

The Qur'anic term Hizbullah (mentioned in surahs 5 and 58) refers to the body of Muslim believers who are promised triumph over hizb al-Shaytan (the Devil's party). Thirteen centuries later, the term was reemployed by Iranian Shi'i faithful who described their amorphous political organization as "the Party of God" and claimed to emulate the teachings of Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi Khomeini. The Hizbullah philosophy was summed up nicely in its slogan: "Only one party, the Party of Allah; only one leader, Ruhollah."

The lineage of Hizbullah in Iran can be traced back to a few extreme right-wing organizations, such as the Fid'iy_n-i Isl_m, which were active in the 1940s and 1950s. Like their predecessors, Hizbullah faithful have adhered to a politicized interpretation of Islam and have not shied away from using violent means to achieve their goals. They entered the Iranian political scene during the 1978-1979 revolutionary upheaval of Iran. Recruited mainly from the ranks of the urban poor, the bazaaris, and the lumpenproletariat, the Hizbullahis played an important role in organizing demonstrations and strikes that led to the downfall of the Pahlavi regime. Following the victory of the revolution, they served as the unofficial watchdogs and storm troopers of the clerically dominated Islamic Republican Party (established in 1979 and dissolved in 1987). Considering its amorphous nature and non official status, there is no way one can correctly estimate Hizbullah's numerical strength. However, the fact remains that along with such other (para)military-intelligence apparatuses as the Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami (Revolutionary Guards), komitehs (revolutionary committees), and SAVAMA (the intelligence service), Hizbullah played a crucial role in the consolidation of the new regime.

Often led by the firebrand Hujjat al-Islam Hadi Ghaffari, the Hizbullahis were known to employ clubs, chains, knives, and guns to disrupt the rallies of opposition parties, beat their members, and ransack their offices. The Hizbullahi ruffians, nicknamed by the opposition as

"chumaqdars" (club wielders), were instrumental in the undoing of President Abol-Hasan Banisadr, the closing of the universities, the enforcement of veiling, the suppression of the press, and cowing people into silence. In addition, the Hizbullah provided an inexhaustible pool of faithful warriors who enlisted for the war with Iraq. The recruitment of many of these veterans by such organizations as the Basij (youth volunteers), Jihad-i Sazandigi (Reconstruction Crusade), and Pasdaran has so far prevented the actual establishment of a formal party called Hizbullah. Quite to the contrary, some Hizballahi squads have now been transformed into the private militias of powerful clerics and have even set on each other's benefactors.

The Iranian Hizbullah is reported to have certain transnational links with like-minded groups in the region, in particular with its namesake in Lebanon. The Lebanese Hizbullah was organized, trained, and financed by the Iranian Pasdarans who were dispatched to Lebanon in 1982. The two groups share certain characteristics, such as a militant interpretation of Shi'i doctrines, adoration for Ayatollah Khomeini, anti-Zionism, suspicion of Western governments, and propensity to use violence. Furthermore, some of the leading personalities of these two groups are linked through family ties or can boast of having studied with the same mentors at Najaf and Qom theological seminaries. However, while the Hizbullah of Lebanon operates as a formal political party, the Iranian Hizbullahis for the most part continue to operate as vigilante bands. Nonetheless, in both countries, they have proven themselves forces to be reckoned with.

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- [See also Fida'iyān-i Islam, Iranian Revolution of 1979, Islamic Republican Party, Komiteh, Sipah-i Pasdaran-i Inqilab-i Islami, and the biography of Khomeini.]