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RESEARCH PAPER

Hezbollah's Dual Identity: Navigating Political Engagement and Military Resistance against Israel

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) backs Hezbollah's dual role—as a legitimate political party and a military organization—and how this affects Lebanon's sovereignty, governance, and regional stability. This paper investigates the historical origins, ideological basis, and strategic development of Hezbollah, analyzing how it manages its dual identity within Lebanese politics and the wider Middle Eastern geopolitical environment. Additionally, through the defensive realism theory, the research analyzes Hezbollah's connections with Iran and how its involvement in the region has impacted domestic stability and interactions with international entities. Through a qualitative method, we will interpret its function to balance national cohesion and regional dynamics after interventions in the regional wars based on ideology, which creates challenges for Lebanon's sovereignty due to a lack of institutions. As Hezbollah progresses, its dual identity will continue to play a key role in influencing the future of Lebanon and the surrounding area.

| **Keywords:** | Hezbollah, Israel, Iran, IRGC, Dual Identity, Defensive Realism |

Introduction

Hezbollah's leaders publicly support the idea of Wilayat al-Faqih and strongly align themselves with Iran's Supreme Leader, regarded as the highest authority within this structure. This loyalty is a foundational element of Hezbollah's identity and its connection with Iran (Wimberly, 2015). Hezbollah has evolved from a semi-democratic political faction into a significant force within Lebanon's parliamentary framework, obtaining representation in the government and impacting important policy choices Even though the political agenda highlights social justice, anti-corruption measures, and safeguarding Lebanese sovereignty, especially in response to Israeli occupation, even for many years, the group has secured positions in Lebanon's parliament and managed areas in the nation's southern and eastern parts (Lecocq, 2020).

However, Hezbollah's dual identity is intricate and varied, managing its functions as a political organization and a military resistance force. At the same time, Iran actively supports Lebanon's Shiite leadership in its efforts to fight Israeli regional expansionism, notably the vision of a Greater Israel, which is most of the time brought to bloodshed of escalation (EISENKOT, 2016). Different political Leaders have refrained from holding another census since some religious entities worry that the count will decrease their population proportion, except the Amal Movement, which is a close political ally of Hezbollah (Norton, 2007).

Hezbollah, with Iranian assistance, is challenging US power in the area by supporting Palestinian factions that oppose Washington's friends, even also assisting Palestinian fighters, and emphasizes its responsibility to maintain Lebanon's territorial integrity,

although as a non-state player. In contemporary times, military conflicts between Israel and Hezbollah have posed a risk to Lebanese national security due to abiding by Khamenei's order for "death to Israel" while Jurist Scholars stressed that Hezbollah, in conjunction with the Palestinian Resistance, is battling in the name of God and is succeeding despite possessing less resources than their opponents because in October 2024, Israel began a ground offensive against Hezbollah in the southern territory of Lebanon and executed attacks that resulted in the death of the group's long-serving leader (Mens, 2024).

Despite Nasrallah's death, fighting persists, and concerns about further escalation linger, contributing to the nation's precarious economic and political outlook above its military and ideological objectives above national priorities (ÖZKAN, 2024). Then, how does Hezbollah manage its functions as a political party and an army entity?

On the contrary, Israel's politics have moved extremely to the right wing after the premiership of Netanyahu, and the ceasefire deal posed a threat to the greater Israel plan through a strong religious ideology, which is a compulsion for Israel to demilitarize southern Lebanon and stop operations in the Gaza Strip even though in Middle Eastern politics, the aggressive expansionist policies of Zionists aiming to establish a Greater Israel created a point of contention for both sides. Hezbollah maintained that this vision, which effectively denied Zionist statehood, was destined to fail (Youvan, 2024).

Concurrently, Hezbollah has established a dual identity in Lebanese society, with a varied mix of three main religions serving as the foundation for the political branch of the consociational while paradigm-shifting as a structural realist (Kaur & Raman, 2024). So, instead of protecting Lebanon, how can the party maintain its aims in the worldwide arena of the Party of the God, which the West refers to as a "Terrorists Group"? This research will look into the elements of Hezbollah's political and anti-Israel tactics, as well as the influence Hezbollah's dual identity has on Lebanon's internal stability and contacts with regional and global parties. Hezbollah's relevance and influence will be sustained locally and regionally, while it will become the focus of much academic and policy research.

Literature Review

The research of Khattab (2022), explains the identity of a hybrid framework of Hezbollah in Lebanese politics, which shows a case of military activities along with legitimate political grounds as opposition to Israel's interest in southern Lebanon. According to Bakir (2023), a vast focus on Hezbollah investigates the intricate connection between Hezbollah and Iran. By the discussion about whether Hezbollah functions as an Iranian proxy or as a partner. In addition, Badawi (2024), finds on transforming Islamic ideology into armed resistance against Zionism. The conflict has long been a crucial aspect of the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East, influencing not just the ties between these two countries but also the wider dynamics of the area. In contrast, Hezbollah originally emerged as an Islamic resistance group focused on freeing Lebanese land from Israeli control. Furthermore, Zreik et al. (2024), identified that the organization has emerged as Lebanon's foremost political power, obtaining significant backing from the Islamic Republic of Iran and following the principles of Wilayat al-Faqih through evolution into a regional entity, along with a crucial security function outside of Lebanon's boundaries, which has been remarkable while defense authority in the Party of God is affecting the sovereignty of the state.

Hezbollah in Lebanon is considered a strong ally of the Quds Corps and all units collectively present a long-standing deterrence against Zionists. On the contrary, the increasing influence in Beirut from the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) trickles the local Lebanese to go against the organization network due to a significant rise in inflation and economic constraints. (Steinberg, 2021). According to the study by Akcinaroglu et al, (2025) find that being a West-declared non-state actor must retaliate against Israel as in

previous wars they have shown the capability. However, the research (Tarnowski, 2025) indicates that resistance corridors from Iranian proxies will remain open toward Zionist forces.

While Zimmt (2024), studies define that Iran has challenged the Israelis from multiple dimensions, particularly retaliation from Hezbollah, giving a tough time to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Expressing research on Nuclear Iran by Youvan (2024), highlights the deterrence of Iran through Hezbollah to counter Israel is based on a religious ideology that denies to disarm of his proxy (Muzaffar, Khan, & Yaseen,2017; Khan, Muzaffar, & Khan, 2019). Whereas the study of Ullah & Xinlei (2024), From the Saudi-Iran mediation perspective the tensions of contemporary blur the geo-political deal and destabilize the region from the action of Persian proxies.

Critics claim that its military faction weakens the Lebanese government's control over the use of force, leading to a "state within a state." This duality has made Lebanon's governance more complex, especially during crises like the 2006 conflict with Israel and the current economic downturn after the ceasefire with Israel. The Lebanese see this as a distraction from its declared goal of opposing Israel, and it has estranged Sunni communities both in Lebanon and throughout the region, but dual identity is not discussed in the interest of Lebanon.

Theoretical Framework

Defensive realism is a theory in international relations aimed at explaining the reasons behind warfare, or the primary objective of states is to ensure survival and security instead of pursuing territorial growth or imperialism (Waltz, 2000). It implies that war is the anomaly, rather than the norm, within the international system, while defensive realism, in the realm of international relations, mainly emphasizes the actions of states as key players, which means it typically does not regard non-state actors as central to its framework; still, it can recognize their impact in specific circumstances, particularly when they affect a state's security assessments and drive them towards defensive approaches to ensure stability in the global system (Esfahani, 2018). Although it doesn't explicitly examine non-state actors, defensive realism may explore how entities such as terrorist groups, multinational companies, or influential NGOs impact a state's security conditions, possibly driving them to implement defensive strategies (Higgott et al., 2000).

In a defensive realist view, Hezbollah's military and political tactics stem from the necessity to secure its existence in an anarchic environment lacking any higher authority to assure its safety. Hezbollah's military strengths, especially its stockpile of rockets, act as a deterrent to Israeli attacks. The group's capacity to penetrate far into Israeli land fosters a mutual deterrence scenario, leading both parties to be wary of intensifying confrontations (Rezeg, 2020).

This is consistent with defensive realism's focus on the significance of deterrence for ensuring stability. Hezbollah functions in an area marked by ongoing conflict, especially with Israel, which it perceives as a threat to its existence; therefore, to opt for defensive realism theory is to find the structure of roots of its dual identity as a compulsion to survive in anarchical grounds where the offensive doctrine of the state of Israel is threatening the existence of Hezbollah.

Material and Methods

This research employed a qualitative approach, drawing on a wide range of secondary sources. Which include academic literature, policy reports, and media analyses. The research also utilized case studies, such as Hezbollah's role in the wars with Israel and

its involvement in the Syrian civil war, as well as a ceasefire with Israeli officials, to illustrate the dynamics of its dual identity.

Results and Discussion

Lebanese Civil War: Creation of Hezbollah

After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which deposed the Western-backed Pahlavi monarchy, refugee camps in southern Lebanon became a gathering place for Iranian allies, Islamists, and Shah Opponents. In the meantime, Palestinian military actions and Israeli responses, particularly in Southern Lebanon, were significantly radicalizing Shiites. The Lebanese government was largely absent and incapable of reestablishing order in that area. The outcome was the rise of Hezbollah, an organization dedicated to Khomeini, and the annihilation of Israel, which has advocated for pro-Iran policies in Lebanese governance. Imam Musa al-Sadr, a renowned Shiite cleric, disappeared in 1978, adding to the rising influence of Iranian revolutionary ideology among Lebanese Shiites. Iran began deploying Revolutionary Guards and funding to Lebanon's Beqaa Valley to promote the Islamic revolution and enroll Shiite youngsters. Hezbollah's military character is primarily based on its opposition to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon; therefore, domestic support bases play a vital role in Hezbollah's defensive strategy, as it guarantees that the organization can depend on a devoted populace during conflicts (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2003). The group's resistance actions developed during the Lebanese Civil War, which began in the mid-1970s and was fueled in part by rising tensions over the country's large Palestinian population. Lebanese sectarian groupings had differing perspectives on the Palestine question because Palestinians were fighting alone, even though the conflict was important due to its unique geopolitical dynamics (Fischer, 2020).

Taif Agreement: Recognition of Hezbollah

While the 1989 Taif Agreement required most militias to disarm, it enabled Hezbollah to remain armed in southern Lebanon until Israeli soldiers withdrew. This exemption, in contrast to other organizations' disarmament, enabled Hezbollah to strengthen its position. By leading the struggle against Israel, Hezbollah won enormous support among Lebanon's Shiite majority and other marginalized groups (Hazran, 2009). Its military victories over Israeli forces, culminating in Israel's departure from southern Lebanon in the mid-2000s, which included suicide attacks and guerrilla tactics, and reinforced by succeeding battles such as the 2006 Lebanon War, bolstered its credibility. These actions, together with the execution of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution 425, established Hezbollah as a potent military force and a symbol of resistance against external threats, frequently overshadowing the role of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the official army of the Lebanese government. The group aims to preserve its impact within the Lebanese political framework instead of seeking complete control. This emphasis on narrow goals aligns with defensive realism's claim that participants prioritize their survival and security rather than pursuing expansion (TAHA, 2016).

Furthermore, escalating regional competition between Iran and Israel during the 1990s granted the Lebanese Shia an important strategic position in this conflict through Shia's initiative against Israeli control of Southern Lebanon, which received significant logistical, military, and financial backing from Iran and Syria, equipping Hezbollah with extensive resources. In addition, the second phase of Lebanon's politics began with the establishment of the Taif Accord, and significant military actions concluded in 1990 when Syrian forces entered the areas of Lebanon not controlled by Israel. The party has established lasting alliances with sectarian and ideological partners, including the Amal Movement and the "Free Patriotic Movement," gaining wider political power beyond its Shia constituency (Kolárik, 2022). In contrast, the 2006 agreement with the mainly Christian party showcases the party of God's skill in maneuvering through Lebanon's multi-sectarian

environment, while UN resolution 1701 created a buffer zone that divides Israel and Hezbollah, extending from the Litani River in Lebanon to the Blue Line, which is an interim border established by the UN following previous conflicts and Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. From a defensive realist viewpoint, Hezbollah's maintenance of its military strengths was a logical reaction to the perceived danger from Israel. The organization positioned itself as Lebanon's main protector against Israeli hostility, utilizing its armed faction to prevent Israeli assaults and preserve its significance in the regional power dynamics (May, 2021).

Multifaceted Identity: Liberty of Consociationalism

Lebanon's liberation from France during World War II, the state built a democratic system based on religious identity and the allocation of political power among different sects. According to the Lebanese nation's longstanding power-sharing arrangement in the context of consociationalism which is based on confessional, each of the three main religious communities is assured a designated leadership position in every executive First, a Maronite Christian holds the presidency; second, the premiership is occupied by a Sunni Muslim; and third, the parliamentary speaker is a Shia Muslim. The president is chosen by parliament and, in collaboration with parliament, selects the prime minister. Proponents of consociationalism contend that it represents a more pragmatic choice in highly polarized societies compared to integrationist methods of managing conflict. Hezbollah has evolved into a semi-democratic political faction. Hezbollah, a political organization and resistance movement, developed in the early 1980s to navigate Lebanon's sectarian democracy while simultaneously carrying out operations against Israel and its supporters (Jeong & Salamey, 2021). For societies with multiple ethnic groups, Lijphart recommended ethnic-based consociationalism as a governance model characterized by an elite cartel intended to convert a democracy with a divided political landscape culture into a lasting democracy. Thus, Lebanon's consociational democracy has produced corporate types of power-sharing known as corporate consociationalism. However, two pacts are known as the Lebanese political foundation; one was designed after the independence, and the second was signed after the civil war. According to the consociational democratic pacts, Hezbollah's political involvement includes taking part in Lebanon's parliamentary system and offering social services to its supporters. At the same time, its military resistance targets external dangers, especially Israel (Salloukh, 2023).

On the other hand, the delicate balance of power within the consociational system limits Hezbollah's securitization attempts. The organization must consider how other sects see its activities since focusing too much on external dangers may alienate prospective partners and destabilize the delicate political equilibrium. So, its goal is to guarantee political representation and stability by incorporating diverse ethnic, religious, or linguistic communities in the decision-making process (Hiba, 2016).

Hezbollah Legitimate: Political Identity

Hezbollah's role in the Lebanese parliament and its partnerships with different political parties enabled it to dominate the nation and block decisions that did not align with its agenda or advance its interests. Hezbollah effectively functions as a governing body in its controlled regions, although involvement in political identity highlights its strategic flexibility and the organization's attempts to maintain its legitimacy within Lebanon's complex socio-political landscape. Hezbollah's military branch is the Jihad Council, while its political arm is the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc in the Lebanese Parliament. Politically, Hezbollah is facing criticism due to huge losses in terms of infrastructure and the socioeconomic crisis that erupted after retaliation against offensive Zionist policies, including the Israeli Defense Forces. Hezbollah's defiance against Israeli occupation struck a chord with many Lebanese, especially within the Shiite community, which had long been

sidelined. This story enabled Hezbollah to rationalize its ongoing military involvement and secure public backing despite the disarmament of other militias (Zreik et al. 2024).

The contemporary disputes and splits among various Lebanese political factions undermine any domestic efforts to restrain Hezbollah. As public discontent towards Hezbollah's weapons and special status in Lebanon increases, the group is hesitant to damage its local trust even more by initiating a conflict. Fundamentally, the opposition is attempting to increase its influence over power considerably, particularly at the cost of the established Christian elite and Sunni Muslims. The potential erosion of Sunni privileges and influence in Lebanon has driven Saudi Arabia to become a significant supporter of the government. Both military and federal entities are unable to oppose this position due to its extensive social services network that encompasses infrastructure, healthcare, schools, and youth initiatives, which have played a crucial role in winning support from both Shiite and non-Shiite Lebanese individuals through approach to preserve and enhance its power in Lebanon and the larger Middle East region (Suhail, 2024).

Iran's Strategic Approach: Hezbollah Politics

"Backing Hezbollah and deterring Israel" shields close to Beirut's interests and Lebanese security in the concept of Iranian wilayat al-faqih (Guardianship of the Jurist) doctrine further according to this ideology, the power granted to a religious scholar to guide the Shiites. The political strategy of the organization is characterized by a practical method towards alliances and coalitions on the contrary Hezbollah's rise in politics is closely linked to its Shia identity, as it frames itself as the defender and voice of Lebanon's sidelined Shiite, offering a foundation for their political and social goals in consociation politics (Ibrahimian, 2024). Notwithstanding its militant position and extreme ideological roots, Hezbollah has shown an openness to interact with various political entities, including those beyond its sectarian support, to fulfill its wider goals. The organization's tiered framework and ideological dedication guarantee its ability to utilize its resources for political aims. This internal equilibrium is vital for Hezbollah's capacity to address external dangers. Harmonically practical is demonstrated through its partnerships with different Christian and Sunni groups, which have aided it in maneuvering within Lebanon's confessional framework and preserving its political significance. Nevertheless, Hezbollah's involvement in politics is not free from controversy because of its multifaceted role as a political entity and a pivotal influence in directing the country's sectarian and political paths, allowing United Nations peacekeeping forces to influence again in the region to counter Iranian strategies through IDF tactics to capture Litany River surroundings while its armed forces have established it as a significant participant in regional disputes (Khazaeli, 2022).

Hezbollah Military Capability: Deterrence to Israel

Hezbollah's military faction has executed fatal assaults on Israeli and American troops in Lebanon, according to the ideology of Khamenei. Therefore, leaders think that their military strength establishes a scenario of reciprocal deterrence with Israel; even a major assault by either party would probably lead to considerable destruction and loss of life on both sides, which contributes to avoiding total warfare. Hezbollah belongs to a regional coalition termed the "Axis of Resistance," comprising involvement of Iran, Syria, and various attacks opposing Israel and U.S. dominance in the (MENA) Middle East and North Africa region as a result, partnership backs Hezbollah and enhances its standing in the area, although the Syrian regime dismantled alliance strength, Resistance from this party opposed the existence of Israel (Schweitzer et al., 2023).

Hezbollah has notably improved its military strengths in recent years. It possesses a highly trained and well-equipped military, frequently noted to be stronger than the Lebanese army because, according to inventory, it comprises a substantial accumulation of rockets and missiles with diverse ranges, precision-guided ordnance, anti-tank guided

missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles UAVs. The team has also shown expertise in employing drones for surveillance and offensive operations, including recent escalation against the IDF, while its combatants have acquired significant battlefield experience in Syria, collaborating with regular forces and adjusting to contemporary warfare strategies that accumulated above 100,000 soldiers, including trained guerilla warfare commandos also believed to possess anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles, along with guided missiles that can reach deep into Israel, whereas funding resources are assisting directly from Tehran and local business empires. Despite the security dilemma, both Hezbollah and Israel have exhibited some level of restraint in their confrontations, frequently sidestepping full-scale war. This shared restraint can be viewed as a logical approach to sidestep the significant expenses of total conflict, aligning with defensive realism's focus on the need to control escalation for the sake of survival (Al-Aloosy, 2022).

Hezbollah has continuously cautioned that it can launch strikes deep into Israeli land, targeting significant cities like Tel Aviv and Haifa, should a war occur. Hezbollah's deterrent approach relies on its capacity to engage in asymmetric warfare and take advantage of Israel's weaknesses. The group's employment of tunnels, ambushes, and various unconventional strategies has enabled it to contest Israel's military dominance and foster a feeling of insecurity within the Israeli populace. Hezbollah's military strength and deterrence approach has established it as an important influence in the regional power dynamics and an essential participant in the ongoing struggle with Israel (Agubamah & Theresa, 2024).

Hezbollah's military power, featuring its missile stockpile and guerrilla combat skills, acted as a deterrent against Israeli invasions. By upholding a believable threat to Israel, Hezbollah made sure that any Israeli operations against Beirut would incur significant costs, thus countering Israel's dominant conventional military strength, which cost destruction along with civilian casualties.

Opposition to Hezbollah: Domestic Level Duality

Hezbollah's merging of its political and military branches has encountered difficulties, such as global pressure and internal opposition due to the confessional system, which has led to a fragile central government and restricted state power, which enables non-state entities such as Hezbollah to function with a certain level of independence. Although it engages in parliamentary elections and builds coalitions with other political groups, its Shia identity and strong connections to Iran foster distrust and opposition from certain Sunnis, Christians, and the Druze bloc; therefore, Hezbollah's capacity to attain a wider national agreement on critical matters frequently results in a political impasse. The requirement to align its aggressive actions with political duties results in an ongoing quest for legitimacy, and political rivals frequently claim that it favors its military objectives above national unity and security (Steinberg, 2021). Whereas sectarian divide erodes Lebanon's delicate political agreement and encourages a climate where conflicting identities take precedence over national unity, the group's actions often incite countermeasures from opposing factions, sustaining cycles of violence and political deadlocks that often create political deterrence against Israel. The sectarian landscape is further complicated by Lebanon's economic collapse that began in 2019 and the post-war against the IDF in the protection of the Sunni Hamas. Then, the economic crisis heightened anti-sectarian demonstrations, with protesters demanding the disarmament of Hezbollah and the socio-political forces endangering the system. A major challenge is military independence, which numerous Lebanese see as undermining the state's sovereignty and worsening sectarian divides (Kanaaneh, 2023).

Whereas Hezbollah presents its armed struggle as a patriotic obligation to defend Lebanon against Israeli hostility beyond the LAF strategies because Hezbollah's concept legitimized that the LAF defends Western interests in domestic politics, its opponents

contend that its military actions mainly benefit the Shia community and Iran's broader regional goals. The Islamic Resistance, Hezbollah's military faction, functions separately from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and is often considered more robust than the official military of the state. This has raised worries regarding the weakening of state authority and the possibility that Hezbollah might employ its military strength to sway political results. Additionally, its involvement in conflicts in Iraq and Yemen, along with its advisory position for Iran-supported militias, highlights its transformation into a transnational military force. This expanded role corresponds with Iran's regional strategy. Still, it has increased Hezbollah's vulnerability to international sanctions and isolation due to escalation against Western interests through participation in illegal actions like drug smuggling and money laundering to create revenue. Apart from that, Hezbollah consistently highlights its willingness to react to any perceived acts of aggression from Israel. At the same time, it has also asserted its role in preventing breaches of Lebanese sovereignty, positioning itself as the protector of national security (Schulz, 2024).

Challenges to Hezbollah: Great Powers Stance

However, dual identity also influences its global position, even though its advocates see it as a valid resistance group while numerous Western countries and institutions, such as the United States and the European Union (EU), label it a terrorist organization, consequently hindering Hezbollah's capacity to conduct diplomacy and obtain international backing, deepening its isolation in the worldwide community. The U.S. government has enacted sanctions against Hezbollah and its leaders, aiming to restrict the organization's access to global financial markets. The United States has additionally offered military and economic assistance to Lebanon, intending to diminish Hezbollah's influence and reinforce the Lebanese state. Although the EU has labeled Hezbollah's military branch as a terrorist entity, it has not applied this label to the political segment of the group. This strategy illustrates the EU's acknowledgment of Hezbollah's influence in Lebanese politics and its intent to interact with the organization as a political participant including, Hezbollah's military power is a crucial element in the current standoff with Israel, and the group continues to be dedicated to its objective of opposing Israeli attacks (Levitt, 2024).

Nonetheless, these measures frequently do not distinguish between Hezbollah's political and military branches; in the meantime, nations such as Russia and China take on neutral positions, acknowledging Hezbollah's political validity while steering clear of direct conflict regarding its military activities. This difference in global strategies illustrates wider geopolitical conflicts and highlights the intricacies of tackling Hezbollah's involvement (Nicolas, 2024).

Dual Role: A Threat to Regional Stability

Lebanon's stability is closely connected to regional dynamics because dual identity establishes an unstable equilibrium that weakens state sovereignty, intensifies sectarian divisions, and complicates global diplomacy. 'Party of God' political involvement enables it to merge into Lebanon's governmental frameworks, whereas its military wing functions independently, frequently outside the Lebanese state's oversight. Serving as a major proxy for Iran, Hezbollah plays a crucial role in Tehran's approach to challenging Saudi power at the regional level, whereas Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have declared this organization a prominent terrorist organization with adversaries alleging it acts as a proxy for Tehran's regional goals instead of authentically representing Lebanese interests (LEVITT, 2021).

Either dynamic is apparent in the group's engagement in Middle East conflicts, such as Yemen, where Iran backs the Houthi rebels against the (KSA) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's military involvement. Likewise, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and Iraq has bolstered Iranian control in these regions, frequently disadvantaging Saudi-supported groups and

further intensifying the divide between Sunni and Shia factions. Hence, proxy conflict intensifies sectarian divisions and sustains instability, involving regional powers in a complex network of rivalries. Iran's backing, via financial support, military, and ideological assistance, has strengthened Hezbollah as a proxy able to amplify Iranian influence in the territorial proximities (Sobelman, 2023).

A connection is crucial for comprehending Hezbollah's actions in the region, especially its participation in conflicts like the Syrian Civil War, during which its fighters backed President Bashar al-Assad's government and dismantled the opposition after sectarian violence. Hezbollah's clashes lead to humanitarian emergencies and threaten to ignite broader regional conflicts that could involve major global powers. Additionally, Hezbollah's activities go beyond traditional military conflict. Its purported engagement in drug trafficking, money laundering, and arms trade highlights its part in transnational organized crime, further undermining stability in the region and beyond (Wahab, 2021).

Clash of ideologies: Lack of institutions

Resistance (Muqawama) is a fundamental principle of Hezbollah's beliefs. For Hezbollah, resistance is more than a military tactic; it is a moral and religious duty. The group perceives resistance as a way to protect the Muslim community from outside threats, especially from Israel and the United States. Hezbollah's dedication to resistance is evident in its motto, "The Islamic Resistance in Lebanon."

Its military operations frequently conflict with the official policies of the Lebanese government. The group's upkeep of a separate arsenal, defended as a means to resist Israel, weakens the LAF Lebanese Armed Forces and questions the concept of a cohesive national defense. Even participation in regional disputes has attracted outside pressure and sanctions against Lebanon, worsening the nation's economic crisis and lowering its international reputation. Hezbollah was disarmed at the time and was not banned because a confessional democratic state was facing an external threat from Israel and a sectarian divide from internal institutions (Blanford & Assaf Orion, 2020). However, according to local political parties, a ceasefire after participation in the Gaza War and supporting Hamas reduces the direct danger of Israeli aggression. At the same time, Hezbollah intends to counter greater Israeli ideology from a Zionist perspective, whereas no state institutions – including the LAF – will overtly contest Hezbollah's domestic authority with its own Shia base, and the group's Resistance activities and military efforts in Syria have further bolstered Hezbollah's national legitimacy (Helou & Mollica, 2024).

Conclusion

Hezbollah's dual role as a political and military force is a strategic response to the intricate and unstable context in which it functions, influenced by the legacy of the Taif Agreement and the ongoing threat from Israel. At the same time, its political faction offers legitimacy and stability in Lebanon, enabling Hezbollah to incorporate itself within the state structure while preserving its independence and power. Within the country, its engagement in Lebanese politics has positioned it as a significant player in governance, yet it has faced criticism for weakening state authority. Hezbollah has preserved its operational strength and political power, showcasing resilience against global attempts to diminish it. On the contrary, Israel has insisted on the right to respond if Hezbollah breaches its commitments, yet Lebanese officials dismissed the idea of including that in the proposal. The conflict of ideologies represented by Hezbollah's dual role as both a political party and a military resistance organization presents a danger to stability in the Middle East, especially when there are no robust institutions able to resolve such disputes. From the perspective of defensive realism, this dualism can be viewed as a strategy to secure survival and increase influence within a complex regional context. Hezbollah's skill in balancing political involvement with military opposition demonstrates its practical strategy for sustaining

power and legitimacy. The fragility of Lebanese institutions additionally obstructs the government's capacity to properly tackle the underlying issues of Hezbollah's military opposition. The persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the unresolved situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, and the ongoing occupation of contested lands all add to the rising tensions that support Hezbollah's opposition to Israel.

Recommendations

This not only undermines Lebanon's already delicate institutions but also escalates regional conflicts, as Hezbollah's actions are frequently seen as extensions of Iranian interests, deepening the ideological rift between Shiite and Sunni Muslim groups further absence of institution weakens the possibility for institutional remedies, as it mirrors wider ideological splits within the international community about the validity of armed resistance and the involvement of non-state actors in political affairs.

Enhancing Lebanese institutions is essential for building the rule of law and cultivating public confidence in the government. Defensive realism advocates prioritizing essential interests (like Lebanon's security and Shiite concerns) instead of getting involved in peripheral disputes. This encompasses overhauling the judiciary, tackling corruption, and fostering effective governance.

Considering Lebanon's financial turmoil and American sanctions, Hezbollah ought to diversify its funding streams and lessen its dependence on external entities such as Iran for long-term viability.

Moreover, actions should be taken to tackle the root causes of Hezbollah's military opposition, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Lebanon can only aspire to overcome the challenges presented by Hezbollah's dual identity and establish a more stable and peaceful future through a blend of institutional reform and conflict resolution.

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