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Hizbullah, Hamas, and the "Arab Spring"—Weathering the Regional Storm?

Benedetta Berti

Benedetta Berti *is a research associate at the Institute for National Security Studies specializing in terrorism and political violence in the Middle East, radical Islamic organizations, and Palestinian and Lebanese politics. She holds a PhD from the Fletcher School at Tufts University. Among her other publications Dr. Berti is the co-author (with Joshua L. Gleis) of* Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study, *just published by Johns Hopkins University Press.*

Over the past eighteen months, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has experienced fast-paced and pervasive social and political change. The popular protests that have characterized the so-called Arab Spring delivered a powerful blow to the status quo, affecting states and political, military, and social organizations alike.

How the Arab Spring has affected Hizbullah and Hamas' outlooks and strategies is a question of no little importance to the future of this region. It is worth examining how these groups have adapted to the new political and security environment in the MENA region.

There is in fact a relatively widespread belief that the shifts in the regional balance of power and the steady rise of political Islam have benefitted groups like Hamas or Hizbullah. Although there may be some truth to this assessment, it is overly simplistic, downplaying crucial differences between local political processes and the distinct Islamist parties. Instead, the balance sheet of the Arab Spring is far more mixed, bringing opportunities as well as posing serious challenges to both Hizbullah and Hamas.

Moreover, Hizbullah and Hamas, both of them multi-layered organizations, have responded differently to the regional "awakening." So far, it seems that Hamas has been able to cope with the ongoing process of change more successfully, while Hizbullah has been experiencing more substantial and even profound challenges.

Hizbullah and the "Arab Spring"—The Ground is Shaking

A summary review of the political trajectory of Hizbullah since the beginning of the Arab Spring could lead to the belief that the group has not been negatively affected by the ongoing regional change.

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