʿi radicals aspired to overthrow the sectarian system in Lebanon using a revolutionary model like Iran. They dismissed the localist view of Amal and the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council—both entrenched and reformist Shiʿi forces—arguing that "the Lebanese issue is not independent from Iran or Iraq and other countries in the Islamic world."[42] In contrast, Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din, who presided over the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council, believed that any solution to the social and economic disadvantages of the community should be sought within the Lebanese sectarian political order.[43] Thus, Shams al-Din opined that the Iranian Revolution could not be a model for Lebanon.[44] Early on, this inspired controversy and conflict within the Shiʿi community, which, as the first secretary-general of Hizbullah recounts, led to establishment of pro-Khomeini organizations in Lebanon:

> After the creation of the Islamic Republic, there were long debates between us and Shaykh Shams al-Din about many issues. We did not see eye to eye over many points, such as the relationship with the Islamic Republic. Shaykh Shams al-Din had points of view different from ours. Our disagreements were political. [After 1979] . . . the Supreme Islamic Shi`i Council was in a position far from the Iranian stance and for this reason we believed that the Supreme Islamic Shi`i Council and its clerical branches were not able to play the role we believed they had to. As a result, we decided to establish clerical and political bodies that would be in line with our stances and direction.[45]

The distrust of Shams al-Din ran deep among the Iranian internationalists, going back to the simmering tensions between the pro-Khomeini revolutionaries and Sayyid Musa al-Sadr in the 1960s and 1970s, over al-Sadr's ties with the Shah and tense relationship with the "Palestinian revolution" in Lebanon.[46] Although al-Sadr expressed sympathy for Palestinian resistance, he did not want Palestinian fedayeen to open a front in the south against Israel and expose the Lebanese in that region to Israeli retaliations. Al-Sadr accused the Palestinians of creating anarchy in the south, and over time Amal increasingly became the umbrella for opposition against Palestinian activities.[47] This soured the relationship between al-Sadr and many Khomeini followers, especially Muhammad Montazeri and ʿAli Akbar Muhtashami, who came to embrace Palestinians as their ally in Lebanon after 1979. Therefore, in their effort to export the revolution, the internationalists backed pro-Palestinian individuals, like many of the founding members of AMUL, who did not see in al-Sadr, despite his clerical leadership of the Lebanese Shiʿa, an example to emulate. After 1979, al-Sadr's fraught past with pro-Khomeini internationalists and his reformist approach, which Shams al-Din inherited, came to be viewed as the antithesis to the Khomeinist script, which advocated radical and sweeping change in the political system of Lebanon.[48]

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[40]On the leadership crisis after al-Sadr, see Fouad Ajami, *Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shiʿa of Lebanon* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 191–200.

[41]*Umid-i Inqilab*, 31 August 1982, 18–19; Naʾim Qasim, *Hizb Allah: al-Minhaj, al-Tajirba, al-Mustakhbal* (Beirut: Dar al-Hadi, 2002), 25.

[42]See Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah's speech at the liberation movements conference in Tehran in Vahid-i Nihzatha-yi Azadibakhsh-i Islam-i Sipah-i Pasdaran, *Nihzatha-yi Azadibakhsh Dar Guzargah-i Inqilab-i Islami* (Tehran: Chapkhanih-yi Daftar-i Intisharat-i Sazman-i Inirzh-yi Atumi-yi Iran, 1982), 56–59.

[43]Unlike pro-Khomeini Lebanese shaykhs, Shams al-Din, who was Sayyid Musa al-Sadr's successor as the head of the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council, argued that the Shiʿa in Lebanon were primarily Lebanese and should not follow Khomeini's example. See H. E. Chehabi and Hassan I. Mneimneh, "Five Centuries of Lebanese–Iranian Encounters," in *Distant Relations*, ed. Chehabi, 42.

[44]Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shia: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1987), 99–100; al-Madini, *Amal wa-Hizb Allah*, 117. See also Shaykh Shams al-Din's interview about his view of the Islamic Republic in *al-Wahda al-Islamiyya,* no. 30, March 1986, 21–27.

[45]Author interview with Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, Duris, Lebanon, 11 November 2009.

[46]On al-Sadr's relations with the Shah, see Norton, *Amal and the Shia*, 41; and Abbas William Samii, "The Shah's Lebanon Policy: The Role of SAVAK," *Middle Eastern Studies* 33, no. 1 (1997): 72–74.

[47]Ajami, *Vanished Imam*, 178.

[48]For an analysis about the relationship between pro-Palestinian and pro–al-Sadr factions in Iran, see Mohammad Ataie, "Revolutionary Iran's 1979 Endeavor in Lebanon," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 2 (2013), 137–57.

The collaboration between Iranian and Lebanese radical clerics was a challenge to the authority of "Imam Shams al-Din," who, according to Shaykh Adib Haydar, a former member of Amal, "regarded himself as the Khomeini of Lebanon."[49] Shams al-Din believed that Iran's policies were detrimental to the Shiʿi interests in Lebanon and the Persian Gulf and demanded that the Islamic Republic coordinate its policies in Lebanon with him, as the highest religious Shiʿi figure in the country. But the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council, in the wake of al-Sadr's disappearance, lacked the hegemony it wished to claim. Even more, Shaykh Shams al-Din had to fight back increasing criticism in Lebanon and Iran for his ambivalence toward joining the military resistance against the June 1982 Israeli invasion.

The weakness of the traditional Shiʿi institutions and the leadership crisis after Musa al-Sadr's disappearance paved the way for a stronger Iranian influence to augment pro-Khomeini forces within the community. As Muhtashami explains, "The Shiʿa lacked central leadership and power, and after Imam Musa al-Sadr did not have any wise leader. However, this did not mean that we should have focused exclusively on the Shiʿa and widened the rifts between Shiʿa and Sunnis."[50] Cooperation with Sunni Lebanese and Palestinian clerics was crucial to ignite an Islamic revolution in Lebanon. As Ayatollah Montazeri emphasized, a sectarian approach would be doomed since "neither Shiʿa, nor Sunnis, nor Maronite have the majority. But if we speak of Muslims, then both Shiʿa and Sunnis together have the majority."[51]

The Islamic Republic and Sunni Forces in Lebanon

The Khomeinist script had in one sense an even more profound impact on Sunni ʿulamaʾ and lay Islamists, who had long struggled with the question of why ʿulamaʾ in the Sunni world were incapable of staging a successful revolt to seize power. No wonder that the very success of ʿulamaʾ in Iran in taking power was a great inspiration to Sunni Islamists, who hoped that they could accomplish something similar in their own struggles.[52] Khomeini's pan-Islamic and anti-imperial message resonated with many Sunni activists. To many Sunni clerics, like Shaykh Saʿid Shaʿban, the leader of the Islamic Unification Movement in Tripoli, the revolution in Iran was an example of the victory of Islam over the West and the pro-Israeli Shah of Iran.[53] Thus, in Shaʿban's view, Iran was "an axis that all Muslims should gather around" in their struggle to "shed the narrowness of sectarianism for the vastness of Islam."[54] As Shaykh Ahmad al-Zayn, a Sunni cleric and the former qadi of Sidon, says, what inspired him and his cohort to join ranks with Khomeini was Iran "embracing the Palestinian cause and standing up to the Israeli enemy."[55] Palestine was at the heart of the Islamic unification to which revolutionary clerics aspired. The symbolism of the Palestinian cause was such that Fathi al-Shiqaqi, the founder of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine, argued that "the unification" and "Palestine" "constitute the two sides of the Islamic agenda" in the face of "fragmentation [*al-tajzʾia*] and the Zionist entity; the two sides of the colonial agenda."[56]

The Islamic Republic's efforts to cultivate relations with Sunni ʿulamaʾ around the world led to Unification Week *(haftih-yi vaḥdat)*.[57] Declared by Ayatollah Montazeri, this ecumenical initiative laid

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[49]Author interview with Shaykh Adib Haydar, Budnayil, Lebanon, 24 October 2009.

[50]Muhtashami interview, 18 July 2010.

[51]Ayatollah Husayn ʿAli Montazeri, "Guruhi az ʿUlamaʾ-yi Afghanistan," MP3 audio recording from private collection, Qom, n.d.

[52]Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World*, 124. On the revolution's impact on Sunni Islamists and intellectuals, see also Emmanuel Sivan, "Sunni Radicalism in the Middle East and the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 21, no. 1 (1989): 1–30; Laleh Khalili, "Standing with My Brother: Hizbullah, Palestinians, and the Limits of Solidarity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 2 (2007): 276–303; and Nikki Keddie and Rudi Matthee, eds., *Iran and the Surrounding World* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011).

[53]*Pasdar-i Islam,* no. 50, January/March 1986. Although Shaykh Saʿid Shaʿban was not officially part of AMUL or Hizbullah, he was a pillar of the pro-Khomeini network of ʿulamaʾ and the Islamic resistance in Lebanon. See ʿAli al-Kawrani, *Tariqat Hizb Allah fi al-ʿAmal al-Islami* (Maktab al-Iʿlam al-Islami, 1985), 187.

[54]*Al-Wahda al-Islamiyya*, no. 27, February 1986, 11.

[55]Author interview with Shaykh Ahmad al-Zayn, Sidon, Lebanon, 22 July 2009.

[56]Fathi al-Shiqaqi, *Rihlat al-Dam Alladhi Hazama al-Sayf*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Markaz Yafa li-l-Dirasat wa-l-Abhath, 1997), 564. For an analysis about the centrality of Palestine for the Islamic Republic see Amal Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah: Politics and Religion* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 72–76.

[57]On the declaration of this Islamic ecumenical initiative, see Husayn ʿAli Montazeri, *Khatirat-i Ayatollah Montazeri*, vol. 1 (Tehran: n.p., 2000), 432–33.

Figure 2. The Islamic Unification assembly in Tehran, held during Unification Week in 1984. Attendees included Palestinian Shaykh Ibrahim Ghunaym (first on the right), the then-president Khamenei (fifth from the right), and Shaykh Hassan Ibrahimi, who is delivering Ayatollah Montazeri's message from the podium. From private collection of the author.

the ground for outreach to Sunni ʿulamaʾ and the organization of meetings and events in revolutionary Iran to bring together Shiʿi and Sunni clergy from inside and outside Iran (Fig. 2). Montazeri, who emerged in the 1980s as a powerful advocate of Islamist internationalism, made an extensive effort for inter-sectarian rapprochement and established joint Sunni–Shiʿi clerical platforms to promote the example of the clergy-led revolution in other Muslim countries. "I declared Unification Week to end the Shiʿi and Sunni conflict which smears the name of Islam," says Ayatollah Montazeri. "I used the metaphor of these five fingers, each of which has a particular function. These five fingers should turn into a fist against the enemy. The five schools [of Islamic jurisprudence, *mazāhib-i khamsa*] are like these five fingers."[58]

Montazeri also introduced other ecumenical platforms to reinforce ties with Sunni clergy and movements, like the Global Assembly of ʿUlamaʾ and Friday Prayer Leaders (*Kungirih-yi Jahan-yi Aʾimih-yi Jumʿih va Jamaʿat /al-Muʾtamar al-ʿAlami li-Aʾimat al-Jumʿa wa-l-Jamaʿat*), to gather ʿulamaʾ across the world in the capital of the revolutionary Iran to "surmount the obstacles to unification" (Figs. 3 and 4).[59] Montazeri's office and the Iranian government also organized a series of conferences and seminars in Tehran called Islamic Thoughts (*Kunfirans-i Andishiha-yi Islami/Muʾtamar al-Fikr al-Islami*) with the participation of Sunni ʿulamaʾ from Iran and other Muslim countries.[60]

Given the diverse religious mosaic of Lebanese society, including the large Palestinian refugee population, Montazeri viewed Lebanon as a key place to promote ecumenical contact between Shiʿa and Sunnis. In 1985, in an open letter to Lebanese and Palestinian clerics, he declared that "exaggerating and intensifying differences between Shiʿi, Sunni, Lebanese, and Palestinian groups" is religiously forbidden, adding that the "paramount duty" of the Lebanese and Palestinian ʿulamaʾ "is unifying the Shiʿi and Sunni groups and factions against the international Zionist usurpers."[61] He also advocated the overthrow of the Maronite-dominated political system in Lebanon:

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[58]Author interview with Ayatollah Husayn ʿAli Montazeri, Khaveh, Iran, 21 July 2008.

[59]On this initiative, which was launched in 1982, see *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 27 December 1982; and *Payam-i Inqilab*, no. 75, 8 January 1983, 20–25, 78.

[60]See *Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 3 June 1982; *Kayhan*, 29 January 1986.

[61]*As-Safir*, 15 October 1985; *al-ʿAhd*, 2 October 1986.

Figure 3. The Global Assembly of ʿUlamaʾ and Friday Prayer Leaders, held in 1980 in the library of Fayziyyah Seminary in Qom. From https://kadivar.com/15209, accessed 13 September 2020.

Figure 4. Montazeri, flanked by a Sunni cleric from Kurdistan Province in Iran (right) and Sayyid Jalal al-Din Tahiri (left), who was the Isfahan Friday prayer leader at the Global Assembly of ʿUlamaʾ and Friday Prayer Leaders held in 1980 in the library of Fayziyyah Seminary in Qom. From private collection of the author.

Time and again I've told the ʿulama' and dignitaries of Lebanon that nowadays governments should follow the majority's will. . . . Muslims have the clear majority in Lebanon. . . . Why should we defer to the wrongdoing of the French colonizers . . . ? The rule in Lebanon must become Islamic . . . one which protects the rights of Christian, Druze, and Jewish minorities.[62]

 To further the clerical activities, Montazeri's associates began to develop a trans-sectarian network of ʿulamaʾ across Lebanon. Shaykh Ismaʿil Khaliq, Montazeri's representative in Lebanon, and other

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[62]Ayatollah Husayn ʿAli Montazeri, "Baradaran-i Lubnani-yi Mihman-i Bunyad-i Shahid," MP3 audio recording from private collection, Qom, ca. 1985–86.

individuals like Sayyid ʿIsa Tabataba'i, who worked in association with Montazeri's office in Lebanon, led these activities.[63] Through their connections with members of the al-Jamaʿa al-Islamiyya, the Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Sunni clergy such as Shaykh Saʿid Shaʿban, Shaykh Muharram al-ʿArifi, Shaykh Mahir Hamud, and Shaykh Ahmad Zayn, they sought to lay common ground to promote the revolution and the anti-Israeli resistance.[64] Other Sunni clerics who were associated with this network were Shaykh Ibrahim Ghunaym, in the Badawi and Nahr al-Barad camps in northern Lebanon, and Shaykh Salim al-Lababidi in Beirut.[65]

The Association of Muslim ʿUlama' in Lebanon

The creation of AMUL was an echo in Lebanon of the Khomeinist script and the ecumenical ideas of the 1978–79 revolution.[66] The association sought to bridge the Shiʿi–Sunni and Lebanese–Palestinian rifts in Lebanon. Central to the charter of AMUL were Islamic unification and the Palestinian cause, which "lies at the core of the conflict between Islam and the global arrogance (*al-istikbār al-ʿālamī,* i.e., imperialism)."[67]

It was during the Israeli army's invasion that Lebanese and Palestinian clerics who gathered in Tehran to attend the June 1982 conference of liberation movements began to discuss establishing this association. The IRGC's Islamic Liberation Movements Unit (*Vahid-i Nihzatha-yi Azadibakhsh-i Islami-yi Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami /Maktab Harakat al-Taharrur*), which was under pro-Montazeri internationalists, hosted the conference to mark the Global Day of the Downtrodden (*Ruz-i Jahan-yi Mustazʿafin /Yawm al-Mustadʿafin al-ʿAlami*) in solidarity with anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli struggles.[68] "There were five or six [individuals], including me, Shaykh Saʿid Shaʿban, Shaykh Ahmad al-Zayn, Shaykh Mahir Hamud, and al-ʿAllama [Sayyid Muhammad Husayn] Fadl Allah," recounts Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli. "We met to discuss the Israeli invasion and methods of resistance against the Israeli army."[69]

In fact, ever since the revolution in Iran, partly inspired by Khomeini's ecumenical statements, the idea of setting up a joint platform of Shiʿi and Sunni ʿulama' was floated among Lebanese religious leaders. However, the decisive moment came with the 6 June 1982 Israeli invasion, which took place as the Lebanese and Palestinian ʿulama' were arriving in Tehran. "No one expected that the invasion would reach such an extent. We had thought that there would be aerial attacks, but we did not expect an invasion," recounts Shaykh Mahir Hamud, one of the founding members of AMUL.

> When we arrived in Tehran and the news began to arrive, the whole conference began to focus on the issue. There, the idea of resistance began to percolate and the Sunni and Shiʿi ʿulama' who had come from Lebanon met and decided to unify their actions against the occupation. This led to [establishing] the Association of Muslim ʿUlama'.[70]

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[63]Author interview with Sayyid ʿIsa Tabataba'i, B'ir Hassan, Lebanon, 28 July 2009.

[64]See Muhtashami's interview in *Etela'at*, 2 May 1984.

[65]Author interview with anonymous interlocutor, Tehran, Iran, 31 August 2007; al-Lababidi interview, 14 July 2009.

[66]Prior to AMUL, Lebanese Shiʿi clerics, inspired by the Islamic Revolution, had established two exclusively Shiʿi organizations. The first was the Association of Muslim ʿUlama' in the Bekaa (Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlama' al-Muslimin fi Biqaʿ), which was founded in 1980 by Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli and some other members of the al-Daʿwa party. According to al-Tufayli, they sought "to increase the role of ʿulama' in the political and social spheres." However, as Shaykh Adib Haydar notes, establishing this association was viewed by pro–Musa al-Sadr individuals as an attempt to challenge the authority of "the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council, which was against the revolutionary actions of Iran." The second organization was Haya't ʿUlama' Jabal ʿAmil (Council of ʿUlama' of Jabal ʿAmil) in southern Lebanon. Shaykhs Raghib Harb and ʿAfif Nablusi established the council to organize anti-Israeli activities in the south. Author interview with Shaykh ʿAfif Nablusi, Sidon, Lebanon, 22 July 2009; Haydar interview, 24 October 2009; al-Tufayli interview, 11 November 2009.

[67]Al-Khazim, *Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlama' al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*, 79. On AMUL's view of the unification of Muslims see *al-Wahda al-Islamiyya,* 16 February 1984, 1.

[68]*Payam-i Inqilab*, no. 62, 10 July 1982, 14–16; Fadl Allah, *al-Khyar al-Akhar*, 12; Fahs, *Madin la Yamdi*, vol. 2, 260–63.

[69]Al-Tufayli interview, 11 November 2009. Other than these influential ʿulama', dozens of Lebanese and Palestinians, like Shaykh Salim al-Lababidi and Shaykh Ibrahim Ghunaim, attended the liberation movements conference. Vahid-i Nihzatha-yi Azadibakhsh-i Islam-i Sipah-i Pasdaran, *Nihzatha-yi Azadibakhsh*, 325; al-Lababidi interview, 14 July 2009.

[70]Author interview with Shaykh Mahir Hamud, 13 December 2017.

Shaykh Ahmad al-Zayn, a Sunni cleric from Sidon, read out the first statement of AMUL at the conference.[71] At the end of the conference, these 'ulama' met Montazeri in Qom to discuss their decision. "Ayatollah Montazeri supported this idea," says Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli. "Following its establishment, his representatives in Beirut helped [politically and financially] the Association of Muslim 'Ulama'."[72]

Before returning to Lebanon, the Lebanese and Palestinian clerics (the latter refugees in Lebanon) agreed after an hours-long debate on a plan, whereby once they returned to their cities and villages they would embark on an anti-occupation campaign and coordinate their field operations and initiatives with the Islamic Committees (al-Lijan al-Islamiyya).[73] Shaykh 'Ali al-Khazim, a young cleric at the time who was present at the conference, says:

> The dearth of resistance against Israel made it clear to the `ulama' who came from different corners of Lebanon that they could and should have a significant role in mobilizing the people. When we came back to Lebanon, Israel had already occupied major parts of the country. The Association of Sunni and Shi`i Muslim `Ulama' in Lebanon announced its establishment and started its activities at mosques, because it did not have any center or headquarters.[74]

What these clerics sought to carry out was in line with Khomeini's credo that mosques "should not only be places of prayer, but rather, as in the Prophet Muhammad's time, should be centers of political, cultural, and military activities."[75] Like the process of the 1978–79 revolution in Iran, when religious sermons played a key role in spreading the words of Khomeini, the Lebanese clerics chose mosques and *ḥusayniyāt* to encourage resistance against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.[76] Clerics like Shaykh Raghib Harb in the southern village of Jebchit and Shaykh Mahir Hamud in Beirut delivered fiery speeches from the pulpits of mosques and *ḥusayniyāt* against the Israeli occupying army and invited people to join the resistance. Given the lack of resources and organizational tools at the time, this mosque-based communication network proved to be very effective in mobilizing people and spreading the word about the resistance. The clerical endeavors played out as the first contingent of the IRGC began to arrive in Lebanon— a significant turn toward armed internationalism in the export of the revolution to Lebanon.[77]

The Army of Khomeini Arrives

Shortly after the Israeli occupation, a contingent of around one thousand IRGC forces arrived in the Bekaa to assist the Lebanese with military preparation and training. They utilized the Imam 'Ali mosque and the al-Imam al-Muntazar seminary in Baalbek for recruiting, training, and public outreach.[78] "People flew white flags on rooftops all over Baalbek," recounts Shaykh 'Ali al-Kawrani, the former leader of the Lebanese branch of the al-Da'wa party, visiting the area with an IRGC commander, 'Ali Shamkhani. "Shamkhani exclaimed 'Why are they flying white flags? We want them to fly the red flags [of Imam Husayn].' 'Inshallah it will be so,' I said. The prevailing mood was surrender to Israel."[79] As the IRGC

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[71]The statement was written by Fahs at Istiqlal Hotel, where the conference convened; author interview with Sayyid Hani Fahs, al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, Lebanon, 1 May 2010.

[72]Al-Tufayli interview, 11 November 2009.

[73]The Islamic Committees predated the 1978–79 revolution. They were composed of young activists who took part in battles against the Israeli invasion. Author interview with Shaykh Hassan Himada, al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, Lebanon, 31 July 2009. The interviewee is an official in Hizbullah.

[74]Author interview with Shaykh 'Ali al-Khazim, al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, Lebanon, 23 July 2009.

[75]Ruh Allah Khumayni, *Sahifih-yi Nur: Majmu'ih-yi Rahnamudha-yi Imam Khumayni*, vol. 19 (Tehran: Sazman-i Madarik-i Farhangi-yi Inqilab-i Islami, 1992), 388.

[76]On the mosque network in Iran's role in spreading Khomeini's message and mobilizing for the 1978–79 revolution, see Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 33–49.

[77]On dispatching the IRGC forces to Lebanon see *Payam-i Inqilab*, no. 62, 10 July 1982, 74–77, 82; no. 82, 16 April 1983, 27–29.

[78]The orientation meetings between the youth who volunteered for military training and the IRGC commanders were held at the seminary. Among the very first volunteers were future leaders of Hizbullah, such as 'Abbas al-Musawi, Hassan Nasrallah, and Muhammad Khatun. Author interview with Shaykh Muhammad Khatun, al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, Lebanon, 10 September 2009; author interview with Mansur Kuchak Muhsini, Tehran, Iran, 19 July 2010.

[79]Author interviews with Shaykh 'Ali al-Kawrani, Qom, Iran, 14 November 2019.

militants began to enter the area, the clerics who were associated with AMUL declared the arrival of "the army of Khomeini" in their sermons and exhorted the youth to rush to the training camps of the IRGC, such as Janta Camp, located twenty-two kilometers south of Baalbek and close to the Syrian border, to prepare themselves for battle against the occupation. According to the secretary-general of Hizbullah:

> There were no institutions like now, no large organization or specialized departments. There was only a group effort concentrating on . . . banding together young men, training and organizing them into small groups, and then dispatching them to the occupied areas from where they were instructed to carry out attacks.[80]

Sayyid ʿAbbas al-Musawi, the head of the al-Imam al-Muntazar seminary in Baalbek (who was to become the second secretary-general of Hizbullah, from 1991 until his assassination by Israel in 1992), Shaykh Mahir Hamud, in his mosque in the heart of the Sunni district of Beirut, and Shaykh Raghib Harb in the ḥusayniyya of Jebchit, a village in the south, were among the most vocal preachers and agitators in Lebanon.[81] Al-Musawi attracted Sunni and Shiʿi youth from the south and Beirut and dispatched them for training and logistical assistance to Baalbek.[82] Harb, who asserted that "unifying all Muslims [is the] path of resistance and continuity of the Islamic Revolution" in Lebanon, emerged as one of the principal leaders of resistance in the south, from 1982 until his assassination in February 1984.[83] Although he remained aloof and distant from both AMUL and Hizbullah, Harb became the main link between the south and the IRGC bases in Bekaa.[84]

In pursuit of creating "a combatant society against the occupation," mosques and seminaries turned into centers for indoctrinating and recruiting youth for military training.[85] These clerical activities were in line with the IRGC's plans in Bekaa to "recruit and mass mobilize people to confront the occupation"—a duplication of the Iranian basīj (mobilization) model for popular mobilization.[86] "This originated from our experience in Iran," says Mansur Kuchak Muhsini, the then-IRGC commander in Lebanon, in reference to utilizing networks of mosques, seminaries, and religious institutions to rally the support of the public against the Shah and later for the Iran–Iraq War effort.[87] "We believed that this was the path of resistance, [which] was based on a popular basīj, and began from mosques. And [we believed] in its effectiveness."[88]

Soon after the IRGC opened its training bases, the first group of 180 volunteers arrived in Baalbek to receive training. This group, which included a number of future leaders of Hizbullah, like Sayyid ʿAbbas al-Musawi, was followed by hundreds of other youth from different regions of the country.[89] The

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[80]Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 49–50.

[81]Rashid al-Huri mosque is adjacent to the Beirut Arab University. At the time of the Israeli invasion, Shaykh Mahir Hamud was the prayer leader of the mosque, which became one of the main centers of AMUL's activities in Beirut; al-Khazim, *Tajammuʿ al-ʿUlamaʾ al-Muslimin fi Lubnan,* 51.

[82]One example of such Sunni groups was the Quwat al-Fajr (Dawn Forces), composed mostly of young members of the Lebanese Muslim Brotherhood. Disenchanted with the reluctance of the Brotherhood leadership to engage in military confrontation, they established links with al-Musawi to expand their military operations against Israel. Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle against Israel* (New York: Random House, 2011), 51–52.

[83]*Kayhan*, 10 January 1984. Harb also was known as the brain behind the attacks against Israeli soldiers. Hizbullah accused Israel of the assassination. See Jaber, *Hezbollah*, 21.

[84]Before the creation of AMUL, Harb had established Hayaʾt ʿUlamaʾ Jabal ʿAmil to organize Shiʿi clerics against the Israeli invasion. He was not, however, in agreement with the pro-Khomeini clerics who sought to organize resistance activities within a pro-Iran organization. Instead, he believed in "popular resistance." This drove a wedge between Harb and the clerics who established AMUL and Hizbullah. According to a member of Ayatollah Khomeini's office, Harb came to the Ayatollah's office and expressed serious reservation about the ongoing efforts to establish AMUL and Hizbullah. Author interviews with anonymous interlocutor, Tehran, Iran, 24 November 2019. See also Fahs, *Madin la Yamdi*, vol. 2, 261–63.

[85]Fadl Allah, *al-Khyar al-Akhar*, 14–15.

[86]*Umid-i Inqilab*, 31 August 1982, 73.

[87]See Amin Saikal, *Iran Rising: The Survival and Future of the Islamic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 52–59.

[88]Kuchak Muhsini interview, 19 July 2010.

[89]See ʿAbbas al-Musawi interview, *al-ʿAhd*, 18 October 1987; Fadl Allah, *al-Khyar al-Akhar*, 14–15.

then-IRGC commander in Lebanon, who oversaw establishing the Pasdaran training camps in the Bekaa, explains how they sought to empower the local people:

> We taught them how to work on the youth, how to create districts [in rural and urban areas for recruits] similar to what we did here [in Iran]. Hizbullahis started to do this by making brigades and training camps. We told them you should perform cultural and educational outreach and [after] going through these stages, set up the district (*nāḥīyih),* and then the battalion (*gurdān),* and finally create the staff (*sitād).*[90]

Within three months, according to Kuchak Muhsini, the Basij (volunteer paramilitary force) of the Baalbek region took its final form: "Its mosque, its district, training location, and ammunition depot were established the way we had done in Iran. [It was] such that if Israel would attack Baalbek, the Hizbullahis knew how to use weapons."[91]

Whereas related studies on the role of the IRGC in the formation of the Lebanese resistance concentrate generally on its military dimension, the present study demonstrates how the Khomeinist script of clerical leadership and reliance on religious networks underpinned the IRGC's recruitment and training in Lebanon.[92] The origin of the Islamic resistance and Hizbullah should be traced back to the pulpit, not the IRGC.[93] In the absence of any organized Lebanese resistance, a network of clergy, mosques, *ḥusayniyāt,* and seminary schools managed to fill the gap left by an embattled PLO, unassertive Amal, and uninspired Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council. "In that first stage, we managed perfectly to mobilize people in their villages and cities. These activities led to the idea of Hizbullah," Shaykh Mahir Hamud says, an allusion to the weakness of established organizations at the time.[94]

Countering the 17 May Agreement

Amal and the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council were wary of the Iranian internationalists' credo of backing the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon, a slogan that hardly resonated with many Shiʿa in southern Lebanon who had suffered from the antagonistic tactics of Palestinian guerrillas and Israeli retaliation. In June 1982, anti-PLO attitudes in the south were so prevalent that even some Shiʿa greeted the Israeli soldiers, believing that they would eventually rid them of the fedayeen.[95] But they grew disillusioned as president Amin Gemayel signed, under US pressure, a peace agreement with Israel on 17 May 1983. The southern Shiʿa's initial optimism during the June invasion began to yield to furor over the brutal practices of the Israeli forces. A turning point came in October 1983, when an Israeli military convoy clashed with a large procession of ʿAshuraʾ mourners who gathered in the southern town of Nabatiyya to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, killing at least two people and wounding several more.[96] A year into the invasion, the prevailing mood in the south became one of the militant resistance that AMUL and pro-Khomeini clerics had preached in the southern occupied villages and cities.

Early on, the Israelis realized the power of this emerging clerical network, which a member of Ayatollah Khomeini's office describes as "a new political weight."[97] The Israeli forces unleashed a campaign of arrests and assassinations to undermine AMUL. Israeli soldiers arrested Shaykh Raghib Harb in March 1983 and Shaykh Muharram al-ʿArifi, the imam of al-Battah mosque and a leading agitator in Sidon, in December 1983 (Fig. 5). Israel also tried to assassinate Sayyid ʿAbd al-Muhsin Fadl Allah and Shaykh Husayn Surur,

[90]Kuchak Muhsini interview, 19 July 2010.

[91]Ibid.

[92]For example, see Kenneth Katzman, *The Warriors of Islam: Iran's Revolutionary Guard* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), 96–98; Shanahan, *Shiʿa of Lebanon,* 113–15; Chehabi, "Iran and Lebanon in the Revolutionary Decade," 216–20; Azani, *Hezbollah,* 60, 176; and Daher, *Hezbollah,* 27–29. Chehabi highlights the cultural activities of the IRGC in Bekka.

[93]I am grateful to David Siddhartha Patel's illuminating feedback for developing this argument.

[94]Hamud interview, 13 December 2017.

[95]Norton, *Amal and the Shia,* 65–66.

[96]Ibid., 112–13.

[97]Author interviews with anonymous interlocutor, Tehran, Iran, 31 August 2007.

Figure 5. "The path of Islam is jihad and martyrdom," reads a poster published in 1985 by the Islamic Resistance that portrays "the combatant Shaykh Muharram al-ʿArifi" and "the martyr Shaykh Raghib Harb." From http://www.signsofconflict.org/ar/Archive/poster_details/1894, accessed 3 December 2020.

and forced other clerics out of their villages.[98] In February 1984, Shaykh Raghib Harb was assassinated in Jebchit. The murder of Harb, who was thereafter known as Shaykh al-Shuhadaʾ (Master of All Martyrs), fueled the growing insurgency in the south.[99] Iranian clergy saw the popular reaction as proof of their success. "This demonstrated," Muhtashami says, "the influence of those ʿulamaʾ among people. Arresting and expelling them gave birth to a new wave as many youth left the south and rushed to receive military training [in Bekaa] in order to go back to the south and carry out operations against the occupation."[100]

One such operation was the suicide bombing of the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre on 11 November 1982. Recruited by Hizbullah, Ahmad Qasir from the southern city of Tyre drove a car packed with explosives into the eight-floor Israeli army headquarters and killed dozens of soldiers, including top military commanders. For Israel, this was an entirely new kind of resistance.[101] Originating from mosques and ḥusayniyāt, it was much more lethal than what Israel had faced from the PLO. On 23 October 1983, the month of the Nabatiyya clash, Beirut awoke to "the largest non-nuclear explosion that had ever been detonated on the face of the earth." A truck, laden with 15,000 to 21,000 pounds of TNT, hit the US Marine barracks, killing 241 Marines. A faceless Islamic Jihad, with obscure ties to Iran, claimed responsibility for the attack.[102]

As the mounting number of Israeli casualties increased pressure on Israeli leaders to withdraw, a joint US-Israeli effort was underway to extract political concessions from the besieged Lebanese government. Iran and Syria sought to deny Israel any such gains. The US-backed 17 May 1983 agreement aimed to bring Lebanon into the sphere of Arab countries that had made peace treaties with Israel.[103] This was met with strong condemnation from both Tehran and Damascus, and Islamic and nationalist forces in Lebanon rejected the pact, which they viewed as the surrender of southern Lebanon to Israeli control. However, objections came foremost from AMUL, whose ʿulamaʾ, as a member of Hizbullah puts it, took upon themselves the duty of "awakening the nation" to the danger of the "lesser Satan."[104] They launched

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[98]*Jumhuri-yi Islami*, 27 March 1983 and 28 March 1983; Qasim, *Hizb Allah*, 148–49.

[99]Saad-Ghorayeb, *Hizbullah*, 12; David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 201.

[100]Author interview with Sayyid ʿAli Akbar Muhtashami, Tehran, Iran, 17 July 2010.

[101]Hirst, *Beware of Small States,* 197.

[102]Ibid., 194. At the same time, fifty-eight French soldiers died when another truck hit their barracks in Beirut.

[103]Norton, *Amal and the Shia*, 96–97.

[104]Author interview with Shaykh Muhammad Husayn ʿAmru, al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, Lebanon, 05 August 2009. The lesser Satan is a reference to Israel, versus the great Satan, an epithet used by revolutionary Iran for the US.

a popular campaign coordinated with Muhtashami against the agreement and President Gemayel, "the shah of Lebanon."[105] On May 13, AMUL issued a stark statement against the draft of the agreement and urged 'ulama' to take "the stance that their leadership role behooves them."[106] In addition to agitation from mosque pulpits, AMUL 'ulama' organized protests, such as a march in al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya (the predominantly Shi'i southern suburb of Beirut). Fronted by AMUL clergy and future leaders of Hizbullah like Shaykh Na'im Qasim, who is now the party's deputy secretary-general, the crowd chanted against Gemayel, Israel, and the US, carrying a large banner reading in English, "Choultez [sic], it's better for you to go back."[107]

By this time, AMUL had assumed a more organized structure by expanding its network to about twenty Shi'i and Sunni members.[108] Clerics, such as Shaykh 'Ali al-Khazim (originally a member of the student battalion, al-Katiba al-Tulabiyya, a branch of al-Fatah for religious student members) and Shaykh Salim al-Lababidi (a Palestinian member of the Islamic Combatant movement), formally joined AMUL.[109] The association was expanding its activities with steady support from Ayatollah Montazeri and his liaisons, like Shaykh Isma'il Khaliq, Shaykh Hassan Ibrahimi, and Sayyid 'Isa Tabataba'i. In Damascus, Ambassador Muhtashami, who was Khomeini's point person in Bilad al-Sham, also was involved with AMUL's undertakings.[110] He held regular meetings with the Lebanese and Palestinian 'ulama', who visited Damascus to discuss the situation in Lebanon and coordinate policies.

Amid widespread criticism of President Amin Gemayel, who in the eyes of many Lebanese Muslim leaders had relinquished the sovereignty of his country by signing the 17 May agreement, AMUL clerics began to call for a mass protest and exhorted people to take to the streets against the agreement.[111] The 'ulama'-led protests unfolded in coordination with Muhtashami, who says that the clerical activities proved to be "influential in derailing the negotiations between the Lebanese government and Israel":

> I personally met tens of Lebanese clerics to discuss the situation and warn them about the sensitivity of the issue. Clerics, such as Shaykh Sa`id Sha`ban from north Lebanon, Shaykh Ibrahim Ghunaym, `ulama' of Bekaa, Sidon, the south, and Beirut, met with me and I warned them about the challenges that they faced. I also met Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah and Shaykh Shams al-Din in Syria, and little by little a new environment was created.[112]

The campaign that started from mosques and Friday prayer sermons culminated in a sit-in strike at the al-Imam al-Rida mosque in al-Dahiyya al-Janubiyya, where Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah preached to crowds about the Islamic revolution and resistance. No sooner had the fiery speeches against Gemayel and the negotiations with Israel finished, than protesters gathered inside and around the mosque took to the streets of the southern suburbs. In the ensuing clashes with the Lebanese army, one person was killed, and several others were wounded.[113] Similar demonstrations were held in the Bekaa to protest the talks with Israel. "This was very effective," says Muhtashami. "As for the negotiations, the first group which expressed its condemnation was the Association of Muslim 'Ulama' and clergy like Shaykh Raghib Harb, who were in touch with the Islamic Republic."[114] Very soon, the wave of protests became so strong that even the taciturn Shaykh Shams al-Din had to join the calls to abrogate the 17 May agreement.

[105]Blanford, *Warriors of God*, 71.

[106]Al-Khazim, *Tajammu' al-'Ulama' al-Muslimin fi Lubnan,* 91.

[107]The US Secretary of State George Shultz was at the time in Beirut to mediate the agreement; al-Khazim, *Tajammu' al-'Ulama' al-Muslimin fi Lubnan,* 22–23.

[108]Ibid., 25.

[109]Al-Lababidi interview, 14 July 2009; al-Khazim interview, 23 July 2009.

[110]Al-Zayn interview, 22 July 2009.

[111]Norton, *Amal and the Shia,* 96.

[112]Muhtashami interview, 17 July 2010.

[113]Al-Khazim, *Tajammu' al-'ulama' al-Muslimin fi Lubnan*, 23.

[114]Muhtashami interview, 17 July 2010.

AMUL, Iranian Policy, and the rise of Hizbullah

The trans-sectarian resistance and cooperation between Iranian, Lebanese, and Palestinian ʿulamaʾ steadily emerged as a crucial lynchpin in shaping the Islamic Republic's policies in Lebanon. Unlike the conservative Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council, AMUL was loyal to the Val-yi Faqih, Iran's leader.[115] Given the disinterest of most influential Shiʿi ʿulamaʾ, like Shams al-Din, in the Iranian Revolution and overthrowing the Lebanese political order, AMUL provided a spiritual mantle for Tehran's policies in Lebanon.[116] The organization also conferred on Iran a trans-sectarian legitimacy, which allowed Tehran to make inroads into Lebanese politics despite the resistance of conservative Lebanese factions. "Most of these clerics were young," says a member of Ayatollah Khomeini's office about the pro-Khomeini clergy. "By contrast, generally the older clerics who were mired in Lebanese politics, like Shaykh Shams al-Din and Mufti Hassan Khalid, had conceded to the negotiations [with Israel]."[117]

As much as the 1982 invasion and its aftermath marked the rise of radical clerics in Lebanon, it also revealed the waning influence of the conservative Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council and Amal. This was evident in the "comprehensive civil resistance" declaration of Shams al-Din in response to the Israeli invasion.[118] It only further isolated him. Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, who was one of the founders of AMUL, describes this passivity as a basic motive behind establishing the association: "the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council was against opening any front to counter Israel, and after the 1982 invasion they only called for civil resistance."[119]

The ʿulamaʾ-led struggle and street marches, in parallel with the military operation of the hitherto underground Hizbullah against Israeli and Western targets, successfully disrupted the American efforts to consolidate the client regime of Amine Gemayel and the implementation of the 17 May agreement. By February 1984, the US Marines left Lebanon, and a month later the Lebanese government had to abrogate the agreement.

A year later, on 16 February 1985, the anniversary of Shaykh Raghib Harb's assassination, Hizbullah published its manifesto.[120] The public debut marked Hizbullah's transition from "secret resistance" to a political-military party, ushering in a new era for AMUL.[121] The network of AMUL ʿulamaʾ, which had its inception in the first days after the June 1982 invasion at the International Liberation Movements Conference in Tehran, was the cornerstone of Hizbullah's formation and success. The underground organization, in its 1982–85 formative stage, relied on AMUL's "mass-oriented, ʿulamaʾ-led, and mosque-based method" to recruit and mobilize against the occupation.[122] In the words of Shaykh Mahir Hamud, "We were doing what Hizbullah did later."[123]

In the second half of the 1980s, political factionalism in Iran and struggle over control of Tehran's foreign policy impinged on AMUL. Internationalist clerics, like Ayatollah Montazeri, sought to spread the Islamic revolution and safeguard it against outside threats by nurturing ties with international radical forces and sparking other Islamic revolutions in the region. Creating a transnational and trans-sectarian network of religious leaders was central to the internationalists' pan-Islamic quest. However, the foreign and intelligence ministries, supported by the pragmatists Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (who was the parliament speaker) and the then-president, Sayyid ʿAli Khamenei, sought to assert control over the international relationships of the Islamic Republic, especially Iran's connections with liberation movements.[124]

[115]AMUL's charter emphasizes commitment to the Islamic Republic and allegiance to the *Vali-yi faqih* in the framework of the Sunni and Shiʿi credo. The Sunni ʿulamaʾ define their allegiance to the *Vali-yi faqih* based on the concept that the leadership of an Islamic Jurist (*faqīh*), even a Shiʿi one, has precedence over a sultan (king) or lay ruler. Al-Zayn interview, 22 July 2009.

[116]Fahs interview, 1 May 2010. In Fahs's view, AMUL was an important channel for attracting clerics to the pro-Iran camp in Lebanon.

[117]Author interview with anonymous interlocutor, Tehran, Iran, 31 August 2007.

[118]ʿAmru interview, 5 August 2009. As ʿAmru, who is an official in Hizbullah, explains the dominant view within Hizbullah at the time, Shams al-Din's declaration was perceived as a rejection of armed resistance and triggered controversy between the Supreme Islamic Shiʿi Council and Hizbullah.

[119]Al-Tufayli interview, 11 November 2009.

[120]See *as-Safir*, 17 February 1985; and Jaber, *Hezbollah*, 54–61.

[121]Qasim, *Hizb Allah*, 155.

[122]Al-Kawrani, *Tariqat Hizb Allah*, 11, 185–86.

[123]Hamud interview, 13 December 2017.

[124]See Maziar Behrooz, "Factionalism in Iran under Khomeini," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 4 (1991): 607–8.

The controversy over export of the revolution coupled with clerical factionalism, which came to a head in the late 1980s over who would succeed Khomeini, left a deep mark on Iranian foreign relations and the approach to Lebanon. The power struggle culminated in the removal of Montazeri as the heir designate of Khomeini in March 1989.[125]

The official restrictions on Montazeri's role in foreign policy, followed by the post–March 1989 crackdown on all the religious and political institutions associated with him, enmeshed AMUL in factional antagonism within Iran. The Iranian government confiscated institutions and schools that were under Montazeri's supervision and restricted the activities of his representatives in Lebanon, like Shaykh Isma'il Khaliq. "The Iranian Intelligence Ministry did not want him to play a significant role and was trying to limit him in Lebanon," says Montazeri's former chief of staff. "Their security concerns did not allow much maneuverability for loose-knit clerical activities. This led to the gradual exclusion of Khaliq [from political activity in Lebanon]."[126] Many members of AMUL were unhappy to see that Montazeri's spiritual and political influence was under attack. Shaykh Sa'id Sha'ban was so upset that, according to Ayatollah Montazeri, he said:

> Did you see that after 1400 years our argument proved right that politics ousted 'Ali and brought Abu Bakr [to power]? Now it turned out that we are right: that if politics necessitates, even one who is righteous will be deposed. Abu Bakr was brought to power because prudence [*maṣliḥat*] takes precedence over truth [*ḥaqīqat*], and you too did the same [by removing Montazeri].[127]

Some AMUL members intended to issue a public statement to denounce the pressure on the ayatollah.[128] Nevertheless, AMUL was able to survive Montazeri's removal—the culmination of sharp disagreements that had opened a deep rift between Khomeini and Montazeri over contentious issues, like the execution of many leftist prisoners by revolutionary courts and the Iran–Iraq War.[129]

Hizbullah's public debut in 1985 and the increasing influence of the Iranian foreign and intelligence ministries over Iranian foreign policy gradually diminished the overall importance of the cleric-led activities in Lebanon, on which the Islamic Republic had relied since 1979. The steady bifurcation of AMUL and Hizbullah into two distinct entities transferred the association's political role to Hizbullah and made the clerical organization a lesser political force. AMUL, in the words of one of its members, "became more and more focused on 'ulamaʾ-based spiritual activities, rather than popular [political] action."[130] Sayyid Hani Fahs, who later parted ways with AMUL, puts this in a more straightforward tone, saying "it became an institution," hinting that the association had lost its initial revolutionary and all-embracing ecumenical appeal.[131]

To date, AMUL has remained a platform for ecumenical activism and promotion of Iranian interests in Lebanon—an example of the lasting intellectual and political impacts of the 1978–79 revolution and its pan-Islamic origins.[132] The ouster of Ayatollah Montazeri, the towering theologian and revolutionary, dealt a crippling blow to the internationalists who advocated for Islamic revolutions in Lebanon and other Muslim countries. It also highlighted a turn away from pan-Islamic internationalism to realpolitik in Tehran which, under the leadership of Khamenei, who became supreme guide following Khomeini's death in June 1989, shifted to a vigorous pursuit of reaching a modus vivendi with Damascus in Lebanon and reconciliation between Hizbullah and Amal within the Lebanese sectarian political order. Had

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[125]On the impact of the power struggle on Montazeri's internal and external activities, see Anonymous, *Vaqiyatha va Qizavatha* (n.p., 1998).

[126]Author interview with Shaykh Hassan Ibrahimi, Tehran, Iran, 10 January 2010.

[127]The ayatollah quoted this from Shaykh 'Ali al-Kawrani. Montazeri interview, 21 July 2008.

[128]Ibrahimi interview, 10 January 2010. Ibrahimi says that he talked them out of this decision lest they undermine AMUL's future.

[129]On Ayatollah Montazeri's ouster after he protested the mass executions in 1988, see Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 181–82. Montazeri also was critical of the war management and the human-wave tactics the IRGC employed on the war fronts. See, for example, his missive to Khomeini; Montazeri, *Khatirat*, vol. 2, 1055–56.

[130]Al-Khazim interview, 23 July 2009.

[131]Fahs interview, 1 May 2010.

[132]For information about the current activities of AMUL, see its official website, accessed 21 July 2020, http://tajamoo.com.

Montazeri succeeded Khomeini in 1989, AMUL and Hizbullah, rather than integration in the Lebanese political system could have posed a bigger challenge to the post–al-Taʻif sectarian power-sharing arrangement that has underpinned the Lebanese political system since 1989.[133]

Epilogue: AMUL and the Limits of Sectarian Narratives

The Khomeinist script with the supreme vanguard of ʻulama' at its core inspired the creation of AMUL, which lay the groundwork for Hizbullah in Lebanon. The script made the Iranian Revolution highly appealing among Islamists and exportable beyond the Shiʻi communities outside of Iran's borders. Despite the shrinking influence of AMUL and diminishing appeal of Iran among Sunni forces in the subsequent years, the importance of Islamic ecumenicalism in the formative years of the Islamic Republic's involvement in Lebanon challenges narratives that neglect or downplay the pan-Islamic dimensions of the revolution and confine its international impact to Shiʻi forces. Sunni–Shiʼi unification and the Palestinian cause were key to the formation of AMUL and Hizbullah and have offered Iran a unique influence in Lebanon. From the standpoint of Shiʻi and Sunni clerics, AMUL's ecumenical network was so important at the time that, in the words of Hani Fahs, "confronting [the Israeli occupation] could not have been accomplished without the unification of Sunnis and Shiʼa."[134] Israeli aggression has been instrumental to Shiʻi–Sunni cooperation in Lebanon and AMUL's initial success and longevity to this date. The trans-sectarian adaptation of the Khomeinist script in the context of the complex relationships between anti-Iran Shiʻi and pro-Khomeini Sunni clerics shows how sectarian models rob indigenous actors of agency and gloss over diversity within the ʻulama', revealing the limits of sectarian narratives when analyzing the dynamics of Sunni–Shiʻi relationships and Iranian regional policies.[135]

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[133]This also is significant in light of the tensions that existed in the 1980s between the office of Montazeri and the Syrian government, especially over the former's relationships with some of the leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and anti-Asad Islamists in Lebanon. See Ataie, "Revolutionary Iran's 1979 Endeavor in Lebanon," 148–50.

[134]Fahs interview, 1 May 2010.

[135]Brigitte Maréchal and Sami Zemni, "Conclusion: Analyzing Contemporary Sunnite–Shiite Relationships," in *Dynamics of Sunni–Shia Relationships*, ed. Maréchal and Zemni, 226–27.