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The Role Of Non-State Actors In Shaping Regional Hegemony: The Case Of Hezbollah In Lebanon And Iran's Influence

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Abstract

Traditional state-centric security paradigms have undergone major change, especially in the Middle East, as non-state actors have become more prominent in international affairs. Hezbollah, which was first established in the early 1980s as a resistance movement against Israeli occupation, has developed into a potent hybrid organization that functions in Lebanon as both a political force and a violent group. It has been able to expand its influence outside of Lebanon's boundaries and shape the geopolitical landscape of the region because to its strategic relationships, particularly with Iran and Syria. This paper examines Hezbollah's involvement in regional crises, and evaluates how Hezbollah has evolved from a regional resistance organization to a significant force in Middle Eastern geopolitics by closely examining its political tactics, military prowess, and ideological underpinnings. The analysis also takes into account Hezbollah's influence in asymmetric warfare tactics that oppose conventional military forces, its involvement in the larger Iran-Saudi rivalry, and its effect on internal politics in Lebanon.

Through the integration of viewpoints from conflict studies, international relations theory, and regional geopolitics, this paper emphasizes Hezbollah's distinct status as a non-state actor with the ability to wield substantial political and military power. The ultimate goal of the research is to further the knowledge of how non-state actors, especially those with transnational linkages and military prowess, alter regional security frameworks and threaten state sovereignty in the modern Middle East. Hezbollah's complex role in influencing regional security dynamics is thoroughly examined in this paper. It contends that the distinction between state and non-state power is becoming increasingly hazy in Middle Eastern geopolitics due to Hezbollah's flexibility, ideological tenacity, and strategic partnerships. In order to evaluate future conflict trends, the regional power dynamics, and the likelihood of stability in a geopolitical context that is becoming more unstable, it is imperative to comprehend Hezbollah's trajectory.

Key Words:

Hezbollah, Lebanon, Hybrid Warfare, Proxy Warfare, Middle Eastern Geopolitics, Sectarianism, Asymmetric Warfare, Security Dilemma, Resistance Axis, Shia Crescent,

Introduction

The role of non-state actors in modern international relations has changed significantly, upending conventional state-centric theories of world politics. In the past, nations were thought to be the main players in international relations, and the world order was defined by their sovereignty, territorial control, and centralized governance (Josselin & Wallace, 2001b). However, the nature of conflict, security, and governance has changed due to the growing involvement of non-state actors, such as terrorist networks, paramilitary groups, insurgent groups, and transnational movements (Wijninga et al., 2014). These organizations frequently function outside of traditional state frameworks, using economic, political, military,

and ideological tools to exert dominance. By doing this, they subvert the power of sovereign states, mold the dynamics of regional and international security, and affect international relations.

In the Middle East, a region marked by protracted battles, shifting alliances, and intricate geopolitical rivalries, the influence of non-state players is more evident than anywhere else. Hezbollah is one of the most significant non-state actors in this unstable environment. Hezbollah first established itself as a resistance force against Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon during the Lebanese Civil War in the early 1980s (Norton, 2007). But in the last forty years, the group has changed into a hybrid that functions as a political party, an armed militia, and a social service provider all at the same time. Because of its multifaceted character, Hezbollah is able to influence events on a number of levels in Lebanon and the larger Middle East. It's strong ties to Iran are among the main reasons for its ascent to prominence in the area. Tehran has provided Hezbollah with substantial financial, military, and ideological assistance, making it a fundamental component of Iran's foreign policy strategy (CFR.org Editors, 2024). Hezbollah has been strategically employed by Iran to extend its influence outside of its boundaries, especially in Syria and Lebanon, where the organization has been crucial to furthering Iranian objectives (Masters, 2025).

Hezbollah has become one of the most potent non-state organizations in the world as a result of this patron-client relationship, able to conduct protracted military operations and influence regional political events. Furthermore, Hezbollah's dedication to fighting Western influence, facing Israel, and advancing Iran's larger geopolitical goals has been strengthened by its ideological affinities with Iran's revolutionary theory (Raouf, 2019).

Beyond its connections to Iran, Hezbollah has a long-standing animosity with Israel, which has influenced its identity and methods of operation. Hezbollah's military prowess and capacity to fight asymmetric warfare against a technologically superior foe were made evident during the pivotal 2006 Lebanon War (Rabinovich, 2019). Israel launched a fierce air and ground attack, but Hezbollah survived the war unscathed, solidifying its standing as a tough and well-trained armed organization. The conflict also demonstrated the shortcomings of traditional military tactics in dealing with non-state actors, underscoring the growing importance of hybrid warfare, which blends traditional military strategies with cyber operations, psychological warfare, and guerrilla warfare (BBC News, 2025).

Hezbollah's regional aspirations go beyond its dispute with Israel. Its strategic direction underwent a significant change with its engagement in the Syrian civil war. The survival of the Syrian government against rebel forces was largely dependent on Hezbollah, which sent thousands of fighters to defend the Assad administration (Longley, 2022). The Assad government was reinforced by this involvement, which also increased Iran's influence in Syria and bolstered "Shia Crescent"—a geopolitical axis that connects Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut (Kausch, 2014). But there were also serious consequences from Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, including heightened sectarian tensions and a heightened rivalry with Sunni-majority nations like Saudi Arabia (Raouf, 2019). The group's intervention exacerbated the Sunni-Shia divide in Middle Eastern politics by alienating Sunni communities throughout the region and escalating conflicts with Gulf Arab states.

Moreover, Hezbollah's involvement in international criminal activities, including drug trafficking, money laundering, and arms smuggling, has highlighted its intricate and varied character. The organization can continue to operate, finance its military campaigns, and retain political clout in Lebanon thanks to its vast financial networks (Masters, 2025). Significant international attention has also been dedicated to these activities; nations like the US have classified Hezbollah as a terrorist group and placed severe economic restrictions on its affiliates and members (Pierman, 2015). Hezbollah has still persisted in changing and growing its power, using its political standing in Lebanon and its international alliances to keep its place as a major regional power broker. The emergence of Hezbollah as an influential non-state actor puts established theories of international relations which have traditionally placed a higher priority on state sovereignty and official diplomatic contacts to the test. The group's capacity to function both inside and outside of state systems challenges accepted notions of government, security, and geopolitical rivalry. Through an analysis of Hezbollah's development, strategic alliances, and military operations, this study aims to clarify the wider roles that non-state entities play in influencing modern international politics.

Research Questions:

1. How has Hezbollah evolved from a militant resistance group into a key political and military actor in the Middle East?
2. What role has Iran played in shaping Hezbollah's military and political trajectory?
3. How has Hezbollah's involvement in regional conflicts, particularly in Syria, influenced its strategic position and alliances?
4. In what ways has Hezbollah's hybrid nature combining political, military, and transnational activities challenged traditional conceptions of state sovereignty and international security?
5. How do Hezbollah's confrontations with Israel and its role in the Sunni-Shia geopolitical rivalry impact regional stability in the Middle East?

Literature Review:

Numerous scholarly and policy-focused studies have examined Hezbollah's position in Lebanon and its wider regional ramifications. Hezbollah has been examined by academics from a variety of angles, such as its development as an armed non-state actor, its political function in Lebanon, its ideological underpinnings, and its engagement in regional conflicts. This examination of the literature looks at what has been written about Hezbollah's history, political and military aspects, outside connections, and effects on regional stability and Lebanese state sovereignty.

Analysis has focused on Hezbollah's beginnings and development, especially in relation to its creation in reaction to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Early research, including that by Norton (2007) and Azani (2009), describes how Hezbollah came to be a Shia militia supported by Iran that was dedicated to opposing Israeli occupation and furthering the Iranian state's revolutionary goals. Harb and Leenders (2005) have drawn attention to Hezbollah's development into a highly developed military and political entity, contending that its capacity to offer a wide range of social services has bolstered its legitimacy in Lebanon. Cammett (2014), who investigates Hezbollah's welfare networks and their function in gaining political support among Lebanese civilians, supports this viewpoint.

Another important topic of research has been Hezbollah's political involvement, with academics investigating at how the group has assimilated into the Lebanese political system. Hezbollah's ideology and transition from an armed resistance group to an active political organization that engages in electoral politics while retaining its militant skills are examined by Saad-Ghorayeb (2002). The literature frequently discusses the need for Hezbollah to strike a balance between its military and political responsibilities, especially in light of the 2008 Doha Agreement, which, as Blanford (2011) points out, gave the organization substantial political clout by guaranteeing its control over governmental choices. The extent to which Hezbollah functions inside or outside of the state's jurisdiction is called into question by this dichotomy of roles.

Hezbollah's military aspect has been extensively researched, with scholars highlighting the group's military prowess and strategic flexibility. According to Byman (2015), Hezbollah is a "hybrid force" that combines guerilla and conventional warfare strategies; this ability was proven during the 2006 Lebanon War. Hezbollah's capacity to resist the Israeli forces and its tenacity during the fight are documented by Harel and Issacharoff (2008). Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian Civil War, where its military engagement was crucial in bolstering the Assad administration, is the subject of more recent research by Smyth (2015) and Lister (2016). These reports demonstrate how Hezbollah's regional activities have increased its sway outside of Lebanon and brought it closer to Iran's overarching strategic objectives.

Discussions on Hezbollah's place in regional geopolitics have focused heavily on the group's foreign connections, especially its connections with Iran and Syria. According to Levitt (2013), Hezbollah serves as a crucial stand-in for Iran, furthering Tehran's geopolitical goals throughout the Middle East. Takeyh (2009) goes into further detail about this relationship, highlighting Iran's military and ideological backing for Hezbollah. Phillips (2016) discusses how Hezbollah's military involvement in Syria have strengthened the Assad regime and widened sectarian divisions in the region. The relationship between Hezbollah and Syria has also been the subject of much analysis.

The impact of Hezbollah on Lebanese sovereignty has been extensively studied in the literature, which debates whether the group's actions support or threaten the government. Hezbollah's independent military operations, according to Salloukh (2017), pose a threat to Lebanon's sovereignty because they are not under official supervision. Similarly, Hezbollah maintains parallel security and governance systems that operate

independently of the official Lebanese government, referring to itself as a "state within a state" (Hamzeh, 2004). Daher (2019) contends that Hezbollah's regional activities, especially in Syria, have worsened economic instability and fueled internal strife in Lebanon.

In the larger framework of Middle Eastern security dynamics, Hezbollah's regional significance has been examined outside of Lebanon. As part of Iran's regional policy, Hezbollah trains and supports ally militias in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, according to Wehrey (2018) and Ehteshami (2017). These academics point out how Hezbollah's activities have exacerbated geopolitical tensions with the US, Saudi Arabia, and Israel—all of whom view the organization as a serious security concern. Berti (2015) delves deeper into the effects of Hezbollah's military actions on regional security, contending that the organization's growing engagement in wars outside of Lebanon has altered the balance of power in the Middle East.

When everything is considered, Hezbollah's development and impact on Lebanon and the surrounding area are thoroughly understood thanks to the body of current literature. Although there is general consensus about Hezbollah's military and political importance, there are still disagreements among academics about how it affects Lebanese sovereignty, its long-term regional goals, and how its military actions affect Middle Eastern security. Building on these conversations, this paper examines the wider geopolitical implications of Hezbollah's changing role in Lebanon's political and security environment.

Theoretical Framework:

A thorough theoretical framework incorporating aspects of constructivism, realism, and hybrid warfare theory is required for the study of Hezbollah as a non-state player in the international system. State actors have been the main analytical units in traditional international relations (IR) theories. But traditional state-centric paradigms are being challenged by the growing power of non-state actors like Hezbollah. This section examines how Hezbollah's ascent, strategic actions, and influence on regional security dynamics may be explained by several theoretical stances, including constructivism, realism, and hybrid warfare theory.

1. **Realism and the Role of Power Politics:** One of the most prevalent theories in international relations, realism, offers a critical perspective for comprehending Hezbollah's strategic moves and its place in the balance of power in the region. Realist theorists like Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz contend that nations (or other powerful actors) aim to increase their security and influence through the accumulation of power, making the international system anarchic (Waltz, 1979). Hezbollah operates as a quasi-state player in this situation, balancing against regional enemies and furthering the objectives of its main backer, Iran. Hezbollah's militarized growth and operations, especially in Syria, Lebanon, and its conflicts with Israel, can be viewed from a structural realism standpoint as attempts to improve its strategic positioning. The realist idea of external balancing is in line with Iran's backing of Hezbollah; Tehran utilizes the group to offset the influence of Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the West in the area (CFR.org Editors, 2024). Furthermore, Hezbollah's military prowess and asymmetric warfare strategies against Israel during the 2006 conflict demonstrate its capacity to use strategic deterrence to oppose a state that is traditionally superior (Rabinovich, 2019). Furthermore, Hezbollah's dual role in Lebanon as a military force and a political party may be explained by neoclassical realism, which takes into account both internal and systemic forces. As a strategic response to both internal and external challenges, its involvement in Lebanon's governance serves as a tool for power consolidation and long-term survival (Hezbollah: A Short History, 2018). Therefore, realism provides a strong justification for Hezbollah's actions as a logical actor attempting to optimize security and power in a hostile and competitive regional setting.
2. **Constructivism and Ideological Identity:** While constructivism explains how identity, ideology, and social structures shape Hezbollah's behaviors, realism sheds light on the organization's power-centric conduct. International politics, according to constructivist academics like Alexander Wendt, is shaped by ideas, beliefs, and identities in addition to practical power (Wendt, 1999). Shiite political Islam, anti-Zionism, and opposition to perceived Western hegemony—especially that of the US and Israel—are fundamental components of Hezbollah's ideology (Raouf, 2019). The constructivist emphasis on narratives and identity building becomes apparent by Hezbollah's self-identification as a "resistance movement" as opposed to a just militant organization. By employing symbolic language and religious authority to support its acts, the organization has successfully presented its battle as a component of a larger ideological and theological conflict (Norton, 2007). Hezbollah's legitimacy has been strengthened beyond military prowess thanks to this identity-driven strategy, which has allowed it to rally support among regional allies and within Lebanese Shiite communities. Furthermore, Hezbollah's ties to Iran stem from common religious and intellectual beliefs as well as material objectives. The core of

Hezbollah's ideological ties to Tehran is the idea of Wilayat al-Faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist), which is the basis of Iran's political structure. The reason Hezbollah continues to adhere to Iran's strategic vision in spite of the political and economic consequences can be explained by this constructivist viewpoint (Masters, 2025). Furthermore, Hezbollah's engagement in Syria demonstrates how ideological discourses change to support tactical adjustments. Hezbollah, which was first established as a resistance organization against Israel, changed the name of its operation in Syria to one that defended Shiite sacred places and fought against extremist organizations, especially those associated with Sunni jihadism. The constructivist claim that political actors alter identities and narratives to suit changing strategic requirements is shown by this ideological flexibility (Longley, 2022).

3. **Hybrid Warfare and Asymmetric Strategies:** Another essential theoretical framework for examining Hezbollah's military tactics and operational efficacy is the idea of hybrid warfare. Frank Hoffman defines hybrid warfare as combining informational, cyber, irregular, and conventional warfare strategies to accomplish strategic goals (Hoffman, 2007). Hezbollah is a prime example of this strategy since it can function as both an insurgent organization and a conventional military force, changing its strategies to oppose stronger state armies like Israel's. An important example of hybrid warfare is the 2006 Lebanon War, in which Hezbollah effectively repelled an Israeli military operation by combining information warfare, missile attacks, and guerilla warfare (Rabinovich, 2019). Hezbollah evolved into a hybrid actor by integrating advanced weapons, subterranean bunkers, and cyber capabilities, in contrast to classic insurgencies that only use hit-and-run tactics (BBC News, 2025). Hezbollah's hybrid nature extends beyond its armed activities to include social service delivery and administration. Throughout order to increase its legitimacy and public support, the group runs hospitals, schools, and welfare programs throughout Lebanon by establishing a parallel state structure (Hezbollah: A Short History, 2018). Because it blurs the boundaries between the political, civilian, and military spheres, this dual function as a military and social player makes counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts more difficult. Furthermore, Hezbollah's participation in international criminal activities, such as arms smuggling and money laundering, illustrates another aspect of hybrid warfare: financial and economic operations that support militant activity (Pierman, 2015). Hezbollah is able to evade international sanctions and maintain long-term operational capabilities because of the financial independence these illegal networks give it (Masters, 2025).

Historical Background and Evolution of Hezbollah:

The historical, political, and sectarian dynamics of Lebanon and the larger Middle East are fundamental to the rise of Hezbollah. Hezbollah was created in the early 1980s in reaction to a confluence of regional ideological changes, external interventions, and internal grievances. Important historical occurrences like as the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982), the Iranian Revolution (1979), and Syria's strategic interests in Lebanon all influenced its transformation from a violent resistance group into a potent political and military organization. Hezbollah has evolved over the years from a divided militia to a major player in regional conflicts and a dominant presence in Lebanese politics.

- **Origins and Formation (1982–1990):** In response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which sought to drive out the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and impose authority over southern Lebanon, Hezbollah was formally founded. The Lebanese Shia community, who had long been excluded from the nation's sectarian political structure, became even more resentful after the invasion and occupation. The ideological underpinnings of Hezbollah were also significantly shaped by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, as Iran's newly formed Islamic Republic attempted to spread its revolutionary ideas to Shia communities around the region. Hezbollah became a militant organization committed to opposing Israeli occupation and creating an Islamic state in Lebanon with direct financial and military assistance from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) (Norton, 2007). Hezbollah waged guerilla warfare against Israeli soldiers and the South Lebanon Army (SLA), an affiliated militia, during the 1980s. High-profile acts, including as the 1983 bombings of the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, which led to the evacuation of American and French forces from Lebanon, also made the group prominent (Levitt, 2013). Hezbollah's worldview at the time was overtly anti-Western and closely mirrored Iran's revolutionary philosophy. As part of its larger plan to put pressure on foreign nations to withdraw from Lebanon, the group also participated in hostage-taking operations, specifically targeting Western journalists and diplomats.

- **Consolidation and Institutionalization (1990–2000):** After the Taif Agreement was put into effect and the Lebanese Civil War ended in 1990, Hezbollah had to deal with a new political landscape. The accord ordered other militias to disband, however Hezbollah was exempt from this requirement, citing its ongoing resistance to Israeli occupation as justification. The organization changed its approach in the 1990s from being a purely militant group to actively engaging in Lebanon's political system. Schools, hospitals, and welfare programs were all part of its strong social services network, which greatly boosted its support among Shia people in Lebanon (Cammett, 2014). A significant turning point in Hezbollah's development occurred in 1992 when it placed its representation in Lebanon's parliamentary elections. When Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah took over in 1992 following the murder of Abbas al-Musawi, Hezbollah was better able to strike a balance between its political and military responsibilities. In spite of its involvement in Lebanese politics, Hezbollah continued to engage in military resistance, regularly engaging Israeli forces in combat in southern Lebanon. Hezbollah claimed triumph for its resistance strategy when Israel unilaterally withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000, a result of the group's military prowess (Byman, 2015).
- **Regional Expansion and the 2006 Lebanon War:** Hezbollah progressively positioned itself as the defender of Lebanese sovereignty after Israel withdrew. But tensions with Israel continued, and sporadic cross-border clashes resulted. The 2006 Lebanon War, which was brought on by Hezbollah's seizure of two Israeli soldiers during a cross-border assault, was the most important of these. Hezbollah strongholds were the target of intense Israeli bombardment during the 34-day conflict, which left Lebanon in ruins. Despite its casualties, Hezbollah came out of the conflict with a better reputation as a strong military organization that could resist an Israeli attack (Harel & Issacharoff, 2008). Additionally, the battle strengthened Hezbollah's position in the area by garnering broad support from Shia groups throughout the Middle East. Hezbollah's connections with Iran and Syria grew stronger during this time. Syria acted as a vital logistical hub for the delivery of weaponry, while Iran continued to offer military and financial support. Additionally, Hezbollah started to increase its power in the area by providing allied parties with military assistance and training, especially in Palestine and Iraq (Phillips, 2016).
- **Intervention in Syria and Regional Role (2011–Present):** Another pivotal point in Hezbollah's development was the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011. Hezbollah actively supported the Assad regime against opposition groups, in contrast to its prior confrontations, which were mostly directed against Israel. The justification for Hezbollah's engagement in Syria was to defend Shia holy sites and fight extremist organizations like ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Its participation was, nevertheless, partly motivated by strategic concerns, since Hezbollah's supply routes from Iran through Syria depended on the Assad regime's existence (Lister, 2016). Hezbollah's military involvement in Syria fundamentally changed the organization's regional status, turning it from a resistance organization based in Lebanon into a transnational player engaged in several conflicts. Additionally, the organization extended its activities into Yemen and Iraq, where it trained and supplied logistical support to militias supported by Iran. Tensions with Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the US increased as a result of these moves, which further positioned Hezbollah within Iran's larger regional strategy (Wehrey, 2018). In Lebanon, Hezbollah's expanding political and military power has drawn more and more criticism, especially from rival Lebanese groups who contend that its activities threaten Lebanon's independence. Lebanese society's disagreements over Hezbollah's position were further revealed by the 2019 protests and the ensuing economic crisis. The group's participation in regional conflicts has increased political divisiveness in Lebanon, despite the fact that it still enjoys a sizable following within its Shia base (Daher, 2019).

Hezbollah's Political and Military Strategies:

The key to Hezbollah's survival and growth has been its capacity to operate as both a military group and a political party. The group has evolved a complex dual strategy over the years, which enables it to affect the political climate in Lebanon as well as the larger regional security scene. To maintain legitimacy and solidify power, Hezbollah uses a combination of social welfare initiatives, political engagement, strategic partnerships, and armed resistance. This section examines Hezbollah's military and political tactics, showing how the organization has balanced both functions to keep its place as a major regional player and a dominant force in Lebanon.

Military Strategies: Resistance and Asymmetrical Warfare: Hezbollah's identity as a "resistance" movement, which was first established to oppose Israeli occupation, is the foundation of its military strategy. Iranian and Syrian military methods, especially the employment of asymmetrical warfare, guerilla tactics, and hybrid military operations, have a significant influence on the group's military theory.

- **Guerrilla Warfare and Asymmetrical Tactics:** Hezbollah has used asymmetrical warfare since its founding to make up for its military lack of strength in comparison to traditional state armies such as the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Hezbollah fighters targeted Israeli forces in southern Lebanon in the 1990s and early 2000s using improvised explosive devices (IEDs), ambushes, and hit-and-run attacks. Hezbollah presented Israel's 2000 departure as a victory of resistance due to the methods' eventual effectiveness (Byman, 2015).
- **Missile and Rocket Warfare:** With direct assistance from Iran and Syria, Hezbollah has greatly increased its missile and rocket capabilities over time. The group proved it could do harm far inside enemy lines during the 2006 Lebanon War by launching thousands of missiles into Israeli territory. The regional military balance has been drastically changed by Hezbollah's arsenal, which consists of medium-range Fajr missiles, short-range Katyusha rockets, and more sophisticated precision-guided weaponry (Harel & Issacharoff, 2008). Hezbollah's military strategy against Israel continues to be based on this deterrence capability.
- **Entrenchment in Syria and Regional Operations:** A significant change in Hezbollah's military strategy was brought about by its engagement in the Syrian Civil War. The group actively participated in counterinsurgency operations to support the Assad regime rather than concentrating just on resistance against Israel. Hezbollah soldiers proved their capacity to carry out coordinated military operations on foreign land by playing a significant role in pivotal engagements like the 2013 recapture of Qusayr (Lister, 2016). Since then, the organization has increased its military might by supplying Iranian-backed militias in Yemen, Palestine, and Iraq with logistical support and training.
- **Cyber and Psychological Warfare:** Hezbollah has created psychological operations and cyberwarfare capabilities in addition to traditional military tactics to sway public opinion. The organization successfully disseminates propaganda, creates narratives, and rallies support through media platforms like Al-Manar TV. In order to undermine political rivals and preserve its credibility in Lebanon and among the larger Shia community, it also runs disinformation campaigns (Levitt, 2013).

Political Strategies: Integration and Domination: Hezbollah has undertaken a strategic political approach to gain control of Lebanon's sectarian system in tandem with its military endeavors. The group has been able to preserve its independent military branch while gaining credibility thanks to this strategy.

- **Participation in Electoral Politics:** In 1992, Hezbollah participated in parliamentary elections, marking its official entry into Lebanese politics. The group understood the strategic importance of obtaining political representation, despite its initial reluctance to interact with Lebanon's sectarian system. Hezbollah has progressively increased its influence in Lebanon's government since then, gaining ministerial posts and parliamentary seats. Hezbollah has a legal framework to function inside the state while retaining its armed capabilities outside of official authority because to this political integration (Cammett, 2014).
- **Alliance-Building and Coalition Politics:** To increase its dominance, Hezbollah has deliberately allied itself with a number of Lebanese political groups. In order to build a strong Shia bloc in Lebanon, its main ally is the Amal Movement, another Shia political organization. Furthermore, in an effort to increase its power across sectarian boundaries, Hezbollah has formed partnerships with Christian organizations like the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) (Daher, 2019). Hezbollah has been able to overcome resistance from Sunni and Western-backed groups while navigating Lebanon's complicated political environment because to these relationships.
- **State within a State: Parallel Governance Structures:** The establishment of a parallel government that functions separately from the Lebanese government has proven to be one of Hezbollah's most successful political tactics. Especially in Shia-majority areas, the group operates a vast network of social services, such as healthcare, education, and financial aid programs. Hezbollah has strengthened its base of support and encouraged loyalty among its supporters by offering crucial services that the Lebanese government frequently falls short of providing (Cammett, 2014). Hezbollah's political power is increased and its autonomy is reinforced by this parallel government.
- **Control over Security Institutions:** Hezbollah has been able to establish itself as Lebanon's main security actor, frequently taking precedence over the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Because of the group's strong

hold on Lebanon's security and intelligence infrastructure, the government finds it challenging to stop its military operations. Despite recurring demands for disarmament, this de facto control guarantees that Hezbollah maintains its armaments and operational autonomy (Phillips, 2016).

- **Blocking Political Opponents and Shaping Policy:** Hezbollah has blocked decisions and programs that jeopardize its interests by using its political clout. The group has frequently blocked attempts to reduce its military operations and other steps that would harm its standing in Lebanon's government by exercising its veto power. Additionally, it has had a significant influence on Lebanon's foreign policy, especially on how the nation views Israel, Syria, and Iran (Daher, 2019).

Hezbollah's Role in Regional Conflicts:

In line with Iran's geopolitical goals, Hezbollah has transformed from a militant organization based in Lebanon to a significant regional player, expanding its influence in several war areas. Its military might, political goals, and ideological underpinnings are demonstrated by its actions in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine. Hezbollah gains regional prestige and strengthens Iran's influence in West Asia by participating in these wars, frequently at the expense of rising sectarian and geopolitical tensions.

1. **Syria: Defending the Assad Regime:** Hezbollah's most significant and direct military action took place in Syria, where it was instrumental in protecting the Assad government from terrorist organizations and opposition forces. Hezbollah officially entered the conflict in 2013 when it fought alongside Syrian government forces to recover key locations during the Battle of Qusayr. In addition to guaranteeing ongoing Iranian backing and strengthening the "Axis of Resistance" against Israel and forces affiliated with the West, this action was essential in protecting supply routes between Syria and Lebanon. In addition to stabilizing the Assad government, Hezbollah's presence in Syria has increased its operational capabilities over time, transforming it into a more advanced and resilient force. Sunni groups in Lebanon, however, are against Hezbollah's military engagement abroad, and this involvement has also heightened tensions within the country.
2. **Iraq: Supporting Shiite Militias:** Hezbollah has supported Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq, especially during the war against ISIS, in a more subtle but important way. Tehran's influence in Iraq has grown as a result of its provision of military instruction, strategic direction, and logistical support to the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). The capacities of the Shiite militias have been strengthened by this aid, but it has also increased sectarian tensions and attracted attention from Israel and the US. Targeting Hezbollah members in Iraq, the United States sees their actions as a component of Iran's larger regional destabilization campaign.
3. **Palestine: Backing Armed Resistance Against Israel:** For a long time, Hezbollah has positioned itself as a major backer of Palestinian resistance organizations, such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas. It has given these organizations financial support, training, and weapons, which has improved their capacity to wage asymmetric warfare against Israel. Hezbollah's support for Palestinian resistance advances the organization's popular legitimacy in the larger Arab and Muslim world in addition to advancing Iran's anti-Israel goal. The 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon solidified Hezbollah's standing as a powerful resistance movement by showcasing its military readiness and capacity to thwart Israeli assaults. Its strengthening relations with Palestinian groups, however, have also resulted in more Israeli military operations, such as the killing of important agents and focused attacks on Hezbollah facilities.
4. **Yemen: Supporting the Houthi Insurgency:** Hezbollah has provided strategic advice to the Houthi rebels in Yemen in their fight against the Saudi-led coalition. According to reports, Hezbollah has helped the Houthis carry out complex strikes against Saudi and Emirati sites by giving them military training, intelligence, and potentially cutting-edge missile technology. Although this engagement has heightened regional tensions, it also supports Iran's overarching goal of undermining Saudi influence in the area. As a result of the Houthis' growing military prowess—which is partially attributable to Hezbollah's assistance—cross-border strikes on Saudi Arabia have increased, further destabilizing the Gulf area.
5. **Strategic Implications:** Hezbollah is now a major actor in West Asian geopolitics as a result of its involvement in various regional conflicts, which have greatly increased its operational reach and impact. But there is a price for this expansion. Hezbollah has improved its military might and fortified its ties, but its participation in several wars has also drawn criticism from around the world, led to harsher sanctions, and heightened tensions in the area. Additionally, Hezbollah's extensive involvement in overseas conflicts has sparked criticism within Lebanon, where detractors claim that the group's activities endanger national stability and lure the nation into outside conflicts. Hezbollah's involvement in these conflicts will continue to be a significant aspect in the changing power dynamics of West Asia as it continues to influence the regional security environment. Iran's strategic aims, the shifting power

dynamics in Syria and Iraq, and the ongoing wars with Israel will probably all have an impact on its future interactions.

International Perceptions and Responses

International responses to Hezbollah's expanding power in West Asia have been diverse and have been influenced by regional alliances, geopolitical interests, and security concerns. Some actors see Hezbollah as a legitimate resistance movement, while others see it as a proxy for Iran's regional aspirations and a disruptive force. Economic sanctions, military conflicts, diplomatic engagements, and legal designations as terrorist organizations have all been part of the international response.

- **Western Responses: Sanctions and Counterterrorism Measures:** Hezbollah has long been considered a terrorist group by the US and its Western allies, who point to its participation in militant activities, such as strikes against Israeli and Western targets. In order to disrupt Hezbollah's financial networks, the United States has imposed a number of sanctions on people and institutions connected to its funding sources. Similar limits have been placed on Hezbollah's military wing by the European Union (EU), which has classified it as a terrorist organization and maintained a separation between its armed and political wings. Because Hezbollah is suspected of participating in illegal financial activities throughout Africa and Latin America, Western intelligence services have also stepped up their attempts to restrict the organization's influence outside of the Middle East.
- **Israel's View: An Existential Threat:** Hezbollah is viewed by Israel as one of the biggest regional security threats. The group's increasing military might, especially its collection of sophisticated drones and missiles, has escalated fighting along the Israeli-Lebanese border. Israel has targeted Hezbollah's weapons caches and supply lines in Syria and Lebanon with preemptive bombings during the 2006 conflict. Israeli defense leaders view Hezbollah's presence in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon as an outgrowth of Iranian power, which leads to recurring military conflicts and intelligence operations intended to sabotage its operations.
- **Iran's Patronage: A Key Regional Ally:** A key ally for Hezbollah is Iran, which offers significant military, financial, and logistical support. Hezbollah is a key part of Tehran's Axis of Resistance, a network intended to offset Israeli and American dominance in the area. By extending Iranian influence in the wars in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen and serving as a deterrence against Israeli invasion, Hezbollah has benefited Iran's strategic objectives. However, Gulf governments and Western countries have strongly opposed this connection, which has prompted increased measures to undermine Hezbollah's military and financial capabilities.
- **Arab States: Divisions and Strategic Interests:** Different Arab states still have distinct views about Hezbollah. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf states view Hezbollah as an Iranian proxy endangering regional security, notwithstanding Syria and Iraq's cooperation with the group, which they see as a stabilizing force against extremist groups. Hezbollah has been labeled a terrorist organization by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which has also imposed financial sanctions to limit its impact and expelled Lebanese citizens who may have had ties to the group. Relations with Gulf nations, especially Saudi Arabia, have become even more strained as a result of Hezbollah's support for the Houthi rebels in Yemen. The kingdom has accused the group of giving its enemies military equipment and knowledge.
- **Russia and China: A Pragmatic Approach:** Hezbollah and Russia have a complicated relationship, especially during the Syrian Civil War, when the group has fought alongside Syrian government forces supported by Russia. Moscow recognizes Hezbollah's importance in upholding the Assad government even though it does not publicly support the group's larger regional activities. Conversely, China has mostly maintained its neutrality, focusing on economic ties with Iran and Lebanon while avoiding direct intervention in Hezbollah-related disputes. Beijing does not take part in the U.S.-led sanctions against Hezbollah but avoids upsetting Western nations.
- **International Legal and Financial Countermeasures:** Through legal and financial measures, a number of international organizations and financial watchdogs have attempted to restrict Hezbollah's activities. Hezbollah's military actions have drawn repeated criticism from the UN, especially for breaking UN Security Council Resolution 1701, which demands that all armed parties in Lebanon disarm. Hezbollah's fundraising methods have also been targeted by financial organizations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which focuses on illegal operations like money laundering and arms smuggling. Hezbollah-affiliated networks have been disrupted by Latin American and African nations, especially in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) comprising Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay, where the group is thought to be active in financial and organized crime activities.

Future Prospects and Challenges for Hezbollah

Changing political relationships, growing internal and foreign pressures, and changing regional dynamics will all influence Hezbollah's future. Through a combination of political clout, military might, and socioeconomic support systems, the organization has long preserved its key location (Norton, 2018). But Hezbollah is currently dealing with a number of issues, from international isolation and sanctions to internal unrest in Lebanon (Levitt, 2013).

Hezbollah's base of support has been eroded domestically by Lebanon's protracted economic crisis, which has been made worse by political unrest, anti-government demonstrations in 2019, and the 2020 Beirut port explosion (Saab, 2021). Although Hezbollah has long portrayed itself as a guardian of Lebanon's Shi'a community and a supplier of necessary services, the nation's financial crisis has exacerbated popular unhappiness. Growing opposition was further highlighted by the 2022 parliamentary elections, which saw Hezbollah and its allies lose their absolute majority (Slim, 2022). Hezbollah's long-term capacity to uphold its social legitimacy and political supremacy is in jeopardy due to this internal issue.

Hezbollah has gained military expertise in the region through its engagement in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, but it has also overextended its resources (Harris, 2018). It has become a target of Israeli bombings and heightened tensions with Gulf states because to its ongoing involvement in Syria, where it was instrumental in securing the Assad regime (Berti, 2018). Since Hezbollah's long-standing anti-Israel rhetoric is no longer a unifying element in the Arab world, the Abraham Accords and the restoration of relations between Israel and a number of Arab states provide additional challenges to the organization's regional influence (Hokayem, 2020).

Western sanctions and terrorist designations by the US, EU, and Arab League continue to put tremendous pressure on Hezbollah on a global scale (Levitt, 2021). Hezbollah's financial networks have been severely curtailed by these actions, especially its funding from Iran, which has experienced its own economic challenges as a result of sanctions and internal upheaval (Byman, 2016). Even though Hezbollah has adjusted by expanding its sources of income, its financial security is becoming less certain (Azani, 2019).

There are three possible outcomes for Hezbollah going forward: (1) it strengthens its position of power at home while reducing its involvement in the region, (2) it intensifies military conflicts with Israel to reaffirm its significance, or (3) it gradually deteriorates as a result of economic hardship, political difficulties, and regional isolation (Harris, 2018). Hezbollah's long-term course will depend on how these three factors—regional power shifts, Iran's capacity to assist Hezbollah, and Lebanon's economic recovery—balance out.

Conclusion

Lebanon and the larger Middle East have been significantly impacted by Hezbollah's transformation from a violent resistance movement to a powerful political and military force. Hezbollah, which has its roots in the chaos of the Lebanese Civil War and was influenced by Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon, has firmly established itself within Lebanon's political, military, and ideological systems while retaining its own independent armed forces. Its history demonstrates a two-pronged approach: using military resistance against Israel and growing its political power in Lebanon, gaining parliamentary representation, and exerting significant control over state institutions. The organization has been able to project power beyond of Lebanon thanks to its political and military tactics, and it has played a significant part in regional crises, particularly those in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War strengthened its ties to Iran and the Assad government, strengthening the so-called "Axis of Resistance." But these wars have also put a strain on its resources, exposed it to more enemies abroad, and heightened tensions with Gulf Arab and Western nations. Given its vast arsenal and capacity for asymmetric warfare, Hezbollah's ongoing animosity for Israel continues to be a fundamental component of its military philosophy. However, there is still a strong chance of a full-scale conflict, especially as Hezbollah keeps bolstering its military capabilities and Israel reassesses its security plans. On a global scale, Hezbollah continues to be a divisive force. It is considered a terrorist group by the US, EU, and Gulf governments, which results in financial penalties, diplomatic isolation, and efforts to stop its global fundraising networks. On the other hand, Iran's steadfast support ensures its sustained resilience in the face of economic difficulties by giving it vital military and financial support. But because of its reliance on Iranian assistance, the group is susceptible to changes in Tehran's geopolitical objectives and financial limitations, especially in light of mounting Western pressure on Iran's economy. Hezbollah has established a strong socioeconomic base at home, offering its adherents, mostly Shiites in Lebanon, financial help, healthcare, and education. Although the credibility of this welfare network has been strengthened and grassroots loyalty has been gained, the continued economic crisis in Lebanon poses a challenge to this foundation of support. Hezbollah faces growing internal opposition due to rising inflation, financial collapse, and a decline in public trust in the political system. This is especially true among Lebanese citizens who believe that Hezbollah's policies and alliances are making the country's

economic problems worse. Its once-beneficial dominance in Lebanese politics has turned into a burden as the group is being regarded more and more responsible for state corruption and poor governance. Hezbollah is confronted with a challenging array of issues that will influence its course in the future. Within its borders, Lebanon's capacity to hold onto power may be hampered by its worsening economic crisis and changing sectarian dynamics. Its strategic calculation may change in response to changing geopolitical alignments in the region, such as the normalization of Arab-Israeli ties and possible Israeli military moves. The ability of Hezbollah to adjust to these changing circumstances will determine whether it maintains its influence or faces growing isolation, despite the fact that its military and political might remain formidable. Ultimately, Hezbollah is at a turning point. It runs the risk of alienating regional and local players, further destabilizing Lebanon, and attracting further international pressure if it keeps putting military conflict ahead of political and economic realism. It could be able to maintain its power in a fast-shifting regional system, though, if it reorients its strategy by enacting political reforms and readjusting its relationships. Hezbollah's existence will continue to define the Middle East's political and security environment for years to come, regardless of the course it takes.

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