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Syria

# Interview with Joseph Daher on Hezbollah and the Syrian Revolution

- Features -

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**Joseph Daher is a Swiss-Syrian socialist activist, academic, and founder of the blog Syria Freedom Forever. He is the author of Hezbollah: Political Economy of the Party of God, Pluto Press, London, 2016 (distributed in the US by Univeristy of Chicago Press). Oriana P. spoke with him during the conference on Syria at Barnard College in New York on Feb. 16th 2017 for RAWP report.**

**ORP: What is the Western Left's perspective of the Hezbollah? What is the Hezbollah known for in Western progressive circles?**

JD: So I would say without falling into generalizations there are a couple of views and perspectives regarding Hezbollah. You do have kind of a section of the Left, especially in France that, because of Islamophobia, see Hezbollah only as a terrorist party but in a very reactionary basis and this is problematic as well.

Then you have a second section that falls into seeing Hezbollah as an anti-imperialist party, which is a view that is very present amongst sections of the Left, seeing the party as something similar as the liberation of the ideology of South America in an Islamic model if you want and therefore limiting the analysis of Hezbollah according to its struggle against Israel, which is problematic because we should never analyze a political party only according to its rhetoric against a particular country, even if it's Israel, or according to its military operation or military struggle.

We analyze a political party according to its political program, policies and the social origin of its leadership. And when we do a global analysis of Hezbollah we can see that it's a party that throughout the last three decades, when it was officially established in 1985 – it started to become active in 1982 in Lebanon, that still wants to establish an Islamic state, or that that is its preferred system, but it can't establish it because of the demography of Lebanon - one third Christian, one third Sunni Muslim and one third Shi'a Islam - so they accept the Lebanese sectarian bourgeois system and that became one of its main elements, being part of the government since 2005. When we look at Hezbollah's political economy it favors neo-liberal policies, privatization, etc.

When it comes to women's rights, they are very much against women's rights having a reactionary perspective while trying to impose a kind of Islamization on the Shi'a population. So the problem of the section of the Left is when they only see the struggle of Hezbollah against Israel and therefore defining it as anti-imperialist is very problematic. And we have seen these similar problems regarding the definitions or the characterization of the Assad regime in Syria or of Iran as well. I usually answer to this kind of definition or characterization when you say "death to Israel" and you are progressive, or "death to America" and you are progressive, in this kind of framework you should consider Al-Qaeda as one of the most progressive organizations. So this is why they are very wrong.

And finally one of the perspectives is seeing Hezbollah as part of a trend of Islamic fundamentalism and while we oppose these parties it is also true that when for example the Gaza strip or South Lebanon is attacked by Israel we completely stand in solidarity with the people and the right to resistance and we oppose Israeli war. However, this does not mean that we support the political project of the parties, being Hezbollah or Hamas. I think this difference has to be very clear.

**ORP: What are the roots of Hezbollah and what were the circumstances in which Hezbollah could take root and grow?**

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JD: Hezbollah was established during the [Lebanese Civil War](#) in the beginning of the eighties and was officially established in 1985, although it had already been active since the beginning of the eighties. There are a couple of reasons for the establishment of Hezbollah.

First, the development of various Shi'a political parties and most famously [Haraket Amal](#), which was led by [Imam Musa al-Sadr](#) and which was in opposition against some sections of the feudals in Lebanon but especially against the Left. Some of the later leadership of Hezbollah was part of Amal but they left that movement because of the policies of the second leader of Amal, [Nabih Berri](#), who was considered corrupt and too lenient towards Israel. This was in the eighties.

The second reason was obviously the establishment of the [Islamic Republic of Iran \(IRI\)](#) in 1979. The IRI had the policy of "[exporting the revolution](#)" to the region and the most important success of this "[exporting the revolution](#)" policy was Hezbollah which was established through sending the [Pasdaran: the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps -IRGC, the elite military of the IRI](#) with the help of the Assad regime at the time. So the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was a big reason for the emergence of Hezbollah and today also the link between Hezbollah and Tehran is very clear, such as the political authority of [Khomeini](#) and before [Khomeini](#).

Hezbollah also benefited of the weakening of the Left in Lebanon after 1982 by the attacks of both Israel and Syria. Hezbollah also attacked leftist movements in this period, and notably killed leftist intellectuals such as [Mahdi Amel](#).

Finally the last, and I would say the main, element was the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon and Beirut. It's true that one of the main reasons for the establishment of Hezbollah was the struggle against Israel, definitely.

So it's these elements in addition to socio-economic dynamics and evolution that occurred since the establishment of [the independence of Lebanon in 1943](#) among the Shi'a population and its growing middle class, which would compose Hezbollah.

**ORP: Can you situate the Syrian Revolution as well as Hezbollah in relation to Arab Nationalism? And also explain to a Western audience what Arab Nationalism is. How did it come about and how did it shape further developments in the region?**

JD: Obviously [Arab Nationalism](#) had various trends. The dominant trend in Egypt was [Nasserism](#) and in the [Levant](#) - Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Jordan – you had an evolution of Arab Nationalism, first mostly dominated by liberal bourgeois elites with an evolution towards increasing radicalization, mostly lead by small petite bourgeoisie, middle class people that would basically be represented by the [Ba'ath Party](#). That could be characterized as a form of Third Worldist movements for the independence of the state against Western imperialism, even against USSR to some extent, some sort of to a certain extent social justice with redistribution of lands and nationalization policy, and obviously solidarity with Palestine and to some extent some sort of secularism although not completely.

We cannot deny that in the 1950's and 1960's Arab Nationalism was growing throughout the region. It was the voice of people that wanted radical change in their own societies and to liberate Palestine. But with the arrival to power of various personalities that actually crushed the idea of Arab Nationalism, whereas it became completely devoid of its meaning e.g. [Hafez Assad](#) in Syria or [Saddam Hussein](#) in Iraq, Arab Nationalism lost all of its appeal to the people.

Before it had an appeal to vast sections of the population such as minorities but not only minorities but also Arab Sunnis and so on. The 1970's we can say was the end of the large appeal of Arab Nationalism especially following [its defeat of 1967](#) (and [here](#)). That was a turning point. And in 1970 you had the death of [Nasser](#), the [coup d'état in Syria of Hafez Assad](#). So Arab Nationalism since then lost its appeal.

But we should never forget that Arab Nationalism was also very repressive towards other parties especially the Left and the communists. They repressed them massively whether under the rule of Nasser in Egypt and under the Ba'ath rule in Syria while also massively repressing various trends of Islamic fundamentalism like the [Muslim Brotherhood](#) . So it was also very much authoritarian.

### **ORP: What was the relationship between the Syrian regime and Lebanon before and after the Ta'if Agreement of 1989?**

JD: [The Ta'if Agreement](#) kind of legitimized the domination of the Assad regime in Lebanon. The Ta'if Agreement was a deal between Syria, Saudi Arabia and the US for Syria to have a hand on Lebanon. The policy of Syria in Lebanon was clear: to use it a bit in its negotiation with Israel and to prevent any kind of an organization of opposition within Lebanon against the Assad regime. And this is basically why in [1976 the Assad regime intervened in Lebanon](#) to crush the [Palestinian National Movement](#) and [the Lebanese Left](#) because it saw it as a threat towards its own regime because imagine if you had a radical secular socialist or at least a Left leaning government in Lebanon then according to the rhetoric of Hafez Assad the Syrian regime would no longer be "the champion of Arab Nationalism". This why they crushed the Lebanese Left and the Palestinian National Movement. In the 1980's the Assad regime crushed the rest of the Lebanese Left and nationalist movements in Lebanon-Â»  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1984/02/19/magazine/syria-s-assad-his-power-and-his-plan.html?pagewanted=all>], which were actually leading the armed resistance until then against Israel, in order to only allow Hezbollah as unique armed resistant actor to be used by the Assad regime as an instrument of pressure against Israel in negotiation. [In the 1990's to 2005 the Assad regime](#), with the collaboration of Lebanese elites such as [Hariri](#) , [Jumblatt](#) , Nabih Berri and Hezbollah, was able to dominate Lebanon.

### **ORP: How true is it when large sections of the western Left claim that the Assad regime is a force against Israel and that the regime is supportive of the liberation struggle of the Palestinians?**

JD: This is one of the biggest lies of the rhetoric of the Assad regime. There's a history of repression of Palestinian groups within Syria or in the region. When Hafez Assad was Minister of Defense in 1970 and you had the uprising of the Palestinian groups in Jordan and the Jordanian Left against the Hashemite kingdom, Hafez Assad refused the order of the president of Syria to send Syrian forces in solidarity with these Palestinian groups and Jordanian Left and this led to [Black September](#) as we know it, a big massacre. And Assad, as I mentioned before, imposed harsh repression on Palestinian groups within Lebanon by the Assad regime. Throughout the eighties you had the war of the camps between mostly Amal and Palestinian groups and Syria was supporting Amal against the Palestinian groups and crushing them.

What is less known, following 1982 and the crushing of Palestinian groups in Lebanon by the Syrian regime. The Palestinian camp at [Yarmouk](#); a neighborhood of Damascus, witnessed a couple of uprisings or protest movements on a massive level to protest this kind of repression. There was massive repression by the Syrian secretive services against them, more than a 1,000 political prisoners throughout the eighties in Assad's prisons.

From 1974 until 2011 not a single bullet was shot from Syria to liberate the [occupied Golan](#) . Assad was always ready to enter into a peace agreement with Israel if Israel gave back at least a section of the occupied Golan but Israel never wanted that. It wasn't the opposite and it's very important to understand this. Until this day they see Assad as the lesser evil, as the best guarantee for their own borders. So this is why they are happy with a weakened dictatorship in Syria. And so as a threat to various uprisings and I think the best way to symbolize the fear of Israel of various uprisings in the region, because this authoritarian regime had interest to, directly or indirectly, collaborate with Israel and crush their own people or the Palestinians, was a statement made by [Avigdor Lieberman](#) , the Minister of Foreign Affairs in 2011, when he declared that the biggest threat to Israel is a successful Egyptian revolution, an Egyptian democracy, and not Iran. Because it is so that, and this could be extended to the region, people liberating

themselves will turn towards the Palestinian cause that has been a central cause for decades in the region. So no, definitely the Assad regime is very far from being an ally of the Palestinian people or anyone of the peoples struggling for freedom and dignity.

One of the last examples also has been throughout the uprisings in Syria since 2011 there has been massive repression against Palestinian people, Yarmouk camp suffered [a horrible siege](#) with hundreds of people dying of hunger etc...In the first week of the uprising Bouthaina Shaaban, the advisor of the Syrian regime, accused the Palestinians of fomenting sectarian strives within Syria, especially in Latakia etc...Several Palestinian refugee camps have been bombed. Today there's more than 20,000 Palestinians wanted by the Assad regime.

I can talk of even more examples of how the Assad regime is completely opposed to the liberation of the Palestinian people.

**ORP: What were some of the political, social and economic consequences of the Ta'if agreement in Lebanon that we talked about? And what did it mean for Hezbollah?**

JD: So following the Ta'if Agreement you had the implementation of hardcore neo-liberal policies lead by the Prime Minister at the time, Rafic Hariri, who had regional and international contacts. He was actually in many aspects the Saudi representative in Lebanon.

The social consequences were catastrophic because they increased the social inequalities in Lebanese society with the intention to return the status of Lebanon to the one before the war, meaning a country of services, to mostly the unproductive sectors of the economy, services, banking, real estate etc...Industry and agriculture became even more undermined following the Ta'if Agreement. On many levels the socio-economic consequences were very hard for the popular classes of Lebanon.

Regarding Hezbollah throughout the nineties and 2000, even though they had a rhetoric and discourse saying we are [in favor of the oppressed and for some sort of social justice](#) , they never opposed the neo-liberal policies in Lebanon and from 2005 they participated in all the various Lebanese governments following the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, which implemented neo-liberal policies, including the privatization of various public services of Lebanon e.g. electricity etc... When you speak with most of the Hezbollah cadres or officials they do not oppose neo-liberal policies at all.

And they played the role, just as the rest of the Lebanese elite with the assistance of the Assad regime, to undermine the [CGTL](#), the main Lebanese trade union movement of the beginning of the nineties that had played an important role in the seventies and eighties to try to unite the workers from different religious sects. [They considerably undermined the CGTL to be completely controlled by Lebanese elite from 2000](#). They did the same from 2011, by trying to crush the combativity of the Union Coordination Committee (UCC), that was led by [Hanna Gharib](#) and in 2016, in the elections among the teachers trade unions both [the 14th of March](#) lead by the [Future Movement](#) and [March 8th](#) lead by Hezbollah united to crush Hanna Gharib, who was very combative and leading the strikes etc...

**ORP: Why are the Syrian regime and Hezbollah considered suspects of the assassination of Rafik Hariri?**

JD: The issue of Rafic Hariri's assassination is very unclear to this day. However, when the assassination took place there was a big clash between Hariri and the Assad regime, even threats according to various newspapers. So this is why the Assad regime was accused. In various articles Hezbollah was accused as well of participating in the assassination or at least trying to hide some things but up to this day I wouldn't point any kind of accusation because things are still very much unclear, the way the special tribunal was established and everything. it's very unclear to me

who was responsible for the death of Rafik Hariri.

**ORP: What would their motives be though?**

JD: The motives would be that Rafic Hariri had completely ended its collaboration with the Assad regime and the Assad regime has a history of killing personalities that oppose them from [Kamal Jumblatt in 1977](#) to other personalities in the eighties, nineties, etc... But again, it's a hard question to answer and many questions still remain very open on this issue.

**ORP: What was Hezbollah's position towards the [Arab Spring](#) and especially towards the Syrian uprising and related, what was its position on the ["You Stink" movement](#) in Lebanon?**

JD: So when the protest movements started in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain Hezbollah was sympathetic towards these movements. They were actually taking the official discourse of the Islamic Republic of Iran calling the uprisings Islamic revolutions against the [Camp David agreements](#), against US imperialism. There was even a big meeting on March 19th to celebrate these uprisings but we could see that a few days before the Syrian uprising started not a single word was mentioned on the issue. So in the beginning people had a quite positive view of this Islamic revolution against US imperialism.

With the uprising in Syria things started to change progressively and Hezbollah took a clear position of support of the Assad regime undermining the protest movement in Syria, first rhetorically by saying it was basically people being supported by foreign powers like Saudi Arabia, the US, Israel in order to undermine [the "project of resistance" of Hezbollah, Syria and Iran](#). At the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012 they began to directly militarily intervene in Syria and to participate in the crushing of the uprising. This participation obviously increased throughout the years as we can see in the case of [the recapture of Eastern Aleppo in December 2016](#) in which they played a humongous role.

Also other crimes were committed by Hezbollah militias in Syria. The vision of the uprisings in general changed throughout the years. As I explained, Hezbollah was quite sympathetic towards these uprisings in the beginning but then their viewpoint changed and the uprisings became a conspiracy against the "project of resistance". When talking to people sympathetic to Hezbollah this was very much present and also because of the increasing sectarian tensions in the region these uprisings became viewed negatively on quite a wide basis.

Regarding the campaign "You Stink" that started in the summer of 2015, Hezbollah's position towards it was first not to speak about it. Amongst its members people were asking, how do we deal with it, [it's challenging the Lebanese sectarian bourgeois system](#); rhetorically you criticize it but at the same time you're part of it. So finally after a couple of weeks [Hassan Nasrallah](#), the leader of Hezbollah, spoke and in his discourse he was basically undermining the movement saying we don't know who the leadership is, who is funding this, even saying maybe it was Qatar, what is the position towards the resistance.

So in other words, he didn't want the people of Hezbollah to participate in this movement, which challenged the whole sectarian system and was not only an ecological issue or challenged only one section of the Lebanese elite. So he was much more afraid and this has been a constant position of Hezbollah every time a movement from below challenges the Lebanese sectarian bourgeois system and the whole line has been to be very careful, to try to undermine it and even to oppose it to a certain extent.

**ORP: Along those lines, the Western self-proclaimed Left refuses to include the Syrian uprising in the Arab Spring. Why is that?**

JD: Unfortunately some sections of the Left in the West and actually also in the Middle East and North Africa, mostly in what I would call rooted in a Stalinist culture, oppose as you say the Syrian uprisings. There are a couple of reasons for this.

Most of the time they have a geo-political analysis, meaning seeing blocs of countries opposing each other. So for example in the case of Syria, it was on one side Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey with the US against the Assad regime with the "resistance axis" -Syria, Hezbollah, Iran – on the other side, with Russia. As we can see today it is much more complicated and actually these countries often collaborate with each other – US/Iran, US/Russia, etc... - and in the peace talks on the Syrian issue you had Russia, Turkey and Iran at the same table with the US supporting the talks. And again, as I said before, the problem with this geo-political analysis or this analysis from above, where people are seeing a rhetoric opposition to Israel or the US and then think that these are progressive regimes, has been catastrophic amongst a section of the Left.

The other main analysis, that was also present to a certain extent amongst some sections of the Left that supported the Assad regime, was saying that this was a Sunni uprising against the Alawite regime and they want to crush all the minorities and the seculars etc...., which was also very problematic.

So this section of the Left stood with an oppressive regime against a popular uprising. And unfortunately we have more examples besides Syria where you had historically [the Syrian Communist Party of Bakdash](#), where the founder stayed the leader for 50 years, and always supported the Assad regime. This is why you had a lot of defection from this party in the past as well as in the beginning of the uprising with some sections of the youth joining in the revolution. In Egypt you had this main Communist party, Tagamu, supporting Mubarak until the last days while after they supported Sisi without any kind of criticism, even supported the repression against the Muslim Brotherhood and the crimes against this political party.

Unfortunately this section of the Left will go into history as partners in crime but hopefully a new Left is being built, since the nineties a new Left has been expanding in the region, in Lebanon, in Syria, people participated in the uprising, in Egypt as well, Morocco, Tunis, with new ideas, not wanting to stand with oppressive regimes but wanting to build a democratic and progressive movement independent of what I call the two sides of the counterrevolution, the authoritarian old regimes and the Islamic fundamentalist forces. And when you look at the original objectives of these uprisings – democracy, social justice and equality – I think you can build on this. These objectives are still present amongst a section of the population and this new Left is part of this and we have to look more at these people trying to build this new Left.

**ORP: According to Hezbollah their whole reason for existence is to fight Israel. Then how can they justify being in Syria?**

JD: They justify their intervention in Syria through a couple of discourses. You have the sectarian discourse, the defense of the religious minorities, of the Shi'a and they increase the sectarian tension not only in Syria or in Lebanon but in the whole region participating just like Saudi Arabia or Iran are increasing the Sunni/Shi'a tension.

A second discourse was, we protect the 'project of resistance' through helping the Assad regime that has always stood by us and by the Palestinians. A couple of months ago Hassan Nasrallah declared that the liberation of Palestine goes through Aleppo, Deir Ezzor, etc.... Therefore you have to crush the uprising in order to liberate Palestine, which is completely wrong because as I explained before I don't think you can liberate Palestine without the liberation of the people of the region. I think this is a key issue.

These authoritarian regimes are partners in crime with Israel and seeking collaboration with it and with various

imperialist powers such as US and Russia. Hezbollah's policies regarding the Palestinians in Lebanon have not done anything to improve the socio-economic and political conditions of the Palestinian refugees. They are still living in the worst conditions ever. One of its closest allies in Lebanon is [the Free Patriotic Movement](#), whose leader became the president of Lebanon and which has a racist and sectarian discourse towards the Palestinians. Hezbollah has said nothing. When you had the marches in [June 2011, the marches of return to Palestine](#), organized by various Palestinian refugees in neighboring countries, Hezbollah prevented the marches towards the borders to prevent instability in Lebanon. They worked together with the Lebanese Secret Services to prevent these marches.

And you have other examples of Hezbollah collaborating with the Lebanese Secret Services and the army to prevent the development of another resistance actor in South Lebanon. Unfortunately Hezbollah because of its policies and in Lebanon and in the region is no longer a force that can be counted to liberate Palestine and even they have declared that their weapons are to defend the borders and not to liberate Palestine and this has been a change and they intervened massively in Syria and also in Iraq following the US/British invasion and to a lesser extent in Yemen as well.

**ORP: Two other parties in Lebanon are supportive of the Syrian regime, the SSNP and the PFLP. Who are they and what is their background?**

JD: The [SSNP](#) is a party that was founded by [Antun Saadeh](#) in the 1940's that believes in a [Greater Syria](#) ie. Syria as a historical concept; the current Syrian territory plus a section of Turkey that once was part of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, a section of Jordan, Iraq and Cyprus. Their policies are based in European fascism such as the figure of El Duce etc.... They were seeking a secular state in Syria to try to unite the various territories. They developed from Lebanon to Syria afterwards with small groups in Palestine. They were also opposed to the idea of an Arab identity. For them there was a particular Syrian identity, which evolved through times for various sections.

They were actually a big force in the 40's, 50's and 60's to some extent in the Middle East. They appealed to some sectors of society because of their secularism. They were opposed to socialism, they were mostly in favor of privatization and liberal policies and stood mostly with conservative forces. But after there were various strands within the SSNP. In the 70's and 80's they participated in the resistance against Israel in Lebanon. After you had the Assad regime melting with it in the internal elections of the party in Lebanon and the new leadership then pretty much were exclusively serving the interests of the Assad regime in Lebanon. You also have the SSNP in Syria that for decades were opposed to the Assad regime. They were mostly opposed to the Ba'athist party, but through times relations improved, especially once Bashar Assad came to power. There was an opening for the party, more importantly they were allowed to open their offices, to have their newspapers, and they had contacts with officials close to Assad. We also hear that [Rami Makhoul](#), the cousin of Bashar Assad, is very close to the SSNP.

When it comes to the [PFLP, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine](#), which was established in 1967 by various Arab Nationalist movements that became more radicalized, George Habash, Naif Hawatmeh in the beginning, and others. It is interesting to see how the rhetoric evolved. At the end of the sixties, beginning of the seventies, ...because after 1967 there was a defeat, as I said before, of Arab Nationalism, and for 3-6 years you had a radicalization on the Left in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa and they developed into this perspective of being radicalized etc... At the time their discourse was, we need to seek relationships with progressive movements of the neighboring countries of Palestine - Jordan, Lebanon, Syria - to liberate these countries of their dictatorship in order to liberate Palestine. And they did it, in Jordan, in Lebanon, they collaborated with the Lebanese Left and the National Movement as well.

Unfortunately this discourse disappeared and they began to seek more collaboration and coordination with authoritarian regimes whether it was with Saddam Hussein and the Ba'atist regime in Iraq or with Hafez and after Bashar Assad. Ideologically they lost this kind of radicalization and they became closer to a kind of Arab Nationalist

political party. Even in Palestine, even though they are much better than other parties when it comes to local politics, they are not able to provide a kind of radical agenda the youth in Palestine wants to see.

So unfortunately the PFLP lost a lot of its appeal through the last decades and regarding the Syrian uprising taking a very bad position. Officially the PFLP is neutral, but most of its leadership is very close to the Assad regime because it depends on its relation and even to some extent, some people say, provision of money. They also have a very close collaboration with Hezbollah. This makes the appeal of the PFLP not the same as it was at the end of the sixties when PFLP was a symbol of resistance, not only in Palestine but throughout the region. People looked up to [Leila Khaled](#) , [George Habash](#) and others but unfortunately you can see Leila Khaled completely standing with the Assad regime today. So it's a shame.

### **ORP: What is left of Hezbollah's rhetoric of standing in solidarity with the oppressed?**

JD: So historically the rhetorical discourse of Hezbollah standing with the oppressed as it took the rhetoric from Khomeini I think even from the beginning it was wrong and today these contradictions are exploding not only in the political field but on every kind of level. So yes, in the past every time Israel attacked Lebanon Hezbollah defended the right of resistance of the Lebanese people and others but you cannot say to stand with the oppressed while today being part of a criminal massive murderous repression of the Syrian people and stand with the Assad regime or regarding Lebanon itself. Hezbollah is doing nothing for the Syrian refugees, actually two days ago Hassan Nasrallah demanded that the Syrian refugees go back to Syria while Hezbollah is one of the reasons they fled in the first place. You know some areas close to the borders suffer from Hezbollah's attacks in anticipation of the Assad regime conquering these territories and that's what is pushing the people out. How can you claim to stand with the oppressed while supporting neo-liberal policies, privatization, opposing women's rights, opposing Palestinian refugee rights, etc...? So in an era where you see increasing contradictions in society, you have the uprisings in the region, people calling for democracy, social justice and equality, these contradictions are very clear to a lot of people and Hezbollah's rhetorical discourse is very hard to maintain on this basis.

The issue now is to build a real alternative on the ground because if we don't build this Hezbollah will be able to live with these contradictions. Even amongst Hezbollah supporters there is criticism, even though not openly but people are not necessarily completely happy with Hezbollah's intervention in Syria but with the rise of Sunni fundamentalist forces, Daesh, Jabhat Al-Nusra, the attacks and targeted explosions that occurred in Shi'a inhabited areas in Lebanon by these forces, they fail to see a democratic alternative which they could join and therefore they stay with Hezbollah despite their criticism of Hezbollah. But I think we have, and this is also true for other popular classes that joined in Lebanon for example Future Movement, Hariri, we have to challenge sectarianism, we have to build a democratic progressive secular alternative that can appeal to the popular classes of the region regardless of the ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.... This is the biggest mission for the Left I think in this region.

**ORP: Thank you.**

[The RAWR report](#)