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The Oxymoron of a Benevolent Authoritarian Leadership: the case of Lebanon's Hezbollah and Hassan Nasrallah

Abstract

Leadership entails both, continuity and an ever-changing relationship between a number of factors including the leader, the context, the followers, broader society and even the pace of change. Although the above elements are not identical in all scenarios, there are still certain transcending common features allowing to draw conclusions applicable to different situations. This article focuses on the leadership of radical political movements (RPMs) in volatile and crises situations, and the role of this leadership in the transformation process from weak and fragmented communities to peaceful and viable ones. The article uses the case of Hezbollah to test the above ideas, and examines the motives behind Hezbollah's *infitah* of opening up, and its lebanonization, expressed in its ideology, political programmes, and policies, leading to Hezbollah's integration into mainstream political life, blurring the boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate politics. The research demonstrates the need for a constantly balancing of different and often contrasting leadership characteristics and for the adjustment of leadership styles to constantly changing situations. Lastly, he article focuses on the rigidity of state counter measures towards RPMs and their leadership, with particular emphasis on the resilience of what often appears to be outdated state counternarratives.

Keywords: Radical Political Movements (RPMs), transitional processes, leadership, Hezbollah, narratives and counternarratives.

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Introduction and Structure: Why Focus on RPM Leadership in Crisis and Transitional Situations

Leadership is only one of the elements of conflict transformation and transition, and can be both part of the solution and of the problem either on a personal or on a group level. The focus is on leadership, because in the end, most transitions are finalised at the top, with a relatively small number of people taking the ultimate decisions. Likewise, the initiation of an implementation phase takes place at the top. There are of course bottom-up mass movements initiating change, and there can be contacts at grass root level initiating or pressuring for peaceful transitions out of a crisis, but still at some point there is top-down involvement to formalise the transitional process. Pasquino posits that in a transition political leaders have to transfer their authority to organisational structures and compete under the new rules to remain effective, but also to remain in power.[1] Leadership of radical political movements (RPMs) operates within a heightened environment of uncertainty and risk as part of daily operations, and the survivability of this type of leadership relies even more heavily on flexibility and ingenuity towards the situation and the environment. As Goleman underlines leaders "must play their leadership style like a pro – using the right one at just the right time and in the right measure."[2]

In this research transition can be twofold, the transition of a country and or the transition of a leadership in crisis. In turn, a crisis situation can refer to a persistent state of transition. The article has a dual focus. Firstly it focuses on the role and impact of leadership of RPMs in crises situations and transformation processes from weak and fragmented communities to peaceful and viable ones. Lebanon, Hezbollah and its secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah is used to test the ideas of this research. Secondly, the article focuses on the inflexibility of state counter measures towards RPMs and their leadership, with particular emphasis on the resilience of what often appears to be outdated state counternarratives.

The twofold focus aims to provide a more holistic approach to deal more effectively with the 'so what' question. The first focal point builds on mainly from Alagha's[3], and Hage Ali's[4] research on Hezbollah's *infitah* of opening up, and its lebanonization, expressed in the organisation's ideology, and political programmes. The *infitah* and lebanonization have allowed Hezbollah's integration into mainstream politics, which blurred the boundaries between terrorism and resistance movement, and removed the government's monopoly on the

legitimate use of force. With the second focal point this article goes the step further and examines the impact the above has on state counternarratives and countermeasures. The combination of these two focal points provides the originality of this article. The research questions guiding this study include: what are the main leadership challenges in crises situations, and how do leaders cope with them? What is the role of leadership of RPMs in transitional processes and crises environments? What are the implications of outdated state counternarratives towards Hezbollah?

The emphasis of this study is on the incentive structure and institutional and contextual constraints on leaders, as well as the role this has on established state counternarratives. The research highlights the need for a constantly balancing of different and often contrasting characteristics of leadership to continuously changing situations. As such, malleability, opportunism, and subjective pragmatism rise above others as key traits for both RPM and state leadership. However, RPM leaders seem more able to achieve this, rather than state leadership, which appears to be more constrained by old narratives that do not reflect new realities leading to ineffective countermeasures towards RPMs.

Theoretical Framework – Characteristics of RPM Leadership

Political leadership in crises entails the diagnosis of a problem, the prescription of solutions and the mobilisation of support for needed action.[5] A key role of leadership is to ask the right questions, even though the complexity of the transitional process can render a collective agreement more important than getting the right answer. Adding to complexity is the decrease in the strength of formal institutional structures during a transition, as these would be undergoing changes in order to meet the new situation. Moreover, a political vacuum during a transition phase could increase the possibility of conflict, with the parties involved in the transition process perceiving the uncertain future outcome as an opportunity to establish a better position for themselves.

RPM leadership exists within organisations that need to take decisions that address short and long term spans of responsibility, faced with complex situations and dealing with environment relationships.[6] In this sense, RPM leadership is viewed as "a process of influencing people to accomplish the mission, inspiring their commitment and improving the organisation."[7] To

paraphrase Rosen[8], RPMs are unique entities in their organisation and in the manner in which they deliver output, and which owing to their very nature promote and reward from within.

Leadership is a dependent identity because a leader needs followers, which presupposes favourable conditions and contexts. Although leadership is not the sole actor in a crisis and a transitional process, it has a major role, given the ability of the leader to shape and define the future of a movement, a country, and its structures. For Renshon there are three key characteristics regarding the importance of political leadership including, decision centrality, the extension of public sphere responsibilities, and the structural amplification of effects.[9] Decision centrality suggests that it is simply not feasible to hold a public vote on every political issue and leaders take decisions without any direct input from the electorate. The extension of responsibilities is directly relational to the leaders' decision-making role, while the structural amplification of the effect of leaders' decisions is evident in the proliferation of changes caused by the implementation of a leader's decisions.

Instability and uncertainty are part and parcel of transitions out of crises, and key actors seek to solidify their positions within the new structures and conditions. This refers to Cameron's and Quinn's "adhocracy leadership culture", which is constantly dynamic and creative.[10] In turn, this closely aligns to organisational structures of RPMs in transitional processes, as an RPM is continuously facing new circumstances, which requires changes in rigid structures entailing innovative thinking, as well as risk taking in leadership. According to Sheffer this adaptability is the result of "a fresh scrutinising of the real world; dissatisfaction with the reality that is observed; clear notions about desired changes in existing systems, goals and strategies for change; and dedication to implementing these changes."[11] All this makes leadership of RPMs a proactive form of leadership, but at the same time it puts it in a position of continually trying to strike a balance from one element and issue to another. Thus the optimum leader would be somebody with an ability to understand context and lead change through necessary communication methodologies.

Leading change remains one of the most important, and most challenging leadership roles. Yukl argues that efforts to implement change are more likely to succeed if a leader "understands the reasons for resistance to change, sequential phases in the change process, different types of change and the importance of using appropriate models for understanding organisational problems."[12] Then again, as Posen advocates it takes time and effort for organisations to unlearn and then relearn.[13] The need to keep the organisation aligned with

changes within the broader environment redefines the purpose for which the people have to facilitate the adjusted way of doing things. Change is associated with uncertainty, which is quite pervasive within the strategic environment relative to time, space, and place. Radical political organisations in order to sustain commitment from the followers prefer to reduce uncertainty, which is also why they codify narratives, and solutions as constitutions and manifestos. From the followers' and members' perspective conformity to current practices and norms are necessary requirements, and those who are part of the system become aware that the logic of consequentialism and appropriateness necessitates their unwavering loyalty to the organisation and their leaders.[14] Consequently, leaders have to think broadly in terms of systems, non-linear effects and network forces and hence feed the natural, bottom up dynamics of emergence, innovation and fitness.[15]

Flexibility and dealing with the unexpected efficiently and effectively represents advantages and opportunities, and not just threats to an RPM and its leader. Inevitably, during transitional processes leadership is constantly changing both, internally (within the organisation itself) and externally (within the state). Malleability is not meant in the sense of leaders not knowing the course of the organisation, rather it is meant as necessary and pragmatic means to achieve ends. Therefore, leadership has to be rigid enough to set its direction and destination, and flexible enough to be able to reach that destination.

For Burns there are four types of transformational leaders: intellectual, revolutionary, heroes or ideologues, and leaders of reform.[16] The aim of transformational leadership is to transform people and followers into something better. The outcome of this transformation is for followers to be prepared to be true to their better selves.[17] Leaders help create organisational cultures and then try to reinforce them through their narratives, and communication with followers and actions. Crisis leadership can have a symbolic role, but at the same time it can also be more directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the organisation, where the leader is seen as 'one of us', instead of just a distant formal authority figure. Thus, leaders encourage risk-taking down the hierarchy, and the duty of followers becomes to accept what the organisation wants done, and do it. This responsibility is reinforced by repeated encouragements and admonitions by the leader to focus on the end notwithstanding the daily challenges. In this sense members of RPMs buy in to the needs and wants of the leadership and thus it becomes a collective obligation to succeed. The operational commitment of members of an RPM transforms the 'buying in' to an organisations' aims into a 'we and I' culture with high institutional and high in-group collectivism. As Follet states one person should not give orders to another, but both

should agree to take their orders from the situation facing the organisation.[18] Followers and members of RPMs are therefore encouraged to cooperate broadly through the 'we' culture, but at the same time to take greater individual and team responsibility for outcomes through the 'I' culture. Since membership in RPMs is predominantly voluntary both actions and results are of high importance in order to retain membership and commitment to the cause.

Plato feared that even leaders who intended to lead in a moral way would be corrupted by the system and since leaders were essential to the health of the community, a corrupted leader would inevitably destroy his own community and organisation.[19] Therefore, pragmatically there has to be a coincidence of personal 'wants' and a leader's duty in order for leaders to remain altruistic and try their best for the general good. As the diagram below illustrates, contextual constraints can range from custom and previous practice through to institutions, which can introduce restrictions as well as opportunities. An argument of this research is that key factors that distinguish effective leaders from the rest, often lie outside the control of an individual leader. Even though leaders must have the ability to exploit the opportunities offered by external to them factors, irrespective of how good they may be, leaders cannot really guarantee effectiveness by their own actions.

Figure 1. Here please

Informal Ties and Charisma

The 'great man' approach allows followers to abort decision making responsibility to leaders and if the decision is proven wrong the subordinates can blame their leadership for that. For Max Weber charismatic leadership can be differentiated between power and authority and distinguishes three different kinds of authority.[20] Firstly, traditional authority occurs when subordinates follow because they have always done so; in rational-legal authority it is rational for subordinates to follow; and charismatic authority where followers are attracted and devoted to the leader's powers that seem to provide the possibility for a radical and previously unknown solution to some kind of social crisis. The last one, charismatic leadership constitutes the only form of non-coercive authority but because the charisma is embodied within an individual, it usually dies out with that individual or becomes routinized through an institution.[21] When charismatic leaders are gone it is not always certain that their achievements can be sustained,

and their very actions as charismatic individuals may undermine the possibility of sustainable actions by the followers.

Weber argues that charismatic leaders seek fundamental and radical changes in society, necessitating destruction of conventionally accepted practice. Like Machiavelli, Weber's account of political leadership refers to those with a strong instinct for power.[22] Likewise, for MacGregor Burns charismatic leaders are "power-wielders, meaning leaders who safeguard loyalty and dedication from followers that satisfy the leaders' interests instead of the followers".[23] Charismatic leaders may feel impelled to maintain crises if resolving them would undermine their authority. Tolstoy's criticism of the charismatic leader is very poignant when he likens this type of leaders to bow waves of moving boats, always in the front and in theory leading but in reality just being pushed along by the boat itself. Power-wielders maintain followers' obedience to an organisation of ideals, and not adherence to an ideal organisation, and therefore achieve high levels of dependency amongst their followers, but in effect disempowering them. In addition, to an extent followers can feel that they share their leader's charisma by being members of the same organisation. In crises situations charismatic leaders may prove vital in decision-making, but when time comes to move on and progress to a different phase out of a crisis, charismatic leaders often prove reluctant, to say the least, of handing power over to successors. In reality charismatic leaders seem to be less mysterious than they might initially appear. Actually, it is this aspect of being mundane that adds to the charisma. After all the rise to charismatic leadership is not spontaneous but it takes planning, organisation and staging. The paradox is that followers and people in general seem to want a leader to have the dual role of the 'great man' and 'one of us' at the same time, with all the complications this duality entails.

RPMs that function under strict rules and regulations, also rely on informal social ties to achieve their tasks. This leads to the formation of networks, which become systems of personal links maintained along-side formal structures. Leaders of RPMs often emerge in primary groups consisting of people connected by informal social ties. These informal links enhance loyalty to the organisation, and they help with trust-building among the members of the organisation. Consequently, leaders are often socio-emotional. Greenwald, defines socio-emotional as nonmaterial, though personally gratifying, communications and activities that form part of nearly every human group: personal validation, companionship, recreation and expressions of esteem.[24] In most RPMs individuals who rise to the top are particularly skilled and forthcoming in personal and emotional matters, and are approached in a crisis for sympathy

and understanding. Socio-emotional rewards promote adherence to role expectations and stability of structure. The advancement of followers and subordinates could therefore be subjective if the weighting given by the assessing leader to loyalty and adherence to orders is deemed more important than the application of acquired knowledge to yield better results.

Lipman-Blumen argues that most followers view leaders through distorted lenses, emphasising their strengths and minimising their failings.[25] Hence the utopian portrayal of charismatic leaders, who are seen to have powers and abilities exceeding those of everyday individuals. This type of leadership is primarily defined by who the leaders are, and it is based on an emotional relationship between leaders and subordinates. For Durkheim followers actually want their leaders to be godlike in their powers.[26] Etymologically hierarchy means 'holy sovereignty', where *archi* denotes ruler or sovereignty and *ieros* means divine. *Hierarchia* signifies a sacral ranking and therefore the concept of hierarchy is the sacred organisation space that facilitates leadership, where leadership has to be treated as sacred to maintain its legitimacy.

The legitimacy of leaders depends on the relationship they have with their followers. Grint advocates that it is the followers who teach leadership to leaders, as it is not just experience that counts but reflective experience.[27] Grint argues that learning is not so much an individual and cognitive event but a collective and cultural process. This relationship between leaders and followers is based on deeply held and shared ideological values, where persuasive leaders achieve unique goals through followers who are exceptionally loyal to and deeply trusting of their leaders. Under these circumstances, followers in the interest of the shared vision are willing to make personal sacrifices that might appear as irrational to outsiders. Therefore, a crisis can be necessary and can act as a unifying and motivating actor towards the materialisation of a shared vision.

Crisis Leadership, Paradoxes and Misconceptions

In order to fulfil a unitary role, a leader would need to show moderation and openness. However, during crises and the initial phase of transition moderate leaders, with possibly a more pragmatic outlook, fail and often fall victims of their own side. Another paradox is that the stronger the leadership the more likely the survival of a transitional process, but the stronger the leadership the less the need for compromise and concessions in order to achieve this

process. It becomes a risk for leaders to try and regulate a conflict or a crisis, as it can weaken their position within and between conflicting parties. Political leaders can act as triggers to escalate violence during a crisis, but also during peace processes.[28] During the early stages out of a crisis leadership of RPMs has to be flexible enough to push its constituents towards transition, but not to push too far and lose support and commitment from the followers. Leaders in crises situations can become single minded and resort to tactical decisions and lose objectivity. Thus, often they surround themselves with followers whose advice and opinion is limited to uncritical compliance and destructive consent (UCDC). In this case, even when they know their leader is wrong, followers feel they have reasons, such as self-preservation or a new role within the organisation, not to say anything and become part of the damage of their own leader. Such leaders start seeking crises, as by maintaining an emergency status they can maintain authority and their position. Consequently, UCDC signifies another form of leader-follower dysfunction, and develops delusions of grandeur and as such set either impossible or detrimental objectives for the organisation.[29] Popper suggests that it is the responsibility of followers to impede leaders' shortcomings and to remain constructive dissenters.[30] In this way followers can help keep the organisation in track and prohibit leaders from undermining the organisation. For effective leadership it is imperative to achieve agreement and constructive dissent, if necessary, instead of disagreement and destructive consent. Destructive consent, Grint argues, is "the bedfellow of irresponsible followership" and an inadequate frame for addressing protracted and complex problems.[31] Leaders of RPMs do not need to be perfect. They just need to be aware of the limits of their ability and power and that they can rely on their followers to compensate for their own limits.

Again a leader would have to try and strike a balance between over or under emphasising a crisis and an exit from this. If they overemphasise a crisis the leaders may cause frustration to and disengagement from the followers, and goals are not materialised, while if they underemphasise the crisis it will be difficult to persuade the followers to buy into the transition, rendering an exit from a crisis difficult if not impossible. During efforts to exit a political crisis leaders have to try to deliver their own people and simultaneously reassure them that the ultimate goals they had been fighting for have not been sacrificed. Concurrently, political leadership also has to 'assist' the opponents and bring them to the negotiating table, what Sun Tzu calls building the 'golden bridge'. By delivering their own people, if the leaders do not get it right, they run the risk of losing their own followers, while if they do not 'assist' their opponents they risk the collapse of the transition to peace and stability.

Importance and Impact of Leadership Survivability

When a transitional process is initiated and a new regime and structures are formed, further change is needed as the leader now would have to move "from guiding the political system in introducing new structures, to working within those structures".[32] However, this is when leadership often turns from revolutionary and pro-change to conservative, with main aim the preservation of the status quo. Leaders have to be prepared to move from the foreground to the background, but as Breslauer highlights "rare is the leader who is able to succeed in both, system destruction and system building", and "a breakthrough may be required to undo old structures…but numerous and repeated follow-up initiatives are required to put new structures in place and to build legitimacy for the new order".[33] In protracted conflicts leaders change because they either 'see the light' of new realities or they 'feel the heat', that is they feel the pressure either from their own side as well as from the opposing side. Regarding leadership survivability and transitions to peace processes, Bass and Steidlmeier subdivide transformationalism into true transformational and pseudo-transformational leadership.[34] Truly transformational leaders either align public interest with their own, or else sacrifice their own interests for the common good. These leaders envisage an attainable future for their followers and their community, which is why narrative and vision are important elements for leadership in transitional processes. On the contrary, pseudo-transformational leaders adopt the rhetoric of public interest but in reality their own self-interest takes precedence. If for political leaders gambling for survival is more important than what the state wants and needs their decision making will be affected accordingly, which is why there has to be a coincidence of personal and professional goals for a leader to remain selfless and self-sacrificing.

Leaders base decision-making not just on the probability of being removed, but also the manner and consequences of becoming redundant. The more the ability of leaders to call on their followers to support a reform decreases, the more the leaders shift from transformation to a more transactional leadership type, in order to survive. After all leaders who are fighting for their own survival do not need to win, but to just avoid defeat. Leaders may have vested interests in the status quo and policies may be chosen with an eye to their continued stay in office and maintaining the status quo, even if the present and future are left in a limbo.

Frequent leadership change makes it very difficult to build relationships that facilitate a smooth transition out of a crisis. Within the organisation, lack of leadership continuity can cause uncertainty and absence of commitment to fight. Externally the frequent change of leadership

augments uncertainty, while internally a leader has a unitary role and needs to help avoid dissension and spoiler groups. Since membership in RPMs is predominantly voluntary there also has to be a realistic timescale to achieve these changes, otherwise the membership's commitment to the cause usually starts faltering. On an individual level leaders are often reluctant to admit the need for changes lest it be seen as a weakness among supporters and opponents. As such leaders can fall victims of their own rhetoric, narrative, and propaganda. During a protracted conflict they can demonise the 'other side' but during the transition phase they have to persuade their own as well as the opposing side that they have to coexist peacefully in the future. The problem though is that as Kierkegaard advocates "life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards".[35]

The case of Lebanon: Nasrallah's and Hezbollah's Role in Political Transition

Vision is the understanding of a state's national history, character, or even destiny that is stable and is rooted in popular sentiment.[36] In the case of Lebanon there does not appear to be a unified vision in defining vital interests. A key argument of this research, discussed above, is that one of the most important factors that distinguish effective and influential leaders often lie outside their control. Three dates, 1975, 1979, and 1982 are of critical importance for Lebanon's modern history. In 1975 Lebanon entered a civil war, followed by an unprecedented and destructive war during the Israeli invasion of 1982. In 1979 there was the revival and rise to power of the Shia under the guidance of Iran, while the 1982 Israeli invasion of the south of Lebanon led to the creation of the strategic relationship between Lebanon, Assad's Syria, and Khomeini's Iran, and to the formation of Hezbollah (Party of God). Thus, the Shia of Lebanon were mobilized, and drafted to be a part of the strategic axis of Iran and Syria, even though the relationship between the Shia of Lebanon and Iran date back to five hundred years.[37] Hezbollah was formed as the military arm to project multi-dimensional power. Hezbollah with President Assad the father, was a controlled tool for his regional design, and although he never met personally the General Secretary of the party of God, the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah had to go through Syria first for any final decision.[38] The foreign policy of Lebanon had to be geared by the Syrians to serve their grand strategy design, and the broader Lebanese security apparatus as well as the political institutions, and elections were under strong Syrian control. In this sense any apparent stability, was at the expense of the sovereignty of Lebanon. During this critical period, no Lebanese leadership was really able to manage the domestic

situation successfully. Rather, the chairman of PLO Yasser Arafat was a de facto ruler of a big part of Lebanon, especially in Beirut and the South. On the other hand Syria and Israel were using Lebanon as a battleground and a buffer state. The legitimate sate of Lebanon was limited to a small predominantly Christian area, and the 1975 long civil war was a major factor for redistribution of political power. Lebanon was destroyed, and geographically partitioned into many sectarian cantons.

After fifteen years the civil war in Lebanon became futile and costly, and it was time to end it. When the militias of Lebanon were disarmed following the Taif Agreement ending the civil war in 1990, Hezbollah was the only non-state faction that was allowed to keep its arsenal and military structure under the idea of Islamic resistance, with main aim to liberate the occupied land from Israel after the 1982 invasion. From its perspective, as a resistance movement, Hezbollah had to formulate inclusive political programmes, focusing not only on the issue of Israel's presence in the south, but also on broader domestic and regional issues. Its persuasive leadership in combination with Iranian and Syrian support allowed Hezbollah to develop a network of social services, and a very well organized militant wing, which together effectively rivalled the capabilities of the Lebanese government.

What follows applies the theoretical approaches and key arguments from the first part of this article on the case of Lebanon's Hezbollah. The key themes selected to substantiate the arguments of this article include the more general idea of Lebanon's quasi-permanent state of crisis, then it moves on to the more particular themes of Hezbollah's *infitah* and Lebanonisation, leadership paradoxes and contradictions, and the lasting appeal of the armalite and the ballot box.

Lebanon's quasi-permanent state of crisis and the Chronic Political Vacuum

A key point of this study is that leadership entails continuity but also signifies an ever-changing relationship between a number of different factors including the leader, the context, the followers, broader society and the pace of change. Historically, Lebanon's political elites have not been able to create their own political solutions, which appear to always be imposed on Lebanon. The phase of political transition is a time of intense fluidity, as the rules and structures of the preceding regime are eradicated and new ones are developed and implemented in their

stead. However, the outcome of a transitional process is not guaranteed and it is possible for it to stall, to go backwards or consolidate in a phase of limbo.[39] During this transition phase there is a reduction in the strength of formal institutional structures, as these are changed and reformed to cope with the new situation. However, the longer this limbo and vacuum remain, the higher the risk for conflict and instability. This uncertain future also becomes an opportunity for conflicting parties to establish a better position for themselves.

Figure/Table 2. Here please

As the table above indicates, Lijphart's observation that Lebanon is a fragmented, and unstable democracy, still reflects reality.[40] With its cycles of civil war and its role as a regional buffer state and a battle ground, crisis has become the norm rather than the exception for Lebanon. Historically, in Lebanon negotiated settlements to end crises maintain multiple sovereignties amongst protagonists and the security dilemma is enhanced rendering any settlement temporary, tactical, and just enough to survive and prepare to fight another time leading to another crisis. The idea 'no victor, no vanquished' has followed the ending of crises, and the imposition of a political solution in Lebanon.[41] This win-win approach has remained superficial up until now at least, and although it is considered as the main platform for reaching an agreement, in the long run it has ended up into lose-lose owing to its very superficiality.

Leadership in Lebanon is directly related to the persistently volatile nature of its political structure, and the extent of volatility has determined the type of leadership Lebanon has produced. During different crises internally leaders have sought legitimacy in their religious, sectarian, arms, or even feudal backgrounds, while externally the political influence of various foreign powers has favoured a certain type of leaders. Regarding legitimacy and Hezbollah's financial support from Iran and Syria over the years, the additional problem with a weak Lebanese state is that it also receives funding from a coalition allied to Saudi Arabia and western countries.

Hezbollah's *Infitah* and Lebanonisation

The three key aspects that enhance the image of a resistance and social movement is Hezbollah's successful resistance to Israel, albeit relative; the authority it commands among

the broader Lebanese population through its wide social networks; as well as its adaptability to the different needs at the local, regional and international level. All these transformed the organization into a prominent regional player that cannot be ignored. Since its formation in Iran's embassy in Damascus in 1982 Hezbollah has transformed itself from an organization known for its terrorist attacks into Lebanon's dominant socio-political, and military force. Hezbollah became a state-within-a-state, and has had an armed wing better equipped and organized than the Lebanese army, as well as a far-reaching social network delivering goods and services to the Lebanese.[42] The *Infitah* shifted Hezbollah's focus onto a systematic effort to alleviate socio-economic issues. The idea was to mobilise Hezbollah's institutions to improve the services to the different communities and cater to their needs without hampering the continuation of the resistance.[43] Lebanonisation is described as "examining the prevailing circumstances and formulating Hezbollah's strategy within that framework, making allowances for Lebanon's particular circumstances, its confessional sensitivities, and its perception of its environment".[44] Hezbollah appears to be able to do this well. The organization has shown a notable degree of pragmatism, and created an effectively constructed image as defender of the whole of Lebanon. Its impressive social network has bolstered the organisation's standing, and opened the path to mainstream politics. Lebanonisation focused beyond the Shi'a community through the launching of the relations aimed at fostering ties with the other social and political powers. Under the lebanonisation Hezbollah officially renounced its intention to establish an Islamic Republic, even though it did not renounce its conviction that it would be desirable to introduce elements of Islamic law.

Hezbollah's strength is its multilevel multipronged agenda, which also demonstrates its awareness of its vulnerability and the conditionality of popular support. For Byman and Saab Hezbollah's status "rests on its opposition to Israel and the military prowess it has demonstrated, its ties to foreign sponsors, such as Iran and Syria, and its strong political and social position within Lebanon".[45] As DeVore and Stähli argue "foreign support strengthened Hezbollah, but only insofar as the organization creatively adapted its inputs to Lebanon's unique environment".[46] Foreign state sponsorship can be a necessary facilitator for non-state actors, but it is insufficient in itself to guarantee the effectiveness of these actors. Hezbollah's social services range from water supply, health services, building hospitals, running schools, garbage collection, and repairing war-damaged houses. With its military performance the organization acquired the role of Lebanon's defender, while with its social networks it gained the status of a provider of social welfare where the Lebanese government performed

inadequately. Sure there is inconsistency, to say the least, as Hezbollah has been part of the problem. However, in a state of permanent crises and inadequate state provisions, lines get really blurred.

Hezbollah needs to maintain the loyalty of the Shi'a community, be accepted as a legitimate political party by the broader Lebanese polity, and position itself as the party representing the economically disadvantaged, irrespective of communal identity. Although Hezbollah provided social services soon after its formation, it was really under the leadership of Nasrallah, the organisation's secretary general, when it emphasized its social role in order to maintain and expand it powerbase. At thirty-two at the time, Nasrallah was a charismatic leader, who with his conversational mode of address and his use of strong politico-religious language produced an effective and persuasive image. Nasrallah's image was enhanced when his 18-year old son Hadi was killed in a military operation against Israel in 1997, which led to an outpouring of support towards a man who had just lost his eldest son. The above fits with the desire of followers to have a leadership with the dual role of the 'great man' and 'one of us' at the same time, with all the complications this duality entails. The provision of social services and reconstruction efforts have been highlighted systematically via *Al Manar*, Hezbollah's most famous media channel.[47] As Hezbollah's public relations supervisor stated "Hezbollah is not just about rockets and fighting; otherwise people would have left us long ago. We will be victorious in the reconstruction, just as we have been victorious against Israel's army".[48]

Figure 3. Here please

According to the above figure, successful leadership in transitional situations is the outcome of options informed by the dynamic interaction between the leader, organisational choices, context. In turn, these three are affected and shaped by time, space, and perceptions, reflected in the figure with the dashes in the lines. More often than not, as the case study shows, Hezbollah appears to get these elements quite successfully aligned. With reference to Hezbollah's multi-level adaptability, at the local level the organization has adopted increasingly a soft power approach, building its credentials as a provider of social services. As Nasrallah suggested the "Lebanese could fight each other in Syria, just not in Lebanon".[49] When non-state actors are able to provide even a limited type of governance where there is a

chronic state vacuum, these actors are empowered and form loyal constituencies. In turn, this renders the organisation a quasi-state in itself augmenting its legitimacy and seriously challenging the legitimacy of the state.[50] In this sense the organisation needs a weak or inadequate state, which would leave a service's vacuum to be filled by Hezbollah. At the regional level the organisation adopts a strong approach and a hard power expressed in direct involvement or concrete support to armed attacks by other groups in neighbouring countries, such as in Syria and Palestine. Internationally, Hezbollah aims to portray itself as a moderate and legitimate resistance movement representing and defending the broader Lebanese society.

Paradoxes and Contradictions

For RPM leadership often crisis is a solution, as it aims to take advantage of unstable environments. Politics of crisis is much more suitable and preferable than mundane politics, as it limits the focus on more emergent and more apparently important issues. The organization has the power to influence the formation of a government, but Hezbollah's participation in mainstream politics puts the organization under a different kind of scrutiny from its support base, as it has to perform on day to day, and more mundane issues. In crises politics there can be more leeway for imperfect solutions and answers, while in day-to-day politics with lower intensity and less emergency there is more time and space for public scrutiny. As such Hezbollah and its leadership is part of the cause of the crisis in Lebanon, and at the same time it is part of its solution. Hezbollah created crisis, and crisis made Hezbollah. In this sense, even if Hezbollah is capable to resolve a crisis, is not necessarily willing. The government may be willing but they are not capable. Thus, Lebanon seems trapped in a pattern of internal strife and fragility.

Exiting a chronic crisis often requires strong leadership, able and willing to persuade its own side, as well as the other side about its commitment to transition to peaceful politics and to a well-functioning society. However, the stronger the leadership, the less willing it might be to compromise and reach an agreement. In the case of Hezbollah and the Lebanese government, who is capable is not willing, who is willing is not capable.

The Lasting Appeal of the Armalite and the Ballot Box

After twenty two years of occupation Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000, creating new conditions and rules, while internal strife resurfaced. After years of armed insurgency by Hezbollah, backed by Iran and Syria, the issue of Hezbollah's arms was brought up, and the relevance of the strategic axis of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah was contented after the liberation of the south. To legitimize the maintenance of Hezbollah's arms after the Israeli withdrawal, a *casus belli* was designed in Shebaa farms, as an occupied territory by Israel that needed to be liberated.

On the 12th of July 2006 the Israel-Hezbollah war started. This war, which became known as the 34-Day War, was not between Israel and Arab states, but rather between Hezbollah, a non-state actor, against the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), the most advanced army in the Middle East. In this case, Israel lost because it did not win, while Hezbollah won because it did not lose. Israel appeared ill-prepared for such kind of war, a hybrid between asymmetric and conventional.[51] Israel was not able to measure its success against a shadowy enemy, and it could not easily relate this war to politics. At the beginning of the war, Hezbollah was accused by certain predominantly Sunni Arab countries, and the Arab League as dragging Lebanon into an unnecessary war.[52] Once the war started to tilt toward Hezbollah, the Arab league changed its stance by supporting Hezbollah, and the organisation was chanted in the Arab and Islamic world, as the only entity that was able to stand against Israel, and maybe even defeat it. For instance, there were posters of Nasrallah the secretary general of Hezbollah, hung all over the streets of Cairo. The streets of the Arab world, transcended the fact that Nasrallah is a Shia, and focused on the achievement against Israel.

The war did not change the stance of Hezbollah's opposition, who accused the organization of deceiving the Lebanese by promising not to wage war, and instead it violated its promise. Nasrallah himself admitted during an interview that "we would not have snatched soldiers if we thought it would spark a war".[53] The fear was that this brief war would damage Hezbollah's status as Lebanon's protector.[54] Hezbollah's adaptability has not always been down to ability and choice but down to necessity, especially given the dependency of such organisations on popular support and the conditionality of this support. The organisation has often found itself in a position of defending its actions in order to avoid popular condemnation for the human and financial costs of its actions, which is why Hezbollah adopts an approach of strategic ambiguity.

Hezbollah's electoral successes are attributed to the popularity of its extensive social services programmes within the different communities of Lebanon. This did not necessarily mean that Hezbollah supported the parliamentary system, but that parliament provided another forum where they could express their views, and urge others to at least be more accommodating towards them. Nasrallah justified the decision for electoral participation arguing that "the military resistance requires political backing. Our entry into the ranks of parliament gives us the opportunity to defend our resistance on the political plane".[55] Hezbollah's attitude towards elections and mainstream politics also highlighted its pragmatic and adaptive approach regarding manoeuvring through the sectarian Lebanese political system, and its preparedness to compromise aspects of its ideological roots.[56] This however, was done in order to promote its goals and not because it changed its core views and values. Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem emphasised that the unified leadership of the multi-faceted organisation and the false dichotomy between the military and political echelons, and stated that "all political, social and jihad work is tied to the decisions of its single leadership. The same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work, also leads jihad actions in the struggle against Israel."[57] Hezbollah through the *infitah* of opening up, expressed in its ideology, and policies, was integrated into mainstream politics, blurring the boundaries between terrorism and resistance movement, between legitimate and illegitimate politics, while at the same time eliminating the government's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In this sense, for RPM leadership often crisis is a solution, as it aims to take advantage of unstable environments and fill in any political vacuum. For Kizilkaya Hezbollah's legitimisation strategy contributed significantly to the organisation's success to retain its status as a formidable non-state actor, which foresaw the development of moral arguments that were conveyed to the masses by its leader Nasrallah.[58]

A challenge dealing with organisations like Hezbollah is that they can win just by not losing. For instance in the 34-Day War Hezbollah emerged as a powerful political force because it stood up to Israel. The war granted Hezbollah a justification in the eyes of its constituency and the region for its refusal to disarm. Any military action taken to counter the organization has the undesirable effect of justifying its existence, and feeding Hezbollah's narrative to garner support. Consequently, Hezbollah has avoided becoming an open target by the international community, while it has complicated international efforts in the region. Thus, Hezbollah does not need to win, but just needs to be able to justify its continued existence.

Implications of Outdated State Counternarratives towards Hezbollah

The case study demonstrates that the nature of conflict has changed to the point that the information battle is as important and runs at least parallel to any kinetic fight, highlighting the importance of narratives and counternarratives. Johnson argues that "insurgency and counter-insurgency is primarily an information war supported by military actions; the side with the best resonating narrative therefore has a significant advantage".[59] Narratives do not arise spontaneously but they are strategic because "they are deliberately constructed or reinforced out of the ideas and thoughts that are already current".[60] As such narratives are compelling story lines explaining events convincingly, and from which inferences can be drawn. Vital to crisis leadership is inspiration, which requires a vision as well as the understanding of the nature and complexity of political transition. Vision and narrative are interlinked and they imply transition, and a move towards a more positive future challenging people to transcend the status quo and to commit themselves to worthwhile causes connected to the larger community. Still, the implementation of a vision requires the 'buying in' from and the voluntary compliance of the followers as it will be them in the end who are going to implement it. This section brings together the theoretical part and the case study and analyses the implications and challenges of rigid counternarratives in policy formation. It illustrates that because of inflexible counternarratives, policies fail to deal effectively with Hezblollah.

Zalman identifies the key elements of narrative as narrator and audience, plot, and characters.[61] Western state's narrative of Hezbollah was formulated within the context of unprecedented threat of terror, depicting a fierce battle between simplistic and easily identifiable characterisations between good and evil, in which the righteous were bound to triumph, which was then further inflated by claims of a global insurgency.[62] One of the strongest elements was the plot, which evoked strong feelings from the audience. By portraying a real threat to national security and democratic values, the plot resonated with the West, especially the USA for whom their core values were under attack. A further strength of the narrative was the characters, who need to be real enough for the audience to identify with, and influential enough to exert effect.[63] Characters typically include heroes as potential fixers of a policy problem, villains as causes of the problem, and victims who are harmed by the problem.[64] In the case study the narrative encapsulated all three, depicting Hezbollah as villains plotting against the West, and the victims of Hezbollah as superheroes.[65]

Reception refers to how a narrative changes the behaviour of and meanings held by other states and actors.[66] For Zalman audiences actively participate in creating meaning from narratives based on their own historic, cultural, and ideological experiences, and therefore narrators must accept the authenticity of their audience's position and be aware of their won heuristics and biases.[67] Moreover, there are significant differences between how top-down and bottom-up narratives are disseminated, which they potentially attributed to liberal peace actors such as the West, believing they have the power to write the narrative, even if it does not reflect the true situations on the ground.[68] The West failed to take into consideration local and regional cultural differences.[69] A strategic narrative must be tailored to a society's cultural context, and an effective external strategic narrative has to resonate with local political myths.[70] The West's messaging toward Hezbollah is broad and does not appreciate cultural significances, while Hezbhollah's messaging was targeted, and cognisant of local political and social issues in Lebanon.

Rigid and persistent narratives and counternarratives restrict the choices of effective policy formation and measures in countering RPMs. West's narrative vis-à-vis Hezbollah does not reflect new realities and appears to be too inflexible to match and counter the persuasiveness and the fluidity of Hezbollah's narratives. More precisely, West's narratives did not acknowledge the shift from a closed system that could previously be controlled by deterrence, defence and dominance, towards an open system based on influence and persuasion within a complex system.[71]

For Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin the post-cold war era brought a new communication ecology, creating a new distribution of power and attributing a prominent role to strategic narrative.[72] Whilst, as discussed above, Hezbollah has exploited this new media ecology effectively, using any means possible with Al Manar as its pinnacle, this has not been the case for the West which did not embrace fully and early on the new media ecology. Patrikarakos describes "a new kind of warfare with social media at its centre", replacing state and traditional media as gatekeepers of information with individuals rather than institutions.[73] This increases the role of agency in narrative projection, or people, organisations or institutions as actors trying to create social change.[74] This idea has been recognised and accepted by Hezbollah, but not fully by Western countries. A failure to sufficiently consider the projection and reception of the narrative played a key role in the West's failure to achieve influence and fulfil policy goals towards Hezbollah. Old and rigid narratives that do not reflect complex reality, as is the case for the battle of narratives between the West and Hezbollah, are likely to be rejected owing

to a psychological backfire effect, which is a potential disadvantage of basing policies on narratives.[75]

Conclusion

The success of crisis leadership depends on the ability to constantly adapt and to manoeuvre between competing forces and lead through change while bargaining and compromising where necessary to maintain stability. With reference to the survivability of leaders, a transitional leader has to engage in creative destruction and reforming and rebuilding institutions and practices at the same time.[76] Within this context, Hezbollah's leadership has put effort to appeal to both religious and secular elements across the different Lebanese communities, by emphasizing patriotism and nationalism on one hand, while concurrently maintaining its Islamic framework on the other in order to keep satisfied core elements of the organisation.[77] Hezbollah has sacrificed radicalism for pragmatism, but the later has been adopted to promote the former.

The article explores how the narrative and modus operandi of Hezbollah and its leader Nasrallah changes and adapts according to current socio-political contexts in order to appeal and to mobilise different groups in constantly evolving circumstances. This study emphasises the difficulty to determine any single type of leadership as better than another. The article also highlights the implications and challenges of rigid counternarratives in policy formation. It illustrates that inflexible and stale counternarratives lead to policy failure in dealing effectively with Hezblollah. Leadership in crisis and transitional processes is by definition transformative, as it involves moving from one regime to another through the reforming of social and structural relations.[78] After all, leaders in transitional processes have to be at the same time creators and destructors. To paraphrase Schumpeter such leaders are "incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one".[79] Thus the more effective leader is the one who is able to determine the context of the situation and use the most fitting leadership behaviour required at the time. Consequently, leadership of RPMs during transition processes often appears to be contradictory in style and substance owing to the circumstances surrounding it. This pragmatically contradictory style depending on the situation and the issue may make leaders both dogmatic and concessionary, traditionalist and modernisers, idealists and pragmatists, transactional and transformational.

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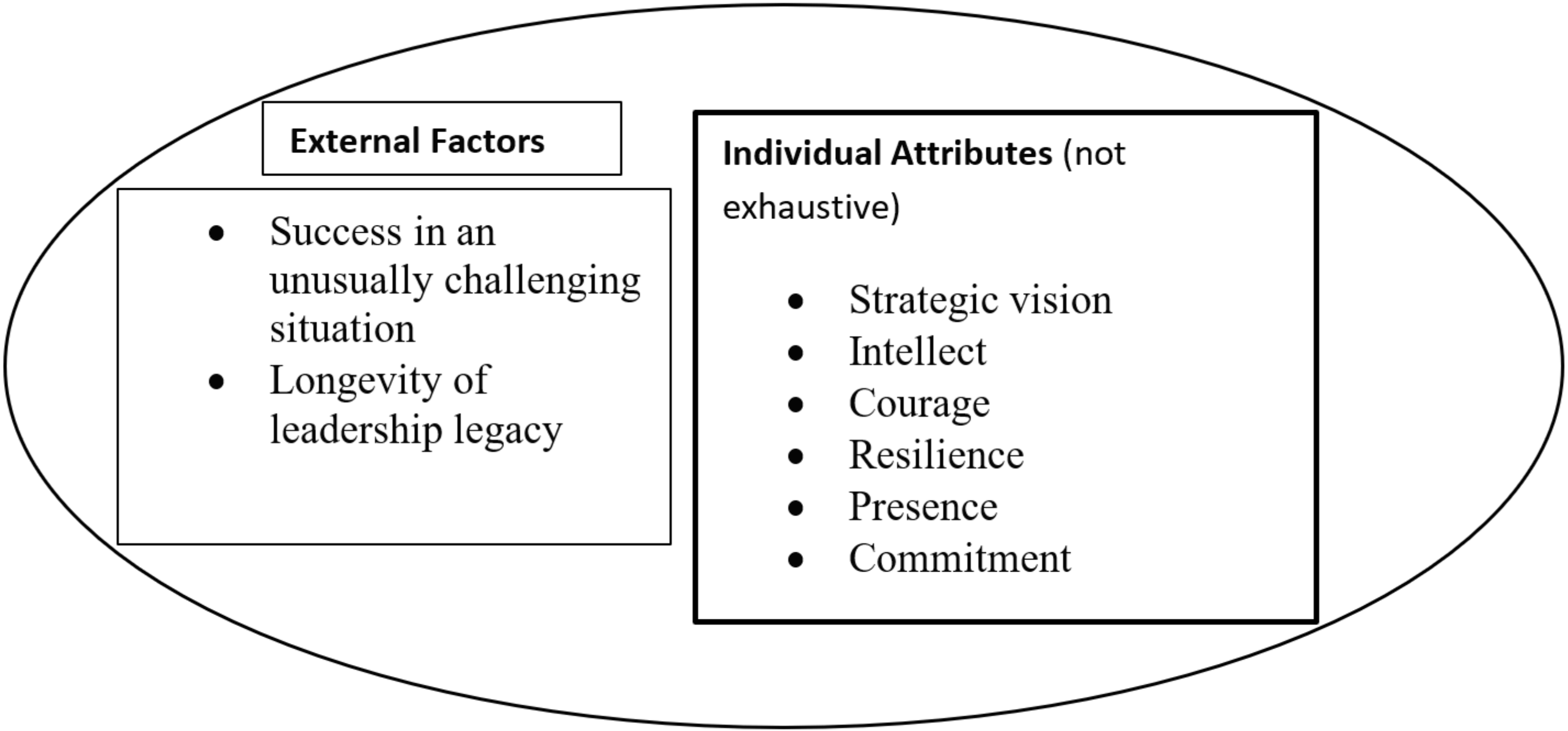
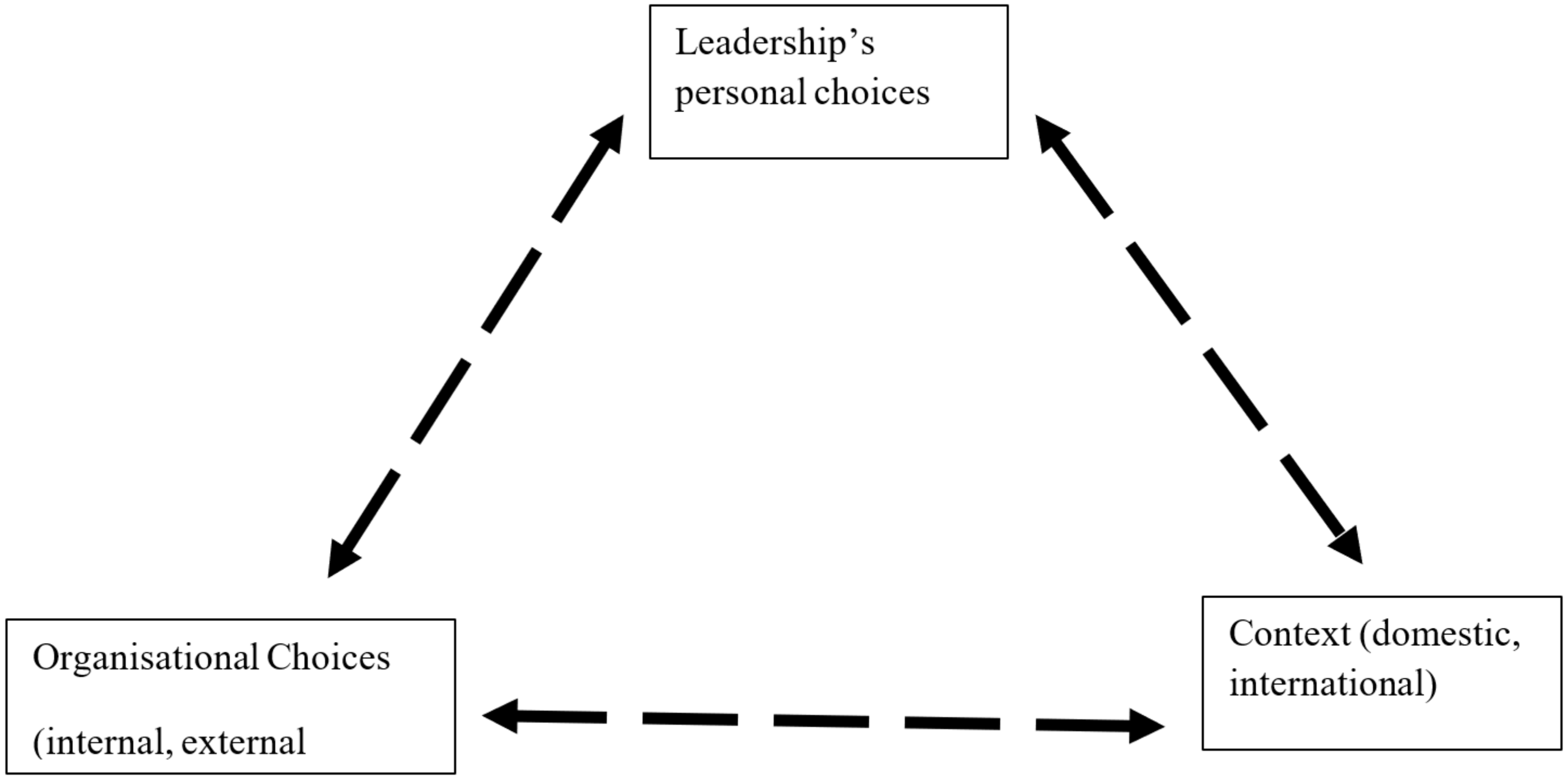


Adapted from Blondel, J., 1987

	Lebanon
Context	Fragile power sharing (PS)
From win-win to lose-lose situation	After agreements constant crisis leads to a trap of two dynamics: from positive to negative – all about the degree of fragility
Exit options	Power sharing as a means
Authority/legitimacy	Volatile and fragile state Constant change of leadership


Leadership's personal choices
Organisational Choices (internal, external
Context (domestic, international)

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The oxymoron of a benevolent authoritarian leadership: the case of Lebanon's Hezbollah and Hassan Nasrallah

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