

Biographical sketch of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah: "The Nasrallah Enigma" 10 Nov. 03

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A Small Glimpse into Nasrallah's World

Lebanon's Hizbullah chieftain, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, is perhaps one of the most enigmatic and magnetic leaders in the Middle East.

It is only in rare instances that he agrees to be interviewed by Western journalists.



As the expected prisoner swap deal between the Lebanese resistance group and Israel seems to be reaching its "final stages" in recent weeks, each and every word that Nasrallah says is being thoroughly analyzed and examined by the Israeli intelligence services.

In the meantime, Nasrallah has been already preparing himself for the "day after" the prisoner exchange with Israel.

A production crew, headed by Syrian scenarist Nabil Al-Milchem has been filming a documentary entitled "The Nasrallah Riddle". Perhaps this movie would shed some light on the secretive world of the Hizbullah (Party of God) leader.

The movie tells the life story of Nasrallah, who was born to a poor family in a camp near Beirut. From a very young age, he was a remarkable student, devoted to the teachings of Islam, and attracted the attention of the heads of the Shiite leadership in Tehran, till the moment he became a leader in his own right in Lebanon.

Hassan Nasrallah is married to Fatima Yassin, who comes from the Al Abbasiyee village. They have three children remained after their elder son Hadi was killed by Israeli forces at the age of 18. Nasrallah's remaining children are Muhammad al Jawad, Zeinab and Muhammad Ali.

During an interview he once gave, Nasrallah spoke of himself as a family man and stated that at home, he enjoyed spending time with his family. He reads many books, especially the memoirs of political personalities. He has read the "Memoirs of (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon" as well as Benjamin Netanyahu's book "A Place under the Sun", with the intention of getting to know his enemies.

The dominant figure in "Nasrallah's Riddle" is that of his mother, who raised him in Lebanon until the family moved to Najaf, the holy city for Shiite Muslims in Iraq. His father, Abd al-Karim, was a wondering merchant who made a living selling fruits and vegetables in villages in Southern Lebanon with the help of Hassan's brothers.

With a slight improvement of their circumstances, the father was able to open a small grocery shop in the neighborhood. Hassan used to visit the shop frequently in order to help, always noticing the picture of Imam Mousa al Sadr hanging on one of the walls. The little child would sit in front of the picture and stare at it, and as Nasrallah recalls, he used to drown into endless dreams. Each time he stared at the picture, his attachment to the Imam increased, and he hoped he would be able to follow his footsteps one day.

Hassan did not look like the other boys in the neighborhood. Those boys used to play football and go swimming, whereas Nasrallah used to go to the mosque in Sin el-Feel area, Bourj Hammoud, or Nabaa, since there was no mosque in Karanteena. Despite his family not being uniquely religious, Hassan, the young boy, was fascinated by religion, where simple practices such as praying and fasting were insufficient for him, and he would go further.

When Hassan was nine years old, he went to the old martyrs' square, known as city center, in order to purchase second hand books, which were displayed at the roadsides or carried on wandering carriages.

He used to read anything that would fall into his hands concerning Islam. When he encountered any difficulties understanding a book, he would place it aside to read it later when he grew up.

He finished his elementary education in "Najah" School, being a member of one of the last groups to obtain a "Certificate". Afterwards, he continued his studies in the public school of Sin el-Feel. The war that began in 1975 forced the family to leave Karanteena and return to the village, where Hassan Nasrallah finished his secondary education at the Sour public school.



Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah making a speech upon the occasion of the liberation of Lebanon from Israel in May 2000. Nasrallah is the only Muslim in history to defeat Israel on the battlefield.

Nasrallah joined the Movement of the Deprived [Amal] at age 15.

When he lived in Karanteena, neither he nor any member of his family belonged to any party, despite the existence of many organizations – some of which were Palestinian – in that region. However, after he returned to his village of Bazouriya, he joined Amal. It was a natural decision for him since he was affectionately attached to Imam Mousa al Sadr. At that time he was 15, and Amal was known by the name of “the movement of the deprived.”

Hassan and his brother Hussein became members of Amal Base, where he became the representative in his village despite his young age. During those times, and within a few months, he decided to travel to Najaf in Iraq to study Koranic divine sciences. At that time, he was below the age of sixteen.

In the mosque of Sour, he met cleric Sayyed Muhammad al Gharawi, who used to teach in the name of Imam Mousa al Sadr, and Hassan spoke to him about his wish to go to Hawza (Islamic Seminary) in Najaf, the village and Shiite religious school, where students chose their teachers, and lived a communal life. Al Gharawi, who knew Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al Sadr in Iraq, sent with Hassan a letter of recommendation to the latter.



Nasrallah's militia is a model for revolutionary organization and discipline as shown here Hezbollah parade at Beirut 29 Nov. 01.

Consequently, Hassan fled to Baghdad and traveled by bus to Najaf. When he reached the city, he had no money on him, not even one penny. However, there is always – as he said – a supportive helping hand. What is more important is that he could bear the life of modesty.

He lived on bread and water, and his bed was a simple mattress.

Upon his arrival, he met some Lebanese people and asked them about the possibility of delivering a letter of recommendation to Ayatullah Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al Sadr, who was one of the Hawza magnates, and they replied that Sayyed Abbas al Musawi is capable of doing so.

At first, Hassan Nasrallah thought that al-Musawi, a dark colored man, was an Iraqi, therefore he spoke to him in classical Arabic. However, al-Musawi had told him, "Don't bother yourself, I am Lebanese, and I come from Nabi Sheeth in the Beqaa." This was the beginning of a strong relationship of friendship and partnership between the two.

According to the request of Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al Sadr, Al-Musawi was appointed to the custody and teaching of the new arrival. After receiving him and reading the letter of recommendation from Sayyed Muhammad al Gharawi, the Iraqi religious pioneer asked him if he had any money.

When Hassan replied "not even one penny", Sayyed Muhammad Baqir al Sadr turned to

Sayyed Abbas al-Musawi and told him, "provide him with a room, be his teacher, and take care of him." He then gave Nasrallah some money to buy clothes and books, in addition to a monthly allowance.

The "Nasrallah Riddle"

The "Nasrallah Riddle" film depicts the steps in which Nasrallah joined Islamic movements, the Iraqi Intelligence's hunt after him, Nasrallah's joining of the Shiite Amal movement, till its dismantling in the mid 1980s, and the establishment of the Hizbullah organization together with Abbas Mussawi, who was assassinated by the Israeli army in 1992. Following Mussawi's killing, Nassrallah was chosen to replace Mussawi as Secretary General of the Hizbullah, which took control of the villages of southern Lebanon.

The movie also shows Hizbullah's attacks against Israel until the Israeli army's withdrawal from southern Lebanon three years ago. The movie reconstructs the death of Hadi, Nasrallah's son and the failed Israeli assassination bid against Nasrallah himself.

Nasrallah wanted to receive congratulations and not condolences following the killing of Hadi. Still, he once said, that as any father, he misses his elder son and lives with the belief Hadi is within the most purified goodness of Allah. Hassan Nasrallah made clear that he lost a dear human being, but he knows that they would meet someday.

"Nasrallah is a riddle in my opinion", Al-Milchem said. "I have been following him with cameras, and have discovered how big his influence is, due to his personal charisma which radiates on his surroundings in Lebanon."

Nasrallah is known for his captivating "charisma", which he believes is a divine gift, and can be developed through education and experience.

Currently, the film's airing has been delayed; however, the production crew predicts that after an agreement will be reached on a prisoner swap with Israel, there will be a great demand for it, especially by international and Arab television channels. The movie is aimed at portraying Nasrallah as a leader that "doesn't neglect the hardships of his Arab and Palestinian people."



By listening to his many vibrant speeches, one can get a clearer idea of what Nasrallah's views are. During one of his speeches, for example, he explained the roots of the "Zionist occupation" and stressed the American colonialism. He explained how the Jews, who came from outside, raped the lands and built settlements in Palestine. He stressed the helping hand of the U.S. to many terrorizing and suppressing organizations in the world with arms, intelligence, training, support, and the most sophisticated American weapons, and highlighted the example of Israel who is, among others, militarily sponsored by the U.S.

In a rare interview with ABC's Nightline with Ted Koppel some three years ago, Nasrallah reiterated his stand regarding Israel, and said, "... where was Israel before the year 1948? During the First World War and Second World War? After World War I, there was Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt. There were two mandates, one British, one French. There was no state called Israel. There was something called Palestine and the Palestinian people.

"...But then violent organizations came, bringing with them many large groups of people from various parts of the world to Palestine. They occupied the land of others, and displaced the Palestinian people, committed massacres... Therefore this state was established on the basis of occupation."

Nasrallah explained,

"I believe that Palestine is an occupied land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and this is the right of the entire Palestinian people, this land. On this land, Muslims, Christians and Jews can coexist together, as they have - as they had for the - for hundreds of years in the framework of a democratic state. However, there is no legal and legitimate state called Israel.

"Would you allow a people to come from somewhere else and occupy a part of the United States, and set up an independent state, and, after 50 years, you would not be able to stay on this land? The initial point is it permissible for them to come and occupy this land or not? What is illegal cannot be legal just because it has been 50 years. Occupation remains occupation, even if it's for hundreds of years.

"Over the last 50 years, the State of Israel has proved that it is an expansionist state, and wants to dominate the region, and it is not convinced of what it has already. It always intervenes in the affairs of the other countries in this region, as it happened in Lebanon.

"I don't believe that - ever since the first day, I don't believe that Israel is a candidate for peace in this region."

Nasrallah also said that if territories would be returned, there would be no wars,

"What we'd like to say is that the occupiers go back to where they came from, for example, the Falashas of Ethiopia can go back to where they came from. They only, they only came to Palestine a few years ago. People of Palestine are expelled. They are in Lebanon, they are in Jordan, they are in Syria. Meanwhile, they are looking for the Falashas of Ethiopia to bring to Palestine. The ones who came from Russia can go back to Russia, in such a manner. If you return the land to the people, there will be no war, or wars.

"This region cannot accept occupation, and the people of this region are ancient peoples, and have historic, historical ties and ancient civilizations.

"And you cannot seize their holy, what they hold holy, this easily. I think the people who occupy Palestine should gain from the example of the Crusaders who also came here. Palestine was subject to the wars of the Crusades for 200 years, and not just fifty.

"In the end", the Hizbullah leader stressed, "no foreign body can continue and survive here. So we can end this without bloodshed from either side."



A Lebanese Billboard reads: "Hezbollah awaits your signal".

With all the secrecy surrounding Nasrallah and the Hizbullah resistance movement, one thing is clear – Hassan Nasrallah has emerged as one of the most influential and powerful forces in the Middle East. He is a leader who endlessly fights for the rights of the Arabs and Palestinian people and his courageousness, charisma and devotion shine through every word he says. Perhaps the "riddle" behind Nasrallah will never be fully solved, but it seems it may also be one of the key sources of his power and true leadership. (Albawaba.com)

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