

From Resistance to Regional Involvement:
Hezbollah's Changing Role Amid the Syrian Civil War

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A. Major Research Questions

The primary questions that this thesis seeks to answer are: First, do actions and decisions by Hezbollah since 2013 represent a major change in its role, namely, that it has transitioned from a Lebanese resistance force against Israel to a regional player? Second, did Hezbollah undergo this transformation to further Iranian interests or due to its own strategic calculation? Third, has Hezbollah benefited or lost from expanding its range of operation? Fourth, how has Hezbollah's deepening role in Syria affected its ability to carry out its mission in Lebanon? Lastly, how has it affected Israel's perception of Hezbollah and the organization's ability to confront Israel?

B. Importance

This thesis' work is relevant and necessary. A plethora of papers, dissertations, journal articles, and other analyses have been published on Hezbollah's ideology and original shift from a terrorist organization looking to overthrow the Lebanese government and establish an Islamic caliphate to an organization integrated into Lebanon's political, economic, and military fiber. However, there has been far less substantive research on, and analysis of, Hezbollah's recent fundamental transformation into a regional actor — its causes, extent, and implications for the group, Lebanon, and Israel, although more literature became available over the course of the writing of this thesis. This thesis attempts to bring together all the discussed aspects of Hezbollah's post-2013 role into one place using concrete examples and research, thereby enabling those studying the organization to easily obtain information on Hezbollah's increased involvement in the region.

C. Literature Review

There is a lack of literature covering Hezbollah's activities post-2013, and so most material does not address the questions posed in this thesis. There are important books and analyses that are useful in developing a basic understanding of Hezbollah, but this existing literature cannot be expected to address this thesis' questions, as they were written before these questions arose. In this section, I will summarize several of these basic readings on Hezbollah and show how they provide a background for answers to the questions addressed in this thesis.

The first reading is *Hezbollah: A History of the Party of God*, by Dominique Avon, Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian, and Jane Marie Todd. This book explores the history of Hezbollah as a political and religious force and their current and future role in the Lebanese government. The book is a critical read for anyone interested in learning about Hezbollah's formation and evolution. It tracks Hezbollah from its genesis from 1982 to 1985, describing how it came about, initially gained support and recruits, and eventually became a major force in Lebanon. It then goes on to discuss how Hezbollah went from being an organization created to resist Israel's occupation of Lebanon to a full-fledged hybrid organization, extending its reach into social welfare and politics. Lastly, the book discusses Hezbollah's pre-2013 situation in Lebanon and the future of its hold on power in the country.¹

While the book does not discuss Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war, it provides a highly detailed picture of Hezbollah's formation and subsequent development into the organization it is today. Understanding Hezbollah's roots and capabilities is integral to obtaining a well-rounded understanding of the organization's decision to enter Syria, how it

¹ Avon, Dominique, Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian, and Jane Marie Todd. *Hezbollah: A History of the Party of God*.

amassed the resources necessary to wage a successful campaign in Syria, and why Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict is such a cause for concern.

The second reading is "Hezbollah's plunge into the Syrian abyss," an article published in *Foreign Policy* by Randa Slim, the director of the Initiative for Track II Dialogues at the Middle East Institute and a non-resident fellow at the SAIS Foreign Policy Institute. In this article, Slim discusses how Hezbollah's decision to join the fighting in Syria is a potential turning point in its trajectory, and might end the control that Hezbollah has had over Lebanon's Shia community for the better part of two decades. According to Slim, the development of a Shiite middle class in Lebanon could serve as a "limiting factor" to Hezbollah's operation. Now that many of the Shia are politically empowered and have a stake in a stable and secure Lebanon "where economic conditions are conducive for business and investments," if Hezbollah's actions in Syria destabilize Lebanon's politics to a further extent, which they are threatening to do, and harm the security of the country, which they have (attacks have already been carried out by Sunni radicals in Lebanese territory), then Lebanese Shias might withdraw their support for Hezbollah. Anti-Hezbollah sentiment could also be exacerbated by a string of corruption scandals involving senior Hezbollah officials, which could erode Hezbollah's image of a resistance movement led by selfless leaders and lead Lebanese citizens to question the wealth of Hezbollah's leadership.²

This reading is helpful for understanding internal Lebanese motivations for opposition to Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, as well as motivations for Hezbollah to finish its involvement in Syria earlier rather than later. It is also useful when addressing the overall thesis question, as it reflects that the Lebanese Shia view Hezbollah's involvement in Syria as a strategic change in the organization's role and are assessing its impact on their interests.

² Randa Slim. "Hezbollah's Plunge into the Syrian Abyss." *Foreign Policy*.

A third important read on Hezbollah is *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*, by Dr. Matthew Levitt, a senior fellow and director of the Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. This book contains one of the first and largest examinations of Hezbollah's activities beyond Lebanon's borders, including its financial and logistical support networks and its criminal and terrorist operations worldwide. Matthew Levitt draws "on a wide range of sources, including recently declassified government documents, court records, and personal interviews with intelligence and law enforcement officials around the world"³ to examine Hezbollah's terrorist activities abroad and across the globe. By doing so, Levitt highlights Hezbollah's growth from a Lebanese resistance organization into one of the premier criminal networks in the world, conducting much of its operations in order to fund itself and at the behest of Iran.⁴ Levitt's book addresses the questions raised in this thesis. First, it exemplifies that Hezbollah has indeed moved beyond its Lebanese borders, and has spread as far as Southeast Asia and Central America. Second, this thesis attempts to determine whether Hezbollah's involvement in Syria was the result of an Iranian insistence to do so, and Levitt's book would suggest that Hezbollah's Syrian intervention follows a pattern of Hezbollah operating under Iranian orders.

Lastly, a fourth basic reading on Hezbollah is *Hezbollah in Syria*, an in-depth security report by Marisa Sullivan of the Institute for the Study of War. A must-read piece of material on Hezbollah's activities in Syria, this report discusses Hezbollah's involvement in Syria from 2013 to mid-2014, including accounts of the battles that it was involved with, detailed descriptions of the types of operations it conducted in Syria, from training Syrian forces to undergoing actual physical combat, and concludes with a chapter on the possible implications that the Syrian

³ "Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God." *Georgetown University Press*.

⁴ Matthew Levitt. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*.

conflict will have for Hezbollah in the future.⁵ Although the report does not cover Hezbollah's activities in Syria after 2014, Sullivan's security report is important literature for any scholar or student looking to gain a deeper understanding of exactly what Hezbollah has been doing in Syria since it announced its involvement in 2013 — information that this thesis seeks to analyze.

D. Methodology

In the second chapter, I use a wide range of sources to look back on Hezbollah's founding and development into a full-fledged hybrid terrorist organization. By examining the organization's history, including Iran's role in its founding and expansion, I set the stage for Hezbollah's decision to intervene in Syria and assist Bashar al-Assad in his fight against the Syrian rebels.

In the third chapter, an analysis of five important actions or decisions taken by Hezbollah in Syria since 2013 indicates a strategic shift in its role. I rate each event as indicative of change and not indicative of change, determining that Hezbollah's actions and statements after 2013 do culminate in a strategic, purposeful decision to catalyze a change in the organization's role and perception. Further, in determining the motivations for Hezbollah's decision to go into Syria in the first place, to show that Hezbollah's involvement in other countries in the Middle East was the result of Iranian pressure, I calculate whether such actions affect Hezbollah's direct interests regarding Israel, Lebanon, or Syria. If they do not, then the involvement can be said to be motivated by Iranian interests.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I use newspaper and journal articles, think tank analyses, and published interviews with renowned scholars on Hezbollah to determine the extent of the

⁵ Marisa Sullivan. "Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War.

success, or possible lack thereof, of Hezbollah's foray into Syria and the consequences its increased involvement will have for Hezbollah and the region at large.

E. Limitations

In discussing backlash among the Arab populations of the Middle East against Hezbollah's deepening involvement in Syria, this thesis cites Pew polls evincing growing distaste against Hezbollah. Yet polling in the Middle East is a risky venture; one cannot be sure that the questions and responses were not influenced by Arab governments, bias, or other factors. Thus, readers should take the possibility that the poll numbers might be compromised under consideration.

Furthermore, this thesis discusses events taking place in real time. As such, at any given moment a major change in the status quo can occur. Thus, analyzing the situation and predicting its implications is a difficult and, at times, speculative task, and there is a limited amount of readily-available information on these speculative topics. Readers should be aware that any attempt at predicting the future of Hezbollah and the Middle East employs a certain amount of guesswork.

Chapter 2: Hezbollah: Origins and Evolution

A. Hybrid Organizations: Brief Overview

In order to understand why Hezbollah's involvement in Syria is so important and difficult to address, it is imperative to understand why and how Hezbollah came about as a powerful hybrid terrorist organization, as well as what the nature and roles of hybrid terrorist organizations are.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the study of warfare has shifted from conventional inter-state warfare to complex and multifaceted conflicts, "influenced by globalization and the spread of advanced technology, and affected by the presence of both global and local jihadist terrorist organizations, and by the co-existence of state and non-state actors."⁶ This type of warfare is known as "hybrid warfare," with "hybrid" referring to the mixture of conventional and irregular types of combat. Due to the new nature of study of such conflict, an exact definition of hybrid warfare has not yet been agreed upon. The United States Department of Defense defines hybrid warfare as "a blend of conventional and irregular warfare approaches, across the full spectrum of conflict."⁷

Others have stated that hybrid warfare will entail "[a]n adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs some fused combination of political, military, economic, social and information means, and conventional, irregular, terrorism and disruptive/criminal conflict methods. It may include as well a combination of state and non-state actors."⁸ According to Frank Hoffman of the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, hybrid warfare will soon "incorporate

⁶ Eitan Azani. "The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study," p. 899.

⁷ Jim Kouri. "War on Terrorism: Defining 'Hybrid Warfare,'" *Canada Free Press*.

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), "Hybrid Warfare" (briefing to the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, 10 September 2010). GAO-10-1036-R.

a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”⁹

Boaz Ganor, Founder and Executive Director of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, added to the lexicon of hybrid warfare a new type of non-state actor, the “hybrid terrorist organization.” Not all hybrid warfare entails the involvement of hybrid terrorist organizations, but hybrid terrorist organizations do play a significant role in many instances of such fighting. Ganor writes:

A hybrid terrorist organization is one that stands on two or, in many cases, three legs. The first leg is that of the classic terrorist organization: a military or paramilitary organization that engages in terrorism, committing those atrocities we refer to as terrorist acts to operate and “win” in both the illegitimate arena of terrorism and the legitimate one of the media, the hybrid terrorist organization extends a second leg, that of a political organization. A hybrid terrorist organization’s political branch may merely represent its ideology, or it may compete in legitimate, free, and democratic campaigns and elections. Further, to be able to engage in warfare against a state—an entity whose legitimacy is presumably well established—the hybrid terrorist organization has extended a leg into the realm of legitimate, usually state-sponsored services, through affiliated organizations that provide welfare services to a potential or actual constituency.¹⁰

Hezbollah fits this definition. Beginning in the 1990s, Hezbollah transformed itself from a simple terrorist group into a sophisticated hybrid terrorist organization and a major force in Lebanon’s government by developing its commitment to three complementary areas of activity: *da’wa* and social welfare, military resistance, and political activity. In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss in greater detail Hezbollah’s transition into a full-fledged hybrid organization and the challenges posed by its complex role.

⁹ Frank Hoffman. “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 52 (1st Quarter 2009).

¹⁰ Boaz Ganor. “The Hybrid Terrorist Organization and Incitement,” *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*.

B. Genesis

Hezbollah did not start out as a hybrid terrorist organization. Hezbollah, or the Party of God, was founded during the Lebanese civil war in June 1982 as a response to Israel's invasion of Lebanon. Hezbollah initially formed as an umbrella organization comprised of several radical Shiite Muslim groups; many Shia Muslims saw the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) invasion and the subsequent establishment of the pro-Israel Southern Lebanon Army as valid reasons to wage war against the Jewish state.¹¹

Hezbollah emerged as an offshoot of, and rival to, its predecessor, the Amal movement. Amal (Afwaj al-Muqawamat al-Lubnaniyya), an acronym of the Lebanese Resistance Detachments, was founded in 1975 by Sayyid Musa al-Sadr as the militia wing of al-Sadr's Harakat al-Muhrumin (Movement of the Deprived), a movement that attempted to "unite Lebanon's Shi'a along communal rather than ideological lines" and empower the Shia community politically.¹² In 1978, Musa Al-Sadr disappeared after traveling to Libya¹³ (sources told Al-Arabiya in 2011 that al-Sadr was still alive in a Libyan prison)¹⁴. His replacement, Nabih Berri, "reduced the Islamic character of the movement"¹⁵ and, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon, participated in the National Salvation Authority, an Israel-backed "entity created by Lebanese President Elisa Sarkis to increase communication among Lebanon's most powerful

¹¹ Matthew Levitt. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*, p. 12.

¹² Daniel Byman. *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*, p. 82.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Saud Al-Zahed. "Mousa Al-Sadr Alive in Libyan Prison: Sources." *Al-Arabiya*.

¹⁵ Daniel Byman. *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*, p. 83.

militias”¹⁶, against Iran’s wishes.¹⁷ The committee included Bashir Gemayel, the Maronite commander of the Lebanese Forces.

However, conservative members within Amal viewed the Committee as “an avenue for the United States to control Lebanon.”¹⁸ Berri’s participation in the Committee and other differences in ideology led Hussein Musawi, a leading figure in Amal, to break away from the organization and form Islamic Amal.¹⁹ Musawi’s new organization was based in the northern Bekaa Valley and was backed by the Iranian government. Islamic Amal intended to purify Lebanon’s corrupt political system and rejected working with other political groups, but its “primary mission” was resisting Israel’s presence in southern Lebanon.²⁰

Hezbollah eventually emerged out of Islamic Amal, starting as a group of twenty-something revolutionaries inspired by the Iranian revolution and its leader, Ayatollah Khomeini. Within months of Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, “various groups began to organize attacks against Israeli forces once it became apparent” that Israel had no intention of departing Lebanon in the near future.²¹ Among these was Hezbollah, which soon developed into an umbrella guerrilla group whose mission was to fight Israel in southern Lebanon.²² Hezbollah drew recruits from a collection of fundamentalist splinter groups and breakaway factions of Amal that objected to Amal’s participation in the National Salvation Committee and other moderate policies,

¹⁶ Patrick Joseph Kennedy. *From Mujahideen to Mainstream: The Evolution of Hezbollah*, p. 10.

¹⁷ Daniel Byman. *Deadly Connections: States That Sponsor Terrorism*, pp. 82-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Alexander, Yonah and Milton M. Hoenig. *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, p. 65.

²⁰ Patrick Joseph Kennedy. *From Mujahideen to Mainstream: The Evolution of Hezbollah*, p. 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

including the Muslim Students Union and the Da'wa Party of Lebanon.²³ During the Lebanese civil war, Hezbollah established its strongest support base among impoverished Shia youth, who benefited from the redistribution of land and buildings in Hezbollah-controlled areas. Indeed, the recruitment of Shia youth and Hezbollah's Islamist Shia doctrine created a wealth of potential recruits and gave the group a "singular capability to strike wherever it wished, [a capability which] other less fanatical militias" lacked.²⁴

Due in part to significant Iranian financial and military assistance, Hezbollah quickly became the leading terrorist organization in Lebanon; Hezbollah was responsible for nearly 90% of all attacks on foreign troops in Lebanon throughout the 1980s.²⁵ As part of Iran's mission to aid Shia groups and fighters across the region in order to spread its influence, 1,500 IRGC advisers set up a "base in the Bekaa Valley" in order to assist Hezbollah in its growth, and all Hezbollah members were required to participate in IRGC-run camps to learn how to "confront the enemy."²⁶ Iran is also believed to grant Hezbollah at least \$100 million per year, although recent estimates put the number closer to \$200 million a year.²⁷ According to Matthew Levitt, "[s]ome of this financial support comes in the form of cash funds, while much is believed to come in the form of material goods such as weapons. Iranian cargo planes deliver sophisticated weaponry, from rockets to small arms, to Hezbollah in regular flights to Damascus from Tehran.

²³ Matthew Levitt. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*, p. 12.

²⁴ Alexander, Yonah and Milton M. Hoenig. *The New Iranian Leadership: Ahmadinejad, Terrorism, Nuclear Ambition, and the Middle East*, p. 65.

²⁵ C. Gambill, Gary and Ziad K. Abdelnour. "Hezbollah: Between Tehran and Damascus." Middle East Forum.

²⁶ Matthew Levitt. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*, p. 12.

²⁷ Matthew Levitt. "Hezbollah Finances: Funding the Party of God." Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

These weapons are offloaded in Syria and trucked to Hezbollah camps in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley."²⁸

In its early stages, Hezbollah refused to work with other groups in Lebanon and participate in the country's political process, which it viewed as corrupt. According to its 1985 founding manifesto, Hezbollah possessed several early objectives. The first was the removal of all Western influences from Lebanon and the region. Second was the pledging of Hezbollah's loyalty to Iranian Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the desire of the creation of an Islamic republic in Lebanon modeled after the Islamic Republic of Iran and founded on the concept of the political rule of the Islamic jurist. A third objective was the destruction of the state of Israel, which Hezbollah refuses to recognize.²⁹ The manifesto states:

Our primary assumption in our fight against Israel states that the Zionist entity is aggressive from its inception, and built on lands wrested from their owners, at the expense of the rights of the Muslim people. Therefore our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognize no treaty with it, no cease-fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated.³⁰

Hezbollah's actions during this period represented its role of resisting Israel. Between 1985 and 2000, Hezbollah carried out operations against Israeli targets in South Lebanon and beyond. Some of the more dramatic examples of Hezbollah resistance against Israel both within and beyond Lebanon include an attack on November 11, 1982, during which Hezbollah member Sheikh Ahmad Qasir drove a bomb-laden car into an Israeli Intelligence headquarters located in Tyre. More than seventy-five Israeli officials and soldiers were killed.³¹ On July 18, 1994, a van loaded with explosives destroyed the Israeli-Argentinean Cultural Center in Buenos Aires, killing 85. Although Hezbollah's leaders have denied any direct involvement in this incident, the

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Hezbollah." CFR Backgrounders. Council on Foreign Relations.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ David Daoud. "Meet the Proxies: How Iran Spreads Its Empire through Terrorist Militias." *The Tower*.

Argentine government, Israel and the United States have accused Iran of using Hezbollah to carry out the attack.³² On April 9, 1996, Hezbollah fired a heavy rocket barrage upon several cities in northern Israel, leading to the initiation of the Operation Grapes of Wrath by the IDF in an attempt to reduce Lebanese support for Hezbollah.³³

Possibly the most dramatic of Hezbollah's attacks, albeit one not directed at Israeli targets, was the Beirut Barracks Bombings of October 23, 1983, when two trucks equipped with bombs struck separate buildings housing United States and French military forces, killing 299 American and French servicemen. The bombings constituted the deadliest single day for the U.S. Marine Corps since the battle of Iwo Jima during World War II and the deadliest single attack on Americans overseas since World War II, and led to the withdrawal of the international peacekeeping force, of which the servicemen were a part, from Lebanon.³⁴

The culmination of Hezbollah's role as a Lebanese resistance organization was its war with Israel in 2006. The Second Lebanon War lasted 34 days and began when, on July 12, 2006, Hezbollah fighters fired rockets at Israeli border towns as a diversion for an anti-tank missile attack on two armored Humvees patrolling the Israeli side of the border fence, killing three, injuring two, and seizing two Israeli soldiers. Israel responded with airstrikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon that damaged Lebanese infrastructure,³⁵ an air and naval blockade, and then a ground invasion of southern Lebanon.³⁶ The war continued until a ceasefire was reached through UNSC Resolution 1701 on August 14, 2006.³⁷ Around 117 IDF soldiers were

³² "Argentina Marks 1994 Bomb Attack." BBC News.

³³ "Military Operations by Lebanese Guerrilla Forces." Human Rights Watch.

³⁴ Jim Michaels. "Recalling the Deadly 1983 Attack on the Marine Barracks." *USA Today*.

³⁵ "Israeli warplanes hit Beirut suburb". *CNN*.

³⁶ Edward Cody. "Lebanese Premier Seeks U.S. Help in Lifting Blockade." *Washington Post*.

³⁷ "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

killed and 1,244 wounded during the conflict.³⁸ Hezbollah claimed that 250 of its own fighters were killed, while Israel claims that the number is between 600 and 800.³⁹

The war highlighted the extent to which Israel viewed Hezbollah as a major threat, as well as Hezbollah's unprecedented military capabilities. As a result of Iranian support and training, Hezbollah's arsenal and ability to resist Israeli troops took Israel by surprise, and its use of various types of combat further exemplified its hybrid nature. Hezbollah surprisingly possessed the capacity to fire rockets that paralyzed Israel's northern region and essentially turned one of its largest cities, Haifa, into a border town. Further, despite being significantly weakened, Hezbollah cemented its reputation as a formidable fighting force by holding its ground during the crisis. This led to the growth of Hezbollah's ranks and appeal among the Arab population both in Lebanon and across the Middle East.

C. Da'wa and Social Services

The second aspect of Hezbollah's hybrid existence was and remains its provision of social services to the Lebanese Shia community. Hezbollah expanded its recruitment networks and established social service organizations in southern Lebanon, suburbs of Beirut, and Shi'ite villages throughout the Bekaa Valley, expanding its network of public services, including schools, mosques, clinics, hospitals, and community centers.

At the time of Hezbollah's conception, the economic situation of the Shiite community in Lebanon was in a poor state, which was exacerbated by the government's inability to provide needed services.⁴⁰ The absence of appropriate or sufficient government services created a vacuum, which was filled by Islamists. Hezbollah used social, religious, and educational

³⁸ "The Second Lebanon War (2006)." Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³⁹ Anthony H. Cordesman, and William D. Sullivan. *Lessons of the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War*, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Eitan Azani. "The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study," p. 904.

services as a means of practicing *Da'wa*, the proselytizing of Islam, in order to reduce the influence of rival organizations and to “disseminate its fundamentalist Islamist platform” and gain recruits for its armed forces.⁴¹

Hezbollah employed four strategies for providing services to Lebanese citizens. The first of these strategies was to provide financial aid to needy families, including providing “a pension for the families of someone who had died fighting for Hezbollah, medical care and schooling, free or subsidized cultural enrichment activities, and employment.”⁴² The second strategy involved the provision of medical care. Hezbollah maintains two hospitals, over a dozen medical centers, pharmacies, and dental clinics. For individual members of Hezbollah and the families of fallen Hezbollah operatives, this medical care “was heavily subsidized or even free.”⁴³

The third strategy involved “the provision of education through both Islamic and secular institutions.”⁴⁴ Students at Islamic colleges combined religious studies with Hezbollah military training, and many of them went on to become Hezbollah activists and fighters. In the late 1980s Hezbollah expanded its educational activity, targeting people and institutions through “conferences, seminars, and student union activities organized by its ‘Recruitment and Culture Committees.’”⁴⁵ Hezbollah also built Iranian-funded preschools and elementary schools in which they taught the children to support the group’s cause. Hezbollah established youth brigades and scout troops, which “combined competitive sports activities with Islamist indoctrination and

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 905.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Hezbollah propaganda.” Youth group members also participated in parades and marches and underwent basic military training at annual summer camps.⁴⁶

The fourth strategy involved the use of media and recruitment channels to indoctrinate various target populations. Hezbollah opened and maintains a network of mosques and religious centers in which “emissaries of Hezbollah openly engaged in recruitment.”⁴⁷ Further, Hezbollah maintains Al-’Ahad, a Hezbollah newspaper which has been published weekly since 1984, the radio stations Sawt Al- Musta’adafin, Sawt Al-Islam and Radio Nur, and a television station, Al-Manar, which began broadcasting in 1989. These media platforms promote and disseminate Hezbollah’s principles and messages.⁴⁸

D. Political Participation

Lastly, Hezbollah became involved in the Lebanese political process in the 1990s, at the end of the Lebanese civil war. After the Taif Accords of 1989, which effectively ended the civil war, Hezbollah began experiencing the first major shift in its role. In the 1980s, Hezbollah refused to participate in what it believed to be a corrupt Lebanese political system. By the 1990s, however, Hezbollah’s leaders decided to participate in the Lebanese political process, rather than work against it. In contrast to its 1985 open letter, the group now confronted both regional and Lebanese politics in a more engaging manner, jumpstarting its transition into a full-fledged hybrid organization.

Internal debates took place within Hezbollah between joining the political system laid out by the Taif Accords or opposing it at the risk of being marginalized. After substantial deliberation, Hezbollah made the decision to enter the Lebanese political arena during the 1992 elections,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid..

⁴⁸ Ibid.

believing that political participation would bring with it “political benefits such as access to government jobs, contracts, licenses, and permits.”⁴⁹ Additionally, its participation would provide Hezbollah with “recognition as a political institution in Lebanon, a public forum to express its views, and the ability to influence government budgets and spending to better serve its constituents.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, Hezbollah made the decision to embrace political participation because many in Lebanon viewed the group negatively due to its aim of establishing an Islamic caliphate in lieu of the government. Moreover, Hezbollah was thrust into a leadership role in Lebanon due to its superior military capabilities and participation in the Lebanese political system was crucial in order to maintain its newfound status.⁵¹ Lastly, Hezbollah’s main reason for working within the framework of the Taif Accords is that the agreement exempted Hezbollah from its general stipulation that all Lebanese militias must disarm. This allowed Hezbollah to participate in the Lebanese political process while maintaining its military might, a highly lucrative offer that incentivized Hezbollah to work with the government instead of against it.

Iranian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader to whom Hezbollah had sworn its loyalty, was consulted on the permissibility of participating in legislative elections. In May of 1992, he issued a fatwa stating that participating in elections was allowed. This edict formally began Hezbollah’s transition into a political player in Lebanon. The establishment of an “Islamic order” was “no longer viewed as an imminent political objective,” but rather as a long-term goal.⁵² Downplaying its original theme of governmental overthrow, Hezbollah replaced the expression on its emblem

⁴⁹ Patrick Joseph Kennedy. *From Mujahideen to Mainstream: The Evolution of Hezbollah*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Augustus R. Norton. *Hezbollah: A Short History*, p. 45.

⁵² Avon, Dominique, Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian, and Jane Marie Todd. *Hezbollah: A History of the Party of God*, p. 41.

from “Islamic revolution in Lebanon” to “Islamic resistance in Lebanon.”⁵³ Moreover, in February 1992, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah replaced Abbas Musawi, who had been assassinated by Israel, as Hezbollah’s Secretary General; Nasrallah maintained and increased Hezbollah’s new political role.⁵⁴ In its first national elections in 1992, Hezbollah won eight parliamentary seats out of the total 128.⁵⁵

At the end of the 1990s, Israeli public opinion turned against the increasingly-costly occupation of Lebanese territory. Finally, in 1999, Ehud Barak was elected as the new Israeli prime minister on the campaign promise to withdraw all Israeli forces from Lebanon by June of 2000, and Israeli forces completed their scheduled withdrawal on May 23, 2000.⁵⁶ Hezbollah capitalized on Israel’s withdrawal and made a strong showing at the polls. In 2000, the Amal-Hezbollah alliance, the Resistance and Development Bloc, won all twenty-three available seats in southern Lebanon and more than a quarter of all parliamentary seats.⁵⁷

In the 2004 municipal elections, Hezbollah won 21% of Lebanon’s municipalities.⁵⁸ During the 2005 elections the group won 11% of the country’s 128 parliamentary seats, while the Resistance and Development Bloc again won all twenty-three seats in southern Lebanon and 27% of the parliamentary seats nationwide.⁵⁹ In May 2008, Hezbollah gained

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Hezbollah." CFR Backgrounders. Council on Foreign Relations.

⁵⁶ Marjorie Miller, John Danizewski, and Tracy Wilkinson. "Israel Leaves South Lebanon After 22 Years." *Los Angeles Times*.

⁵⁷ Avon, Dominique, Anaïs-Trissa Khatchadourian, and Jane Marie Todd. *Hezbollah: A History of the Party of God*, p. 41.

⁵⁸ Leonhardt van Efferink. "Lebanon's Sovereignty - The Military, Social and Political Rise of Hezbollah." Exploring Geopolitics.

⁵⁹ "Introduction of Hezbollah in Lebanon". *China Daily*.

even greater political strength after it was effectively granted veto power in the Lebanese cabinet through the Doha agreement, which brought an end to a nearly two-year long fight between Hezbollah and the ruling Movement of the Future party in the Lebanese government.⁶⁰

E. Hezbollah as a Hybrid Organization: Contemporary Importance

Since its establishment, Hezbollah has transformed itself from a revolutionary terrorist organization bent on overthrowing the Lebanese government into an organization that strives to achieve the same or similar goals by using legitimate political tools from within. It has grown into a hybrid terrorist organization that employs the use of social welfare, religious education, jihad, and political participation in order to maintain a dominant position in Lebanon. The involvement of an organization as large and important as Hezbollah in Syria could potentially have far-reaching consequences for the future of Lebanon, Hezbollah's capabilities, Iranian influence north of Israel, and Israel's security calculations, among other aspects. As a result, Hezbollah's actions in Syria are of more consequence than that of other groups, such as Jabhat al-Nusra, and close examination of its involvement in the conflict is thus necessary.

⁶⁰ Hezbollah." CFR Backgrounders. Council on Foreign Relations.

Chapter 3: Hezbollah's Transition into a Regional Actor

Since it first officially announced its involvement in the Syrian Civil War in May of 2013, Hezbollah has been active, both openly and covertly, in various countries across the Middle East, including Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. The group has also been involved in a plethora of terrorism plots across the globe. This external involvement has dramatically changed Hezbollah. Dr. Matthew Levitt described this phenomenon, writing, “[o]nce limited to jockeying for political power in Lebanon and fighting Israel, [Hezbollah] is now a regional player engaged in conflicts far beyond its historical area of operations.”⁶¹ As a Hezbollah commander told the Financial Times in May 2015, "We shouldn't be called Party of God. We're not a party now, we're international. We're in Syria, we're in Palestine, we're in Iraq, and we're in Yemen. We are wherever the oppressed need us...Hezbollah is the school where every freedom-seeking man wants to learn."⁶²

A new crucial objective was formulated by the organization in the beginning of 2013 in the aftermath of the Arab Spring: assisting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his fight against the rebels and enabling him to maintain power over the country. Despite priding itself as being an indigenous Lebanese liberation force committed to defending the Shia in Lebanon, since mid-2013 Hezbollah fighters have operated openly and in significant numbers across the border to prevent the overthrow of the group's Iranian ally — Iran being Hezbollah's main funder. Hezbollah has enabled the Syrian regime to regain control of rebel-held areas in central Syria and has improved the effectiveness of pro-regime forces.

⁶¹ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

⁶² Ibid.

Hezbollah's operational shift to Syria and beyond has transformed the group from a Lebanese party focused on domestic politics and Israel into a regional sectarian force acting at Iran's behest across the Middle East.

According to Marissa Sullivan of the Institute for the Study of War, Hezbollah's support for Assad seeks to achieve three objectives. First, Hezbollah seeks to "preserve the Axis of resistance by shoring up the military capabilities of the Assad regime."⁶³ Second, Hezbollah "seeks to retain access to Iranian and Syrian material support by securing the lines of communication that run from Damascus to Lebanon from any rebel interference. Without the ability to operate within Syria, Iranian support to Hezbollah becomes much more difficult and risks interdiction; Hezbollah's own military capabilities and readiness would suffer without access to this military and financial assistance."⁶⁴ Third, Hezbollah is also acting to prevent the emergence of a Sunni-dominated regime in Syria if/when Assad's regime will fall, which would leave an adversarial government that disagrees with Iran and Hezbollah's actions and worldview in control of the major thoroughway between the two actors.⁶⁵

To show that Hezbollah's increased involvement in the Middle East indicates a strategic shift in its role, I compiled a list of important actions or decisions taken by Hezbollah in Syria since 2013. Each event is rated on a scale of "indicative of change" and "not indicative of change," determining that Hezbollah's actions and statements after 2013 do culminate in a strategic, purposeful decision to catalyze a change in the organization's role and perception. This will be elaborated on in the following paragraphs.

⁶³ Marisa Sullivan. "Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Finally, to prove that Hezbollah's strategic shift occurred in part to further Iranian interests, I show that Hezbollah's involvement in Yemen and Bahrain (and to a certain extent in Syria) does not affect its positions in Lebanon, Syria, or Israel, and thus can only be a result of Iranian influence and serves Iranian interests.

A. Syrian Civil War

Since 2013, Hezbollah has been heavily involved in the Syrian Civil War. With its assistance, Bashar al-Assad has solidified his hold on various areas of the government and held off rebel advances. It is believed that Hezbollah has up to 10,000 fighters currently in Syria.⁶⁶

There are different ways that Hezbollah operates at the tactical level in Syria. From 2011 to the beginning of 2013, prior to becoming engaged in the actual fighting in Syria, Hezbollah acted as advisers and trainers for the Syrian military, with Hezbollah fighters training regime forces at various military bases in the country. According to Marisa Sullivan, "Hezbollah fighters train NDF paramilitaries at military bases across Syria. This training has proved instrumental in cultivating a light infantry force that can help the regime hold cleared terrain."⁶⁷

This assistance was crucial for the Syrian regime, as "[o]ften, Hezbollah forces are far better trained, disciplined, and experienced than their Syrian or Iraqi counterparts. Hezbollah fighters improve combat effectiveness when partnered with less-capable Syrian units."⁶⁸ According to one Hezbollah fighter, "When we first started helping the Syrians, it was true they had big problems with their army...they had no skill, no discipline and no

⁶⁶ "Source: More than 10,000 Hezbollah Members Fighting in Syria." *Ynet*.

⁶⁷ Marisa Sullivan. "Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

leadership. Now, the men they have left have learned a lot and are very serious fighters. They've become more like Hezbollah.”⁶⁹

Since 2013, Hezbollah has moved beyond training and defensive missions and “now conducts offensive operations on behalf of the Syrian regime.” The group brings important capabilities to the Syrian civil war, and this has widened the geographic scope of Hezbollah’s involvement. According to Sullivan, “Hezbollah has played an integral role in the regime’s ability to clear urban terrain in Damascus and Homs,” as well as mountainous and rural areas such as Qalamoun, “which lies between these cities along the border with Lebanon.”⁷⁰

Five key actions undertaken by Hezbollah since 2013 reflect its changing role into a regional actor and strategic changes it has made since 2013. The first is Hezbollah’s decision to lead the ground assault on al-Qusayr in April 2013. Second is the announcement in May 2013 by Hassan Nasrallah that Hezbollah fighters had already been fighting alongside Bashar al-Assad’s regime forces for several months. Third is when, from mid-2013 to July of 2015, Hezbollah assisted Syrian forces in taking control of most of the Qalamoun Mountains. Fourth, since 2015 Hezbollah has attempted to institute a new front with Israel on the Golan Heights, which Israel has shown it views as a strategic change from Hezbollah’s past activities. Finally, since 2013 Hezbollah has made several structural and administrative changes reflecting its newfound emphasis on the fighting in Syria.

The beginning of April 2013 saw Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria shift with the decision to lead the ground assault on al-Qusayr, a primarily Sunni town in Homs province not far from the border with Lebanon. The assault began with the aim of capturing the villages around the rebel-held town of al-Qusayr and ultimately launching an attack on the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

town itself. The region is considered strategically important both for the rebels, as a supply route for troops fighting government forces in Homs, and for the Syrian government, as it lies between the capital and the Syrian coast, a stronghold for Assad supporters.⁷¹

The battle of al-Qusayr was extremely deadly. According to “an opposition group from Qusayr,” between 431 and 500 rebels were killed and 1,000 were wounded.⁷² According to the Syrian government, 1,257 rebels were killed, 1,192 were wounded and 1,000 were captured.⁷³ 114 Hezbollah fighters were killed in the fighting,⁷⁴ including commander Fadi al-Jazar⁷⁵ and Nasrallah’s brother, Khader Nasrallah⁷⁶. Over 20 government soldiers were reported killed, with over 30 additional troops wounded.⁷⁷

The Syrian government and Hezbollah’s victory at al-Qusayr marked an important point in the Syrian conflict, as it dealt a major blow to rebel forces both militarily and psychologically. Al-Qusayr also marked the first time Hezbollah fought alongside government troops in a major battle and controlled the planning and conduct of the operation,⁷⁸ instead of simply participating in an advisory capacity, providing weaponry, or other forms of support. In doing so, the battle represented the first major implementation of Hezbollah’s decision to become involved in Syria and the region in a more substantial capacity. Hezbollah’s involvement in the fighting was and remains integral to the Syrian

⁷¹ Jeffrey White. "The Qusayr Rules: The Syrian Regime's Changing Way of War." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

⁷² Mariam Karouny. "Syrian Rebels Lose Strategic Town in Boost for Assad." *Reuters*.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ "Hezbollah Operatives Killed in Syria – Update." The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center.

⁷⁵ Elad Benari. "Senior Hizbullah Official Killed in Syria Fighting." *Arutz Sheva*.

⁷⁶ "Hezbollah Leader’s Brother Killed in Syria Clashes." *The Times of Israel*.

⁷⁷ "L'Armée Syrienne Libre Appelle à Défendre Qoussair." *Le Monde*.

⁷⁸ Marisa Sullivan. "Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War.

regime's success. The Syrian government and Hezbollah followed the victory in al-Qusayr with attempts to regain territory in Homs, Aleppo, and Damascus.

The second event that exemplifies Hezbollah's strategic shift occurred on May 25, 2013, when Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah confirmed in a statement for the first time that Hezbollah was officially assisting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in his fight to maintain power in Syria, and that Hezbollah fighters had already been in Syria for several months:

Today we are facing a kind of danger that is unprecedented in history, which targets humanity itself. This is not a threat to the resistance in Lebanon or to one sector of the regime in Syria or the government in Iraq or a group in Yemen. This is a danger to everyone. No one should bury their heads in the sand.⁷⁹

This statement provides concrete evidence of a change in Hezbollah's official role. Nasrallah officially declared that Hezbollah had modified its *raison d'être*, and would participate in actual fighting alongside the Syrian regime from that point on. It is interpretable that Hezbollah no longer views itself as simply an organization dedicated to resistance against Israel, but also as an actor that may involve itself in other conflicts in the region if necessary, at least for the foreseeable future.

Third, Hezbollah assisted Syrian forces in taking control of most of the Qalamoun Mountains between November 2013 and July 2015. In November 2013, the Syrian military, backed by Hezbollah, launched an offensive against the rebel-held Qalamoun Mountains in an attempt to cut rebel supply lines to Damascus from Lebanon.

The Qalamoun region was a strategically useful area to both parties. The region had been used by rebel forces, led by the al-Nusra Front, as a base for its operations around the Syrian capital of Damascus. According to Marisa Sullivan, a major highway runs through Qalamoun, "linking Damascus to Homs and making it important terrain for securing the

⁷⁹ Nasrallah: Hezbollah to Increase Presence in Syria." *Al Jazeera*

regime's freedom of movement north of the capital to its coastal strongholds."⁸⁰ Qalamoun also secures the supply routes in and out of Syria and prevents armed groups from infiltrating Lebanon, especially the Bekaa Valley, Hezbollah's stronghold.⁸¹ Further, Qalamoun "functioned as a rebel support zone from which to launch attacks on regime positions along Damascus's northern flank and to provide logistical support to opposition fighters in Eastern Ghouta."⁸² Thus, Hezbollah sought to secure this crucial territory both to secure their interests in Lebanon and to support the Assad regime.

From June through August 2014, the Syrian government and Hezbollah laid siege to rebels in the area⁸³, and the battle concluded in June 2015, with only a small area of the region remaining under rebel control.⁸⁴ Hezbollah's assistance was crucial to the success of the Syrian army's offensive. Hezbollah fighters were present at every stage of the fighting; it is estimated that up to 4,000 Hezbollah fighters participated in the offensive.⁸⁵ The massive amount of troops that Hezbollah committed to the offensive — around 40% of the estimated total amount of fighters Hezbollah has in Syria — evinced the importance that the fight held for Hezbollah's leadership.

Additionally, the fight for Qalamoun proved to be another critical moment in the formation of Hezbollah's new role in Syria. By now, Hezbollah's new role of aiding the Assad regime had clearly been established, but the Qalamoun offensive solidified Hezbollah's involvement, emboldened the group's leadership and fighters, and extended the

⁸⁰ Marisa Sullivan. "Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War.

⁸¹ Nour Samaha. "Why Qalamoun Matters for Hezbollah." *Al Jazeera*.

⁸² Marisa Sullivan. "Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria." Institute for the Study of War.

⁸³ Rakan Al-Fakih. "Hezbollah, Syrian Regime Battle Rebels in Northeast Lebanon." *The Daily Star Lebanon*.

⁸⁴ Leith Fadel. "Hezbollah Inching Closer to the Border of Israel." *Al-Masdar News*.

⁸⁵ "Hizbullah Fighters Escort Journalists on Tour of Qalamoun Mountains." *Naharnet*.

organization's reach into Syria. Overall, the Qalamoun offensive was a decisive and successful representation of Hezbollah's new mission to prop up Assad through direct combat.

Fourth, Hezbollah has attempted to stretch its front with Israel to the Golan Heights since last year, which Israel has shown it views as a strategic change from Hezbollah's past experiences. In May 2013, Hezbollah threatened to turn the Golan Heights into a "resistance front,"⁸⁶ and it appears they have attempted to follow through on the threat. On January 18, 2015, an Israeli helicopter attack killed six Hezbollah members, including commander Mohamad Issa and the son of the group's late military commander Imad Moughniyah, as well as an Iranian commander, in the Syrian province of Quneitra near the border with Israel.⁸⁷ According to Western intelligence sources, "a unit headed by Jihad Mughniyeh plotted to attack Israel with rockets, anti-tank missiles and bombs, and planned to send terror operatives into Israeli territory. These attacks were meant to target Israeli troops and civilians in the Golan."⁸⁸ A Syrian activist also stated that Hezbollah was "widely rumored" to be training Syrian government forces in the area.⁸⁹

The Syrian side of the border has become a battleground between Assad's forces and rebels, with fighting occurring even within the U.N.-monitored separation zone between Syria and the Golan. Al-Nusra front and other rebel groups have pushed government troops out of Quneitra — in many areas along the border, Assad's forces have pulled back from their positions.⁹⁰ In the absence of a strong central Syrian government, the Syrian-Israeli

⁸⁶ "Syria and Hezbollah Threaten To Turn Golan Heights Into 'Resistance Front'" *The Forward*.

⁸⁷ Khoury, Jack, and Gili Cohen. "Israeli Strike in Syria Kills Late Hezbollah Leader's Son, Sources Say." *Haaretz*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ "Syria and Hezbollah Threaten To Turn Golan Heights Into 'Resistance Front'" *The Forward*.

border has become somewhat chaotic, and Hezbollah has attempted to take advantage of the security vacuum on the border and establish a foothold there.⁹¹ While Syrian President Bashar al-Assad kept the front line between Syria and the Golan Heights quiet despite an official state of war between the two countries, Hezbollah would be more willing to use the area as a launching pad for missile strikes on Israeli territory. As a result, Hezbollah is attempting to push al-Nusra and moderate rebel forces out of the Quneitra area and take control of the Syrian side of the Golan for itself.

Israel's interdiction shows that Israel considered Hezbollah's attempt to stretch the front as a strategic change that it would not tolerate. Moreover, it shows that Israel prefers and is more comfortable with an al-Nusra presence in the Golan than a Hezbollah one. Hezbollah's actions constitute a strategic change because the opening of a new front on the Syrian border, which has been quiet for several decades, poses a serious challenge to Israel and what remains of the regional status quo. If Hezbollah were to control the Quneitra area, it could stretch the organization's front with the Jewish state from the Mediterranean Sea to the Golan Heights, and even possibly to Israel's border with Jordan, thereby granting Hezbollah access to all of Israel's northern borders. This would be far more threatening to Israel than if al-Nusra were to continue maintaining positions on the Golan Heights. According to Michael Herzog of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "establishing an active front with Israel in southern Syria affords [Hezbollah] valuable options in confronting Israel, while providing better chances for containing any escalation within Lebanon."⁹²

Further, using this new front Hezbollah could "recharge its emptied 'batteries' of legitimacy in Lebanon and the Arab world, reclaiming the mantle of resistance against

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Michael Herzog. "Southern Syria: A New Front for Israel?" *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

Israel...help attract Palestinian armed factions to the Axis, including Hamas, which is under duress and eager to mend fences with Tehran...and...help advance Iran's strategic ambitions of encircling Israel on numerous fronts.”⁹³ Hezbollah leaders themselves have admitted that that the organization’s activity on the Golan constitute a strategic change; Hassan Nasrallah has stated that Hezbollah is seeking a change from the previous status-quo, saying that Hezbollah "no longer accept the separation of the battle fronts.”⁹⁴ The gains that Hezbollah could make from controlling the Syrian side of the Golan worries Israel, and is something that Israel will continuously work to prevent.

Lastly, the strongest indicators of Hezbollah's strategic transformation are structural. Since 2013, the group has added two new commands -- one on the Lebanese-Syrian border and the other within Syria.⁹⁵ According to Dr. Matthew Levitt, this “startling reorganization points to a serious commitment to civil conflicts well beyond Lebanon's borders.”⁹⁶

Hezbollah has also transferred key personnel to Syria from its crucial Southern Command, which deals with Lebanon's border with Israel. Mustafa Badreddine, the head of Hezbollah's foreign terrorist operations, began coordinating Hezbollah military activities in Syria in 2012 and headed the group's Syrian command until mid-2016. Badreddine was a Hezbollah veteran implicated in the 1983 bombing of U.S. barracks in Beirut, the 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and terrorist bombings in Kuwait. According to Dr. Matthew Levitt, his appointment was the “strongest sign” Hezbollah could give of its commitment to Syria's civil war.⁹⁷ On May 13th, 2016 Badreddine was killed

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

in an explosion that Hezbollah stated was the result of artillery shelling by a Sunni armed militia near the airport in Damascus,⁹⁸ although Israel was suspected to be the main culprit. Hezbollah's decision to pin the blame on Syrian rebels could be an attempt to keep tensions with Israel to a minimum in order to avoid a conflict over the summer, as well as a means of justifying a continued Hezbollah presence in Syria despite its significant losses.

Hezbollah's focus on the Syrian conflict also extends to the top of the organization. Nasrallah has directed the group's activities in Syria since at least September 2011, when he "reportedly began meeting Assad in Damascus to coordinate Hezbollah's contributions to the country's civil war."⁹⁹ These structural changes and Hezbollah's reassignment of high-level strategists from its front with Israel are indicative of a strategic change in Hezbollah's role and mission. Hezbollah clearly now views its fighting in Syria as its most important task and has adjusted its organizational structure accordingly.

B. Yemen Civil War

Hezbollah's newfound regional activity in Syria has not occurred in a vacuum. The group has increased its activity in Yemen, Bahrain, and Egypt, as well. This involvement has occurred largely in places and situations that do not affect Hezbollah's positions in Lebanon, Syria, or Israel, and thus can be determined to have been carried out under Iranian orders to serve Iranian interests.

Hezbollah has spent much of its time since 2013 assisting insurgencies backed by its sponsor, Iran. This includes the Houthi rebellion in Yemen, the Shi'ite Muslim insurgent group that has seized control of the country's capital. Its assistance mostly includes advising and training fighters and supplying them with weapons.

⁹⁸ "Hezbollah Killing: Jihadists Blamed for Badreddine Death." *BBC News*.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Rumors and suggestions of Hezbollah involvement in Yemen have been abundant since 2009. In November of 2009, Yemen's president Ali Abdullah Saleh said that members of Hezbollah were teaching the Houthi fighters.¹⁰⁰ That same month, high-ranking officials from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard were said to have secretly met with Houthi rebels and Hezbollah in Yemen to coordinate joint military operations against Saudi positions along the Yemeni border. Arabic daily Asharq al-Awsat said Arab and Egyptian sources uncovered that a number of intelligence services in the region learned of the three-way meeting. It said the high-level meeting was the most prominent evidence of "direct Iranian involvement" in the support of Houthi rebels financially, militarily, and logistically.¹⁰¹

Early in 2013, a suspected Hezbollah cargo ship loaded with highly sophisticated weapons, including surface-to-air missiles, was discovered en route to areas controlled by Houthi militants.¹⁰² In November, Yemeni Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi expressed concern over the fact that Hezbollah was providing protection to former South Yemen President Ali Salem al-Baidh's in Lebanon during an interview with al-Hayat.¹⁰³

On September 25, 2014, Yemen freed two suspected members of Hezbollah held for questioning about alleged ties to the Houthis. Then, on November 27, the Saudi newspaper Okaz reported that senior military personnel from Hezbollah recently arrived in Yemen in order to help the rebels in their attempt to take over the country.¹⁰⁴

On February 17, 2016, proven evidence of Hezbollah's involvement in Yemen was procured. Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi revealed during a press conference

¹⁰⁰ Mazrak Camp. "Pity Those Caught in the Middle." *The Economist*.

¹⁰¹ "Iran, Hezbollah Officials Met Secretly with Yemen Rebels." *Ya Libnan*.

¹⁰² Mona Alami. "Hezbollah Is Expanding Its Reach into Middle East." *USA Today*

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Hezbollah Military Personnel Fighting in Yemen With Shiite Rebels." *The Tower*.

in Turkey that Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah had sent him a letter explaining his organization's role in the fighting in Yemen. According to Hadi, Nasrallah wrote him that his "fighters arrived in Yemen to teach the Yemeni people the essence of governing."¹⁰⁵

Lastly, Hezbollah has dispatched high-ranking officials to Yemen, emphasizing its commitment to assisting the Houthi rebellion. Among these officials is Khalil Harb, a former special operations commander and a close adviser to Nasrallah. He manages the transfer of funds to Hezbollah within Yemen and often travels to Tehran to coordinate the group's activities with Iranian officials. Dr. Matthew Levitt writes that "[g]iven his experience working with other terrorist organizations, his close relations with Iranian and Hezbollah leaders, and his expertise in special operations and training, appointing Harb to work in Yemen no doubt made a great deal of sense to Hezbollah."¹⁰⁶

Hezbollah also sent Abu Ali Tabtabai, a senior commander who had previously been involved with Hezbollah's operation in Syria, "to upgrade the group's training program for Yemen's Houthi rebels, which reportedly involves schooling them in guerrilla tactics." According to Matthew Levitt, an Israeli official stated that "[s]ending in Tabtabai [to Yemen] is a sign of a major Hezbollah investment and commitment. The key question is how long someone of Tabtabai's stature will stay."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Maayan Groisman. "Nasrallah Letter Reveals Hezbollah's Involvement in Yemen." *The Jerusalem Post*.

¹⁰⁶ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

C. Bahrain

Hezbollah has also been accused of involvement in attacks and other activities in the small Gulf kingdom of Bahrain. During the Arab Spring in 2011, Bahrain filed a report with the U.N. Secretary General alleging that Shiite Bahraini opposition members who staged an uprising against the Sunni-ruled government were being trained in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon and Iran. Hezbollah and the Bahraini opposition deny these reports.¹⁰⁸

On March 26, 2013, Bahrain became the first Arab country to designate Hezbollah a terrorist entity.¹⁰⁹ On June 5, 2013, Bahrain's Sheikh Rashid al Khalifa announced that the government would probe possible Hezbollah activity in the kingdom, including "financial investments, commercial and economic activity, operations that masquerade as charities, bank accounts, money transfers and individual members of the organization to take the required legal procedures."¹¹⁰

Moreover, on August 3, 2013, Bahrain blocked the website of al Manar television, Hezbollah's official station, in a move Bahraini officials said was aimed at curbing terrorism. Bahrain's blocking of the al Manar website was announced by the Minister of State for Communications, Sheikh Fawaz bin Mohammad Al Khalifa. Al Manar broadcasts have also been banned by France, Germany, Spain, the Netherlands, Brazil, Canada, and Australia, among others.¹¹¹

On March 2, 2014, Deputy-Chairman of Dubai Police and Public Security Dahi Khalfan Tamim said that a Hezbollah-trained operative perpetrated a blast that killed three police officers outside of the capital. On Twitter, Tamim wrote that, "The criminal who carried

¹⁰⁸ Mona Alami. "Hezbollah Is Expanding Its Reach into Middle East." *USA Today*

¹⁰⁹ Weinthal, Benjamin, and Ariel Ben Solomon. "Bahrain Parliament Names Hezbollah a Terror Group." *The Jerusalem Post*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

out the operation to assassinate the Emirati martyr...used to go to Lebanon and was given explosives training by Hezbollah.”¹¹²

On December 7, 2014, an explosive device was detonated in Damistan, a village south of Manama, killing a corporal identified as Ali Mohammad Ali. Bahraini General Security chief Tareq Hassan al-Hassan stated that the victim was “a Jordanian national who worked in the training team assembled as a result of the security agreement signed between Bahrain and Jordan.” Bahrain accused Hezbollah of being behind the terror attack, with Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa tweeting that “a bomb made by terror [group] Hezbollah killed him.”¹¹³

Finally, on January 6, 2016, Bahrain said that it had caught Hezbollah plotting attacks on its territory. “A secret terrorist plot aided by the so-called Iranian Revolutionary Guard and the Hezbollah terrorist organization was foiled. It targeted the security of the kingdom of Bahrain by (plotting to) carry out a series of dangerous bombings,” the kingdom's state news agency BNA reported.¹¹⁴ In response, on January 10 Lebanon issued a statement rejecting an Arab League statement accusing Hezbollah over alleged interference in Bahrain.¹¹⁵

The extent to which the accusations leveled against Hezbollah by Bahrain are true is unclear. According to Matthew Levitt, “There is a history of Hezbollah activity in Bahrain, where a Bahraini Hezbollah branch was set up and there are radicals who have spent time

¹¹² "Dubai: Hezbollah Trained Bomber in Bahrain Attack." *NOW Lebanon*.

¹¹³ "Bahrain Links Hezbollah to Terror Attack." *NOW Lebanon*.

¹¹⁴ "Bahrain: Terror Plot Linked to Iran and Hezbollah Foiled." *Ynet*.

¹¹⁵ Bassam Abou Reid. "Lebanon Rejects Arab League Statement Accusing Hezbollah over Alleged Interference in Bahrain." *LBC Group*.

in Lebanon, but it is unclear how much credence to give Bahrain's allegations against Hezbollah."¹¹⁶

Bahrain first raised its alarm over Hezbollah's activity in the country in 2011, when protests against the government, led in part by the Shia community, threatened the regime's hold on power. The subsequent accusations and sanctions against Hezbollah could be part of Bahrain's strategy to turn public opinion against and curb Shia — particularly Iranian — influence in the country, as well as in the rest of the Persian Gulf. As the *Wall Street Journal* noted in April 2011, Saudi Arabia urged the United States to back Bahrain's ruling family to help avert a scenario in which an overthrow in Bahrain could lead to Shiite unrest in Saudi Arabia and the spread of Iranian power in the region.¹¹⁷

However, assuming the details of Hezbollah's involvement in Bahrain are correct, it is difficult to see how such actions benefit the organization. Much as with Yemen, during a time in which Hezbollah is stepping up its involvement in Syria — a conflict whose outcome holds significant consequences for Hezbollah — plotting attacks in Bahrain does not help the group or any of its core interests, which suggests that the organization is only doing so at the behest of its benefactor, Iran.

D. Egypt

Hezbollah has also been suspected of engaging in nefarious activities in Egypt. Egyptian authorities arrested forty-nine men in the five months preceding April 2009; Egypt accused them of being Hezbollah agents planning attacks against Israeli and Egyptian targets in the Sinai Peninsula. The plot began in 2005, when a Hezbollah operative named

¹¹⁶ Mona Alami. "Hezbollah Is Expanding Its Reach into Middle East." *USA Today*.

¹¹⁷ Toby Dershowitz. "Bahrain Blocks Hezbollah's Al Manar Television Website." *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*.

Muhammad Yousef Mansour traveled to Egypt on a Lebanese passport. Mansour was in charge of Hezbollah's "Egypt file."¹¹⁸

In Egypt, Mansour worked closely with another senior Hezbollah operative, Mohammed Qabalan, to build a Hezbollah support network in Egypt. According to Matthew Levitt, "the cell's mission appears to have broadened over time, but it started out as an operation focused on smuggling weapons and funds through Egypt to Hamas and other Palestinian groups in Gaza." This cell was also to help "oversee the training of Palestinian terrorists and the facilitating of terrorist attacks targeting Israel."¹¹⁹ Further, Mansour later stated during interrogation that the Egyptian Hezbollah network was conceived as part of a wider plan aimed at establishing Hezbollah networks in Jordan and other Middle Eastern countries, as well.¹²⁰

Following the February 2008 assassination of Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's international operations chief:

Some members of the Hezbollah network—by then comprising several dozen operatives, a few Lebanese Hezbollah operatives and many more local criminal facilitators and smugglers—began plotting a variety of terrorist attacks. Some were clearly still targeting Israelis...Others, however, appear to have targeted Egyptian targets more broadly, including conducting surveillance of critical infrastructure such as the Suez Canal...

The cell reportedly planned to carry out three simultaneous, large-scale attacks targeting Red Sea resorts popular among Israeli tourists, including Taba, Nuweiba, and Dahab. Cell members collected intelligence on Israeli tourists at Orgada, as well. Allegedly, the cell had already purchased a small van to be used as a car bomb...and had prepared several suicide belts for the attacks. Ultimately, however, senior Hezbollah officials – by one account Hassan Nasrallah himself – ordered the attacks not be carried out.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Matthew Levitt. "Hezbollah's Man in Egypt." *Perspectives on Terrorism*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

According to Matthew Levitt, the attacks were likely cancelled “for fear that costs of carrying out attacks in Egypt, the most populous Sunni country in the region and a leader of the Arab world, would outweigh the benefits.”¹²² Yet the cell remained to use Egypt as a staging ground for attacks in Israel, and was only broken up in late 2008, although the matter was only made public in April 2009. Levitt acknowledges that a clear, detailed understanding of the situation is difficult to obtain, but the general idea is that a Hezbollah network had definitely been operating on the ground in Egypt. Its primary focus “was smuggling weapons into the Gaza Strip, but it was also tasked with providing logistical support to other operations and assigned to carry out surveillance of potential targets in Egypt.”¹²³

E. Hezbollah’s Mutation: Strategic Decision or Iranian Diktat?

Now that evidence of Hezbollah’s strategic decision to increase its involvement in Syria and other countries in the Middle East has been reviewed, it is beneficial to discuss why it began: is Hezbollah’s changing role due to a strategic calculation by Nasrallah that increased involvement in the Syrian civil war is beneficial to the organization, or is it a result of an Iranian precondition for continued financial and strategic support for Hezbollah? After all, Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria was a distinct change from anything it had done before — what could possibly have caused the organization to undergo such a drastic change?

Hanin Ghaddar, managing editor of the online magazine *NOW Lebanon*, believes that Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria is a result of a direct Iranian orders to assist the Assad regime in its fights against the rebels:

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

The question is not what Hezbollah wants. The question is what Iran wants. Iran wants Hezbollah to stay strong in Lebanon because they can use it for some regional influence and control. Without Hezbollah, they'll lose a lot. They're losing the Syrian regime. They're doing everything they can, but they know Assad is going to fall eventually. So Hezbollah is in Syria to make sure that when the government falls they will have an enclave in Syria protected by the Alawites and the Iranians so they can maintain the logistical routes for their weapons. They need to keep the city of Homs because without it they'll lose the link. So they aren't over there helping Assad survive, they're over there preserving their rat line.¹²⁴

According to Ghaddar, Hezbollah's new role in Syria was not simply a strategic decision by Hezbollah, although that certainly is an important factor. Hezbollah is fighting for Assad because Iran needs them there in order to help Assad maintain his hold on power; without their necessary assistance, Assad could lose control quickly. Further, Iran believes that Assad will fall at some point and are directing Hezbollah to take strategic positions in Syria so that the organization can maintain Iran's link to Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East in the aftermath.

Dr. Matthew Levitt makes a similar case for an Iranian role in Hezbollah's decision in an interview for the Council on Foreign Relations in 2013, although he adds that a religious factor plays into Hezbollah's decision:

People tend to misunderstand the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran, which has changed over time but is now extremely close. The U.S. intelligence community has publicly described this as a "strategic partnership." But people don't fully appreciate Hezbollah's ideological commitment to the concept of "velayat-e faqih," or guardianship of the jurists, which holds that a Shiite Islamic cleric should also serve as supreme head of government. For Hezbollah, this means the Iranian leadership is also their leader — not for every foot soldier, but for Hezbollah's senior leaders absolutely.

So what we see now is that Hezbollah is going to do things today that are in Iran's interest even if they expressly run counter to the interests of Lebanon and Hezbollah's own interest there. At the end of the day, the group's commitment to Iran trumps its identity as a Lebanese political movement. Part of that has to do with the assassination of Imad Mughniyeh in 2008, who led Hezbollah's military wing. Mughniyeh led Hezbollah and is believed to have had close ties with the Iranian Quds force. Because of that, Iran had tremendous faith in him. If he was told to do something by Iran, he could hold them off a little bit. But his successors, his cousin

¹²⁴ Michael J. Totten. "The Beginning of the End for Hezbollah." *World Affairs Journal*.

Mustafa Badre al-Dine in particular, are nowhere near Mughniyeh in stature, so Iran doesn't have the same trust in him. Therefore, the strategic partnership has become even closer.

If you look at Hezbollah's attacks against Israeli tourists worldwide, there's no way they can be described as in Lebanon's interests in any way. Look back at Hezbollah's support of Shiite militants in Iraq during the Iraq war; look now today to Hezbollah helping to ferry Iranian weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen; look just recently to Hezbollah's flying a drone near the Israeli nuclear reactor in Dimona. None of this is in Lebanon's interest.¹²⁵

Furthermore, in a July 23, 2015 article, Levitt sticks to the belief that Iran strong-armed Hezbollah into joining the fighting in Syria:

Initially, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah resisted dispatching his fighters to Syria to back President Bashar al-Assad, despite repeated requests from Iranian leaders, in particular Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani. Like some other Hezbollah leaders, Nasrallah feared that engaging in Syria would undermine the group's position in Lebanon by associating Hezbollah -- Lebanon's primary Shiite party -- with a repressive Iranian-allied government butchering a Sunni-majority population. But Nasrallah reportedly acquiesced after receiving an appeal from the Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Iran, Khamenei made clear, expected Hezbollah to support Assad's grip on power. As a result, Hezbollah's operational shift to Syria and beyond has transformed the group from a Lebanese party focused on domestic politics into a regional sectarian force acting at Iran's behest across the Middle East.¹²⁶

Levitt believes that Hezbollah's decision to assist Assad's regime in Syria is solely a result of an Iranian order to do so. Iran clearly laid out to Nasrallah that it was requiring Hezbollah to fight in Syria, especially if he wanted Iran to continue funding his group and supply it with strategic support and arms. This was no empty threat — Iran previously drastically reduced the amount of funding it gave to Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist organization governing the Gaza Strip, after the organization failed to show public support for Syrian President Bashar Assad and sided with the rebels in 2011.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Matthew Levitt. "The Hezbollah Connection in Syria and Iran." *Council on Foreign Relations*.

¹²⁶ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹²⁷ "Iran Cuts Hamas Funding for failing to Show Support for Assad." *Haaretz*.

As a result, Hezbollah complied and declared its official intervention in mid-2013. Moreover, aside from Hezbollah's strategic consideration in adhering to Iran's diktat, Hezbollah's leaders felt compelled to fulfill Iran's wish due to their religious belief in following the orders of their supreme leader, Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei. Hezbollah felt that it could not disobey the wishes of the Ayatollah, and so entered Syria regardless of other considerations.

Ghaddar and Levitt are correct in their assertion that part of the motivation for why Hezbollah went into Syria is that Iran is Hezbollah's benefactor, and provides it with weaponry, strategic support, and legitimacy. Iran needed Hezbollah to use its significant manpower to boost Assad's poor standing in Syria. As a result, it simply ordered its proxy to undergo the task it needed it to complete. Hezbollah could not risk upsetting its backer to too great an extent, and complied. (It is also important to note that if an Iranian diktat was delivered to Hezbollah, it will not be found — with the possible exception of by intelligence agencies monitoring communication between Iran and Hezbollah).

Yet this answer seems almost too simple. Providing strategic support to Assad, advising state forces, and assisting in the planning of attacks is one thing, but would Hezbollah truly have sent the amount of troops it has — around 10,000 — if its Syrian involvement was solely the result of an Iranian order? Would fewer have been sufficient for the Iranian government? Furthermore, would Iran dismiss Nasrallah's concerns so quickly? After all, Iran does have respect for Hezbollah and Nasrallah; even Israel respects the organization's strength and doesn't dismiss it lightly.

In actuality, the answer to the question is a mixture of both an Iranian directive and a strategic decision by Hezbollah that intervening in Syria was in its best interest. The question is better posed not as "is Hezbollah's changing role due to a strategic calculation or

a result of an Iranian precondition for support,” but rather, “to what extent is it the former or the latter?”

In response to this dilemma, Charles-Brian Biondi, in a working paper for the Istituto Affari Internazionali, downplays Iran’s role in Hezbollah’s decision to assist Assad in Syria:

Yet the extent to which Hezbollah has gotten involved in Syria has to do with a strategic decision made by Nasrallah. Hezbollah supported Assad before rhetorically, but the addition of troops on the ground in Syria was motivated by a fear that the fall of Assad would significantly weaken Hezbollah. The Syrian regime is a precious ally for Hezbollah due to the substantial help provided by the regime and its geographical position between Lebanon and Iran....

Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria is also motivated by the internal Lebanese situation. In addition to the substantial influx of refugees, the presence of Syrian fighters and the fact that the Syrian/Lebanese border has become a zone of intense arm trafficking have increased Hezbollah’s insecurity. Hezbollah’s leaders are very concerned about the fact that refugee camps could turn into training camps where rebels could recruit other fighters.¹²⁸

Biondi posits that Iran’s desire for Hezbollah to assist Assad in his fight against the rebels was not the sole factor in Hezbollah’s decision to do so. The extent to which Hezbollah has gotten involved actually has to do more with a strategic calculation by Hezbollah that it was in its best interests — indeed, it was integral to Hezbollah’s future — to prop up Assad’s regime and help confront the rebels in Syria. In other words, it had its own motivations for doing so. Hezbollah seeks to retain access to Iranian and Syrian material support by securing the lines of communication that run from Damascus to Lebanon from any rebel interference.

Not only does Iran supply the organization with support through Syria, but also the Syrian government itself supplies Hezbollah with weaponry. As far back as October 2009 it was reported that Syria provided Hezbollah with over a quarter of the group’s arsenal,¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Charles-Brian Biondi. The Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Lebanon. Local and Regional Rationales for Hezbollah’s Involvement in Syria. *Istituto Affari Internazionali*.

¹²⁹ David Schapiro. "Iran-Lebanese Hezbollah Relationship 2009." *Iran Tracker*.

and as recently as May 9, 2013 Nasrallah stated that Syria will supply Hezbollah with “game-changing weapons.”¹³⁰ Without the ability to operate within Syria, Iranian support to Hezbollah becomes much more difficult, and Hezbollah’s own military capabilities and readiness — especially in regards to resisting Israel — would suffer without access to this military and financial assistance.¹³¹

Thus, Hezbollah intervened in Syria due to its realization that maintaining Iranian interests in Syria directly benefited its overarching interests as well, and that the collapse of the Syria regime was too big a price to pay. As one 27-year-old Hezbollah fighter put it, “If we don’t defend the Syrian regime, it would fall within two hours. Our leadership [in Lebanon] took the decision that it would not be acceptable for Syria to fall [to the Sunni-dominated rebels] because we would be encircled by enemies in Syria and Israel.”¹³² Hezbollah has therefore sunk a considerable amount of resources into Syria, a move that could backfire greatly and dictate Hezbollah’s future should it ultimately fail.

Such a view is backed up by Nasrallah’s call for a popular mobilization among Hezbollah supporters to help solidify a victory in the “existential battle” in Syria on May 23, 2015. In a speech addressed to wounded Hezbollah fighters, Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah viewed Syria as a necessary fight of the utmost importance to Hezbollah’s strategic interests:

The resistance is fighting an existential battle par excellence...Had we not fought in Aleppo, Homs and Damascus, we would have fought in Baalbek, Hermel, al-Ghazieh, Sidon, Tyre, Nabatieh and other Lebanese villages, towns and cities... Even if half of us are martyred in this war for the other half to live in dignity, glory and

¹³⁰ "Hezbollah Head Says Syria Will Supply 'game-changing' Arms." *The Times of Israel*.

¹³¹ Marisa Sullivan. “Middle East Security Report 19 - Hezbollah in Syria.” Institute for the Study of War.

¹³² Baker, Aryn, and Rami Aisha. "Taking the Lead, Hizballah Girds for Key Syria Battle on Assad's Behalf." *TIME*.

honor...this would be the best choice. Half of us will not be martyred, God willing, but the situation requires great sacrifice because the attack is huge.¹³³

Consequently, Hezbollah's decision to become involved in Syria was probably the result of a mix between an Iranian order and a strategic decision by the group itself. It came as a result of interactions between Iran and Hezbollah, in which Iran persuaded Hezbollah that it was in the organization's interest to become involved in Syria, because Nasrallah knows that if Assad falls all heavy weaponry flows will be reduced and Hezbollah's access to Iranian funds, which have become more readily available after Iran gained access to \$100 billion of its frozen overseas assets as a result of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in February 2016,¹³⁴ will be severely diminished.

Hezbollah's activities in Egypt also appear to be motivated more by Hezbollah's own strategic interests than by an Iranian order. Hezbollah's activity in Egypt shows that Hezbollah's expansion throughout the region possibly began before the Arab Spring and the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, suggesting that Hezbollah has also focused on expanding not only to serve Iranian interests, but also to further its own interests — in this case, to plan strikes on Israeli targets in both Egypt and Israel. Targeting Israeli citizens certainly falls within Hezbollah's mission of resisting Israel, and establishing a base in Egypt would have allowed Hezbollah to carry out attacks on Israel's southern territory.

Additionally, Hezbollah's leaders clearly felt that conducting an attack on Egyptian soil would be too detrimental to its position in the Arab world, and so decided to not go through with it. This suggests that the operation in Egypt was of Hezbollah's own undertaking, as Hezbollah had the ability and control to decide not to carry out the planned

¹³³ "Everyone Has Role to Play in 'existential' Syria Battle: Nasrallah." *The Daily Star Lebanon*.

¹³⁴ "Iran Now Has \$100 Billion of Overseas Assets Unfrozen under Nuke Deal." *Al Jazeera*.

attacks, while Hezbollah has had to continue its actions in other locales, despite Arab backlash, when they have been directed by Iran itself.

This stands in contrast to Hezbollah's involvement in Yemen and Bahrain, for which, as was previously mentioned, Hezbollah does not have strategic reasons for undergoing and where Hezbollah is maintaining its involvement despite negative reactions from the Arab world. In Syria, furthering Iranian interests and influence is only part of the reason for Hezbollah's involvement. In these situations, Hezbollah's involvement is a direct result of purely Iranian interests, and Hezbollah has obliged despite the fact that its involvement actually runs counter to its own interests.

Hezbollah's involvement in Yemen begs the questions of why it is involved in Yemen in the first place. Does assisting the Houthi rebels directly benefit Hezbollah in any capacity? Does it affect Hezbollah's situation near its own borders — in Israel, Syria, or within Lebanon itself? Is assisting the Houthis something that Hezbollah views as necessary, or is it participating due to some other reason?

In a February 13, 2013 interview with the Council of Foreign Relations, Matthew Levitt stated that it is not in Hezbollah's interests to be involved in the civil war in Yemen, saying, "Look now today to Hezbollah helping to ferry Iranian weapons to Houthi rebels in Yemen...None of this is in Lebanon's interest."¹³⁵ According to Levitt, the reason for Hezbollah's involvement in the civil war in Yemen is that it benefits the interests of Hezbollah's benefactor and religious leader, Iran. "So what we see now is that Hezbollah is going to do things today that are in Iran's interest even if they expressly run counter to the interests of Lebanon and Hezbollah's own interest there."¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Matthew Levitt. "The Hezbollah Connection in Syria and Iran." *Council on Foreign Relations*.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

Levitt's theory certainly holds up to scrutiny. There are several reasons Hezbollah's actions in Yemen do not benefit the group. First, doing so only further raises the ire of the Arab public against the group. As will be discussed in the next chapter, public opinion of Hezbollah has dropped as a result of its involvement in the fighting in Syria. Hezbollah should be attempting to counter that trend, or at the very least not exacerbate the situation. Second, Hezbollah is wasting precious time, resources, and energy focusing on Yemen instead of areas that are vastly more important to the group's well being. Hezbollah is invested in Bashar al-Assad's fight in Syria and still cautiously watches its border with Israel, uninterested in sparking another full-blown conflict with Israel; diverting its attention from these aspects goes against Hezbollah's interests. Doing so does not directly affect Hezbollah's positions regarding Israel, Syria, and Lebanon.

The only plausible explanation for Hezbollah's activity in Yemen is that it conducted its operations at the behest of Iran, which seeks to counter Sunni influence in the Middle East and foment unrest in Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies (the latter goal assisting in the implementation of the former). Replacing Yemen's government with Shia rulers loyal to Iran, which is essentially the situation currently in effect, is a clear implementation of such a policy. The same applies to Hezbollah's activity in Bahrain.

Chapter 4: Implications of Hezbollah's Deepening Regional Involvement

A. Costs Incurred

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has not come without a price. Although for the most part the results of Hezbollah's fighting in Syria have been mixed, the organization has suffered losses — both in manpower and in popular support — and has spread itself thin, threatening its ability to successfully resist Israel.

According to Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, there have been 1,003 documented deaths of Hezbollah fighters in Syria since 2011.¹³⁷ Other estimates put the number at more than 1,500.¹³⁸ Former Hezbollah Chief Subhi al-Tufaili told Al Arabiya in an interview in April that at least 138 Hezbollah fighters were killed in Syrian fighting that year. By the first half of 2015, Hezbollah was suffering between 60 and 80 weekly casualties in Syria's Qalamoun region alone.¹³⁹ To put this in perspective, in three years Hezbollah's casualties in Syria are approaching, and possibly already surpassed, that of Hezbollah's official tally of 1,284 killed battling Israel's occupation of Lebanon between 1982 and 2000. These losses have had an effect — Hezbollah veterans have stated that increasing casualties and an expanding area of operations have forced it to relax previously strict qualifications for recruitment, reflecting the negative effects of Hezbollah's fighting in Syria and the way Hezbollah has been forced to adapt to new circumstances.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ "Over 240,000 Killed since Beginning of Syrian Conflict." *Middle East Monitor*.

¹³⁸ "Deadly Experience." *The Economist*.

¹³⁹ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹⁴⁰ "Deadly Experience." *The Economist*.

Hezbollah's operations have not always been successful. Al-Nusra Front and other rebel groups have managed to repel offensives led by Hezbollah in Idlib, in Daraa, and near Aleppo, according to opposition activists. In February 2015, Hezbollah troops tried to clear out rebels who had encircled two Shiite villages north of Aleppo, but the operation ended in defeat. On Oct. 19, 2015, Al-Jazeera reported that the First Coastal Division of the Free Syrian Army killed four Hezbollah troops and 23 regime soldiers in clashes near Jubb al-Ahmar and Kfar Dalba north of Latakia.¹⁴¹

Hezbollah has also been dealt casualties in skirmishes with the Islamic State. Hezbollah officially declared war on the Islamic State — which is participating in (and even leading) the fight against Bashar al-Assad — on June 12, 2015, after the organization launched an offensive on Hezbollah positions inside Lebanon earlier that week. In a televised address, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah declared that “[t]he battle with ISIL has begun,” vowing to erase the threat the Islamic State posed to Lebanon.¹⁴² Islamic State fighters had previously attacked four Hezbollah positions outside the Bekaa Valley border town of Ras Baalbek. Hezbollah's Al Manar TV station reported that 50 Islamic State fighters were killed and 80 wounded as Hezbollah troops repelled the attack.¹⁴³ This marked the first time that Hezbollah came into direct conflict with Islamic State fighters. Other examples of Hezbollah losses abound.

Hezbollah has suffered high-ranking personnel losses, as well. At least 49 of the deceased Hezbollah operatives in Syria have been identified as "al-Qaid al-Shahid" (martyred leader/commander) or "al-Qaid al-Maydani" (field leader/commander),

¹⁴¹ "Hezbollah Suffers Casualties in Latakia Fighting: Rebels." *NOW Lebanon*.

¹⁴² Nour Samaha. "Why Qalamoun Matters for Hezbollah." *Al Jazeera*.

¹⁴³ Josh Wood. "Hezbollah Declares War on ISIL." *The National*.

meaning they served as commanding officers and not simply as foot soldiers.¹⁴⁴ Among these is Hassan al-Laquis, Hezbollah's chief military procurement officer, who was assassinated in Beirut in December 2013.¹⁴⁵ According to Dr. Matthew Levitt, "Although the prime suspects were Israeli agents, Sunni extremists retaliating against Hezbollah's support for the Assad government have not been ruled out." Numerous other high-ranking officers, including Fawzi Ayub, a longtime member of Hezbollah's foreign terrorist wing, have reportedly been killed in Syria in clashes with anti-Assad rebels.¹⁴⁶

On October 12, 2015, Hassan al-Haj, a previous top commander in southern Lebanon in battles against Israel, was killed in Idlib province in northwestern Syria. According to a senior Lebanese official, "He is the most important [Hezbollah] figure killed in battles in Syria since the start of the war." Previously, in January of that year, an Israeli helicopter attack killed six Hezbollah members, including a commander - Mohamad Issa - and the son of the group's late military commander Imad Moughniyah.¹⁴⁷

According to Dr. Matthew Levitt, these losses, as well as Hezbollah's willingness to go on, indicates Syria's importance in Hezbollah's strategic calculus. The "deaths of Hezbollah members of Ayub's stature in Syria -- and the sheer number of militants killed and wounded there -- demonstrate the group's seriousness in defending the Assad regime. Its tolerance for such losses, on the other hand, reveals that Hezbollah increasingly considers the Syrian conflict an existential fight -- for its domestic standing in Lebanon, on the one hand, and for the position of Shiite forces in Syria's bitter sectarian conflict, on the other."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Ali Alfoneh. "Hezbollah Fatalities in the Syrian War." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹⁴⁵ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ "Hezbollah Mourns Senior Commander Killed in Syria." *Reuters*.

¹⁴⁸ Matthew Levitt. "Waking Up the Neighbors: How Regional Intervention Is Transforming Hezbollah." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

Hezbollah's losses have not been strictly physical, however. Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has also depleted the organization's support among the Arab population and put its popular legitimacy in question. Arab public opinion has been against Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and Yemen, viewing it as an unnecessary fight against the wrong enemy (fellow Arabs) instead of against Israel, and as abetting Persian hegemony in the Middle East.

Whereas a mere decade ago Nasrallah was viewed as a hero for his role in the fight against Israel, Hezbollah's support for the destabilization of the region has caused significant backlash against the group, and Hezbollah has never been more isolated. Its actions led many Arabs to view it as an Iranian puppet and as abandoning its original mission of resisting Israel and providing support for the people of Lebanon. In 2013, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, an extremist Sunni group, taunted Hezbollah for its lack of focus on Israel, daring it to "fire one bullet at occupied Palestine and claim responsibility."¹⁴⁹ Hezbollah's actions further led Arab countries -- particularly those in the Gulf, including Saudi Arabia -- to implement sanctions against the group and deport its supporters.

Rola el-Husseini, a researcher with the Middle Eastern and Middle Eastern American Center at the City University of New York's Graduate Center, wrote in *The National Interest* in April 2015 that Hezbollah's decision to fight on the side of the Assad regime undermined its legitimacy throughout the Sunni Arab world, "despite its attempts to make a distinction between Sunnis and 'takfiris:'"

In Syria itself, Hezbollah is now fully reviled among the majority of the population, and future Sunni Syrian governments will not forget its role in the war. With its recent double standard vis-a-vis the Syrian rebellion which it is fighting, and the Bahraini rebellion which it supported (at least discursively), the organization has categorized

¹⁴⁹ Ben Hubbard. "Syrian Fighting Gives Hezbollah New but Diffuse Purpose." *The New York Times*.

itself as a local sectarian group rather than as a unifying Arab resistance movement whose raison d'être is to fight Israel.¹⁵⁰

It is undeniable that Arab governments, particularly those in the Gulf, have evinced a strong dislike of Hezbollah and have worked against the organization since its involvement in Syria and Yemen. Many Gulf leaders have publicly condemned Hezbollah, labeled it as a terrorist organization, and even sanctioned the group.

On May 26, 2013, Arab League Chief Nabil Elaraby urged the leaders of Hezbollah to reconsider their stance and not get involved in Syria, stressing that "the only way to protect Lebanon...is to protect Lebanon's internal unity."¹⁵¹ That same day, Sheikh Khaled bin Ali al-Khalifa, Bahrain's Justice and Islamic Affairs Minister, announced that "[p]olitical associations are banned from making any kind of contact with the Lebanese Hezbollah organization, for it is a terrorist organization."¹⁵²

On June 1, 2013, Qatari Sheikh Qaradawi said in a statement that, "The leader of the Party of Satan [Hezbollah] comes to fight the Sunnis...now we know what the Iranians want...they want continued massacres to kill Sunnis."¹⁵³ The next day, Bahrain's Foreign Minister said that "all" the GCC countries "are convinced" that Hezbollah is a terrorist organization.¹⁵⁴ Then, on June 7, 2013, Salah Sultan, Secretary General of Egypt's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, stated, "God, break the backs of Hezbollah, the party of Satan, God, break the back of Iran."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Rola El-Husseini. "The Muslim World Is Turning on Hezbollah." *The National Interest*.

¹⁵¹ "Arab League Chief Urges Hezbollah to Stop Fighting in Syria." *Reuters*.

¹⁵² "Bahrain Bans Political Groups from Contacting Hezbollah." *Reuters*.

¹⁵³ "Syria Conflict: Cleric Qaradawi Urges Sunnis to Join Rebels." *BBC News*.

¹⁵⁴ Sultan Al-Tamimi. "GCC: Hezbollah Terror Group." *Arab News*.

¹⁵⁵ Karouny, Mariam, and Alastair Macdonald. "Sermons on Syria Fan Mideast Sectarian Flames." *Reuters*.

As was previously mentioned, on March 26, 2013 Bahrain became the first Arab country to designate Hezbollah a terrorist entity. Bahrain also blocked the website of al Manar television, Hezbollah's official station, on August 3, 2013.

Furthermore, the Gulf Cooperation Council officially named Hezbollah a terrorist organization on March 2, 2016, opening up the possibility of further sanctions against it. In the announcement, GCC Secretary-General Abdullatif al-Zayani said the council would now "take the necessary measures to implement its decision...based on anti-terrorism laws applied in the GCC and similar international laws."

Zayani also accused Hezbollah of committing "hostile acts" against GCC states, including recruiting young men to carry out "terrorist attacks, smuggling weapons and explosives, stirring up sedition and incitement to chaos and violence."¹⁵⁶ A week prior to this terrorist designation, Saudi Arabia, the leader of the GCC and Iran's main adversary, stated that it had blacklisted four companies and three Lebanese men for having links to Hezbollah.¹⁵⁷

On March 11, 2016, the Arab League also declared Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in a near-unanimous decision. This constituted the largest Arab condemnation of Hezbollah to date.¹⁵⁸

According to the Soufan Group, Hezbollah's relations with its Palestinian allies have also taken a hit as a result of Hezbollah's support for Assad. This was seen when Hezbollah "reportedly ordered Hamas operatives to leave Lebanon (where many of the country's

¹⁵⁶ "Gulf Arab States Label Hezbollah a Terrorist Organization." *Reuters*.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ "Arab League Declares Hezbollah a Terrorist Organization." *The Times of Israel*.

Palestinian refugees support Hamas), due to its support of the rebels fighting the Assad regime, which included providing military training.”¹⁵⁹

This distaste of Hezbollah is not limited solely to the governments; the Arab street has also soured on Hezbollah. According to a June 7, 2013 Pew poll, a majority of the people in several predominantly Muslim countries viewed Hezbollah unfavorably after its initial involvement in Syria’s civil war: Egypt (75%), Turkey (73%), Jordan (72%) and Lebanon (59%).¹⁶⁰

According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Hezbollah’s “ongoing military engagement in Syria has invited reprisals from Sunni militants fighting the Assad regime, who threatened attacks in Beirut as long as Hezbollah remains active in Syria.”¹⁶¹ Such a threat has already become a reality. Between 2013 and 2015, Lebanon was victim to more than a dozen suicide and car bombings.¹⁶² Included among these are three suicide bombings that took place in southern Beirut, a Hezbollah stronghold, on November 13, 2015, killing at least 41 people and injuring 200 others. According to Al-Jazeera, “the explosions took place...in the Burj el-Barajneh area, located off a main highway leading to Beirut's airport.”¹⁶³ Southern Beirut was also plagued with a series of deadly suicide bombings in 2014 that was claimed by al-Qaeda affiliates.¹⁶⁴ These attacks on Hezbollah’s home territory evince the hatred for Hezbollah that has risen among the Sunni Arab population as a result of the organization’s involvement in Syria and beyond.

¹⁵⁹ *Hezbollah at the Crossroads*. IntelBrief. The Soufan Group

¹⁶⁰ Bruce Drake. "As It Fights in Syria, Hezbollah Seen Unfavorably in Region." *Pew Research Center*.

¹⁶¹ Masters, Jonathan, and Zachary Laub. "Hezbollah." *CFR Backgrounders*. Council on Foreign Relations.

¹⁶² Hezbollah in 2016: Damaged Goods or Dangerous War Machine? Britain Israel Communication & Research Centre.

¹⁶³ Nour Samaha. "Deadly Suicide Attack Rocks Southern Beirut." *Al Jazeera*.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

Randa Slim has stated that this anger has become deep-seated and will likely remain for some time to come, harming Hezbollah's reputation for the years to come. "Too much blood has been spilled, too many lives have been lost, too much mistrust has set in, and it is going to be very hard for Hezbollah to rehabilitate its image among the majority of the Syrian Sunni street."¹⁶⁵

Moreover, for Lebanese citizens worried about Arab anger at their country, such attacks can serve to weaken popular support for Hezbollah's intervention and for the party at home. Many of the Shia Muslims in Lebanon are now politically empowered and have become part of the middle class. As a result, they have a stake in a stable and secure Lebanon "where economic conditions are conducive for business and investments."¹⁶⁶ Hezbollah has justified its involvement in Syria by arguing that that its attack on extremist Islamists such as the Islamic State would protect Lebanon from threats, but the opposite has been achieved. The more Hezbollah's actions in Syria destabilize Lebanon's political scene and enflame sectarian tensions and harm the security of the country, the bigger the chance that Lebanese Shias might withdraw their support for Hezbollah's Syrian intervention.¹⁶⁷

Hezbollah has also experienced a loss of support within Lebanon itself. Declining Shiite and Sunni Lebanese support for Hezbollah's actions is due not only to Hezbollah's actions in Syria, but also Hezbollah's corruption and method of governance. Hezbollah has been involved in a number of high-profile corruption scandals involving Hezbollah officials and their relatives, which have eroded Hezbollah's reputation as an organization run by selfless leaders. A Hezbollah member was arrested for the July 2012 attempted

¹⁶⁵ Nicholas Blanford. "Syria as Vietnam? Why the War Could Be Making Hezbollah Stronger." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹⁶⁶ Randa Slim. "Hezbollah's Plunge into the Syrian Abyss." *Foreign Policy*.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

assassination of Bourus Harb, a member of the Lebanese parliament, and Hezbollah operatives currently stand accused by the UN Special Tribunal for Lebanon at The Hague of assassinating former prime minister Rafik Hariri.¹⁶⁸ Further, on November 26, 2009, a businessman with close ties to Hezbollah was indicted for running a pyramid scheme worth over \$200 million. Later, on February 15, 2013, the brother of Hezbollah's Minister of Administrative Reform was arrested on charges of illegally importing medication.¹⁶⁹

Lebanese distrust and anger toward Hezbollah is evidenced by the internal response to a speech Nasrallah gave last year on the situation in Yemen. On April 17, 2015, Nasrallah gave a speech condemning the Saudi-led "aggression" against Yemen:

It is our human, jihadist and religious duty to take this stance and all the sons of this nation must reassess their responsibilities and take the appropriate stance. Intimidation or threats will not prevent us from continuing to declare our condemnation of the aggression against Yemen. The war's real objective is to restore the Saudi-American hegemony over Yemen.¹⁷⁰

In response, Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt criticized Nasrallah's speech, saying, "Where does Nasrallah wish to take Lebanon and the Lebanese through his tense speeches against Saudi Arabia? Has he taken into consideration the consequences of his words on the lives of around 50,000 Lebanese living in Saudi Arabia? The foolish tone of Nasrallah is not beneficial."¹⁷¹

Further, Lebanese Justice Minister Ashraf Rifi stated that Nasrallah should be "ashamed" of his attacks on Saudi Arabia, "which has supported Lebanon's state institutions and has not paid money to any side or sect and has not created militias." Rifi described Hezbollah as a "mere tool" of Iran that "sacrifices itself and its people for the sake of a failing

¹⁶⁸ Matthew Levitt. "The Hezbollah Connection in Syria and Iran." *Council on Foreign Relations*.

¹⁶⁹ Eric Lob. *Is Hezbollah Confronting a Crisis of Popular Legitimacy?* Issue brief no. 78. Brandeis U Crown Center for Middle East Studies.

¹⁷⁰ "Nasrallah Slams Saudi-US Yemen Attack." *Press TV*.

¹⁷¹ Khaled Abu Toameh. "Why Arabs Loathe Hezbollah." *Gatestone Institute*.

[Iranian] project... Hezbollah is turning Lebanon into an operations room to spread Iranian hegemony.”¹⁷²

Additionally, “according to a Western diplomatic source,” Hezbollah suffered stinging defeats in the May 2016 Lebanese municipal elections,¹⁷³ in what essentially served as an indictment of Hezbollah’s unpopular activities abroad. The Lebanese Communist Party stated that “it and its allies either won some or all local council seats in 17 towns and villages across the South Lebanon and Nabatieh governorates,”¹⁷⁴ and the anti-Hezbollah Beirutis list, backed by al-Mustaqbal chief and former Lebanese prime minister Saad Hariri, won the elections in Beirut.¹⁷⁵

A final detrimental aspect of Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain is that by doing so, it has spread itself thin and undermined its ability to successfully resist Israel, its *raison d’être*. By shifting the majority of its focus and efforts to Syria, Hezbollah has moved away from its original and main purpose. Resistance against Israel is also what originally lent the organization support from all Arab sectors. This factor will be discussed in greater detail in the final part of this chapter.

B. Gains Made

Despite the negative implications of Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria and elsewhere, Hezbollah has also taken significant steps forward in terms of improving its strength. First, Hezbollah’s troops have received a tremendous amount of combat experience as a result of

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Hussein Dakroub. "Hezbollah Big Loser from Municipal Elections: Western Source." *The Daily Star Lebanon*.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Maayan Groisman. "Anti-Hezbollah Party Wins Municipal Elections in Beirut, amid Allegations of Electoral Fraud." *The Jerusalem Post*.

their fighting on behalf of the Syrian regime, allowing the organization to prepare it next generation for future conflicts.

An Israeli army officer stated anonymously in September 2013 that Hezbollah commanders “are learning about controlling fighters, coordinating intelligence, firepower, and command and control. This is a serious development that requires us to prepare accordingly.”¹⁷⁶ A separate high-ranking Israeli military officer told the New York Times in March 2014 that he has “no doubt that Hezbollah gained much more self-confidence because of the Syrian experience.”¹⁷⁷

This view is concurred by Andrew Exum, a former U.S. Army officer in Afghanistan who recently served as a Defense Department advisor on Middle East policy. He stated in December 2013 that “for Hezbollah the benefits of the experience is going to vastly outweigh the costs in terms of competency.”¹⁷⁸

According to *The Economist*, Hezbollah is now “perhaps the Arab world’s most experienced and competent military force.” Further, *Christian Science Monitor* reported that Hezbollah has “expanded its martial skills in Syria, learning to fight in a broad variety of environments from desolate mountains to arable landscapes and dense inner-city neighborhoods.”¹⁷⁹ Hezbollah forces have learned how to coordinate with other forces, such

¹⁷⁶ Nicholas Blanford. "Syria as Vietnam? Why the War Could Be Making Hezbollah Stronger." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹⁷⁷ Isabel Kershner. "Israel Watches Warily as Hezbollah Gains Battle Skills in Syria." *The New York Times*.

¹⁷⁸ Nicholas Blanford. "Battlefield Lessons in Syria Strengthen Hezbollah's Fighting Force." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹⁷⁹ Nicholas Blanford. "Syria as Vietnam? Why the War Could Be Making Hezbollah Stronger." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

as the Syrian army and “loyalist paramilitaries,” how to “build supply lines to sustain long periods of fighting,” and have experienced the realities of combat.¹⁸⁰

Additionally, Hezbollah’s new recruits have been receiving invaluable military training that they can potentially use in future conflicts and wars:

For every Hezbollah veteran lost in the war, dozens of new recruits are gaining vital combat experience, experience they wouldn't have gained in the more than six years of relative calm along Lebanon’s southern border with Israel. Hezbollah fighters initially spent an average of one week in Syria...this rotation was raised to a month. According to sources close to the party, the rate of rotation has increased, a decision apparently aimed at allowing as many Hezbollah fighters as possible to gain battlefield experience.¹⁸¹

Andrew Exum states that Hezbollah’s training of its younger members is a crucial implication of Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria. “It’s clear that Hezbollah...has sustained some serious combat losses in Syria and some of those older soldiers are going to be tough to replace. But those younger soldiers are getting immense training and experience as well.”¹⁸²

According to Gabi Siboni, director of the military and strategic affairs program at the Institute for National Security Studies at Tel Aviv University, the experience that Hezbollah’s troops are receiving in Syria is invaluable. “This kind of experience cannot be bought.” Although there is a difference between fighting rebel forces and Israel’s modern army, “[experience] is an additional factor that we will have to deal with. There is no replacement for experience, and it is not to be scoffed at.”¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Nicholas Blanford. "Battlefield Lessons in Syria Strengthen Hezbollah's Fighting Force." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Isabel Kershner. "Israel Watches Warily as Hezbollah Gains Battle Skills in Syria." *The New York Times*.

Abu Ali, a veteran Hezbollah fighter, emphasized Hezbollah's increased battle experience in an interview with Christian Science Monitor in March 2015, saying, "After Qusayr, it doesn't matter where we are sent. We are trained for everything."¹⁸⁴

However, Jeffrey White of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has cautiously noted that not all of Hezbollah's newfound combat experience will be applicable to other wars, especially with Israel. While such lessons as "coordination of allied forces and a "hardening of units" to make them more resilient on the battlefield" will help Hezbollah in future conflicts, White states that "Syria is a different theater to Israel." In Syria, Hezbollah has "the backing of the Syrian military's artillery guns and its fleet of jets and helicopters. In fighting Israel, however, Hezbollah would likely maintain the defensive posture it adopted in 2006 to protect its long-range rocket batteries from Israeli attack. Instead of benefitting from air support, Hezbollah's cadres would be on the receiving end of the Israeli air force."¹⁸⁵

Daniel Byman of the Brookings Institution has affirmed such a view, stating that "Hezbollah is in essence a counterinsurgency force, taking on less-organized, poorly trained, and lightly armed rebels. The IDF is a different, and far more dangerous, kettle of fish."¹⁸⁶

Second, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Iran have repaid Hezbollah for its involvement in Syria by supplying it with "sophisticated weapons," according to the New York Times. A senior Israeli military official told the paper that "A Hezbollah with modern surface-to-air systems, with modern U.A.V.'s, with modern cyber capabilities, well, this is a

¹⁸⁴ Nicholas Blanford. "Syria as Vietnam? Why the War Could Be Making Hezbollah Stronger." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹⁸⁵ Nicholas Blanford. "Battlefield Lessons in Syria Strengthen Hezbollah's Fighting Force." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

¹⁸⁶ Byman, Daniel, and Bilal Y. Saab. *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

different Hezbollah.”¹⁸⁷ Hezbollah also currently employs the use of tanks and guided missiles, as well as a fleet of armed drones. Jeffrey White has stated that Hezbollah “has gone from a guerrilla ... force to one that is far more capable of a wider range of operations.”¹⁸⁸ White also asserted that now “Hezbollah has the ability to strike guided munitions across Israel; they can hit targets inside Israel — including central and southern areas — with increased accuracy, including command posts, airfields, and major economic targets.”¹⁸⁹

Third, one of Hezbollah’s objectives in entering the war in Syria was to maintain its relations with Iran and preserve the relationship it has with the regime, and by coming to Assad’s aid it has accomplished that goal. Thus, from Hezbollah’s perspective, preserving its Iranian lifeline is a significant positive aspect of its Syrian involvement.

Fourth, the most significant result of Hezbollah’s fighting in Syria is that the organization has managed to keep Assad in power. In 2012, Syrian rebels were fighting inside the capital of Damascus. Assad’s regime had lost large swaths of Syria’s territory and many strategic towns, and “a small number of loyal and tested army units were rotating around the country in an exhausting attempt to hold back rebel advances on many fronts,”¹⁹⁰ according to Reuters.

With assistance from Hezbollah (as well as Russia), Assad has turned the tide of the war. He has regained control of Qalamoun and al-Qusayr. He has also regained control of “a chain of cities up the north-south backbone of the country, secured his grip on the north-

¹⁸⁷ Isabel Kershner. "Israel Watches Warily as Hezbollah Gains Battle Skills in Syria." *The New York Times*.

¹⁸⁸ "Deadly Experience." *The Economist*.

¹⁸⁹ Nour Samaha. "Hezbollah’s Death Valley." *Foreign Policy*.

¹⁹⁰ Samia Nakhoul. "Once on the Edge of Defeat, Syria's Assad Runs Again for President." *Reuters*.

west coast and Alawite heartland, and cleared rebels away from Lebanon's border."¹⁹¹ Moreover, according to Bloomberg Business, in 2015 Assad broke a three-year siege of two villages north of Aleppo. "The city is almost encircled, apart from a narrow stretch of contested territory...Russian jets, meanwhile, are pounding Idlib, where the al-Qaeda linked Nusra Front is the strongest opposition group."¹⁹²

Whereas not long ago Assad looked as if he was on his last legs, his regime has withstood the raging conflict. Such a turnaround in the facts on the ground in Syria would not have been possible without Hezbollah's assistance. For Hezbollah, keeping the Iranian-allied leader in power is the most significant result of its Syrian involvement.

C. Effects on Hezbollah's Mission in Lebanon

As was previously mentioned, Hezbollah is heavily involved in the Syrian war, while Lebanon's formal policy is dissociation with the same conflict. For the most part, Hezbollah's role within Lebanon has remained the same. Hezbollah is still involved in the government, provides its constituencies with social services, and maintains a strong role in the country's military power. Yet its involvement in Syria and the complex situation that has arisen as a result have created several important implications for the country's future.

First, the presence of Syrian rebel fighters and the fact that the Syrian-Lebanese border has become a zone of arm trafficking have increased Hezbollah's insecurity. Hezbollah's leaders are concerned about the fact that refugee camps could turn into areas of recruitment and training of other rebel fighters.¹⁹³ According to Daniel Byman, Hezbollah's

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Hacaoglu, Selcan, Henry Meyer, and Dana Khraiche. "Advantage Assad After Five Years of War in Syria." *Bloomberg*.

¹⁹³ Byman, Daniel, and Bilal Y. Saab. *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

involvement in Syria will not benefit its political opponents in Lebanon, but rather will strengthen the position of Sunni radicals that would serve as rivals to Hezbollah:

It is not likely that the March 14 coalition (a political grouping of anti-Syrian factions in Lebanon) or other pro-Western voices in Lebanon will gain from Hezbollah's travails. They are divided within, and have shown themselves unable to sustain mass support. Rather, it is militia leaders and extremists who are likely to grow more powerful. The more than 1.2 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon—a little more than a quarter of the total population—are a wild card. They might become radicalized, and their camps could become a sanctuary for fighters in Syria. It is even possible that, over time, they might become a violent player in Lebanon's politics itself, as the Palestinians did before them. This is a particular concern for Hezbollah, as the majority of the refugees in Lebanon are Sunni Muslims who see Hezbollah as the friend of their enemy.¹⁹⁴

Second, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has the ability to threaten the country's already fragile peace and has stagnated Lebanon's government. Nasrallah has shown that Hezbollah will place its own interests above Lebanon's, and its focus on the fighting in Syria has made it too busy fighting to govern Lebanon. Currently, most, if not all, of Lebanon's state institutions are paralyzed. Political gridlock has left Lebanon without an elected president for more than a year, and Parliament has extended its own mandate twice, delaying elections until 2017.¹⁹⁵ This gridlock has recently been exacerbated by a garbage crisis in Beirut, during which the Lebanese government has not acted to clean up a "river" of trash in Beirut — a "makeshift dump that began in a residential area but grew significantly as the garbage crisis went unresolved."¹⁹⁶ This crisis led to protests by thousands of Lebanese demonstrators on August 29, 2015, during which security forces used water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets to disperse the crowd.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Anne Barnard. "Lebanese Protesters Aim for Rare Unity Against Gridlocked Government." *The New York Times*.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

One of the few Lebanese institutions that are not paralyzed, however, is the Lebanese army — but it is increasingly perceived as being loyal to Hezbollah. According to David Schenker, the director of the program on Arab politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, the army has served “as a buffer between warring factions,” but “spillover from the war in Syria has complicated the army's traditionally hands-off approach to Hezbollah.” Splitting from previous policies, the army continues to “assiduously avoid hostilities with Hezbollah,” and instead has taken a more aggressive stance toward Sunni militants. Schenker concludes that “[t]his tack is leading many Lebanese Sunnis to conclude that the army is no longer neutral.”¹⁹⁸

Examples of such a lack of neutrality abound. On June 23, 2013 a gun battle took place between the army and Sunni preacher Ahmad Assir and his supporters in Sidon, during which two dozen army soldiers were killed. Assir, a supporter of the Syrian rebels and an outspoken critic of Hezbollah, was ultimately defeated by a coordinated army-Hezbollah military offensive. Further, the army's “campaign of arrests and shootings targeting Sunnis — including religious leaders — for allegedly providing assistance to Syrian rebels has angered the community.” For example, during the month of January 2014 the army arrested “at least 12 Sunni militants and shot and killed two others.”¹⁹⁹

Lebanese Sunnis increasingly resent Hezbollah's seeming immunity. As Sunni lawmaker Mustafa Alloush stated in April 2014, “When the law is only applied to one side, it creates grievances. What the Sunni street feels is that there's winking toward Hezbollah and severity toward the other side.”²⁰⁰ If the perception that the army is aligned with Hezbollah does not abate, and Lebanon's government does not begin to work properly soon,

¹⁹⁸ David Schenker. “How Syria's Civil War Threatens Lebanon's Fragile Peace.” *Los Angeles Times*.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria will continue to enflame sectarian tensions within Lebanon and threaten to plunge the country into another civil war.

D. Effects on Israel and Hezbollah's Ability to Resist It

Hezbollah's military threat to Israel, or at least Israel's perception of it, is somewhat uncertain. Despite its aforementioned losses in manpower, Hezbollah still maintains worrisome capabilities that it could use in a fight against Israel. According to Brigadier General Itay Bron, head of the IDF Military Intelligence research section, Hezbollah has built up an arsenal of 100,000 rockets and missiles in Lebanon, including anti-ship and Scud missiles, as well as surveillance drones²⁰¹ — a missile stockpile far larger than anything Hamas has ever had in its possession. Israeli intelligence officials estimate that Hezbollah has the capacity to fire 1200 missiles per day, "which it could sustain over a period of several weeks, a number significantly higher than the daily rate of 118 achieved during the Second Lebanon War in 2006."²⁰² Further, the growing range of Hezbollah's rockets puts nearly all of Israel in danger. From Israel's perception, Hezbollah is a far stronger, better equipped, and more dangerous strategic adversary than ever before.

Specifically, rockets that Hezbollah now possesses include the Tishreen missile, which contains control and guidance systems that have given Hezbollah a precision-strike capability. The group "also possesses Iranian-made rockets such as the Fajr-3 and Fajr-5, with respective ranges of 27 and 45 miles; and a huge quantity of simpler 107mm and 122mm rockets with ranges up to 12 miles...Hezbollah has also upgraded its anti-aircraft missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, anti-tank missiles, and reconnaissance and attack

²⁰¹ Oseran, Shai, and Stéphane Cohen. "Don't Be Fooled. Hezbollah Is Bigger and Badder Than Ever." *The Tower*.

²⁰² Hezbollah in 2016: Damaged Goods or Dangerous War Machine? Britain Israel Communication & Research Centre.

drones; all of which would make Israeli retaliatory strikes far more difficult.”²⁰³ Additionally, Hezbollah is rumored to have obtained Russian Yakhont anti-ship cruise missiles from Syria, “which would instantly put any Israeli naval vessel under direct threat, even those docked at Israeli ports.”²⁰⁴

Clearly, Hezbollah is far better equipped now than it was during its 2006 war with Israel. Yet Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria has spread thin the organization’s forces and resources and made the organization less willing to enter into another all-out military conflict with Israel. Daniel Byman has written that Hezbollah’s “heavy death toll [in Syria] and the constant strain are overwhelming, and Hezbollah cannot easily take on a new foe.”²⁰⁵

According to a Britain Israel Communication & Research Centre strategic assessment, Hezbollah has instead focused its efforts on limited “tit-for-tat retaliation” after Israeli strikes against Hezbollah operatives and equipment:

In February 2014, a reported rocket attack against Hezbollah targets along the Syrian Lebanese border was met with unclaimed low-level attacks along the Golan demarcation line and by the detonation of an explosive device within the Shebaa Farms area. In January 2015, Hezbollah responded in a similar manner following a reported Israeli operation targeting Iranian and Hezbollah fighters in the Syrian Golan. Hezbollah has generally focused on the Shebaa Farms area as it claims that the area is occupied Lebanese territory, despite Israel and the UN’s position that it comprises part of the Golan Heights.²⁰⁶

Israel, for its part, is trying to walk a fine line. On one hand, from Israel’s point of view there are positive consequences to Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria, and Israel does not wish to involve itself in the Syrian civil war. As described above, the group has taken

²⁰³ Oseran, Shai, and Stéphane Cohen. "Don't Be Fooled. Hezbollah Is Bigger and Badder Than Ever." *The Tower*.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Byman, Daniel, and Bilal Y. Saab. *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

²⁰⁶ Hezbollah in 2016: Damaged Goods or Dangerous War Machine? Britain Israel Communication & Research Centre.

significant casualties in Syria, with a significant number of fighters killed in action and many more wounded. According to Jeffrey White, “as its involvement deepens, many more casualties could ensue, including among senior commanders and experienced personnel. This will weaken Hezbollah, at least in the short term.”²⁰⁷ Further, any increased lack of support for Hezbollah is a positive from Israel’s perspective. Although Arab anger at Israel and Hezbollah are not mutually exclusive, any amount of declining support for Hezbollah is a gain for Israel.

On the other hand, Israel has “declared that cross border attacks, the transfer of ‘game changing’ weapons, and the establishment of Hezbollah-Iranian operational infrastructure in Southern Syria represent red lines and that it reserves the right to act to prevent them.”²⁰⁸ Israel “wants to prevent transfers of Syrian and Iranian arms to Hezbollah, particularly for systems like surface-to-air missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, or even chemical weapons that might significantly increase the threat to Israel.”²⁰⁹ Numerous strikes carried out by the Israeli air force in Syria since 2013 targeting weapons caches belonging to Hezbollah “testify to the depth of the country’s fears about the group’s acquisition of advanced weapons.”²¹⁰ To that end, Israel has “at times attacked Hezbollah forces transferring weapons, leading Hezbollah to conduct limited attacks on the Golan Heights in response, using Syrian territory as a base.”²¹¹ Israel, however, also does not currently desire

²⁰⁷ Jeffrey White. "Hezbollah's Declaration of War in Syria: Military Implications." *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

²⁰⁸ Hezbollah in 2016: Damaged Goods or Dangerous War Machine? Britain Israel Communication & Research Centre.

²⁰⁹ Byman, Daniel, and Bilal Y. Saab. *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

²¹⁰ Nour Samaha. "Hezbollah's Death Valley." *Foreign Policy*.

²¹¹ Byman, Daniel, and Bilal Y. Saab. *Hezbollah in a Time of Transition*. Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

another drawn-out conflict with Hezbollah, and so the extent to which it will strike Hezbollah targets is uncertain.

Despite reluctance for an offensive operation against Hezbollah, Israel is preparing defensive measures in the event of a conflict with the organization. Israel is developing or has rendered operational several “multi-tiered” missile defense systems, including the “Iron Dome batteries (short range), the soon to be operational David’s Sling system (medium to long range), and the Arrow missile system (long range).”²¹² Israel is also planning methods to protect strategic national sites from Hezbollah attacks, including its electricity grid.²¹³

Ultimately, Hezbollah’s excursion in Syria will probably have a net negative impact on the organization’s future. Hezbollah’s troops have gained battlefield experience, and Hezbollah has proven its abilities, conducting operations in various countries. However, there is a far longer list of costs to the invasion than gains. Hezbollah has seen declining Arab support for its actions, including being sanctioned and blacklisted more than ever before in its history, it has spread itself thin, limiting its resources, and it has accumulated many losses in its various battles on the ground. Even if Bashar al-Assad stays in power, it will take Hezbollah years to recover from the political fallout and loss of troops that it has suffered. If Assad falls, especially after Hezbollah invested so much of its time resources to keep him afloat, then Hezbollah’s prospects will be far dimmer, and the organization will suffer a blow that will be difficult to come back from. While the full consequences of Hezbollah’s involvement in Syria and Assad’s fate remain to be seen, it is not a stretch to say that although Hezbollah has found success in its fighting in Syria, the future might, at best, bring mixed results for the changing Lebanese organization.

²¹² Hezbollah in 2016: Damaged Goods or Dangerous War Machine? Britain Israel Communication & Research Centre.

²¹³ Ibid.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The evidence shows that Hezbollah has definitively invested much of its resources, time, and attention since 2013 into its fight in Syria; the organization views its operation in Syria as one of immense importance. By assisting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime in its fight against the rebels and inserting itself into the conflict, as well as in Yemen and other locales across the Middle East, Hezbollah has changed its role and expanded the organization's original mandate. Hezbollah is no longer simply a Lebanese resistance organization, but a powerful, regional force that has expanded its operations beyond Lebanon's borders. A clear answer to whether this change in role is a result of a strategic decision by Hezbollah to protect separate, specific interests or an Iranian order is currently unattainable, although there is strong evidence suggesting it is a mix of both.

Hezbollah's new role in Syria further complicates the conflict in several ways. First, the Lebanese government has adopted a policy of noninvolvement in the Syrian civil war. Yet Hezbollah, a major force in the Lebanese government, is operating in Syria against the government's wishes and without the government's support. This tension can only serve to exacerbate the tension already extant in Lebanon's increasingly fragile political system.

Second, as stated by Natasha Lander in *Hezbollah: Organizational Analysis of an Insurgency*, Hezbollah's role as a hybrid organization complicates efforts to weaken it. Hezbollah's success is due to support from Iran and Syria, and Hezbollah's political and social programs lead to a substantial amount of support from Shia Muslims, both in Lebanon and across the world.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Natasha Lander, "Hezbollah: Organizational Analysis of an Insurgency," *The Michigan Journal of Public Affairs* 7 (Spring 2010), p. 2.

In order to successfully combat Hezbollah, these aspects of the organization need to be removed, something not easily attainable through counterinsurgency efforts by both outside countries and other groups seeking to gain power within Lebanon. The Lebanese government needs to be able to function without and independently of Hezbollah and provide its constituents with the social services they currently receive from the group, thereby reducing their dependency on Hezbollah and their support for Hezbollah's involvement in Syria. Iranian aid to Hezbollah needs to be curtailed for the group to be weakened. Without Iranian support, not only would Hezbollah's ability to fight in Syria be reduced, but also its very will to act in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad would be weakened.

Third, Hezbollah's hybrid nature is the reason for the existence of such complex discussion over its role in Syria. Regular terrorist organizations are able to become involved or act in other countries without question — it is expected of them. Hezbollah, as an irregular, hybrid organization, has a more questionable role in Syria's conflict. It is a mass movement tied to Lebanon, and so its involvement in another country is scrutinized and analyzed in a far different light. It is unusual for government-involved entities to fight the battles of other governments, and Hezbollah's Syrian involvement brings with it far more risks and complications for the region than does that of regular terrorist organizations, such as Jabhat al-Nusra.

Moreover, this new role has impacted Hezbollah's future prospects, though the degree to which they will be affected remains to be seen. Hezbollah remains a threat to Israel and to regional security. The organization has acquired upgraded weaponry from Iran and has the missile numbers to potentially make Israel's Iron Dome system obsolete. Israeli strikes on Hezbollah and Syrian government sites throughout the civil war evince the worry that Israel has about the group's capabilities and weapons stockpiles. However, Hezbollah

is mired in Syria, weakening its manpower and distracting it from its original goal of combating Israel. According to Israeli General (ret.) Benny Gantz, Hezbollah's attention is divided between domestic politics, military preparations against Israel, and its intervention in Syria.²¹⁵ Hezbollah has not attacked Israel substantially for fear of suffering great losses as a result.

Hezbollah's changing role has also affected Arab support and perception of the group. Its actions in Syria have raised the ire of Sunni Muslims against Hezbollah and Iran. It is possible that in order to retain Arab support, and, in turn, its position of power in Lebanon, Hezbollah will need to take actions to reframe itself as an Arab, Islamic group dedicated to fighting Israel, and not merely as the spearhead of Iranian ambitions in the region.

Finally, the defeat of the Syrian rebels and the maintaining of Bashar al-Assad's hold on power in Syria has become a goal of utmost importance for Hezbollah. If Hezbollah loses and Assad falls Hezbollah will have invested itself heavily in a failed mission. As a result, it would be harder for Hezbollah to acquire support from Iran through Syria, thereby greatly weakening its military capabilities and its ability to threaten Israel through maintaining positions on the Syrian border and retaining an ally hostile to Israel in power in Syria. Further, Hezbollah's legitimacy will come under question and its fighters will be substantially demoralized. However, if Hezbollah succeeds in allowing Assad to maintain power, it will be recognized as a force to be reckoned with and help spread Iran's influence further across the Middle East.

²¹⁵ Nicholas Blanford. "Israel: Hezbollah Is Now Stronger than Any Arab Army." *The Christian Science Monitor*.

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