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## **THE IDEOLOGY, ROLE AND ACTIVITIES OF HEZBOLLAH IN THE CONTEXT OF MIDDLE EASTERN CONFLICTS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY\*\*\***

### **Abstract**

This paper offers an in-depth examination of Hezbollah, tracing its origins, evolution, ideological foundations, organisational architecture, and operational strategies. It also evaluates its multifaceted impact on regional and international arenas. Grounded in a rigorous definition of terrorism and the defining traits of modern terrorist organisations, the study underscores Hezbollah's significance as a paradigmatic hybrid actor simultaneously functioning as a political party, social movement, terrorist entity, and paramilitary force. In this capacity, Hezbollah occupies a pivotal position within the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. The primary objective of this research is to systematically examine the key factors that contributed to the

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formation of Hezbollah, the dynamics of its internal organisation and structure, the ideological foundations that shape its strategic objectives, and the multidimensional aspects of its activities. The analysis encompasses a detailed overview of Hezbollah's military operations, political participation, social and humanitarian initiatives, funding mechanisms, and the evolving global perceptions surrounding the organisation. Special attention is given to Hezbollah's role in Middle Eastern conflicts, such as the 2006 Second Lebanon War and the Syrian civil war, along with its international operations. The research methodology is based on analysing secondary sources, including relevant academic literature, reports from international organisations, media archives, and available primary documents issued by Hezbollah. A comparative and historical approach has been applied to contextualise Hezbollah's development within the broader political and social landscape of Lebanon, particularly in light of the civil war, the 1982 Israeli invasion, and the influence of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. This multifaceted analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the Hezbollah phenomenon and its regional and international security implications. It offers a foundation for further inquiry into the Middle East's complex relationships between state and non-state actors.

**Keywords:** Hezbollah, Middle East, Lebanon, terrorism.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to provide a scholarly analysis of Hezbollah, an organisation whose multifaceted nature, significant influence in the Middle East, and its role in international relations make it a subject of considerable academic interest. Before delving into a detailed examination of Hezbollah's role and activities, it is essential to precisely define the key concepts that will be used throughout the analysis. Considering that terrorism is a complex and controversial phenomenon that affects numerous aspects of modern society, its scope extends across international, regional, and domestic levels, encompassing various forms of organised violence, whether in the form of individual acts or collective actions (Bursać and Tančić 2024, 112).

Terrorism is widely regarded as the most extreme manifestation of extremism. Based on its ideological orientation and strategic objectives, extremism can be categorised into several forms: ideological (far-left and far-right), ethno-separatist, and religious (Đorić 2021, 60). Within the scope of this study, terrorism is conceptualised as a multidimensional political phenomenon – a complex form of organised, individual, and, less frequently, institutionalised political violence. It is characterized by the use of brutal physical force and psychological intimidation as methods of political struggle, typically employed during periods of political and economic crisis, and less frequently in conditions of stability. Such acts aim to achieve far-reaching goals through disproportionate means incompatible with the prevailing sociopolitical context (Simeunović 2009, 78). Terrorist organisations often exhibit a distinct hierarchical or network-based structure, operate with a high degree of secrecy, and rely primarily on violence as a tool for achieving their objectives. Their motivations are frequently rooted in ideological or religious beliefs, which are used to legitimise their actions. Readiness for every form of political violence, and therefore for terrorism, implies that its potential perpetrators exist in an environment contaminated by an extremist ideology, and are susceptible to radicalization up to the level of willingness to apply violent acts (Đorđević i Miljković 2025, 181).

The selection of Hezbollah as the subject of this research stems from its social and academic relevance. This multifaceted organisation functions not only as a terrorist group but also as a significant political and societal actor within Lebanon. Socially, Hezbollah operates as a popular movement with broad public support, while militarily it acts as a paramilitary force engaged in regional conflicts. Its hybrid character, marked by the integration of military, political, and social roles, makes Hezbollah a unique case study within the fields of political science, international relations, and security studies. Moreover, it offers valuable insights into the geopolitical dynamics of the Middle East and the broader challenges to global security.

This research aims to examine the origins and development of Hezbollah through a multidisciplinary lens, focusing on the historical circumstances, political dynamics, and ideological influences that have shaped the organisation. The study provides an in-depth analysis of Hezbollah's internal structure, examining its military, political, and social branches, as well as its financing mechanisms. Special emphasis

is placed on the ideological foundations of the movement, which are deeply rooted in Shia religious tradition. Furthermore, the research aims to explore Hezbollah's modes of engagement, ranging from military operations and political participation to its societal influence within Lebanon, and to evaluate its role and perception within the regional and international arenas.

The methodology of this research is primarily based on the analysis of secondary sources, including relevant academic literature, reports from international organisations, analytical studies, media archives, and available primary documents. A historical and comparative approach will be employed to place the development of Hezbollah within a broader political, security, and social context of contemporary Lebanon. Particular emphasis will be placed on analysing key historical events that have shaped the emergence and evolution of the movement, such as the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of Hezbollah's structure, ideology, and role within regional and global contexts through a critical analysis of primary sources and an interdisciplinary framework.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Understanding the emergence and development of Hezbollah necessitates a detailed analysis of the turbulent political landscape in Lebanon that preceded its formation, as well as an appreciation of the far-reaching implications of the Iranian Revolution. These factors created the conditions necessary for the rise of a new Shia organisation.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lebanon was characterised by a fragile confessional balance. Its political system, based on the National Pact of 1943, envisaged the distribution of power among the main religious communities Maronite Christians,<sup>4</sup> Sunni Muslims

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<sup>4</sup> The Maronite Church is an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with Rome, tracing its origins to the 4<sup>th</sup> century Syrian hermit Saint Maron. Maronites constitute the most prominent Christian community in Lebanon and, according to the 1943 National Pact, traditionally provide the country's president, thereby playing a pivotal role in Lebanon's political life. While their primary concentration is in Lebanon, the Maronites also have a substantial diaspora spread across the globe.

and Shia Muslims – according to demographic proportions established by the 1932 census (Stefanović and Grubić 2015, 8). However, over time, the confessional power-sharing system in Lebanon became unsustainable, primarily due to shifting demographic trends. Notably, the Shia community, historically marginalised and economically disadvantaged, experienced significant demographic growth, concentrating mainly in Southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and the suburbs of Beirut, such as Dahieh.

According to Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates from 2025, Muslims constitute the majority of Lebanon's population at 67.8%, with Sunnis accounting for 31.9% and Shias 31.2%, alongside smaller groups such as Alawites and Ismailis. Christians comprise 32.4% of the population, predominantly Maronite Christians, while the Druze represent approximately 4.5% (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] 2025). These figures highlight a significant demographic shift compared to the last official census, conducted in 1932, which served as the basis for the National Pact. At that time, Christians formed the majority, comprising around 53% of Lebanon's population. This evolution has resulted in a substantial mismatch between the historical foundations of Lebanon's political power-sharing system and its contemporary demographic realities. This internal imbalance, combined with growing socio-economic inequalities and regional interventions by Syria, Israel, and the Palestine Liberation Organisation, escalated into the Lebanese Civil War, which lasted from 1975 to 1990. The conflict was a complex, multilayered struggle involving various religious, political, and paramilitary factions, wherein internal issues were deeply intertwined with external influences.

Despite its significant numerical presence, the Shia community was initially relatively unorganised. Movements such as *Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniyyah* – AMAL,<sup>5</sup> led by the charismatic Imam Musa Sadr,<sup>6</sup> sought to articulate Shia demands for equality and development. However, the mysterious disappearance of Musa

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<sup>5</sup> AMAL is an acronym for the Arabic name *Afwaj al-Muqawamah al-Lubnaniyyah*, which translates as the Lebanese Resistance Detachments. AMAL is a political party and militia that, at its peak, had around 14,000 fighters.

<sup>6</sup> Musa Sadr al-Din al-Sadr (1928–1978) was a prominent Lebanese-Iranian Shia cleric, politician, and revolutionary who played a significant role in the founding and revitalization of numerous Lebanese Shia institutions.

Sadr (*Musa al-Sadr*) in 1978<sup>7</sup> created a leadership vacuum that, despite AMAL's efforts, hindered its ability to fully protect the Shia population and consolidate their position during the war. The Syrian military intervention in June 1976 further complicated the conflict. In a notably paradoxical geopolitical move, Syria initially supported Christian factions against Palestinian forces.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, driven by its interest in maintaining regional dominance, Syria later shifted its alliances, supporting Palestinian factions and effectively establishing political and military control over Lebanon—a presence that lasted until the withdrawal of Syrian troops in April 2005 (Ochsenwald and Kingston 2025).

A critical turning point that significantly reshaped Lebanon's security and political environment, primarily affecting the Shia community, was the 1982 Israeli invasion, referred to as Operation Peace for Galilee. The main goal of the invasion was to dismantle the Palestine Liberation Organisation (*Munazzamat at-Tahrir al-Filasṭīniyyah*) – PLO bases in southern Lebanon, which were used to launch attacks against Israel. Israeli forces quickly advanced to Beirut, leading to the city's siege and substantial destruction (Newby 2024; Shlaim Avi 2000, 384; Rabinovich 1999, 121). This occupation of southern Lebanon and parts of Beirut had a complex impact on the Shia population. Initially, some Shia groups greeted the Israeli arrival with a measure of relief, perceiving the PLO as a *de facto* occupying force that destabilised their regions. However, this sentiment was short-lived, as the Israeli occupation soon became a source of repression, violence, and oppression, fueling strong resistance. Thus, the Shia community in Lebanon—already deeply frustrated by political marginalisation and previous foreign interventions—felt abandoned and vulnerable.

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<sup>7</sup> On 25 August 1978, Musa Sadr, along with Sheikh Mohammad Yaqub and journalist Abbas Badreddine, traveled to Libya at the invitation of Muammar Gaddafi. After August 31, however, they disappeared without a trace.

<sup>8</sup> After being expelled from Jordan (1970–1971), the PLO relocated its headquarters to Beirut. Under the Cairo Agreement of 1969, the PLO was granted control over Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon established after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967 – as well as the right to launch military operations against Israel from Lebanese territory. The agreement also legalized the presence of weapons in the camps, effectively creating a “state within a state”.

## THE IMPACT OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION ON THE SHIA MOVEMENT IN LEBANON

While Lebanon was engulfed in the chaos of civil war and foreign interventions, the Shia movement was further influenced by the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Iran was transformed from a secular monarchy into an Islamic republic. This revolution exerted a profound ideological and practical impact on Shia communities worldwide, including those in Lebanon. Khomeini's vision of "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist" (*Wilāyat al-Faqīh*),<sup>9</sup> which advocated for the leading role of religious leaders in politics and society, inspired many Lebanese Shia clerics and activists. It offered them a model of resistance and self-determination in their long-standing marginalisation and leadership vacuum.

Iran provided not only an ideological framework but also concrete material and military support to the Shia in Lebanon. Shortly after the 1982 Israeli invasion, the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – Pasdaran<sup>10</sup> deployed approximately 800 members of its unit to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, tasked with training and organising local Shia fighters (Levitt 2021, 5; Ranstorp 1997, 110–113). In this endeavour, Iran viewed Lebanon as a crucial arena for "exporting the revolution" and conducting a proxy war against Israel and the United States. Khomeini's rhetoric, which identified the United States as the primary enemy (symbolising global hegemony) and Israel as the regional adversary (symbolising oppression), along with a strong emphasis on resistance and the establishment of Islamic justice, resonated deeply among Lebanese Shiites. Thus, Iranian support, combining ideological leadership with operational assistance, served as a key catalyst in the emergence of an organisation like Hezbollah,

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<sup>9</sup> *Wilāyat al-Faqīh*, or "Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist", is a Shia Islamic doctrine developed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which establishes the supreme authority of a religious jurist (faqih) over all state and societal affairs. This concept forms the foundation of the theocratic governance of the Islamic Republic of Iran and serves as an ideological model for Shia movements throughout the region.

<sup>10</sup> In Persian, *Sepāh-e Pāsdārān-e Engelāb-e Islāmi*, commonly abbreviated as the *Pasdaran*, represents the primary branch of Iran's armed forces, tasked with multiple roles and functions.

providing operational structure, training, and weaponry, and a clearly defined doctrine and purpose.

## FORMATION OF HEZBOLLAH

In the context of a profound regional crisis marked by external aggression and the strengthening of Shia identity under Iranian influence, Hezbollah (*Hizbu 'llāh*) was formed.<sup>11</sup> The emergence of Hezbollah was not an isolated event but rather the result of the consolidation and unification of various smaller Shia militias and religious groups, such as (*Lebanese al-Da'wa, the Association of Muslim Ulama in Lebanon, and the Association of Muslim Students*) that were already active in Lebanon, especially following the Israeli invasion (Ranstorp 1997, 26). Among the key figures in Hezbollah's founding and early development were religious leaders educated in prestigious Iranian and Iraqi seminaries, such as those in Qom and Najaf, who were deeply imbued with Khomeini's revolutionary ideology. Prominent figures during this period included Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli, the first Secretary-General of Hezbollah, and Sayyed Abbas al-Musawi, who succeeded al-Tufayli and played a significant role in uniting various Shia factions. Later, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, a disciple of al-Musawi, assumed leadership of Hezbollah. Although Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah denied direct involvement in the formal establishment of Hezbollah, his intellectual and religious influence was undeniably significant in shaping the attitudes of Lebanese Shiites and preparing the ground for the emergence and development of radical movements. While Khomeini established a broader revolutionary theological-political model that Hezbollah adopted as the foundation of its ideology, Fadlallah provided a specific theological and moral framework that legitimised Hezbollah's actions and ideology within the Lebanese context, shaping public opinion and offering spiritual guidance (Robin 2001, 97), albeit without direct organisational control over the group. Hezbollah's primary objectives were clearly defined: the expulsion of Israeli forces from Lebanon and the establishment of an Islamic regime modelled after Iran (Rabinovich and Reinhartz 2007, 427).

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<sup>11</sup> Hezbollah, which translates from Arabic as the "Party of God", derived its name under the direct influence and inspiration of Ayatollah Khomeini.



Considering the complexities of Lebanon's social structure and regional dynamics, Hezbollah initially maintained a relatively flexible political program, with a primary focus on armed resistance. However, Hezbollah distinguished itself from earlier Shia movements, such as AMAL, through its markedly radical anti-Western and anti-Israeli rhetoric. Their explicit goal of Israel's destruction and hostility toward the United States and France set them apart from more moderate factions (Hezbollah 1985, 5). A crucial distinction also lay in Hezbollah's direct dependence on Iran. This relationship with Tehran has been fundamental to shaping Hezbollah's identity, operational capabilities, and strategic autonomy within the Lebanese and broader regional contexts.

### **THE EARLY PERIOD OF ACTIVITY**

Hezbollah's early phase of activity, spanning from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, was characterised by a series of intense and violent operations primarily targeting Western – mainly American and Israeli – interests in Lebanon. These actions contributed to Hezbollah's reputation as one of the most formidable and lethal paramilitary organisations in the Middle East. During this period, the group was responsible for several of the era's most infamous terrorist attacks, including the bombings of Multinational Force barracks stationed in Lebanon as part of peacekeeping efforts during the Lebanese Civil War. These attacks alone resulted in the deaths of 307 individuals (Hammel 1985, 394).

In addition to its military actions, Hezbollah was also responsible for a series of hostage crises<sup>12</sup> and suicide attacks targeting Israeli forces. During this period of intensified armed resistance, the organisation simultaneously worked to expand its influence within Lebanese society. With substantial financial support from Iran,<sup>13</sup> Hezbollah established a comprehensive network of social services in neglected Shiite regions, including hospitals, schools, and charitable institutions. This social infrastructure proved crucial

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<sup>12</sup> The Lebanese hostage crisis, spanning from 1982 to 1992, involved the abduction of 104 foreign nationals, the majority of whom were Americans and Western Europeans.

<sup>13</sup> According to Professor Dragan Simeunović, during Khomeini's era, Iranian support – supplemented by smaller donations from other Arab countries – reached up to 80 million dollars annually (Simeunović 2000, 198).

in garnering deep-rooted support and loyalty among the Shiite population. Although Hezbollah initially abstained from participating in Lebanon's parliamentary system, its military effectiveness against Israel, combined with its extensive provision of social services, helped solidify its role as an indispensable actor within the country's socio-political landscape.

Over time, Hezbollah developed into a multifaceted organisation with two core pillars. Its military wing concentrated on armed resistance against Israel and Western influence, while its socio-political wing focused on winning popular support through extensive social programs and the creation of a parallel governance structure. Fueled by regional instability and driven by Iran's revolutionary ideology, this dual strategy resulted in a distinctive entity that remains a powerful force shaping Lebanon's trajectory and the broader regional landscape.

## IDEOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES OF HEZBOLLAH

The core of Hezbollah's ideology is rooted in radical Shi'a Islam, particularly shaped by the vision of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. One of the fundamental characteristics of Islam is that it is not only a religious system, but also a political and legal system. It should be noted that Islam, unlike some other religions, has a significant political role in countries with a Muslim majority, as well as in Muslim communities around the world (Vukoičić 2017, 131). Before Hezbollah's emergence, most Shi'a religious institutions in Lebanon were largely apolitical, focusing on religious rituals, theology, and education, while deliberately avoiding direct involvement in governance. However, Khomeini's doctrine of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist) fundamentally altered this paradigm. It advocated that in the absence of the Twelfth Imam,<sup>14</sup> the highest religious authority should assume direct political power and lead the Muslim community.

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<sup>14</sup> In Shiite theology, the Twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, is regarded as the last in the line of Prophet Muhammad's successors. He is believed to have entered a state of "occultation" (Ghaybah) in 869 CE. The term "absence of the Twelfth Imam" refers to his current hidden state, during which he does not appear publicly, preventing believers from direct communication or leadership through his physical presence.

The doctrine of *Wilāyat al-Faqīh* thus provided Hezbollah with ideological legitimacy not only for active political participation but also for armed struggle. Khomeini's influence on Hezbollah was twofold: on one hand, he offered a theological and political model through the concept of an Islamic state and revolutionary resistance against the United States, which represented a symbol of global hegemony, and Israel, a regional adversary. On the other hand, he established a direct hierarchical link through an oath of allegiance to the Iranian Supreme Leader initially to Khomeini himself, and later to Khamenei (Jaber 1997, 54–55). While Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah was an influential spiritual figure, his contributions were primarily manifested in the local theological discourse and in granting moral and religious legitimacy to the resistance within Lebanon's unique context. This enabled the adaptation and broader acceptance of Khomeini's ideas among the Lebanese masses while preserving autonomy from direct organisational control over Hezbollah.

### **ANTI-ISRAEL DISCOURSE AS A COMPONENT OF HEZBOLLAH'S IDEOLOGY**

A central and clearly articulated objective of Hezbollah is the resistance against the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory. This aim emerged directly as a response to Israel's 1982 invasion and the occupation of southern Lebanon, which enabled Hezbollah to position itself as the foremost resistance movement. This stance earned considerable support not only within the Shi'a community but also among wider segments of Lebanese society opposed to Israel's presence. Hezbollah's anti-Israel rhetoric goes beyond tactical considerations; it constitutes a fundamental ideological conviction that regards Israel as an occupying force and denies the legitimacy of the so-called "Zionist entity". The organisation maintains that its primary goal is the liberation of Lebanon and the eradication of Israel (Norton 2014).

This narrative enabled Hezbollah to successfully portray itself as the guardian of Lebanese sovereignty and national pride, significantly

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This concept is fundamental to Shiite theology and carries significant implications for religious and political leadership within the community.

bolstering its support across diverse segments of Lebanese society. Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, along with Hezbollah's role during the 2006 Lebanon War, further solidified its reputation among the Lebanese people as a powerful and effective regional actor capable of standing up to the Israeli military.

## **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS OF HEZBOLLAH'S ACTIVITIES**

Alongside its military activities, Hezbollah has developed an extensive social network that forms the foundation of its popularity and legitimacy in Lebanon (Cammatt 2014, 20). Leveraging significant financial support from Iran, supplemented by funds from the Shiite diaspora, Hezbollah has effectively established a "state within a state" in Shiite regions, filling the institutional vacuum created by the long-standing neglect of the central Lebanese government. Hezbollah provides a wide range of essential social services, including healthcare (operating a network of hospitals and clinics offering affordable medical care), education (founding and managing schools and educational centers at all levels, often emphasizing Islamic values), social welfare (supporting people experiencing poverty, widows, orphans, and families of fallen fighters), financial assistance, scholarships, and infrastructure development (actively involved in the reconstruction and development of infrastructure in Shiite areas, including housing, roads, water supply, and electrical networks) (Ranstorp 1997, 106; Kiameh 2023, 85–91).

Through its social dimension, Hezbollah has cultivated deep loyalty and dependency among the population, extending beyond mere military support to build a robust foundation for its political influence. Hezbollah legitimised its political role by participating in the first parliamentary elections after the civil war in 1992, securing a continuous presence in the Lebanese parliament (Norton 2007, 98). Over the following decades, it consistently won parliamentary seats and gained ministerial portfolios, acquiring direct influence over national decision-making processes. In the formation of Lebanon's current government in February 2025, Hezbollah was allocated two ministerial positions: Rakan Nasreddin as Minister of Health, and Muhammad Haidar as Minister of Labour (Beerli 2025). This political role enables Hezbollah to impact policymaking at the national level,

protect the interests of the Shiite community, and advance its agenda from within the government. Hezbollah's ability to navigate Lebanon's complex confessional political system while maintaining its military strength ensures its long-term sustainability and significant influence domestically and across the broader regional landscape.

### **LONG-TERM GOALS OF HEZBOLLAH: REGIONAL INFLUENCE AND VISION**

Hezbollah's long-term objectives go beyond the Lebanese context and are closely tied to a broader regional vision inspired by the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Hezbollah's doctrine has evolved from the radical "Open Letter" – the 1985 Manifesto (*An Open Letter: The Hizballah Program*) – to the more pragmatic "Political Document" (*The New Hezbollah Manifesto*) or *New Manifesto* of 2009. The original manifesto was distinctly revolutionary, advocating the expulsion of Western influence, the destruction of Israel, absolute loyalty to Iran's Supreme Leader, and the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon modelled after the Iranian system (Hezbollah 1985, 6).

However, the 2009 Manifesto reflects Hezbollah's significant adaptation and integration into the Lebanese political system. Explicit calls for the creation of an Islamic state in Lebanon were omitted, and the group expressed greater openness toward democratic processes and active participation in government. Its rhetoric became more universal, aiming to attract broader support, while still maintaining a strong anti-American and anti-Israeli discourse. Nevertheless, despite changes in tone and approach to domestic politics, the 2009 Manifesto preserved continuity in its core ideological principles, continuing to reject the existence of Israel and any form of peace settlement. It also retained a clear, though more subtly expressed, loyalty to Iran's Supreme Leader and the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih (Hezbollah 2009, 5–9).

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND FINANCING

Hezbollah is a complex hybrid organisation that effectively integrates substantial military capabilities, active political engagement, and an extensive social infrastructure. This multilayered structure grants it dominant influence within Lebanon and enables power projection on a broader regional scale. The organisation's funding model is characterised by a diversified network of sources, contributing to high operational autonomy and long-term institutional sustainability. At the head of Hezbollah is the Shura Council, which makes comprehensive strategic decisions. Although long-time Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah was killed in an Israeli airstrike on Hezbollah's headquarters in Beirut in September 2024, he was soon succeeded by his former deputy, Naim Qassem.

Beneath the Consultative Council operate the Executive, Jihad, Judicial, Parliamentary, and Political Councils. The Executive Council, currently headed by Ali Damoush following the assassination of Hashem Safieddine, consists of nine units: 1) Information Unit; 2) Electronic Unit; 3) Social Unit; 4) Education Unit; 5) Islamic Health Unit; 6) Jihadi-Financial Unit; 7) Labour Unions Unit; 8) Foreign Relations Unit; and 9) Liaison and Coordination Unit (Beeri 2025). The Jihad Council is Hezbollah's highest military command body, equivalent to a general staff, responsible for all aspects of the organisation's military and security activities. As the new Secretary-General of Hezbollah, Naim Qassem chairs the Jihad Council. Other members include:

Mohammad Haydar – considered the *de facto* chief of staff of Hezbollah; Haytham Ali Tabatabai – commander of the elite Radwan Forces;<sup>15</sup> Talal Hamiyah – commander of Unit 910 (External Security Organisation); Khudr Yousef Nader – commander of Unit 900

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<sup>15</sup> In addition to the Radwan Unit specifically trained for cross-border incursions and operations requiring precise execution several other units fall under the direct control of the Jihad Council: the Badr Unit, specialized in guerrilla warfare; the Aziz Unit, responsible for special operations outside Lebanon; the Haidar Unit, designated for rapid response; and the Al-Qaim Unit, tasked with logistics and support.

(Counterintelligence, Internal Security, and Counterterrorism Unit); Wafiq Safa – head of the Liaison and Coordination Unit.<sup>16</sup>

The Judicial Council, established as a Shia network of courts, is mandated to adjudicate and mediate disputes, applying Sharia law. Its jurisdiction covers the Shia population as well as internal conflicts or violations of Hezbollah's internal rules by its members. Mohammed Yazbek currently heads the council. The Parliamentary Council plays a key role in consolidating party discipline and enhancing the effectiveness of Hezbollah's elected representatives in the Lebanese legislative body. Its function is also to ensure the subordination of Hezbollah's elected officials to the Advisory Council. Mohammed Raad heads this body.

The Political Council is responsible for continuously monitoring and operationalising Hezbollah's political activities. Its key functions include drafting political programs and electoral platforms, organising election campaigns, and forging and maintaining coalitions. Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed currently heads the council.

Hezbollah's funding operates through a complex, multi-tiered network that sustains its extensive military, political, and social infrastructure. The primary and most dependable source of financial support is Iran; U.S. officials estimate that Hezbollah received 700 million dollars from Iran in 2018 alone (Karam 2018). A significant share of resources also originates from the Shiite Lebanese diaspora, especially communities in West Africa, the United States, Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil (Labaki 2006, 15–16). Moreover, Hezbollah finances its activities through various illicit enterprises.

These illegal activities encompass drug manufacturing and trafficking – primarily cocaine, with documented involvement in marijuana production and distribution (Mucci 2014) alongside arms smuggling, and trading in cigarettes and “blood” diamonds. Additionally, they engage in currency counterfeiting, including the production of “Supernotes”, complex money laundering through international networks, forgery of passports and other identification documents (Burman and Blanga 2025, 102–107), as well as the

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<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that Hezbollah, for security reasons, does not publicly disclose the names of all members of its councils, especially those of the Jihad Council.

exploitation of natural resources like Venezuelan gold (Giambertoni 2025, 3–6).

These illicit channels include the production and trafficking of drugs, most commonly cocaine. However, there is also evidence of marijuana production and trade (Mucci 2014), arms trafficking, as well as dealing in cigarettes and “blood” diamonds. Additionally, they engage in currency counterfeiting, such as “Supernote” bills, sophisticated money laundering through international networks, forgery of passports and other identification documents (Burman and Blanga 2025, 102–107), and exploitation of natural resources, including Venezuelan gold (Giambertoni 2025, 3–6).

We can conclude that the combination of diverse funding sources, primarily driven by Iranian support, has enabled Hezbollah to solidify its position as a hybrid actor with significant military, political, and social capabilities, establishing it as one of the most prominent non-state actors in the Middle East.

### **HEZBOLLAH OPERATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES: AN ANALYSIS OF DYNAMICS**

Hezbollah’s operations span three primary domains. The first domain includes military actions on Lebanese territory, primarily directed against Israel. The second domain involves transnational military engagement, demonstrated through interventions and support in conflicts such as those in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The third domain encompasses terrorist activities outside Lebanon, often characterised by the phenomenon of suicide terrorism. Regarding military operations within Lebanon, Hezbollah can be seen as a central actor in direct armed conflicts with Israel. The most notable of these is the 2006 Second Lebanon War, during which Hezbollah showcased significant military capabilities. Beyond this central conflict, Hezbollah continuously maintains low-intensity clashes along the border, including sporadic rocket attacks. The latest such attacks occurred in October 2023, when Hezbollah, along with allied groups, launched as many as 781 attacks against Israel in just eight days (Dhaybi and Hussein 2024). These actions form part of Hezbollah’s self-proclaimed role as a “resistance movement” against



Israeli control, which grants them legitimacy among specific segments of the Lebanese population.

Hezbollah's activities outside Lebanese territory often take place in a "grey zone", involving training, advising, and support, which complicates the precise documentation of all military interventions. Nevertheless, their significant military engagements can be identified. Hezbollah began its transnational military involvement during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995), providing training and advice to the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of broader Iranian support. Their members primarily acted as instructors and participated in small combat units.<sup>17</sup> According to British journalist Robert Fisk, approximately 150 Hezbollah fighters, led by Fuad Shukr, took part in the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Fisk 2014). This was confirmed in a speech by former Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah at Shukr's funeral in 2024 (Paunović 2024). Hezbollah's engagement intensified significantly from 2003 during the Iraq conflict, where Unit 3,800<sup>18</sup> oversaw the training of Iraqi Shiite militias such as the Mahdi Army, the League of the Righteous (*Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq*), and Hezbollah Brigades (*Kata'ib Hezbollah*). Their role included acting as military advisors, instructors, and coordinators in guerrilla warfare tactics and the use of explosives.

In 2011, Hezbollah became involved in the Syrian civil war. By 2013, its role had evolved into a full-scale military engagement, marked by the deployment of thousands of fighters providing direct support to the Bashar al-Assad regime. This intervention was crucial for the regime's survival, with Hezbollah forces playing a decisive role in major offensives such as the battles of Al-Qusayr (Choucair 2013) and Aleppo, where Hezbollah committed around 2,000 fighters (Morris 2013), significantly contributing to the takeover of strategic territories.

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<sup>17</sup> Based on motivation criteria, Marija Djorić and Strahinja Obrenović divide foreign terrorist fighters in the Balkans into two main groups. The first consists of fighters recruited for ideological reasons, while the second includes mercenaries, popularly referred to as "dogs of war" (Đorić and Obrenović 2024, 13–14).

<sup>18</sup> Unit 3800 is a specialized Hezbollah unit established in 2003 at Iran's request. Its primary mission is to support Shia militant groups in Iraq and Yemen, making it a key instrument of Iran's proxy warfare strategy. The unit is led by the experienced fighter Khalil Youssef Harb.

Starting in 2014, Hezbollah began supporting the Houthis in Yemen by training their fighters, advising on military strategies, and, most importantly, assisting in the development and production of sophisticated weaponry such as ballistic missiles and drones. This transfer of knowledge and expertise has enabled the Houthi rebels to enhance their asymmetric warfare capabilities (Minor 2024; Jones *et al.* 2021, 1).

An essential domain of Hezbollah's activities is terrorism. Their terrorist actions are not isolated incidents but are deeply rooted in the organisation's ideology. Hezbollah has been linked to numerous terrorist attacks outside Lebanon, often targeting interests connected to Israel or the West. The ideological foundation of Hezbollah is firmly embedded in the concept of martyrdom, which justifies the use of suicide terrorism. Geopolitically, Hezbollah was the first to demonstrate the effectiveness of this tactic, especially during the 1980s in Lebanon, when suicide attacks influenced the withdrawal of foreign forces. A typical example of such terrorist acts is the 1984 attack on the U.S. Embassy, where a single suicide bombing killed 23 people and wounded 90 (Kifner 1984). This showed that a non-state actor could achieve significant strategic goals at minimal cost. Recruitment and motivation of members are based on the concept of "istishhad" (*istiṣhād*), which represents a passion for martyrdom. Within this paradigm, death in battle is not seen as a failure but as an honourable path that elevates the fighter to a martyr, or "shaheed" (*Shahīd*). This ideological concept plays a crucial role in mobilisation, promising fighters spiritual rewards, social prestige, and support for the families of fallen combatants.

Hezbollah's ideology divides the world into oppressors and the oppressed. The oppressors are viewed as unbelievers and apostates, while the downtrodden—those who follow the true faith—include Hezbollah members (Simeunović 209, 198–199). Hezbollah was one of the first groups to systematically use suicide attacks as an asymmetric tactic against militarily superior forces. The 1983 attacks on American and French barracks in Beirut demonstrated how this relatively low-cost strategy could deliver significant psychological and strategic effects, ultimately compelling the Multinational Forces to withdraw from Lebanon. These suicide missions established Hezbollah as a pioneer in this form of warfare and influenced other groups to adopt similar methods.

Many countries and organisations classify Hezbollah as a terrorist group due to its attacks on civilian targets outside conflict zones. The United States takes the most rigid stance, designating the entire organisation as a terrorist and imposing comprehensive sanctions (US Department of State 1997). The European Union adopts a more nuanced approach, labelling only Hezbollah's military wing as a terrorist entity, which allows it to maintain political relations with the Lebanese government (Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/332). In contrast, Russia (Reuters 2015) and China<sup>19</sup> do not designate Hezbollah as a terrorist group, instead viewing it as a legitimate political and military ally. Arab countries remain divided on this issue.

Here is the list of Hezbollah's most notorious terrorist attacks:

1) December 3, 1982: Hijacking of Kuwait Airways Flight 221, resulting in the deaths of two individuals; 2) April 18, 1983. Suicide bombing of the U.S. embassy in Beirut, killing 63 and injuring around 120 people; 3) October 23, 1983. Bombing of the multinational forces' barracks in Beirut, causing 307 fatalities; 4) September 20, 1984. Suicide attack on the U.S. embassy in East Beirut, killing 23 and wounding 90 people; 5) 1985–1986. Series of bombings in Paris, resulting in 20 deaths and 255 injuries; 6) 1992. Suicide bombing of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 and injuring 242 individuals; 7) 1996. Bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, which killed 19 and injured 498 people; 8) February 14, 2005. Assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut; 21 others were killed and 220 were injured in the bombing; 9) July 18, 2012. Suicide bombing targeting a tourist bus carrying Israeli tourists in Burgas, killing six and injuring 32; 10) 2012. Assassination of Brigadier General Wissam al-Hassan, a leading Sunni figure in Lebanon and head of internal security forces, resulting in the deaths of al-Hassan and seven others, with approximately 80 injured (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] 1985; Volo 2010; Hammel 1985; Kifner 1984; Rignault and Deligny 1989; Federation of American Scientists [FAC] 1992; Battles 2021; BBC 2014; BBC 2022; Chulov 2012).

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<sup>19</sup> Rather than a direct alliance, the relationship between Hezbollah and China is best described as a strategic alignment of interests. This connection is based on an indirect partnership primarily conducted through Iran, rather than through direct bilateral cooperation.

Before its latest conflict with Israel in 2023 and the subsequent invasion of Lebanon in 2024, Hezbollah had solidified its position as one of the most formidable non-state military forces. The group possessed a hybrid military capacity, blending conventional and asymmetric warfare capabilities. Its arsenal consisted of tens of thousands of missiles, including precision-guided weapons, drones, and advanced anti-tank and anti-ship systems. With a fighting force exceeding 100,000, Hezbollah's military strength was comparable to that of several nation-states (Al Jazeera 2024). However, following Israel's severe retaliation during the 2023 conflict and the invasion in 2024, Hezbollah endured substantial losses that significantly impacted its military and political influence. Estimates indicate that Hezbollah lost between 4,000 (The Times of Israel 2024) and 10,000 fighters (Clash Report 2025), marking the deadliest period in its history. Among the casualties were 14 high-ranking commanders, including Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, Executive Council Chairman Hashem Safieddine, and prominent leaders such as Fuad Shukur and Ibrahim Aqil. The organisation also severely damaged its military infrastructure, including bases, tunnels, weapons depots, and fortifications. Israeli strikes disrupted weapon supply lines through Syrian border crossings, with over 155,000 pieces of weaponry and equipment seized, including 12,000 explosive devices, drones, rockets, and anti-tank weapons (Bohbot 2024). Despite these setbacks, Hezbollah remains far from defeated. New leadership has been installed in key positions, and the organisation, still commanding tens of thousands of fighters, is actively rebuilding its capabilities and redefining its strategic approach in the evolving regional landscape.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we demonstrated that Hezbollah is a hybrid actor effectively combining elements of a political party, a social movement, and a paramilitary force, while simultaneously operating as a terrorist organization, as evidenced by the analysis of its terrorist activities. The organization's origins are closely intertwined with Lebanon's turbulent historical context, including the civil war, the Israeli invasion of 1982, and the far-reaching impact of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

The paper also covers the analysis of Hezbollah's transformation following the 2024 conflict with Israel. During this period, the organization suffered its most severe losses in history, including the elimination of its long-time leader Hassan Nasrallah and much of its command structure, as well as the destruction of over 70% of its military infrastructure. This turn of events transformed Hezbollah from a "dominant regional power" into a "defeated force", shifting its primary focus from establishing regional influence to recovery and survival.

Looking ahead, Hezbollah faces unparalleled challenges. The new Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, must undertake the difficult task of consolidating authority and restoring the group's diminished capacities. Instead of conventional military engagement, the organization is expected to prioritize safeguarding its remaining resources and political influence. Similar to other embattled groups, Hezbollah might return to asymmetric tactics, making a resurgence of terrorist activities a possibility as a reaction to internal and external pressures. Its future will largely hinge on its adaptability and resilience in a transformed regional environment.

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## **ИДЕОЛОГИЈА, УЛОГА И ДЕЛОВАЊЕ ХЕЗБОЛАХА У КОНТЕКСТУ БЛИСКОИСТОЧНИХ СУКОБА И МЕЃУНАРОДНЕ БЕЗБЕДНОСТИ\*\*\***

### **Сажетак**

Овај рад пружа свеобухватну анализу Хезболаха, истражујући његову генезу, развој, идеолошке оквири, организациону структуру, оперативне методе и комплексни регионални и међународни утицај. Полазећи од прецизне дефиниције тероризма и карактеристика савремених терористичких организација, рад аргументује научну релевантност Хезболаха као хибридног актера који комбинује елементе политичке партије, социјалног покрета, терористичке групе и паравојне снаге, играјући централну улогу у геополитичким динамикама Блиског истока. Примарни циљ овог истраживања је систематско испитивање кључних фактора који су допринели формирању Хезболаха, анализу његове унутрашње организације и структуре, идеолошких постулата који дефинишу стратешке циљеве, као и мултидимензионалних аспеката његовог деловања. Истраживање обухвата детаљан преглед војних операција, политичке партиципације, социјално-хуманитарних активности и механизма финансирања Хезболаха, као и варирајуће глобалне перцепције. Посебна пажња посвећена је улози Хезболаха у блискоисточним сукобима, попут Другог либанског рата 2006. године и грађанског рата у Сирији. Методологија истраживања подразумева анализу

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секундарних извора, укључујући релевантну академску литературу, извештаје међународних организација, медијске архиве и доступне примарне документе. Примењен је компаративни и историјски приступ како би се разумео развој Хезболаха у контексту шире политичке и друштвене ситуације у Либану, нарочито у погледу грађанског рата и израелске инвазије 1982. године, као и утицаја Иранске револуције из 1979. године. Ова комплексна анализа доприноси дубљем разумевању феномена Хезболаха и његових импликација на регионалну и међународну безбедност, пружајући основу за даља истраживања сложених односа између државних и недржавних актера на Блиском истоку.

**Кључне речи:** Хезболах, Блиски исток, Либан, тероризам.

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