

Europeans and Americans have long recognized the key challenges presented to them by the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah, two movements whose ideologies and actions are widely perceived as being opposed to Western interests. In response, both the US and Europe have exerted much effort to influence the positions and popularities of these two movements. More specifically, the Bush administration has aimed at weakening or defeating Hamas and Hezbollah. Others, principally in Europe, have hoped to induce their moderation and cooptation. Both aims have failed. The sections below analyse how and why this has been the case.

## 4. The International dimension: Western policies toward Hamas and Hezbollah

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The West has pursued two, largely contradictory, objectives in Lebanon. First, it has rhetorically backed democracy and reform, and repeatedly recognized the need to foster intra-Lebanese unity amongst all confessional groups. At the same time, it has unreservedly backed one side of the intra-Lebanese political divide, while attempting to punish and weaken the other, represented principally by Hezbollah. In trying to achieve these contradictory aims, Western policies have failed to achieve both.

### 4.1 The West and Hezbollah: Trumping the aim of democracy and polarizing domestic politics

The US and in particular the EU have repeatedly asserted their support for democracy and good governance in Lebanon. Especially since Lebanon was included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003 and the EU published an ENP Action Plan for Lebanon in 2007, the Commission has carefully spelled out, in agreement with the Lebanese government, a wide array of reform priorities across different policy fields. The Action Plan includes priorities in the areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, calling for, *inter alia*, the reform of the electoral law, a human rights strategy and security sector reform. To support these nationally-agreed priorities, the EU has opened the prospect of granting Lebanon a 'stake in the single market', enhanced political cooperation and dialogue, and support in legislative approximation. As detailed below, the EU has also committed significant funds, earmarked for political and economic reforms, economic recovery, reconstruction, infrastructure rehabilitation, de-mining and assistance to Palestinian refugees.

Beyond democracy and governance, the international community and the EU in particular has repeatedly asserted the importance of securing consensus and reconciliation between all Lebanese forces, as stated, *inter alia*, in UNSC resolutions 1559 (2004), 1701 and 1680 (2006). EU High Representative Javier Solana has called upon 'the different leaders of the different forces [to] work together for all that supposes progress', while Commissioner for External Relations and the ENP Benita Ferrero Walder has advocated a 'pro-Lebanon consensus' amongst Lebanon's political class, free from external interference by great powers.<sup>60</sup> Intra-Lebanese consensus and understanding, including naturally Hezbollah, is viewed by the EU as pivotal both as an end in itself and as a means to achieve democracy and good governance in Lebanon. In presenting its report on Lebanon in the context of the ENP, the Commission stated that 'only if the reform process is backed by a national pact, encompassing all political forces as well as religious and ethnic groups, and thereby overcoming political rivalry, vested interests and clientelism, will it have a chance of actually being implemented'.<sup>61</sup>

This national understanding appeared to be in the making when, after the 2005 Lebanese parliamentary elections held after the assassination of Rafik Hariri and the Syrian military withdrawal, an inter-confessional governing coalition including Hezbollah was established. It was precisely during this period that negotiations over the Action Plan between the Commission and the Lebanese cross-confessional government took place. Negotiations were carried out before May 2006 (i.e., before Hezbollah's walk-out from government in November). In fact, although the Action Plan was agreed in January 2007 – three months after Hezbollah's exit from government – its substance largely reflected the priorities identified under the 'Government of Lebanon's Ministerial Declaration' of July 2005, a Declaration made when Hezbollah was in the Lebanese cabinet and parliament. More poignantly, EU officials involved in the negotiations, have privately acknowledged Hezbollah's constructive attitude in these talks.<sup>62</sup>

Yet while rhetorically appreciating the need for intra-Lebanese unity, at no time did EU actors or the US express reservations regarding Hezbollah's exit from government in the

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<sup>60</sup> Press statement of Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP in Beirut, 16 July 2006, S203/06; Statement by Benita Ferrero Walder, Commissioner for External Relations and the ENP (2006) 'Lebanon - Breaking the Impasse, 16 December, <http://www.dellbn.cec.eu.int/en/whatsnew/06/deco6.htm>.  
<sup>61</sup> European Commission (2007) 'European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, Lebanese Republic, Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013', and 'National Indicative Programme 2007-2010', p.11.  
<sup>62</sup> Interview with Commission official, November 2006, Brussels.

fall of 2006. No action was taken by the West to resolve the Lebanese impasse following the demonstrations and strikes organized by the 8 March opposition front in December 2006, the ensuing freeze in regular parliamentary activity and the ongoing political tensions and violence. This notwithstanding the fact that these developments blocked the functioning of Lebanese democracy and progress in those reform efforts much acclaimed in the West, they also exacerbated intra-Lebanese tensions and violence, reawakening the spectre of inter-confessional conflict.

Western policies in fact exacerbated the growing intra-Lebanese polarization and tensions. This is because Europe, and most notably France,<sup>63</sup> together with the US, have unreservedly supported Siniora's front, while attacking and attempting to weaken the Hezbollah-Aoun opposition. The support of the West for Siniora's government is evident in a series of policies and actions, ranging from the vigorous effort in deploying the UNIFIL II mission, to the positions adopted in UNSC resolutions 1701 and 1680. Most significantly, at the January 2007 donor conference for Lebanon, the EU pledged \$520m, France a further \$650m and the US \$1bn in assistance to the Lebanese government.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the EIB committed €960m in loans. On the contrary, the US and to a lesser extent the EU have attempted to weaken Hezbollah through the use of punishments and pressures. Hezbollah is included in the US terrorist list and neither the US nor EU member states attempted to halt without delay Israel's war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, aimed at destroying Hezbollah's capabilities. On the contrary, many in Washington fomented Israel's war effort, viewing its hoped-for success as a welcomed victory against the western fear of a rising 'Shi'ia crescent' in the Middle East. These western policies and positions have not strengthened the Siniora government against Hezbollah. Not only was Hezbollah not weakened by the West, but arguably, by supporting Israel and meddling into Lebanese affairs, the West has discredited its legitimacy in Lebanon and enhanced Hezbollah's resistance image amongst its constituencies. Hezbollah's resistance to Israel, unstopped for 34 days by the international community, at the very least left its domestic popularity untarnished, and at most it raised its popularity further.

What Western policies have achieved instead is a grave deepening of the internal political divide in Lebanon, with this divide now largely reflecting the different views on Lebanon's international alliances. Hezbollah accuses the Future Front of acting as a Western stooge and tacitly accepting Israel's attack in 2006 as a means to achieving Hezbollah's disarmament. It also resents the American and French support for Siniora's anti-Syrian coalition, and the one-sided approval by the Western media of the February-March 2005 demonstrations (dubbing these a 'cedar revolution'), in contrast to their relative silence over the 2006 Hezbollah strikes and demonstrations of similar magnitudes in terms of public participation. In turn, the Future Front accuses Hezbollah of accepting Syrian and Iranian meddling in Lebanese affairs, hindering Lebanon's much-sought independence. Indeed, amongst the triggers for Hezbollah's exit from government was the controversy over the UN Security Council resolution establishing an international tribunal for Hariri's assassination and Hezbollah's resentment towards Siniora for not having appropriately discussed the draft within the Cabinet. This resentment grew in view of Hezbollah's reservations about the broad powers for criminal prosecution the UN draft entrusted to the international community, resulting, in Hezbollah's view, in a crucial limitation of Lebanese sovereignty and a legally sanctioned forum to prosecute Syria. Worst still, by passing the resolution under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, Hezbollah is concerned that the powers entrusted to the international community would ultimately empower the West to forcefully disarm Hezbollah. This is a prospect which Hezbollah believes the Lebanese government is pushing for, given its failure to secure a stronger mandate for the UNIFIL II mission in 2006.<sup>65</sup> Prominent government leaders such as Walid Jumblatt have in fact openly called for a revision of UNIFIL's mandate allowing the mission to 'implement' the provisions of the Taef accords and thus Hezbollah's disarmament.

Also disconcerting is the alleged western involvement in the violence which erupted in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon the spring and summer of 2007. The external dimension in this last tragic twist in Lebanese politics is difficult to assess. Some argued that Fateh al-Islam was financed by Syria to counter the Siniora government. Others suggested that these Salafi groups were close to the Future Front and supported by Saudi Arabia and thus indirectly by the West as a means to expose the weakness of the Lebanese army and empower UNIFIL to disarm these groups as well as Hezbollah and to control the border with Syria (through which Iranian financial and material support to Hezbollah is provided).<sup>66</sup> The truth in these and other allegations is difficult to ascertain, and possibly both may be partly true. The only conclusion that can be drawn from these allegations is that whether Syrian and/or Saudi/Western, an international dimension of the violence in the camps is highly likely and it contributed to the further weakening and fragmenting of the fragile Lebanese state.

63 Former French President Jacques Chirac had strong personal ties with the Hariri family. It is interesting to note that with the end of his mandate, the Chirac family moved from the Elysée to a residence near the Louvre generously provided by the Hariri family.

64 'Donors in aid boost for Lebanon', *BBC News*, 25 January 2007.

65 The UNIFIL II mission was approved under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter and as such does not empower the mission to disarm Hezbollah's forces. On this see Amal Saad Ghorayeb (2007) 'In their own words: Hezbollah's strategy in the current confrontation', *Carnegie Policy Outlook*, January.

66 See Seymour Hersh (2007) 'The Redirection: Is the Administration's new policy benefiting our enemies in the war on terrorism?' *The New Yorker*, 5 March; Jim Quilty (2007) 'Winter of Lebanon's Discontents', *MERIP*, 26 January. See also Jim Quilty (2007) 'The Collateral damage of Lebanese Sovereignty', *MERIP*, 18 June.

In Palestine, as in Lebanon, both the US and the EU have also advocated democracy and good governance. The Bush administration made the reform of the Arafat-led PA back in 2002 a *sine qua non* for the resumption of the peace process. Beyond declarations, the EU supported democracy and good governance in Palestine through budget conditionality and technical assistance especially in the 2002-2005 period. Yet ensuing policies towards Hamas since 2006, by trumping all other priorities, have undercut the West's lofty aims in Palestine.

Hamas is considered a terrorist organization by the EU and the US. As such, since Hamas entered the PLC and the PA, the US and the EU, in the context of the Quartet, have insisted on three 'principles': an end of violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements, which soon evolved into de facto conditions for the recognition of the Hamas government.<sup>67</sup> The insertion of Hamas on the terrorist lists entailed that some form of conditionality was needed in the approaches of the EU and the US towards the new government. Most evidently, for normal diplomatic relations to be established, Hamas would have had to be removed from the lists and to do so it would have had to disavow terrorism. Yet the three conditions went much further, and in doing so revealed their legally dubious nature as well as their devious political intent. The conditionality on Israel's recognition has no legal grounding in so far as only states (and at most the PLO, as the internationally recognized representative of the Palestinian people, of which Hamas is not part), and not political parties or individuals, can recognize other states. The latter's recognition or non-recognition of Israel would have no legal meaning, and so cannot be considered as a credible or irreversible political fact. Furthermore, as Palestinians promptly note, Israel and the international community have never demanded the recognition of Israel's right to exist as a precondition to establish contacts or negotiations between Israel and any Arab state. Yet this demand was placed on the PA, leaving unanswered, as Hroub notes in his chapter, the key question of which borders should Israel be recognized upon, not to mention the fact that the PLO's recognition of Israel in 1988 hardly brought with it any tangible gains for the Palestinians. Moreover, little attention was paid to the fact that the same conditions have been flouted by Israel over the years, as repeatedly affirmed in EU and US declarations that to varying degrees have condemned Israel for its disproportionate use of force, its violations of international humanitarian law and its disrespect of previously signed agreements. Regarding the acceptance of previous agreements, ironically it was the Sharon government which in March 2001 first asserted that it would limit itself to 'respecting' rather than 'accepting' previous agreements depending on the conduct of the other side.<sup>68</sup>

Predictably Hamas, the Hamas-only and the National Unity Government (NUG) did not fully endorse the three conditions. While refraining from the use of suicide attacks against Israel since January 2005 (i.e., a year before the PLC elections), Hamas and the NUG did not renounce the principle of violent resistance and contributed to the launch of Qassam rockets from Gaza into Israel. Neither did Hamas nor the PA 'accept' previous agreements, but, much like Sharon at the time, they agreed to 'respect' them, as specified by the February 2007 Mecca agreement. Finally, while Hamas leaders have repeatedly and publicly acknowledged the existence of the State of Israel as an undeniable political fact,<sup>69</sup> they have also recurrently refused to recognize Israel's 'right to exist', less still its right to exist as a Jewish state.<sup>70</sup>

In response, the US, the EU and most surprisingly also the UN<sup>71</sup> boycotted the PA, the EU and the US withheld assistance to it, and the international community froze international bank transactions in Palestine in view of the US Congress' Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act.<sup>72</sup> In addition, Israel halted the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues amounting to approximately \$50m per month (i.e., one third of the PA's monthly revenues). Israel also repeatedly arrested dozens of Hamas ministers and parliamentarians, and restricted their movement between the West Bank and Gaza and within the West Bank and Jerusalem. These illegal Israeli acts of reprisal were not countered by the EU and US. Admittedly, the EU repeatedly called upon Israel to fulfil its legal obligations with respect to the delivery of tax revenues, the easing on movement restrictions and the implementation of the November 2005 Movement and Access Agreement.<sup>73</sup> Yet words were not followed by actions. Worst still, the EU did not object to carrying out its border monitoring mission at Rafah (EU-BAM Rafah) according to Israel's decisions, thus accepting the border crossing to be closed half the time. Western sanctions, coupled with Israel's policies unfettered by the West made Western pleas for democracy in Palestine sound like a bad taste joke to Palestinians and many outside observers.

## 4.2 The West and Hamas: From internal violence to the end of the two-state solution

67 On the evolution of this policy see Alvaro de Soto (2007) 'End of Mission Report, May 2007, reprinted in *The Guardian*, 14 June, pp.17-19. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/frontpage/story/0,,2101676,00.html>.

68 Akiva Eldar (2007) 'The Syrian secret Sharon did not reveal to Olmert', *Haaretz*, 20 March.

69 Orly Halpern (2007) 'Experts Question wisdom of boycotting Hamas', *Forward*, 9 February.

70 Behind the headlines: Hamas-Fateh agreement does not meet requirements of the international community', *BBC Arabic Service* 16 February.

71 For a critical assessment of the UN's approach see Alvaro de Soto (2007) op.cit.

72 <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/110/4681>

73 EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (2007) *Conclusions on Middle East Peace Process*, 23 April, Luxembourg, 2796th Meeting, paragraph 6.

The first evident result of these policies was to push Palestine to the humanitarian and economic brink, setting off alarm bells from UN agencies, the World Bank and international civil society organizations.<sup>74</sup> In response, at the EU's insistence, the Quartet agreed on a Temporary International Mechanism (TIM), through which funds would be channelled to Palestine while bypassing the PA government. The TIM supplied valuable assistance, providing social allowances (rather than full salaries) to almost 90% of non-security public sector employees and emergency assistance and food aid for approximately 73,000 low-income households. It also provided direct financial and material support to the health, education, water and social sectors as well as funds to pay fuel bills (principally to Israeli providers) after Israel's destruction of the power-plant in Gaza in the summer of 2006. The TIM, coupled with the growing need for humanitarian aid, led to a huge rise in western assistance to the Palestinians. In 2006-2007, as put by UN envoy de Soto, Europeans spent more money in boycotting the PA than what they previously spent in supporting it.<sup>75</sup> Indeed EU aid to Palestine rose by 30% in one year, totalling €700m in early 2007.

But not only did Western and Israeli policies paralyse the PA. The sanctions and the resumption of assistance through the TIM since June 2006 also transformed Palestine into a semi-international protectorate, in which Palestinian institutions functioned as a skeleton allowing the international community to deliver aid to a population under military occupation.<sup>76</sup> This meant that the PA and thus also the Hamas government, no longer remotely resembling a state-in-the-making, was largely de-responsibilized with respect to its public regarding governance and internal security. In this respect, a declaration by Hamas leader Khaled Meshal, referring to Palestine's slide into chaos and economic collapse is revealing: '[w]e firmly believe that it would have never happened had it not been for foreign intervention and the brutal sanctions imposed on our people by Israel and its allies'.<sup>77</sup> Indeed despite Hamas' non-delivery on its 'Change and Reform' platform, Palestinians did not hold Hamas responsible.<sup>78</sup> On the contrary, Hamas' endurance in power up until June 2007 may have raised its popularity further.<sup>79</sup> The results of Hamas candidates in several elections in universities and professional syndications over the course of 2006 and 2007 are indicative of this.<sup>80</sup>

The sanctions and the TIM also reversed the few steps forward made in PA governance reform during 2002-05, promoted at the time especially by the EU. The bypassing of official institutions with the exception of the presidency led to a re-centralization of powers in Mahmoud Abbas' hands, a much criticized condition by the West during Arafat's rule. It also generated an increasingly unaccountable and opaque management of the available PA funds, leading Salam Fayyad, when re-nominated minister under the NUG, to repeat precisely the same fiscal reforms as those he had implemented under Ahmed Qureia's governments three years earlier.<sup>81</sup> Finally, the TIM and its focus on humanitarian rather than development aid generated a dangerous culture of dependence in Palestine. Whereas in 2005 only 16% of EU aid to Palestine constituted humanitarian assistance, this rose to 56% by late 2006.<sup>82</sup> The absence of an effective Palestinian government and Israel's asphyxiating hold over the Gaza Strip dangerously pushed Gaza into chaos and lawlessness, with the emergence of criminal mafia-style gangs and al-Qaeda-like cells operating in Gaza's open-air prison.<sup>83</sup>

Yet by far the most dangerous effect of Western policies has been the polarization they induced and exacerbated between Fateh and Hamas that pushed the Gaza Strip into a bloody civil war in May-June 2007 and caused its political separation from the West Bank since then. The spectre of a Palestinian civil war had existed for a while. It was for a brief moment intercepted by the Saudi-brokered Mecca accord in February 2007. Interestingly, according to no interlocutor interviewed in the region, including declared Fateh supporters, did western sanctions have a direct impact on the incentives of the two factions to broker the NUG in Mecca. In fact, in contrast to arguments suggesting that sanctions weakened Hamas into a compromise, one should note that it was Fateh and not Hamas that refused to form a coalition government back in January 2006.

A national compromise was reached in Mecca thanks to Saudi mediation in spite of rather than due to western policies. Yet, the reaction of the West was deemed by all interlocutors interviewed in May 2007 to be pivotal in determining the fate of the newborn government. First and most intuitively, the government could only survive if it could be made to function, which required a resumption of western aid and Israel's delivery of Palestinian tax money, easing restrictions on movement and releasing imprisoned Palestinian lawmakers and ministers. Second and most challengingly, Palestinian security forces would have had to be reunited. Third, the government would have had to prove to its electorate it could deliver some, even if marginal, successes in its relations with Israel, such as for example a prisoner release.

74 See for example the Office of the Special Envoy for Disengagement (2006), *Periodic Report*, April; United Nations (2006), *Assessment of the Future Humanitarian Risks in the occupied Palestinian territory*, 11 April; or Oxfam (2007) 'Poverty in Palestine: the human cost of the financial boycott', *Briefing Note*, April. [http://www.oxfam.org/en/files/bno70413\\_palestinian\\_aid\\_boycott.pdf/download](http://www.oxfam.org/en/files/bno70413_palestinian_aid_boycott.pdf/download).

75 Quoted in Alvaro de Soto (2007) *op. cit.*, p.31.

76 The principal difference between the OTs and an international protectorate lies in the fact that while the occupying power has (quite willingly) delegated its civilian obligations to the international community, it retains full control over security-related rights and obligations in both Gaza and the West Bank.

77 Khaled Meshal (2007) 'Our unity can now pave the way for peace and justice' *The Guardian*, 13 February.

78 Interviews with Palestinian analysts, Jerusalem and Ramallah, May 2007.

79 Interview with independent member of the PLC, Jerusalem, May 2007.

80 For extended discussion on this point and related ones see International Crisis Group 'After Mecca: Engaging Hamas', Middle East Report no. 62, Brussels, February 2007.

81 Chris Patten (2007) 'Time to judge Palestine on its results', *Financial Times*, 13 March (my italics).

82 Steven Erlanger (2007) 'Aid to Palestinians Rose despite Embargo', *New York Times*, 21 March.

83 On Israel's persisting control over the Gaza Strip following disengagement see Gisha Report (2007) 'Disengaged Occupiers: The Legal Status of Gaza', January.



This never happened. Europeans initially showed cautious relief and optimism following the formation of the NUG. But when the US (and Israel) made clear that the Mecca agreement fell short of meeting the Quartet principles,<sup>84</sup> the EU followed suit, muting its initial support for the NUG. More gravely, Israel continued to withhold taxes to the PA, with the exception of \$100m allegedly delivered by Israel to the presidential guard (Fateh).<sup>85</sup> It also kept movement restrictions and arrested other Hamas parliamentarians and ministers in the West Bank. Finally, the US continued to provide military assistance and training to Fateh militias.<sup>86</sup> Indeed since Hamas' electoral victory, strong currents in the US fomented confrontation between the two factions, hoping to see Fateh's return to power through a hard coup if necessary.<sup>87</sup> In early 2007, the US delivered \$60m in training and weapons to the presidential guard and the National Security Council under Mohammed Dahlan's leadership, which in practice disincentivized the unification of the security forces under the PA Interior Ministry.<sup>88</sup>

All was set for a new round of confrontation in May-June 2007. Over the course of a few weeks, Abbas refused to unite the security forces, hundreds of US-trained forces loyal to Dahlan entered the Gaza Strip from Egypt, unprecedented street fighting and political violence re-erupted, and Hamas forcefully took control of the security forces in the Strip. The violence culminated in mid-June 2007 with Hamas' 'victory' in Gaza, and Abbas' dissolution of the NUG and nomination of a non-Hamas government in the West Bank. In response, the West, far from reversing its counterproductive strategies, persisted in them. The EU and the US immediately stated their willingness to work with the (unelected) Fayyad government in the West Bank and resumed aid and assistance to it. Israel also declared its willingness to devolve approximately \$300-400m of withheld PA tax money to the West Bank government and agreed to release a number of Fateh-affiliated prisoners.<sup>89</sup> By contrast, the West and Israel have remained firm in their intent to defeat Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip through a tightened boycott, isolation and sanctions. The EU monitored Rafah crossing has remained shut since June 2007. This stance, while unlikely to achieve a defeat of Hamas, has visibly re-empowered Hamas actors who were largely excluded from the NUG, and who are less prone to reconciliation with both Fateh and Israel. The future evolution in the occupied territories is hard to predict. What can be safely concluded is that, unintentionally or not, the West has contributed to this tragic outcome, having de facto fomented civil war and triggered a political, beyond the physical, separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>90</sup> Despite all the diplomatic furore over the November 2007 Annapolis conference, the moribund two-state solution seems to have reached its final death-bed.

## Conclusion

84 Donald Macintyre (2007) 'Israel at loggerheads with allies on boycott of Palestinian coalition', *The Independent*, 18 March.

85 Adam Entous and H. Tamimi (2007) 'Palestinian Abbas forces amassing arms' *Reuters*, 28 January.

86 See Alastair Crooke (2007) 'Our second biggest mistake in the Middle East', *London Review of Books*, 5 July.

87 'Elliot Abrams' uncivil war' *Conflict Forum*, 7 January 2007. <http://conflictsforum.org/2007/elliott-abrams-uncivil-war/>

88 'Abbas faces showdown as outlawed Hamas force increases', *Sunday Herald*, 7 January 2007.

89 Adam Entous (2007) 'US, Israel plan to ease sanctions to boost Abbas', *Reuters*, 15 June.

90 Helene Cooper (2007) 'White House seems ready to let Hamas seize Gaza', *New York Times*, 15 June. See also Karma Nabulsi (2007) 'The People of Palestine must finally be allowed to determine their own fate', *The Guardian*, comment, 18 June.