

The News International
July 25, 2006

'We are all Hizbollah'

By Fatima Bhutto

TRIPOLI, Lebanon: Apparently I am a hardliner. I've been told on several occasions since I've started writing about being under siege in Lebanon that my obvious support of Hizbollah means I should start growing a beard and stop listening to Western music. "How can you reconcile yourself to Hizbollah's intolerant/fundamentalist/Islamic/anti-secular/authoritarian agenda?" I am often asked.

But the fact of the matter is Hizbollah is none of those things. They have come a long way since their formation in the 1980s. Hizbollah is no al-Qaeda — killing innocent men and women in terror attacks around the world. I was in New York for 9/11 and I was in London for 7/7 and I know what it feels like to be paralysed by such senseless violence. But I have also been in Lebanon for 7/13, 7/14, 7/15, 7/16 — you get the picture, sorry, but we are without a catchy slogan here. Hizbollah is not led by a Abu Musab al-Zarqawi — a man who killed Shias in the name of Islam and kidnapped and killed aid workers like Margaret Hasan in Iraq and foreign journalists like Daniel Pearl in Karachi just because they were non- Muslims. Syed Hasan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hizbollah, lived in one of the poorest suburbs of Beirut. I say 'lived' because the IDF has ensured that there is nothing left in the Dahiye but dust. He lost his eldest son fighting against the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. He is no Saudi billionaire.

Nabih Berri, the speaker of the Assembly, spoke today of Hizbollah's resistance in Lebanon. He spoke of being thankful to them for defending Lebanon and spoke of the United Nation's complicity with Israel's demands. But Berri is not just a Hizbollah supporter; he is also quite a football fan. In a moment of levity Berri pronounced, "What they are doing to us is just like what that referee did to Zidane in the World Cup finals — He was insulted, he had a right to defend himself and still they gave him a red card and sent him off the pitch!".

But I digress. I do not believe in the politics of religion or the exclusion and supremacy that is part of such ideologies, but for so long as there are Israeli tanks occupying the Southern Lebanese town of Maroun al Ras and Israeli warplanes are flying over Tyre and Sidon I will support Hizbollah's right to engage in resistance.

I'm happy to report that it's not just me. I am not alone. There are many more Pakistanis just like me — educated, liberal, non-violent and leftist leaning who are supporting the resistance movement in Lebanon as if it was their own. This morning I got the following e-mail from a friend in London: "I just got back from a protest march. There were some 10,000 to 20,000 people. Ghanaians, Colombians, Nigerians, Englishmen and women, old, young, Muslims with beards, Jews, Christians and of course Arabs...the main slogan on every one's lips was, 'we are all Hizbollah'... We want to say that we are all with you, we care". A kind journalist from Washington DC sent me a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz, one of my favorite poets. He sent "The Massacre of Beirut", written by Faiz in 1982 when he was in exile in Lebanon, banished by Ziaul

Haq's military government. Above the poem was the note: "I cannot light a bulb for you or give you a bandage should you need it. But I can always send you some poems". I saw photographs of protesters in cities in Lahore, people who went out into the streets and marched in solidarity with Lebanon under the watchful eye of the police who had not sanctioned the gathering and looked more than slightly lathi-happy.

But if there are so many of us, why is the Pakistani government so quiet? (I didn't vote for them, so I will use 'the' instead of 'our'). Why do the statements issued by the government sound like they were written by lawyers? They didn't sound so unenthusiastic last September when they suggested the possibility of recognising and making peace with Israel, excitedly listing all the numerous trade possibilities and American brownie points that could result from such diplomacy. The Syrian information minister was asked a question about Syria's position regarding a full scale ground invasion of Lebanon by the IDF. "What will we do?" He said, repeating the journalist's question, "Stand by with our arms folded? Absolutely not."

Mass grave are being dug in Tyre, bodies piled on top of each other. Citizens of the once liberated South are now under Israeli occupation again and cannot drive on the roads without waving white flags out of their cars. There are over one thousand wounded and over one third of the fatality numbers are children.

The Daily Star, a daily English paper, has put up a sample letter on their website that they are asking readers to download and then send to their governments so that they may pressure the international community and the United Nations to put an end to Israel's brutalities in Lebanon. The letter is far from perfect, we have a lot more to ask of the government, but it's a start. You can find it at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/help_lebanon.rtf and since we tellingly have no direct line to the Pakistani government you can paste the letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at <http://www.pakistan.gov.pk/ministries/ComplaintQueries.jsp?MinID=12>

Let us say 'We are all with you, we care'.