war on terrorism seemed to incorporate Israel’s” (p. 177) and that the United States started to put pressure on the Lebanese government to curtail Hizbullah. This led to a unified Lebanese stance behind the party with Syrian backing (chapter 12). Harik concludes, “United States policymakers well know that Syria alone can pull the plug on Hezbollah. This the Assad government will not do, however, unless there is something to be gained from it” (p. 201).

Although Harik’s book is well written and a welcome addition to the new scholarship on Hizbullah, it remains a fairly descriptive volume. The book fails to provide a theoretical contribution to our understanding of how Islamic movements can become mainstream political parties. A second weakness is the dearth of references to published research in Arabic about the party and the very sporadic use of available primary sources, such as speeches by the party’s leadership or the different publications of Hizbullah and its affiliated welfare organizations, in addition to information available on the party’s websites, for example, moqawama.org and the now defunct nasrallah.net and hizbullah.org. A third weakness is the relatively small number of interviews conducted by the author. This is particularly surprising as the author resides in Lebanon and should therefore have easy access to the party’s leadership. Access to the representatives of Hizbullah in parliament, for example, is fairly simple. The presentation of this book is also marred by problems in the transliteration of Arabic words and by copyediting problems.

It is this reviewer’s opinion that, although this book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Hizbullah, it might not be very useful for researchers looking for new insights into the integration of Islamist parties in the political arena. This volume remains, however, a good introduction for newcomers to Lebanon and Hizbullah. It is also a good book to assign to undergraduate students in a course on political Islam to further their understanding of Islamism in its Shi’a form outside Iran.

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In the Path of Hizbullah is a sophisticated and adroit analysis of a complex and often sensational subject. Hamzeh deploys a dynamic conceptual framework to explain Hizbullah’s birth, its metamorphosis into a corporatist political party, and its policy choices. He argues that the latter are best understood in the context of changing circumstances, the party’s organizational structure, and the demands of ideological legitimation. Yet, despite the party’s theoretical insistence on the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic order, Hamzeh argues that ideology is malleable, remolded by the clerical leadership to fit changing circumstances.

Hamzeh traces Hizbullah’s emergence to a set of overlapping crisis conditions. Four variables are identified to explain the increased militancy of the Lebanese Shi’a community in the 1960s and 1970s: a historical legacy of suffering, the political and economic disenfranchisement of the Shi’a, Israel’s multiple invasions of Lebanon, and the demonstration effect of the Islamic revolution in 1978–79. These variables formed the necessary socioeconomic, political, and psychological conditions that led to Hizbullah’s formation. Hamzeh traverses largely familiar grounds here. It is his analysis of Hizbullah’s Islamic
ideology, organizational structure, and operational choices that marks his analysis from other works.

Ideology is paramount in Hizbullah’s worldview. Hamzeh uses a combination of personal interviews and primary sources to unpack the components of this ideology. He argues that the party is wedded to the doctrine of wilāyat al-faqīh and abides by the ideological directives of the faqīh (jurisconsult), Ayatollah Khomeini and then Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, Hamzeh does not elaborate the implications of this imperative on Hizbullah’s Lebanese politics and identity. Is the party, as some suggest, a tool of Iran in Lebanon? Or does it possess some measure of autonomy from the mullas in Tehran? What was Syria’s influence on the party’s policy choices after 1990, and did Iran sanction them? These questions are especially important given the debate in post-Syria Lebanon on the future of Hizbullah’s extralegal military status, and its role in the U.S.–Iran regional confrontation after the invasion of Iraq.

Hizbullah’s relation to its followers is not a function of ideological appeal only. Rather, the party developed a complex corporatist institutional structure penetrating mainly the Shi’a segments of Lebanese society in the south, the Ba’lbak-Hermel area, and Beirut’s southern suburbs. This corporatist structure amounted to a veritable shadow state. Hizbullah’s social, educational, economic, legal, vocational, and media agencies serve to bind cadres to the party and alleviate the economic hardships of the needy. They are also vehicles for recruitment and indoctrination, extending the party’s reach deep into the Shi’a community. Hamzeh’s analysis of the party’s socioeconomic organs, its leadership apparatus, and its military and security apparatus is comprehensive. He underscores the crucial role played by the clerical leadership in maintaining the party’s corporatist discipline, and their supervision of its military and security organs.

The party’s corporatist structure contrasts with its flexible operational choices. Hamzeh details the shift in the party’s operational strategy from the “militant mode” of the 1980s to the “gradualist–pragmatic mode” beginning in 1989. This shift signaled the victory of the pragmatists over the militants in two overlapping contests: one fought in Iran, between Hashimi Rafsanjani’s group against the militants led by Ali Akbar Muhtashami and Hasan Kharoubi, and another in Lebanon, inside Hizbullah’s clerical leadership, between ‘Abbas al-Musawi and Hasan Nasrallah’s pragmatic camp against Subhi al-Tufaili and Husayn al-Musawi’s militant group. The latter contest revolved around what strategy should the party select in its quest to establish an Islamic order: gradualism or perpetual militancy. This operational shift to a gradualist–pragmatic mode is demonstrated by means of an analysis of Hizbullah’s tactical electoral alliances in the first postwar parliamentary elections in 1992 and in the 1998 municipal elections. Moreover, this shift transpired at a time when Lebanon came under almost total Syrian control. Here again Hamzeh leaves the reader desiring more details. What kind of modus operandi was negotiated with Syria after 1989? What was Iran’s stance vis-à-vis the Hizbullah–Syria alliance after 1989?

Hamzeh’s book succeeds in capturing the ability of Hizbullah’s clerical leadership to reconcile the demands of ideology with those of mundane politics in postwar Lebanon. However, he is unconvinced that the party has accepted Lebanon’s confessional system, arguing that it ultimately seeks to eliminate this system. Developments in Lebanon since the book’s publication have intensified the pressures on Hizbullah to shed its regional connections and prove its Lebanese allegiances. Party leaders have declared emphatically their sensitivity to Lebanon’s sectarian sociology and confessional political system. Indeed, they have fought hard to consecrate consociation as the principal feature of the post-Syria political system. The party is engaged in a decisive political battle to protect its prerogatives in post-Syria Lebanon. In the Path of Hizbullah not only traces the party’s journey hitherto, but it also illuminates its future prospects.