

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
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Master's Thesis

2022

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**Beneficial or Detrimental Relationship? The Case of
State-Sponsored Terrorism and the Identity of Violent
Non-State Actors**

Master's thesis

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Year of the defence: 2023

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 3.1.2023

Daniel Dvořák

References

DVOŘÁK, Daniel. *Beneficial or Detrimental Relationship? The Case of State-Sponsored Terrorism and the Identity of Violent Non-State Actors*. Praha, 2023. 47 pages. Master's thesis (MA). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies. Department of Security Studies. Supervisor Mgr. Bohumil Doboš, Ph.D.

Length of the thesis: 123 329 characters with spaces

Abstract

With the slow, but steady, amelioration of relations between Israel and the Gulf monarchies, the Islamic Republic of Iran is becoming even more regionally ostracized and may currently present a potential threat to the stability in Middle East. This, coupled with an uncertain domestic stability, may incite a rash decision within Tehran's leadership in order to both alleviate its domestic issues and assert its position in the region. This frustration may be directed towards Israel, the Gulf, or any other potentially threatening presence. One of the tenets of Iranian external power is its support for various resistance movements in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and the Gulf. Iran's long-lasting relationship with two of these movements – Hezbollah and Hamas – is particularly interesting in the context of ever-changing dynamics in the region. Thus, the aim of this diploma thesis is to assess whether the relationship between a benefactor, in this case the Islamic Republic of Iran, and a two proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas, is beneficial or detrimental to the latter. The assessment focuses on ideologies and goals of both sides of the relationship and how they may contradict each other at times.

Abstrakt

S pomalým, ale jistým, zlepšováním vztahů mezi Izraelem a monarchiemi v Perském zálivu se Íránská islámská republika stává ještě více regionálně ostrakizovanou a může v současnosti představovat potenciální hrozbu pro stabilitu na Blízkém východě. To, spolu s nejistou domácí situací může podnítit unáhlené rozhodnutí u vedení této země s cílem zmírnění svých domácích problémů a prosazení své pozice v regionu. Tato frustrace může být namířena proti Izraeli, monarchiím v Zálivu nebo jakékoli jiné potenciální hrozbě. Jedním z principů íránské vnější moci je podpora různým lokálním hnutím jak v Libanonu a Palestině, tak v Jemenu, Sýrii, Iráku a zemích Zálivu. Dlouhodobý vztah Íránu se dvěma těmito hnutími – Hizballáhem a Hamásem – je zvláště zajímavý v kontextu neustále se měnící dynamiky v regionu. Tudíž, cílem této diplomové práce je posouzení vztahu mezi sponzorem, v tomto případě Íránskou islámskou republikou, a jejími proxy, Hizballáhem a Hamásem. Cílem je zjistit zda tento vztah je pro tyto dvě skupiny prospěšný, či škodlivý. Hodnocení se zaměřuje na ideologie a cíle obou stran těchto vztahů a jak si případně odporují.

Keywords

Violent non-state actor (VNSA), Identity, Terrorism, State-Sponsored Terrorism, Proxy Warfare, Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Israel

Klíčová slova

Násilný nestátní aktér, Identita, Terorismus, Státem-podporovaný terorismus, Proxy válka, Írán, Hizballáh, Hamás, Israel

Title

Beneficial or Detrimental Relationship? The Case of State-Sponsored Terrorism and the Identity of Violent Non-State Actors

Název práce

Prospěšný nebo škodlivý vztah? Příklad státem podporovaného terorismu a identita násilných nestátních aktérů

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude towards my family who have supported me throughout the perilous period of my studies at Charles University. Also, I would like to thank the staff and colleges at Charles who have, together with myself, endured the tumultuous times under Covid and carried on with their future prospects. As a certain famous individual once said: “You teach a child to read, and he or her will be able to pass a literacy test.”

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Introduction

With the careful, but steady, mending of relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors (Ibrahim, 2022) , Iran is becoming even more ostracized in the regional context and may currently present the greatest threat to stability in the Middle East, either directly or via its affiliates. This, coupled with an uncertain domestic political and economic situation, could incite a rash decision within the Iranian leadership to lash out in order to alleviate these domestic issues and rectify its quasi-hegemonial role by further expressing its accumulated frustration towards other regional actors. Since open conflict is off the table for now, proxy warfare is the name of the game for Iran. One of the tenets of Iranian regional policy is undoubtedly its support for various violent non-state actors (VNSAs). Iran has reportedly been providing funding, weaponry and training to such groups.

A greater understanding of these relationships may benefit scholars and policy makers alike. While the connection between state and non-state actors in this matter has been explored on multiple occasions and from multiple angles, a more nuanced, revised and updated view on how this relationship affects these organizations is required. Moreover, the tendency of researchers of proxy relationships to focus on the benefactor rather than the proxy often neglects the importance of the latter. While there has been some progress lately, mainly by constructivists, in emphasizing the importance of the proxy, the author feels that it deserves more attention. Specifically, this study explores the relationship between Iran and two non-state actors, Hezbollah and Hamas.

Essentially, the study explores the relationship between a benefactor and a proxy, i.e. the one who provides aid and the one who acts in benefactor's stead. As the title states, the aim is to determine whether the relationship of these non-state actors with the benefactor is either beneficial or detrimental, given their own plans in their respective operational territories. The author determines the relationship to be detrimental to the non-state actor when its actions on behest of the state-sponsor contradict its principles. Similarly, the relationship is considered detrimental when the interests of the state-sponsor do not correlate with the agent's identity. In regards to the overall strategy of this paper, the author starts out by reviewing the existing literature on the topic and introducing the paper's research question and target. Then, he identifies the type of research, data collection and methodology used within the paper. Last but not least, he delves into the topic in two parts of the analytical section. The first section concerns the identity of the

three actors while the second section follows on their relationships via the principal-agent theory.

Literature Review

A review of the most relevant and significant publications regarding the topic at hand is presented in this section. Due to the volume of sources used in the research, only essential literature was selected for the review. Within the sources discussed here, there is a greater emphasis on literature concerning the overall problematics and processes used in the paper. Mainly, the focus of the literature review is on the principal-agent theory, identities of Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah, the proxy environment in Middle East and the conceptualizations of state-sponsored terrorism and violent non-state actors. Still, many other important sources used within this paper are omitted from this literature review due to space issues. However, the sources presented here should give a general idea of the topic at hand. To begin, the utilization of the principal-agent theory in proxy warfare is often problematic. While the study of proxy environments has experienced a renewed interest, especially in the post-Cold War era, the use of the principal-agent problem (as it is originally called) within this context is often misguided.

Abbas Farasoo, a researcher and policy analyst of international security and proxy wars, argues that scholars usually employing the theory focus in their research on “individual actors’ motivation analysis” (Farasoo, 2021, p. 1835). The author points out that most of the literature on proxy warfare seeks explanations through the prism of the principal-agent theory, which in turn leads to a stronger focus on the principal rather than the agent in the relationship. This is apparent in Amos C. Fox’s “Conflict and the Need for a Theory of Proxy Warfare” (2019), where the author emphasizes the role of the principal as the driving force behind agent actions. “By default, the principal’s objective becomes the agent’s objective” (Fox 2019 : 49). Andrew Mumford in “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict” (2013) contemplates the various definitions of the concept of proxy warfare by arguing that much of the literature on the topic is too state-centric and oriented towards the benefactor. The notion that proxies can, in time, develop their own character is of particular interest. This proxy evolution has impact on levels of autonomy from the benefactor, or difference in interpretations of the objective (Mumford 2013, p.41). However, the accent here is on incentives of the actors in a proxy relationship in order to explain why the said relationship works, rather than how it affects the proxy itself.

In a more recent “Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict: Take Two” (2020), Vladimir Rauta classifies proxy wars as “strategic bargains waged on more complex grounds than risk avoidance, cost efficiency and deniability” (Rauta, 2020, p.40) on such examples as the US support to anti-Assad rebels and Iranian proxy war in Syria. More so, the principal-agent theory approach is argued to be state-centric in that it does not account for the agent to be a non-state actor. Farasoo ‘generative mechanism’ approach is critical to the principal-agent theory since the former tries to unmask the incentives behind the proxy alignment, rather than immediately assume the dominant-subservient relationship as is the case in the latter (Farasoo 2021 : 1852-1853). While the characterization of the principal-agent as a master-slave relationship is often suggested by various literature, it does not need to be so. Neither does the focus on the principal side of the relationship constitute a rule.

In “State-Sponsored Terrorism: In Decline, Yet Still a Potent Threat” (2014) Stephen Collins sets out to argue that the relationship between the benefactor and the proxy is affected by decline of state-sponsored terrorism. Collins identifies three phases of state sponsorship evolution; 1970s-1980s; 1990s-2001; 2001-present. The basis for his argument is that sponsorship of terrorist groups has become a liability for states due to “external pressures and patron-client misalignment” (Collins 2014 : 132-133). In explaining the changing dynamics of proxy relationships, Eric Rittinger in his study on American ‘small wars’ emphasized the social aspect of the principal-agent problem. He argues that the delegative manner of the principal-agent relationship results in the success of tasks envisioned by the principal to vary, due to historical and social factors affecting the relationship (Rittinger 2017 : 396). Marc DeVore’s article on how Iranian state sponsorship affects Hezbollah maintains that state sponsor’s direct influence, i.e. through orders, and indirect influence, i.e. through funding and aid, inadvertently shape the group’s decision-making processes (DeVore 2012 : 85).

Despite the general critique of the authors on the absence of social factors in proxy literature, their research into proxy relationships often lacks a thorough exploration of actors’ identities, ideologies and goals. To remedy this, the author consults various literature on this matter. Natasha Ezrow’s “Global Politics and Violent Non-State Actors” (2017) presents an excellent overview of various VNSAs within her multidisciplinary research. Ranging from their definitions, political ideologies, objectives to strategies, structures and funding, terrorist groups and resistance movements are framed in the context

of both international and security studies. Ezrow argues that terrorist groups have transformed into more capable and dangerous terrorist networks capable of maintaining *de facto* states within *de jure* states (Ezrow 2017 : chapter 7). A more in-depth overview of terrorist financial networks is presented in Colin Clarke's "Terrorism, inc: the financing of terrorism, insurgency, and irregular warfare" (2015) in which Hezbollah's and Hamas' financial networks are explored through what the author calls grey and dark economies (Clarke 2015 : Chapter 4 & 5).

Going deeper from general into more specific types of sources, Seyed Alavi's 2019 book on Iran-Palestinian relations explores the regime's ties with resistance movements in Palestine. The ramifications of the Iranian cooperation with organizations such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Fatah and others are explained through ideological differences between the Shia sponsor and Sunni movements. The author's ability to bring about the nature of these relationships with all its causes and consequences put "Iran and Palestine : past, present, future" (2019) in a rare category of books relating to such topic. Similarly, J. Kane's "A Life Cycle Analysis of Hezbollah" (2019) expands on the knowledge about relations between Iran and Hezbollah in addition to explanations of the group's origins and future. In a more ideological strain Ziad's "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background" (1993); Scham's and Irshaid's "Hamas: Ideological Rigidity and Political Flexibility" (2009), or Mizrahi's and Schweitzer's "Hezbollah's Political Challenges following the Elections in Lebanon" (2022) together present part of a wider collection of sources complimentary to primary sources used within this paper.

Conceptual & Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework

As we shall see below, the topic irrevocably encompasses a multitude of theoretical bases. This is due to the fact that the concepts used in this paper originate from and/or are best explained through concepts stemming from strands of both realism and constructivism. Although the normative outlook on world politics embedded in Waltz's famous "Theory of International Politics" (1979) characterizes states as the primary actors, the existence of non-state actors in the post-Cold War era of multipolarity had many scholars debating the point of Waltz's accent on state actors. The neorealist, or structuralist, viewpoint on world politics limits the study of non-state entities which, in

effect, can be counterproductive in understanding the contemporary realities of regions that experience varying degrees of destabilization and where non-state, and especially *violent* non-state actors, are aplenty.

On the other hand, and to remedy the priceless works of structural realists, the amount and volume of research undertaken by the realist school into conflict-related concepts should be taken into account. The issues of neorealism, however, become apparent within the conceptual establishment of *structures* in which actors interact. The ordering principle prescribed by Waltz focuses heavily on the positional side of the relationship while purposively omitting the “personality of actors, their behavior, and their interactions”(Waltz, 1999, p. 80) within the said relationship. Ergo, the neorealist approach’s primary objective is to study the relationship between actors and from there, draw conclusions on their motives, interactions and personalities. While this may seem like a blueprint to what this paper strives for - i.e. determining the value of a relationship between two actors along the beneficial-detrimental axis – it is the opposite. In fact, this paper explores the motives of non-state actors, stemming from their identities, in order to determine the value of their relationship with Iran.

While the established thinking is that constructivism and realism are not compatible with each other (Barkin, 2010, p.2), the notion of realist constructivism is an attractive one and might fill the gap between the two. Samuel J. Barkin’s “Realist Constructivism: Rethinking International Relations” (2010) offers a good compromise between the two disciplines. His theoretical foundation of realist constructivism would perhaps be able to explore the concept of *proxy warfare*, part of the Realist concept of *power politics*, through the lenses of the Constructivist concept of *intersubjectivity*, of which the concept of *identity* is part of. Lastly, Barkin’s emphasis on concepts rather than paradigms alleviates the relationship between the two disciplines rather than make them opposite to each other as is the case in the latter. This combination “is one that brings from classical realism a focus on power politics and on foreign policy, and from constructivism a focus on...the co-constitution of structures and agents.” (Barkin, 2010, p. 7).

In this regard, constructivist approaches stress the role of *social* rather than *material* or *individual*, as is the case in realist and liberalist schools, in international politics. Alexander Wendt’s “Social Theory of International Politics” (1999) reveals its opposition to Waltz’s Neorealism by arguing that the “states systemic project” does not paint a clear picture of contemporary realities and thus is not able to fully explain contemporary

international politics (Wendt, 1999, p. 7). He further delves into the case of state-centrism by arguing that monopoly on violence is not inherently in hands of states since this monopoly has been contested on many occasions by non-state actors such as “mercenaries and pirates well into the nineteenth century, and ..terrorists and guerilla groups in the twentieth”(Wendt, 1999, p.9).

Probably the most useful extract from Constructivism, and effectively all theories critical of Neorealism and Neoliberalism, are the two claims on how international politics is structured. Firstly, it argues that “the structures of international politics are social rather than strictly material”. Secondly, these “[*social*] structures shape actors’ identities and interests, rather than just their behavior” – as is the case in rationalist theory (Wendt, 1995, p. 72). Wendt’s Constructivism, albeit critical to the Neorealist theory of the state system, does still operate within the boundaries of the aforementioned system in that it only seeks to change the point of focus from strictly *material* to include *social*. Still, it does offer the inclusion of non-state actors and identity as concepts worth mentioning for which the author of this paper is glad.

This paper further draws on Natasha Ezrow’s “Global Politics and Violent Non-State Actors” (2017). In her book, she discerns types of violent non-state actors as either insurgencies, terrorist organizations, warlords, organized crime networks, paramilitaries and private military companies (Ezrow, 2017, table of contents). For this paper, chapter seven on terrorist organizations serves as a basis for the construction of terrorist organizations via the concept of a *violent non-state actors*. Ezrow concurs with Mary Kaldor in that the new environment of the post-Cold War era gave rise to new methods of violence – essentially, moving the emphasis from state to non-state actors (Ezrow, 2017, ch. 2). Ezrow further explains that the label of terrorist organization is “a way of delegitimizing an opponent who may have legitimate grievances” (Ezrow, chapter 7), a statement vehemently agreed upon within this paper,. This is indirectly explained via Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s participation in the Palestinian and Lebanese political life, respectively. Their characteristics that are different from other terrorist groups such as ISIS is why they are interesting to study.

To move away from Ezrow’s book for a while, the conceptualization of the term “violent non-state actor” (also, non-state armed actor) stems from the need to include other-than-state actors within contemporary dimensions of the international politics. The realist view of the world views state actors as the only legitimate entities that maintain

monopoly over violence. This view has been often contested on account of increasing role of non-state actors in the world arena. While the impact of the other non-state actors such as NGOs, MNCs and IOs on the world is undoubtedly noteworthy, the existence of violent non-state actors (VNSAs) directly undermines the monopoly over violence held by states. The realist approach is somewhat incompatible with non-state actors, and VNSAs alike, simply because it does not admit their competitiveness with state actors in terms of power. However, to argue that such actors do not have a sway comparable to states would not only be wrong, but also dangerous.

Claudia Hofmann and Ulrich Schneckener in their “Engaging non-state armed actors in state- and peace-building: options and strategies” (2011) review the positions of the realist, institutionalist and constructivist approaches on dealing with *armed non-state actors* (citation) From these positions, it becomes obvious how the realist and constructivist approaches differ in terms of acceptance of a violent non-state actor as a concept. While the realist approach maintains that states should violently suppress armed non-state actors since they threaten the anarchical system in which states thrive, the constructivist approach propagates the use of persuasion when dealing with VNSAs (Hofmann and Schneckener, 2011, p. 608, 612). The main difference between the two approaches being the level of acknowledgement of a violent non-state actor as an entity in international politics. With time, the emergence of the so-called new wars has seen a more frequent inclusion of violent non-state actors under the umbrella of realist theories. One of these attempts is Douglas Lemke’s “Power Politics and Wars without States” (2008) where the author analyses VNSAs using the realist theory of *power politics* (Lemke, 2008, p.775). So, we can definitely see that once purely constructivist concepts make their way into other international theories.

However, for example, the use of *identity* with regards to the study of VNSAs seems to remain a purely constructivist concept. The author of this thesis argues that identity is essential in identifying the needs and wants of violent non-state actors. Since non-state actors do not operate within the constraints of statehood (Ezrow, 2017, ch.2), one could argue that identity is more important to non-state actors than to established state actors due to former’s lack of territory and historical foundation. As such, identity plays a major role in how they assert themselves, how they want the world to perceive them, or what their goals are. Thus, since the study of *identity* in international relations is predominantly present in the constructivist school of thought, many constructivist scholars

have used identity to interpret world politics – however, mostly in connotation with state rather than non-state actors. In the constructivist line of thought, identity precedes interests. In other words, an actor must first know what he represents before he knows what his interests even are (Berenskoetter, 2010, p. 4).

Therefore, in the Wendtian thought, *identity* constitutes interests (Berenskoetter, 2010, p.4). For the conceptualization of identity, this paper therefore uses the definition of actor's identity as presented in Wendt's "Social Theory of International Relations" (1999). According to his explanation, identity (of an actor) retains two perspectives – Self and the Other. First, how the actor views himself. Second, how the actor wants to be viewed, and actually is viewed, by others around him (Wendt, 1999, p.224). Given the topic at hand, a movement that employs violence in its vie for an attainment of a certain goal describes itself as liberation or resistance movement. Its enemies, however, do not view it that way and describe the movement as a terrorist organization. Ergo, perspective matters. While Wendt uses this concept in describing state actors, the author of this paper argues that the same can be used to explain non-state actors. The utilization of Self and the Other of one's identity is used in this when describing the three actors - Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas – along factors such as the actor's origins, ideology, goals, changes overtime and its role in the political-social environment. Views of the Other are also included to complete the picture.

Theoretical framing of proxy war is most likely best explained via the ideas of classical realism presented in Hans Morgenthau's "Politics Among Nations" (1948). His argument that all politics is essentially power politics, presupposes that warfare, a type of politics, is power politics (Morgenthau, 1948, p.21). In the same vein, proxy warfare (war by proxy) must also be a form of power politics as it is characterized by *at least* two units (state actors) and their struggle for power, albeit not directly but via other actors. To better understand the conceptualization of proxy warfare, the author offers a variety of different and more modern interpretations of the term. This is because the advent of proxy war is as old as conflict itself, however its exact characterization vary greatly to this day. Vladimir Rauta in his "Proxy War – A Reconceptualization" argues that the adage "proxy" does little in defining such a concept (Rauta, 2021, p.4). This is true, especially when we look at the multitude of proxy war literature. Andrew Mumford defines proxy wars as "the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome" (Mumford, 2013, p.11). The *benefactor* being either a state or non-state actor outside of an

existing conflict that provides a *proxy* with “weapons, training and funding” (Mumford, 2013, p.11).

In “Conflict and the Need for a Theory of Proxy Warfare”, Amos C. Fox characterizes proxy war as a “war-through-surrogate”(Fox, 2019, p.44) which is a complex form of warfare relative to both its geographical theater and the actors within the proxy-benefactor relationship (Fox, 2019, p.48-49). Fox’s terminology prioritizes the role of the benefactor for which the proxy is just another means to a goal, albeit the goal being common. While Fox’s characterization is a useful one, it is necessary for the topic at hand to find a more general representation of the concept. One that is not transfixed on the role of the benefactor as much, but rather the role of the proxy. Thus, the definition of proxy war by G. Hughes stands out the most: “(1) provision of direct assistance (towards the proxy); (2) existence of a common target; (3) sustained Beneficiary-Proxy relation, not mere short-term cooperation.” (Rauta, 2021, p.12). He defines proxy as a “non-state paramilitary groups receiving direct assistance from an external power” (Rauta, 2021, p.19). As such, the definitions of *proxy* and *proxy warfare* offered by Hughes are sufficient for this paper.

Closely related to the phenomenon of proxy warfare, state-sponsored terrorism maintains the role of the state as an actor in a supposed relationship. The concept does not need much explanation as its suggestion is in its name and is agreed upon by most. The relationship between a state and a terrorist group only offers a different and more nuanced interpretation of the proxy relationship between the benefactor and a proxy. Still, some explanation is in order to contextualize the concept within this paper. ‘State-sponsored terrorism’ denotes a state actor’s effort to damage another state actor by sponsoring an external actor, usually a non-state unit, that practices terrorism (Zahra, 2011, p.62) . Effectually, the state sponsor also participates in terrorism and can be labeled as such. Definitions of what constitutes terrorism were mentioned before and are continuously explored throughout the analysis.

Conceptual Framework

The principal-agent problem serves as a theoretical and operational foundation on which this research is based. Essentially, the theory concerns two actors – the principal and the agent – in a relational environment which becomes clearer upon its defining characteristics. Since the principal-agent problem has its roots in the economic field, the

best example is that of a corporation (agent) and its shareholders (principal). Not limited to these roles, the principal-agent problematics include relations between “voters and elected officials, Congress and the bureaucracy, states and international organizations, civilian leaders and militaries, and states and foreign armed proxies” (Rittinger, 2017, p.397). In summary, the principal’s concern are the actions of its agent. As long as the agent fulfills principal’s wishes (i.e. acts in principal’s interest), all is merry. However, the issue, and the reason why it is called the principal-agent *problem*, is when the agent’s interests differ from those of the principal. The reason for its occurrence is that the agent has different and usually more valuable information (one could say in-field information) from that of the principal. The *problem* arises when the principal’s desires are costly to the agent, while the agent’s activities are costly to the principal.

In context of IR and Security Studies the principal-agent theory is common in both rationalists and constructivist theories. The rationalists mainly focus on the conflict between the agent and the principal from the perspective of self-interest, i.e. agent and principal having different interests from each other. On the other hand, constructivists view divergent identities, i.e. the wants and needs of each party, as the main issue of conflict (Rittinger, 2017, p.398). This paper employs both the rationalist and constructivist explanations of the principal-agent problem since the author is a proponent of the rationale that identity constitutes interests. The principal-agent theory has been widely used both in international relations and security studies – especially in the context of proxy warfare. Where the proxy is the agent, the benefactor is the principal. While the relationship does not necessitate that one of the parties is a state or non-state actor, prior experience suggests that the principal is usually a state actor. In regards to agent, both can be observed. The US military’s use of Afghan Defense Forces, Iraqi Security Forces, or Syrian Democratic Forces serve as an example of state-to-state proxy warfare for which the principal-agent problem can be applied (Fox, 2019, p.51). Equally, state-to-nonstate proxy relationship can be observed when looking at Iranian or Russian use of paramilitary organizations (Fox, 2019, p.44).

So far, we have discussed the theoretical foundations of four main concepts and how they are used within the analysis: identity, territorial violent non-state actor, proxy warfare and state-sponsored terrorism. We have also framed the operational foundation of the principal-agent theory. Now, it is important to explain the mechanisms used in this paper. The author developed a graphical representation of the conceptual framework to

better illustrate the overall structure of the study (see Fig.1). To narratively expand on the graphic representation of the conceptual framework, the process of arriving at the destination is multi-layered. Through the study of both the principal's and agents' identities (which includes their origins, ideology, goals, environments), the research attempts to identify similarities and differences between the two sides within the principal-agent relationship. The agents' further classifications as violent non-state actors frame their roles within the context of the proxy warfare, which is aptly presented as proxy environment in the graphical illustration. The principal's role as a state-sponsor of terrorism in the context of this proxy environment helps to identify the needs of the principal and its relationship with the agents.

With all factors considered, this relationship between the agent and the principal is evaluated along two main attributes: *beneficial* and *detrimental*. What this means is that the relationship between the two actors can either be beneficial or detrimental. The target of these two characteristics is the agent, i.e. Is agent's relationship with the principal beneficial or detrimental to the agent? The criterion for evaluation of these two attributes is first based on the principal's and agents' identities (first part of the empirical-analytical section). The second criterion is actions taken within the dimension of proxy warfare. Here, the principal-agent theory is truly employed. In this section, specific principal's interests are compared to the agents' ability to carry out these interests (for example, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria on orders of Iran, Hezbollah's training of other militant groups, Hamas' shift in its opinion on Assad's regime, etc.). The findings in the two sections aim to reveal the nature of the principal-agent relationship.

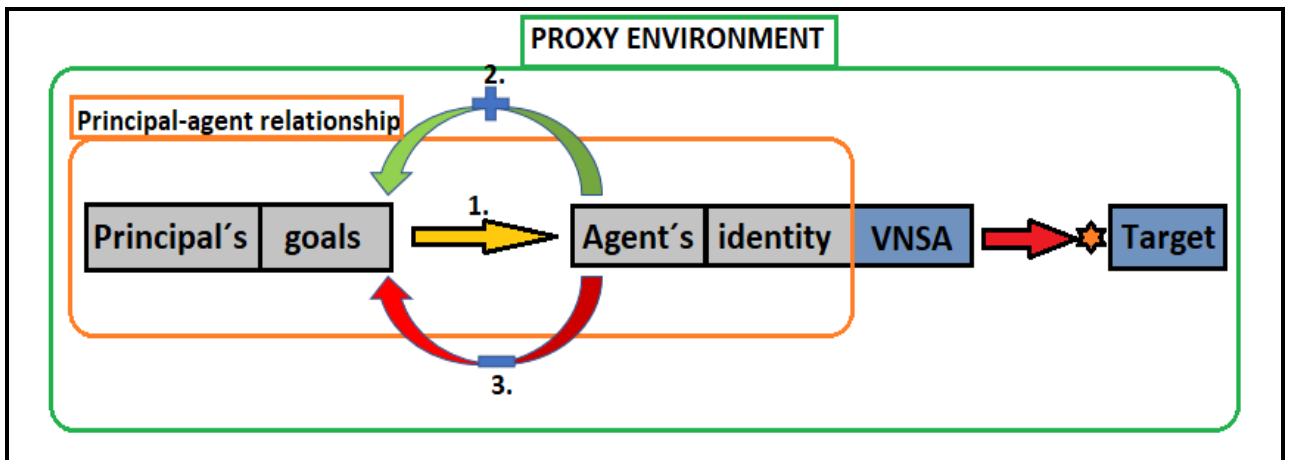


Figure 1. Graphical illustration of conceptual framework : 1.State-sponsored terrorism; 2.Beneficial; 3.Detrimental. Source: Author.

Research Question and Research Target

To begin with the research target, the author argues that not every support is beneficial to the recipient. The benefactor-beneficiary relationship may prove to be harmful to the beneficiary in all kinds of ways. First, it can influence what the beneficiary stands for. Second, the benefactor may ask the beneficiary to do certain kind of things that go against the beneficiary's principles. Third, the relationship itself may be viewed negatively by the broader community and thus the community may sever ties with the beneficiary. Contextually, the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah, and similarly between Iran and Hamas, may have these tendencies. In light of these considerations, the author proposes a research question that should encompass the problematics of these relationships: "How do identities of Hezbollah and Hamas clash with the goals of Iran, considering Iran's role in sponsoring these groups within the framework of proxy warfare in the Middle East?"

To effectively answer the research question, two sub-questions are presented that correlate with the content of this paper: 1. "What are the *identities* of three actors – Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas – within their broader domestic and proxy environment context in the Middle East?"; 2. "What are Hezbollah's and Hamas' obligations towards Iran, given Iran's support to these groups?" The first sub-question aims to find out more about the actors' identities since they are, in part, instrumental in answering the main research question. Here, the accent is on separate description of their identities through factors such as origins, ideologies, goals, changes overtime, domestic socio-political contexts and internal and external perspectives. The second sub-question follows the activities of both Hamas and Hezbollah given Iran's role as principal. Depending on the group in question, the principal-agent relationship is explored through certain events that define the said relationship (for example, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and its impact on the organization).

The combination of these two sub-questions serve as the basis for answering the main research question. The criteria for determining the status of the relationship is simple. It is either beneficial or detrimental to the agent, considering their identity. Essentially, a relationship is considered detrimental to the agent when its actions on behalf of the principal contradict its identity. Moreover, agent's action that could be seen as disadvantageous to the agent at the time are found to correlate with the needs of the principal at the same time, the relationship is also considered detrimental. To reiterate, the

output of the first part of empirical-analytical section about the identity of actors serves as a baseline for the second part of the empirical-analytical section where concrete examples of the principal-agent relationships are analyzed. The outcome is the evaluation of first the Hezbollah-Iran and second the Hamas-Iran relationships.

Methodology

Research Method

Due to the wide array and nature of sources used in this paper – various manifestos, charters and documents of different groups – a methodological approach must reflect the need to incorporate a plethora of information and present it in a meaningful way. For this reason, discourse analysis has been selected as the best method to do so. Petr Drulák's "Jak zkoumat politiku : kvalitativní metodologie v politologii a mezinárodních vztazích" (2008) provides a good analysis of different types of methodologies of qualitative research in the IR discipline. Discourse analysis is best suited in combination with an *interpretative-qualitative* type of research (Drulák, 2008, p.92-93) and stems from constructivist idea that the study of language itself demands attention, due to an emphasis on language as a social phenomenon (Drulák, 2008, p.94). Since reality, according to constructivists, is socially constructed through language and practices, the study of these two is important for understanding the world we live in (Drulák, 2008, p.95). Therefore, discourse analysis as a methodological tool does not only provide qualitative accent in the analysis of primary data, but also helps with interpreting it.

Specifically, critical discourse analysis (CDA) as presented in Norman Fairclough's "Critical discourse analysis : the critical study of language" (1995) has been selected due to its focus on both the internal structure of the text, i.e. its grammatical side, semantics, phonological relationships), and the discourse side of the text, i.e. its context created by social practices (Fairclough, 1995, p.7-8). Fairclough explains the critical discourse analysis "has a three dimensional framework where the aim is to map three separate forms of analysis into one another" (Fairclough, 1995, p.2). The first dimension analyses both the spoken and written language. It is important to note that there are certain linguistic limits in interpreting the primary sources. Since the author of this thesis had only a small introduction into the Arabic language, he relies on translated texts into English. Moreover, the author does not speak or read Farsi, thus he is limited to English translation of such

documents. The author acknowledges that there may be grammatical, interpretative and other differences between the original and translated texts. The second dimension revolves around processes of the language text's "production, distribution and consumption" (Fairclough, 1995, p.2). This intertextuality is a comparison of the studied text with an older text (Drulák, 2008, p.102).). This is a practice important in case of this thesis, since the researcher also compares manifestos of the same organization (Hezbollah, Hamas) and tracks changes between the two. The third and last dimension concerns sociocultural practices as circumstances of discourses (Fairclough, 1995, p.2).

Data process and data collection

Given the complexity of evaluating the relationship between the principal and the agent, it is needless to say that there is no homogenous data collection process in terms of what sources are being reviewed. However, and as presented in the literature review, peer-reviewed articles and books are well included in the delineation of the concepts, theories and events used in this paper. Nevertheless, other-than-academic sources are used in the empirical-analytical section of the paper in order to obtain perspectives of aforementioned actors and other relevant institutions on occurring events and actions taken. That is where the discourse analysis really shines the brightest. To list some examples of data collection and process, the paper includes politically-charged statements from terrorist organizations, Iran-affiliated media, unaffiliated news articles, intelligence reports on Middle East activity, and definitions of state and non-state actors within the concepts of proxy environment, state-sponsored terrorism and violent non-state actors. The classifications of Hezbollah and Hamas within the context of terrorism originate from lists of foreign terrorist organizations available the US Department of State's and the European Union's websites (state.gov; consilium.europa.eu). Furthermore, Hezbollah's and Hamas' manifests are utilized in order to better understand their goals, identities and transformations within their relative environment. Sources such as the Hezbollah's 1985 and 2009 Manifestos; and, Hamas' 1988 and 2017 Charters. For Hezbollah's primary sources, Joseph Alagha's collection titled "Hizbullah's Documents: From the 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto" (2010) is used.

General overview of Hezbollah's identities and operational timeline can be found through the organization United Against Nuclear Iran that runs a website titled "Eye on Hezbollah" (Hezbollah.org). The website is not run by Hezbollah, but offers a plethora of

useful and verifiable information. Primary sources concerning Hamas can be found either freely on the internet or directly on Hamas' own website (hamas.ps/en/). In regards to political, military and other developments subjected to constant changes, news websites such as, but not limited to, Reuters and Al-Jazeera are accessed (reuters.org;aljazeera.com). Moreover, US Congressional and Senate hearings on topic of terrorist organizations compliment various sections of the research. These documents are publicly available from US governmental website such as the govinfo.gov. After all, discourse analysis is the study of language in both written and spoken form which encourages the utilization of any kind of data, whether it be neutral or one-sided. It is in fact important for this research to include all points of view in order to assess and determine what is beneficial or detrimental in the relationship between Iran and its proxies.

Chapter 1: Identities of actors

In this part of the empirical-analytic section, the various actors are discussed. Identities of Iran, Hezbollah and Hamas are explored in terms of their origins, ideologies, goals and evolution.

Iranian identity, Iran's foreign policy and the environment

Brief historical prelude

First, a historical overview is in order. The region of what is now officially called the Islamic Republic of Iran had through history maintained various degrees of influence over its territory and surrounding areas. Its strategic location between the eastern and western parts of Asia ensured its importance in the political, economic, social and cultural evolution throughout the centuries. Just to appreciate the long and interesting history of this regional power and emphasize the geographical importance of the land on which the foundation of modern Iran was built, one can look at the rivalries with ancient Greeks and Romans, the stalemates with the Byzantines, the conquests by the Rashidun Caliphate, or the wars with the Ottoman Turks (Leandro *et al*, 2021, p.19-21). Since the conquest by the Rashidun Caliphate in the 7th century, Iran has adopted Sunni Islam until the new school of Islam – the Shia – was introduced in the 1500s by the Safavid Dynasty (Leandro *et al*, 2021, p.23-24). This has predestined Iran to be different from its Muslim neighbors and shaped its identity for centuries to come.

From 1700s until the outbreak of the First World War, Iran's political figures – the *Shahs* – were somewhat weak in the reign, which signaled competing powers such as Russia, the Ottoman Empire and Britain that Iran is for taking. During that period, Iran became intermingled in power politics of these great powers. The relative instability and great power politics in and around the country caused Iran to lose its Caucasus provinces to Russia, its western provinces to the Ottomans and Afghanistan to Britain (Leandro *et al*, 2021, p.27-31). When oil replaced coal as a more efficient fuel, Britain and Iran founded the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1908 in order to excavate and exploit Iranian-based oil. A British-backed coup d'état occurred in 1921, effectively ending the Qajar dynasty. Reza Khan, a former officer in the Persian corps under the British command, became the head of Iran, known as Reza Shah Pahlavi. The controversial Pahlavi era lasted until its last and only second leader, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, fled with the onset of the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Leandro *et al*, 2021, p.33-37).

Forming of Iranian identity during 1979

The current theocratic regime we are all familiar with may seem like the worst thing imaginable that ever happened to Iran. However, the previous Pahlavi dynasty was no better. Famines and poverty was common amongst the populace, many of the now-notorious prisons in Iran are from that era (Evin Prison for political prisoners was founded in 1972), and SAVAK, the secret police of the Shah, trained by the US Central Intelligence Agency officers had nearly limitless powers within the country. The wealth of the country only went upward and outward, but the people did not benefit at all. The 1979 Iranian Revolution was in many ways a reaction to the corruption and injustices of the Pahlavi regime (Leandro *et al*, 2021, p.40-42). Logically, people looked for a change and found it in a Shia cleric and political dissident Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini. Prior to the revolution, Pahlavi's Iran was a major US ally in the region (Leandro *et al*, 202, p.43), which would explain the complete shift of Iranian foreign policy after 1979. James Buchan in his lecture on the 1979 Iranian revolution attributes the fall of the Pahlavi regime to unpopular reforms, military conscription, presence of foreign military bases and general disdain for monarchist regimes (Buchan, 2013, p.419-420).

In his extensive work on the fall of the monarchy and the rise of the clergy, Jahangir Amuzegar discerns five stressors that could possibly cause the revolution: clash between traditional monarchy and modern intellectualism; rift between the monarchy and

the clergy; differences between Persian imperial roots and more tribal Islamic mindset; want for independence from foreigners against the reliance on global interdependence by oil; and, lastly, incompatibility between rapid economic development and slow political development (Amuzegar, 1991, p.6). These two sources essentially characterize the majority of the debate about the causes of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. While one argues that the root of it can be found directly in the character of the Pahlavi rule, the other argues for a more long-term and deep-rooted problems within the Iranian society. Truth is probably somewhere in between. However, what we can discern is the forming of a new identity in the post-1979 regime. The new Khomeini regime united those who saw future in a democratic system with those who adhered to a more religious state – the two dimensions that were definitely not present during the previous regime. Hadi Sohrabi argues that the success of the revolution and its continuation in the following years was due to the charismatic figure of Ayatollah Khomeini. With Khomeini's death and the ascension of Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei to the position of the (second) Supreme Leader of Iran, the theocratic “republic” became less of a republic and more of theocratic autocracy with anti-imperialism and Islamic authoritarianism at its foundation (Sohrabi, 2018, p.35-36).

Iran after 1979

The sought-after change has quickly become a harsh reality when the same people who shouted slogans such as “Independence! Freedom! Islamic Republic!” in streets during the revolution found themselves in an ever-restricting state of affairs just few weeks after the formation of the new state (Ibrahim, 1979). All aspects of life within Iran – politics, economy, culture, society – were subjected to the scrutiny of Islam. Ongoing construction of new large-scale projects had been halted, shops with foreign goods had been mostly banned and abandoned, and oil production cut back. The combat-ready Iranian Kurds and the Arabs of Khuzistan proved to be a difficult challenge to the new regime's inexperienced military. All the while, Khomeini looked towards its neighbors – Kuwait and Iraq -in hopes of exporting the glorious revolution. These are just snippets of what happened following the overthrow of the Shah. The country's intellectuals, leftists, businessman and freethinkers either left the country or had to adjust to the new system (Ibrahim, 1979). As we can see, the new Iran got off to a rocky start. Forty-three years

later, the surmounting number of issues introduced to the system through the revolution only seem to exacerbate the situation within and outside the country.

The export of the Islamic Revolution as one of the tenets of the Iranian foreign policy

With the cementing of its position at home, the Khomeini regime began looking outward. Whether it was the ideological decisions of the radical segments of the clergy or just a rational and historically backed line of thinking about insulating against foreign powers, the new Iran, “like other revolutionary governments before it, has often used the spread of revolution as a means to other ends, and as an instrument of national policy, rather than an end in itself to be pursued irrespective of other considerations” (Hunter, 1988, p.732). Rouhollah K. Ramazani, a contemporary of the 1979 revolution and an expert on Iran’s foreign policy, called the 1979 overthrow of the Shah a “twin-revolution”(Ramazani, 2013, p.71) in that it did not only affect the domestic politics, but had also had a drastic effect on Iran’s foreign policy.

Its reorientation towards countries such as Syria, North Korea, Pakistan, China, Turkey and the Soviet Union signified a vehement anti-Western sentiment within it. The 1980 invasion of Iran by the Baathist Iraq only confirmed the new bonds with generally anti-US state actors (Ramazani, 2013, p.75-76). Similar to the Manifest Destiny of the second half of the 19th century undertaken by the US, the “export of the revolution” (*sodour-e en-qelab*) was enshrined in the believe of Iranian-Islamic exceptionalism and the need to spread the success of the revolution to neighboring states, and eventually to the world. The Islamic Revolutionary Council, the acting body for this assignment, tasked the newly-formed Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to begin its clandestine works with affiliates in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula (Ramazani, 2013, p.131).

Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism in the Middle East

Iran’s foreign policy in Middle East (ME) is inherently tied to the ideological foundation originating in the revolution. We can understand the country’s activities in the region as an extension of what has been achieved at home, given that Iran views itself as the bringer of the Islamic enlightenment. It is, however, simultaneously imperative to understand that Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism does not sometime correspond to its original values and changes with circumstances, as is the case of sponsorship of militant

Sunni groups. In those cases, the end goal should be followed rather than the ideological origin of their sponsorship. To comprehend the scope of Tehran's sponsorship of terrorism in ME, the regime continually provides varying levels of support to the Lebanese Hezbollah, Yemeni Houthis, affiliated Syrian and Iraqi paramilitaries, and Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad (CIA, 2022).

According to Frederic Wehrey, an expert on Middle East affairs, the decision behind supporting the different groups is in accordance with the Iranian strategy of deterrence, support to non-state Islamic groups, and appeal to Arab opinion. Furthermore, Iran's role in sponsoring the aforementioned terrorist groups serves its in-depth strategy of multilayered defense against its enemies (Wehrey, 2009, p.31-31). Most of the cooperation is clandestine so that Tehran cannot be directly blamed and is done through the IRGC which reportedly boasts around 150-190,000 members. However, the IRGC itself does not allegedly take an active part in combat as that would put a direct target on Iran. Although the branch saw combat action during the Iran-Iraq War and may be part of the Syrian detachment that numbers 3,000 Iranian military personnel in 2022 (CIA, 2022). Negar Fayazi, a publisher for the Institute for the Global Dialogue think-tank, somewhat rightly argues that the definition of terrorism, and in that case also state terrorism, is often a politically-charged and ambiguous term.

While the United Nations (UN) have not yet come to a unilateral conclusion to what constitutes terrorism (Fayazi, 2017, p.1), the practice of terrorism, i.e. "the calculated use of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population...to bring about a particular political objective" (Britannica 2022), is synonymous with the activities of virtually all the actors in this paper. Still, the author of this paper concurs that definitions of terrorism are very skewed and depend on those who define it. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (US) discerns two types of terrorism: domestic & international, the latter including state-sponsored terrorism (FBI, 2022). Sometimes, the label of a terrorist organization may disappear overnight while the designated group still practices terrorist acts, as was the case for Houthis in 2021, when the US government removed the group from its list of foreign terrorist organizations in order to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Yemen (multiple sources: State.gov-list of foreign terrorist organizations; UAE embassy source). When we discuss the identities of Hezbollah and Hamas later in the research, the point is brought up again since these groups identify themselves in various ways. Returning to Iran, the issue is that any state actor that supports violent non-state actors can

be viewed as a state sponsor of terrorism by this metric. If the label of state-sponsorship was multilaterally agreed upon across the board, then there would probably be more states sponsors of terrorism in the world than there is states that do not sponsor terrorism.

Proxy environment

Iranian proxy warfare

Since we have looked at Iran and its principal role in state terrorism, it is equally necessary to contextualize the proxy environment in Middle East. So far, it has been established that the concept of proxy war is often ill-defined (Rauta, 2021, p.4). It has also been determined that Hughes' definition of proxy relationships is best suited due to its universality: “ (1) provision of direct assistance; (2) existence of a common target; and (3) sustained beneficiary-proxy relation, not mere short-term cooperation” (Rauta, 2021, p.12). While the meaning of short-term cooperation has not been explained via any timeframe, we can suppose that the author meant one-time assistance. Nevertheless, applying these relational criteria for proxy relationships, it is possible to identify at least four to five larger conflicts in ME that have varying degrees of proxy involvement: 1.Israeli-Palestinian conflict (1948-); 2.Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy conflict (1979-); 3.Syrian Civil War (2011-); 4.Yemeni Crisis, which is tied to the overall Iran-Saudi conflict (2011-); 5.Civil conflict in Turkey (1976-).¹ Out of these five proxy wars, Iran is directly or indirectly involved in all of them. Among these is the Iranian support to the Kurdistan Workers' Party against Turkey (Gunter, 1998, p.36-38); Houthi rebels in Yemen, Shia and Sunni militias in Iraq in the broader Iran-Saudi proxy conflict (Lewis, 2013, p.82); Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in their liberation cause against Israel; and Hezbollah's complex involvement in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria (Wehrey, 2009, p.81-82). While many of these groups operate outside of their defined operation territories, it is not a point of this paper to mentioned those.

Dimensions of proxy warfare in ME

In regards to the aforementioned conflicts, we can discern certain dimensions of hegemonical quarrel over the region between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Meir Litvak, an Israeli historian at Tel Aviv University, firstly argues that the conflict is fight for hegemony in the region since Iran believes in its rightful place as a regional power.

¹ Publicly available information

Secondly, the conflict underlines long-term disputes over both land and sea borders. Thirdly, it is also a simple vie for control of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and economic competition of oil prices. Iranian conflict with Saudi Arabia is characterized by both hegemonical interests and ideological discord along religious-cultural lines (Litvak, 2017, p.49-50, 54).

Similarly, the Israeli-Iranian conflict's dynamics revolves around strategic interests. Relations between the two countries plummeted following the Islamic revolution in Iran. From the perspective of Iran, former Israeli ties with the Pahlavi regime and the 'subjugation' of Palestinian peoples and territory puts Israel among the top enemies of the regime. From the Israeli perspective, Iran's nuclear program in combination with its support for proxies – Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad – currently represents “an existential threat to Israel” (Kauner & Wertman, 2020, p.100). In their article titled “The Securitisation of Hybrid Warfare through Practices within the Iran-Israel conflict – Israel's practices for securitising Hezbollah's Proxy War”, Christian Kauner and Ori Wertman, argue that Israel inflated the threat embodied in Hezbollah in order to more effectively combat Iran itself (Kauner and Wertman, 2020, p.100-101). As the only actor possessing nuclear capabilities in Middle East, Israel is wary of Iranian nuclear development since any success in that direction would tilt the nuclear table to a level unfavorable to Jerusalem. Therefore, Israel's regional policy in that regard is the concentration of all its efforts in preventing such development (Maher, 2020, 179).

The somewhat shared-but-disconnected interests of Israel and Saudi Arabia were emphasized during the 2010 Arab Spring, when both states could observe long-term neighboring regimes being toppled and chaos erupting. This new environment gave way to various radical groups, a situation exploited by the Tehran regime. While it is not possible to describe the whole evolution of Israeli-Saudi relations, it suffices to say that the two countries have 'found their way' to carefully understand each other in light of these developments (Furlan, 2019, p.178-180). Despite unresolved issues between these two strategic partners, such as the Palestinian question, it is possible to observe changing dynamics in Middle East, or rather different dynamics that do not particularly favor Iran.

Iran's foreign policy

The aforementioned dimensions of proxy warfare in Middle East underline, and are also the result of, Tehran's foreign policy in the region. This policy can be essentially

summed up as anti-US, anti-West and anti-Israeli. Seyed Mousavian and Mohammad Chitsazian argue that Tehran's grand strategy revolves around influence and balance, while also being increasingly offensive (Mousavian and Chirsazian, 2020, p.100-101). Iran's efforts to strengthen ties with Syria and Iraq, and influence through political parties and resistance groups the environment in Lebanon and Iraq, partially define the wants of Tehran. The previous 'Neither East Nor West' policy that Tehran maintained throughout the duration of the Cold War has slowly withered away as its evident in its reorientation towards the enemies of its enemies. Embedded in the external balancing against the US, the West and Israel is Iran's cooperation with Russia and China. Internally, Tehran is vehemently investing in weapons to balance against its foes (Mousavian and Chirsazian 2020, p.105). Politically, the ascension of Khamenei to the position of the Ayatollah coupled with the end of the Cold War brought a new wave of terror to Middle East.

Agents' identities

Does the domestic situation in Lebanon and Palestine allow the groups to stop receiving support from Iran in order to retain their identity? To answer the question it is necessary to explain agents' identities. To reiterate, given that the agent's identities are closely tied to the environment they function in, the issue of agents' incentives comes into question. The study of their identity is closely tied to the incentives these agents have in either following or breaking from their principal. The chapter is divided between Hezbollah's and Hamas' identities, self-interests and goals. Apart from answering the aforementioned question, the aim of this chapter is also to lay foundation for the following chapter regarding the principal-agent problem. Both primary and secondary sources are used in this chapter.

Hezbollah

Origins

Fortunately, we do not have to go that far back in order to look for Hezbollah's origins. The founding of Hezbollah (Party of God) in 1982 was a direct result of the Iranian export of Islamic revolution. The Party of God was created by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) amidst the 1982 Lebanon War between Israel and Lebanon. The war itself being the result of destabilization caused by the more complex Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The leadership of Hezbollah mostly comprised of

graduates from Shia seminaries in Iraq and Iran who were instrumental in spreading Shia ideas in Lebanon (Shay, 2017, p.63). Hezbollah gained a great number of supporters amongst not only the Lebanese Shia population, but also other Muslims in Lebanon, due to its stance against Israel during the country's invasion Lebanon in 1982. This had ensured Hezbollah's favorable position within the Muslim population basically from the onset of its inception (Kane, 2018, 67).

Ideology

The ideology of Hezbollah directly stems from the ideas of the (Iranian) Islamic revolution and propagates the "demand for activism via a violent struggle (Jihad)" (Shay, 2017, p.63). The nonprofit organization named United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI) heads a website, among other things, on Hezbollah due to the group's relationship with Iran. The Party of God is a "transnational Shiite Islamist group...following the ideology of absolute Wilayat al-Faqih, as expounded by Tehran's late Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini" (Eye on Hezbollah, 2022). Wilayat al-faqih (The Guardianship of Islamic Jurist) advocates for an Islamic state headed by an expert on (Islamic) law. This expert ensures that "Islamic rulings are adhered to and implemented within the broad outlines and general principles of the Shari'a" (Mavani, 2011, p.808).

Essentially, this concept of theocratic-judicial system in all spectrums of life forms the basis of Hezbollah's ideology. This is only confirmed in Hezbollah's 1985 open letter addressing the oppressed of Lebanon and the world: "We, the sons, of Hizbullah's umma, whose vanguard God has given victory in Iran and which has established the nucleus of the world's central Islamic state, abide by the orders of a single, wise and just command represented by the guardianship of the jurisprudent (waliyy al-faqih), currently embodied in the supreme Ayatullah Ruhallah al-Musawi al-Khumayni...who has detonated the Muslim's revolution, and who is bringing about the glorious Islamic renaissance" (Alagha, 2010, p.40). Apart from their ideological characteristics, the 1985 open letter vehemently addressed Hezbollah's enemies. Just the sheer amount of space in the letter reserved for the group's enemies is telling of the organization's ideology. Out of the 24 sections of the open letter, 13 concern Hezbollah's enemies including the US, Zionists, Israel, Phalangists (Lebanese Christian militia), the Lebanese government, Christians in and outside Lebanon, France and other Arab states deemed pro-Western (Alagha, 2010, p.41-48, 50).

Goals

Shaul Shay, a military historian for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), delineates Hezbollah's goals along four main objectives. These objectives are also present in *Section 7: our objectives in Lebanon* of the 1985 open letter (Alagha, 2010, p.43). Similarities with and connections to the Iranian ideology can be discerned. First, creation of a "revolutionary Islamic republic in Lebanon based on the Iranian model" (Shay, 2017, p.64). Second, freeing Lebanon from Western Imperialism (mainly France and the US) by minimizing their influence in the country and eventually ousting them from the region altogether. Third, ousting Israeli presence from Lebanon and annihilating the Israeli state. Fourth, make Hezbollah the dominant Islamic organization of Lebanon (Shay, 2017, p.64 ; Alagha, 2010, p.43,48).

However, these hardline goals were eventually 'adjusted' in light of difficulties by the more pragmatic leaders of Hezbollah. Concerning the first point, the establishment of the revolutionary Islamic republic in Lebanon was postponed indefinitely. Equally, the third point was limited to 'only' ousting Israel from Lebanon. Following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, the annihilation of Israel was redefined to mean the support of Palestinians and their struggle (Shay, 2017, p.65). 40 years after, it is certain that not all of the objectives were fulfilled. Still, and perhaps not to give all credit to Hezbollah for that, the second and third point were attained in some form or another.

Moderate Hezbollah: The New Manifesto of 2009

The contemporary (2009) Hezbollah's manifesto differs in several aspects. The main difference from the 1985 manifesto is its 'softer' use of language concerning the establishment of Islamic republic in Lebanon. Simultaneously, however, the points about its enemies, Israel and the United States, remain (Reuters 2009). Drawing on the primary source once again, the *language* of the document is much more refined and political. It does not sound as a document originating from a violent revolutionary movement, but rather an established political party, yet a radical one. Even paraphrasing Fukuyama's end of history (Alagha, 2010, p.117), the manifesto seems like it was written with much more care and thought than the previous one. Rosita Di Peri sums up the 2009 Manifesto as the organization's attempt to present itself more moderately in regard to politics on regional and global level, but also to restore reputation at home. The cause for this moderation is multilayered, however there are two major causes. First, Hezbollah does not enjoy the

same passionate support from external supporters, as it did during its forming years. The current Syrian president Bashar al-Assad and the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei are not as strong as their predecessors. Internationally, they lack the same level of reputation and credibility (Di Peri, 2014, p.343-344). Ergo, Hezbollah does not feel as daring as in the previous years.

Hezbollah as a political, social and religious force

Mariam Farida explains how Hezbollah manages to operate in four separate spheres of social, religious, political and military life. Hezbollah is tied to the Lebanese community, and mainly its Shia portion, through the provision of social welfare, religious education and participation in domestic politics (Farida, 2019, p.1-2). Its participation in the first three spheres transcends Hezbollah's simple definition as a violent non-state actor. It is important to understand that Hezbollah was, and still is to a great extent, seen as the hardline defender of Lebanon, especially by its Shia population. This status has only solidified during the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon (1985-2000) and during the 2006 Lebanon War. The transformation from being a militant organization to successfully establishing itself in the Lebanese politics in the 1992 parliamentary elections is a testament of that. The organization's political wing was well-received due the merits of its military wing and, thanks to Iranian funding, helped in restoration projects throughout the war-torn country.

Hezbollah's capability to 'insert' itself in all walks of the Lebanese life is the reason why is the organization considered the most dangerous among other violent non-state actors (Kane, 2018, p.67). The organization's political results in the long-awaited 2018 parliamentary elections (Lebanon did not have elections since 2009 due to internal and external security instability) were a big success, although shared with the other Shia political party – the Amal Movement. Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hezbollah, considered the outcome “a very big political, parliamentary and moral victory for the choice of resistance” (Al Jazeera, 2018). Following the 2020 Beirut explosion, general calls for security and worsening economic situation, the elections held in 2022 had, however, negative impact on Hezbollah and its allies. Hezbollah and its political affiliates lost the majority, while anti-establishment and anti-Hezbollah political parties gained seats in the parliament (Al Jazeera 2022a; Al Jazeera 2022b).

Still, the results do not mean that Hezbollah is politically defeated since its opponents are very much fractured. More importantly, the outcome of the elections had impact on Hezbollah's decision making. The organization has to rejuvenate its position as the protector of Lebanon by improving the country's economic situation and, mainly, by reinforcing the narrative of fight against Israel (Mizrachi and Schweitzer, 2022, p.4). The election results, thus, could see the organization's attempts at 'securitizing' the Israeli threat in an attempt to reinvigorate the role of Hezbollah as the defender of Lebanon. Considering that its military wing is where most of its power comes from, it would be foolish for it to go to waste.

Hezbollah's final assessment: a violent non-state actor, resistance movement, or a future state-bounded political force?

Now we know that Hezbollah, the Party of God, identifies itself as a resistance movement. This is true, however it can also be described as an Islamic political movement in itself and a revolutionary movement (Abdul-Hussain 2009: page). This ambiguity of identity is perfectly summed by J. Robert Kane when he states that "the group is defined by multiple identities that are not always congruent with one another and strain its strategic interests. These identities are Lebanese, pan-Shi'a, anti-Israeli, and pro-Iranian" (Kane 2018: 68). The wide array of identities make Hezbollah both strong and weak at the same time, as it must continuously back those claims, but at the same time can draw on support from like-minded sections of the Lebanese population. Also given that the organization's military wing boasts 100,000 combatants, according to its secretary general Nasrallah (reuters 2021), the group would effectively supersede the Lebanese Armed Forces numbering around 75,000 soldiers (nytimes 2021). And it probably does thanks to the combination of Iranian support and other factors.

So, while Hezbollah is not considered an official state by international standards, its unofficial control over southern part of Lebanon, number of followers and organizational, logistical and political structure suggest a strong, state-like force. The organization is not called a state-within-a-state for nothing (Abdul-Hussain, 2019). Therefore, it is somewhat a matter of perspective and perhaps time. While the United States classifies the whole organization as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (state.gov terrorist organizations), the European Union only classifies Hezbollah's military wing (a.k.a. the Jihad Council) as a terrorist organization (European Council, 2022). Whether the political and military wings

of Hezbollah deserve a different treatment from the international community is up to a debate, but the actions of one always influence the other. Similarly to the decisions of the US and EU, the majority of the Arab League voted for declaring Hezbollah as a terrorist organization in 2016. Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and, surprisingly, Algeria opposed the decision (middleeasteye.net 2016). Definitely a violent non-state actor, definitely a resistance movement, but not so much a state actor, Hezbollah's future years will be interest to watch. The organization has the difficult task in oscillating between its original ideas and survival at home.

Hamas

Origins

The second organization we are going to discuss is Hamas. Hamas, the acronym for *Harakat al-Muq āwamah al-'Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Resistance Movement), is an Islamist military group that originated in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood (1928)– a Egyptian Islamic movement that exists till this day. The group was established by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a Palestinian clergyman, during the First Intifada to serve as a political extension of the Muslim brotherhood in Gaza (Laub and Robinson, 2021). There is actually some concerning discord within academic, public and other circles surrounding the creation of Hamas. While the first stream of its origin is mentioned above, the second one talks about the illicit creation of the group by Israeli intelligence following the 1967 Six Day War between Israel and the Arab coalition. This discord stems from the differences between the group's own image as is the case in the former and the unconfirmed controversy substantiated by a theory that its inception fractured the historical Palestinian national movement as is the case in the latter. The latter case pushes the idea that Hamas was an Israeli-founded group that went rogue, “turning against its creator” (Filiu, 2012, p.54-55). Not being an expert on the matter, the author of this thesis is a proponent of the official interpretation proposed by the majority of sources. However given that Hamas somewhat overshadowed the other Palestinian movements, it is not entirely impossible that this conspiracy has been pushed by these other groups operating in Palestine.

Ideology

As was the case with Hezbollah's 1985 Open Letter, Hamas also issued a document – called The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement (also Hamas Covenant or Hamas Charter) – possessing 36 articles. Identifying as an Islamic Resistance Movement, the group calls on all “Islam followers of all religions” (Hamas Charter, 1988), supposedly both Shia and Sunny schools. The document refers to many key points like “social welfare, the role of women, other Islamic movements and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) the Arab countries and so on” (Abu-Amr, 1993, p.12). However, the main difference between the Muslim Brotherhood, its parent organization, and Hamas is that the former emphasizes the transformation of society as a whole while the latter centers its ideas around the Palestine problem and Jihad.

Further, the organization vehemently opposes peace negotiations with Israel by arguing that such actions go against its doctrine. (Abu-Amr, 1993, p.12-13 ; Hamas Charter, article 13). In essence, the ideology of Hamas is even more based on its geographical proximity and relation to its enemy than that of Hezbollah. While Hamas' attempts to attract a wide range of the Muslim community – domestic or external – to its goal, Hezbollah's multi-identity characteristics does it automatically. Moreover, what Paul Scham and Osaba Abu-Irshaid call Hamas' ideological rigidity (Scham and Abu-Irshaid, 2009: 1) may at times be both advantageous and disadvantageous.

Goals

The goal of Hamas and virtually all Muslims, according to Hamas, is the liberation of Palestine. This goal has three ‘circles’, or dimensions: “The Palestinian circle, the Arab circle and the Islamic circle” (Hamas Charter, 1988). While it is not explicitly stated what are the roles of these supposed circles, following the text one can deduce that the liberation of Palestine and the struggle against Zionism is a duty of every Palestinian, Arab and Muslim. Since Hamas rejects the previous solutions to the Israeli-Palestine problem – the Balfour Declaration, the British Mandate Document and the UN Palestine Partition Resolution – it also views the state of Israel as being completely illegitimate (Hamas Charter, 1988).

The mentioned rigidity of the organization in terms of its goals (practically one goal only) makes it more difficult for policy makers, the opposition or even the allies inside and outside Gaza and West Bank to often reason with Hamas. Albeit, there has been some quiet development in 2006 among Palestinian resistance groups in terms of the “unification

of Palestinian political discourse on the basis of Palestinian national goals” (Scham and Abu-Irshaid, 2009, p.4,15). While it can be understood that any negotiation would damage Hamas’ reputation, it is also equally necessary to not be in a constant state of war. Although, Iranian position on any meaningful discourse between Israel and Palestine is pretty apparent.

Moderate, but not-so-moderate Hamas: “Principles and General Policies” 2017

Hamas’ Principles and Policies that came out in 2017 is the group’s second Covenant after the original Hamas Charter of 1988. The twenty-nine year difference between the two documents is evident when it comes to the use of language, moderation and structure. Still, the document retains its animosity towards Israel in terms of the land issue. “Palestine is a land that was seized by a racist, anti-human and colonial Zionist project that was founded on a false promise (the Balfour Declaration), on recognition of a usurping entity and on imposing a fait accompli by force” (General principles and policies, 2017). The new 42 articles advocate the creation of the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital by making use of a more modern language to attract audience. The Charter simultaneously creates an image of a humanitarian and international crisis, while downplaying the use of force by the group. Words such as ‘resistance’ and ‘liberation’ are used interchangeably as a justifiable process under international norms and laws (General principles and policies, 2017, s. 24-26). What is missing in the Charter are the points about the establishment of the state of Islam and support for all oppressed wherever they are (Adwan, 2019, p.18). .

Hamas’ home front: the Palestinian nationalist landscape

Compared to Hezbollah’s state-within-a-state, Hamas’ position as the leader of the Palestinian cause is not so certain as it has to compete for power with other liberation, resistance and nationalist movements. Also compared to Hezbollah, its focus is much more militant in terms of the total share of its activities. The element of religion now plays a vital, and one could say decisive, role in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. While the previous Palestinian resistance landscape was run by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (1964-) with Fatah as its largest faction, the conflict had mostly a nationalist, and later pan-Arab nationalist, character. Meir Litvak suggests that the entry of Hamas to Palestine signified an ideological shift in the Palestinian resistance landscape. As evident

from the 1988 Charter, Hamas primarily employs religion as a tool for its cause. Increasingly, the old nationalist struggle along the Israeli-Arab axis was replaced by a new fight between Judaism and Islam (Litvak, 1998, p.148-149). This has fundamentally changed both the perception of the people in it and outside of it.

Generally, the 1980s saw the radicalization and Islamization of the Palestinian cause whether it was through Hamas or Islamic Jihad (Abu-Amr, 1993, p.6-8). That is not to say that Hamas is directly responsible for the radicalization of some aspects of the cause, but rather through its Islamization of it opened gates to different interpretations of the Palestinian issue. Comparingly to Hezbollah's political successes, following the end of the Second Intifada (2000-2005) Hamas gained support of the Palestinians in the 2006 Palestinian legislative election, winning the majority with 74 seats out of 132 (Al-Jazeera, 2006). The 2021 elections were indefinitely postponed, so the 2006 results are also actual.² Given this long *intermezzo*, the results are hardly representative of the contemporary Palestinian stance on Hamas. Their majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council is thus still riding on its reputation from the Second Intifada.

However, a 2021 Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) poll revealed the top priorities of the Palestinian voters: unification of the West and the Gaza Strip, improvement of economic conditions, tackling corruption and the removal of siege and naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. Respondents do not trust that Hamas can address these issues, with the exception of the tackling of corruption. At the same time, Fatah, Hamas' biggest opponent, is fractured along two electoral lines. On the peace process with Israel, respondents have expressed no interest returning to the negotiating table on the current conditions, so support for the two-state solution remains (Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research ,2021, p.1-2).

Hamas' final assessment: Organization's rigidity and home disunity

With the large-scale rocket offensive on Israel in 2021, Hamas may be trying to bolster its approval among the Palestinian population. In light of its wavering support at home, the organization must reinvigorate its cause before the yet-undetermined election date (Laub and Robinson, 2021). However, for both Hamas and Palestinians, the overarching issue is not the elections, but their conflict with Israel which is slowly reaching its eighth decade. The main obstacle, it seems, is the domestic discord with other

² Publicly available information

Palestinian groups. Hamas seems to be the hardliner in this case, as shown in its firm stance on the liberation of Palestine. While there is some possibility for change concerning other issues (General principles and policies, 2017), the main point remains without a doubt unamendable. Normally, the use of language in the 2017 document could attract international response due to Hamas' plight for humanitarian resolution, but its recent actions (the 2021 offensive) appear to go in the opposite direction. For Hamas, the liberation of Palestine is a proverbial double-edged sword, characterized by considerations for Palestinian lives on one side and the successful attainment of the goal on the other. For now, it seems to cut both ways.

Chapter 2: Iran-proxy relationships

Since we have established the identities of the two actors, it is equally necessary to investigate the activities in the region that include both of the actors in the context of the principal-agent relationship. The focus of the part two of the empirical-analytical section is to answer the second question: "What are Hezbollah's and Hamas' obligations towards Iran, given Iran's support to these groups?" It follows the activities of both Hamas and Hezbollah given Iran's role as a principal. Depending on the group in question, the principal-agent relationship is explored through certain events and phenomena that define the said relationship. These are then compared with Iran's foreign policy at the time. First section explores the Hezbollah-Iran relationship, the second explores Hamas' relationship with Iran.

Hezbollah-Iran

In this section, examples of the principal-agent relationship are presented. After a long consideration and consultation of various sources, the author decided to concentrate on two main dimensions of the Iran-Hezbollah relationships. He is of the opinion that these dimensions explore the relationship from two very different angles, while still being part of the overarching proxy framework of the principal-agent problem. First dimension focuses on the financial side of the relationship by taking look at both the Iranian support to the organization and Hezbollah's ability to finance itself through alternate means. The importance of Hezbollah's financial network is emphasized in an article titled "Exploring the Iran-Hezbollah Relationship" (2012) in which Marc DeVore argues that violent non-

state actors who have the backing of a state actor maintain an advantage over other non-state actors in that they enjoy safe havens within the state actor's territory and continuous financial support. This phenomenon allows the non-state actor "to develop a greater degree of professionalism and pursue improved organization learning" (DeVore, 2012, p.85-86). On the other hand, state actor can influence decisions of these non-state actors, both indirectly – through the provision of support – and also directly – through demands for action (DeVore, 2012, p.86). Thus, by exploring Hezbollah's financial network, the author aims to discover how much is Hezbollah dependent on Tehran's funds.

Second dimension focuses on the case of Syrian Civil War (2011-present) as part of a wider phenomenon of the organization's regional activities. The reason for selecting the Syrian conflict is the impact it so far had on Hezbollah's fundamental identity as a resistance movement. Matthew Levitt establishes that Hezbollah's external activities in Middle East can essentially be divided along four main dimensions that are complementary to the Iranian goals in the region. First, its involvement in conflicts abroad. Second, its support for other proxies in the region. Third, its financial activities in the region. Fourth, procurement, intelligence, cyber and disinformation operations (Levitt, 2021, p.11). Via these dimensions it is possible to discern Iranian goals in the Middle East. "The central theme running through the steady increase in Hezbollah's regional activism...is that it has been done at Iran's behest" (Levitt, 2021, p.19). The Syrian Civil War serves as an important turning point for Hezbollah and has major implications for the organization's reputation as an anti-Israeli resistance movement. The conflict also shows how complicated it is to establish Hezbollah's position as an agent in its relationship with Iran.

Hezbollah's financial network

First, it is imperative to establish that Hezbollah owes its existence to Iran. Not just ideologically, but in terms of financial and material support. In an April 2010 "Unclassified report on military power of Iran" submitted by the Secretary of Defense to the US Congress, Iran was said to provide funding, weapons, and training to Hezbollah and other organizations through the Al-Quds component of the IRGC (Report on Military power in Iran, 2010, p.2). Reportedly, Iran's financial support to Hezbollah was estimated at USD100-200 million annually (Report on Military power in Iran, 2010, p.8). Of course, Tehran's financial aid to the Lebanese group varies overtime and it is not possible to entirely estimate its volume. What is certain is that the Iranian sponsorship of Hezbollah's

activities is not limited to military goals, but also serves to fund the organization's welfare programs within Lebanon. Therefore, Iran understands the complexity of the violent non-state actors it supports and further finances their social-oriented endeavors so the groups can win domestic support (DeVore, 2012, p.87). It can be thus established that the financial backing itself is not detrimental to the organization's identity. On the contrary, Iranian financial support most likely helps Hezbollah in maintaining its socio-political role within Lebanon through welfare aid to possible constituents.

What is important to note is that Iran is not the only source of Hezbollah's funding. Support from Lebanese diaspora, mainly in Africa and South America, adds to the organization's treasury. This is done either through charitable donations or through the establishment of "both legitimate and illegitimate commercial enterprises" (Blanford, 2022, p.3). Colin P. Clarke expands on Hezbollah's financing in his book titled "Terrorism, Inc." (2015). According to Clarke, Hezbollah's financing can be divided into two general economies - gray and dark. Under its grey economy falls diaspora support, charities, fraud, legal businesses and money laundering. Dark economy, on the other hand, includes kidnappings for ransom (KFR), armed robbery and theft, smuggling, trafficking and counterfeiting, extortion and protection and external state support – from Iran and Syria (Clarke, 2015, p.94-102). Despite the evidence of Hezbollah's financial streams, it is difficult to estimate the share of the whole financial revenue, including Iran's financial aid.

In 2019, the US Special Envoy Brian Hook told reporters that Iran's financial support to Hezbollah accounts for USD700 million annually, making it around seventy percent of Hezbollah's total annual revenue streams (Sly and Haidamous, 2019). The other thirty percent being the other activities in both grey and dark economies. Going by these numbers, Hezbollah's total revenue would reach 1 billion annually. In a 2017 Congressional hearing, therefore two years prior to Hook's statement, a session on attacking Hezbollah's financial network took place. Reportedly, Hezbollah's financial network includes drug trafficking and thus cooperation with criminal organizations such as cartels in South America. In 2016, the US had eventually, with help of witnesses, put stop to the "multimillion dollar drug traffic and money laundering network" that affected the streets of the United States (US Congress, 2017). According to one of the speakers, Mathew Levitt, Hezbollah faced some financial difficulties, partly caused by the efforts of US government to hit vital revenue streams and sanction affiliates' accounts. Levitt

maintained that the hearing is about Hezbollah's 'other' financial revenues, albeit admitted that the majority of financing comes from Tehran (US Congress, 2017).

While Hezbollah has definitely seen progress in terms of its own financing, it is still far from being financially independent from its state-sponsor. This has several implications. Given enough time, Hezbollah could most likely perfect its financial network and, thus, diminish its reliance on Iran as a sponsor. That could change the dynamics between the two actors, however how that would occur is not certain. Nevertheless, Tehran's support is still a stable and primary way for Hezbollah to finance its operations. Perhaps in following years Hezbollah becomes more self-sufficient, but until then the relationship is still very unilateral. The following section focuses on Hezbollah's regional activities on behalf of Iran. The topic explores the Syrian Civil War and the War in Iraq as two cases of Hezbollah's shift to a more regional player.

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War

A 2019 report on Iran's Military Power by the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) states that Hezbollah's progression from a solely anti-Israeli force to a more active regional actor has had great impact on its domestic standing. While Hezbollah argues that its involvement in Syria, Iraq and Yemen is in accordance with its original goals, this regional expansionism goes against what the organization originally stood for. These activities challenge the Lebanese policy of non-interference and further amplify the sectarian issues present in Lebanon (DIA, 2019, p.60). One example of such activities through which the role of Hezbollah as the Iran's agent is the organization's involvement in the Syria Civil War, and partially in the War in Iraq. This example was selected since it reflects the most recent involvement of Hezbollah in the region, and to various degrees contradicts the movement's identity.

Iranian goals and the war in Syria

The Syrian Civil War (2011-present) is a conflict that erupted in 2011 as a result of the wider Arab Spring. Initially, Tehran welcomed the Islamist struggle against pro-Western regimes in North Africa and Middle East, however its spillover to Syria and Iraq had the Iranian leadership reevaluate its stance. Given Assad regime's affiliation with Iran, the latter decided to protect its close ally against insurgents. Similarly, the destabilization of Iraq in 2013 caused by the influx of Islamic State combatants saw Iran aid the Iraqi government. According to Seyed Mousavian, a former Iranian policymaker and diplomat,

and Mohammad Chitsazian, an expert on Iranian foreign policy, Tehran's involvement in Syria and Iraq was undertaken in order to "minimize its (Iran's) losses rather than maximize its gains" (Mousavian and Chitsazian, 2020, p.107). Therefore, the actions undertaken both during the Syrian Civil War and the War in Iraq (2013-2017) had a defensive character for Tehran's influence in the region. However, the Arab spring's spillover to the two countries had unintentionally increased Tehran's influence within them (Mousavian and Chitsazian, 2020, p.107).

The Iranian presence in Syria and Iraq reflects Tehran's need to maintain a close-knit spheres of influence in its vicinity. If we were to look at a map, Iran's corridor of influence from east to west reaches the Mediterranean. While Lebanon is not under such direct influence in terms of state-to-state relations, as is the case with Syria and Iraq, the Iranian influence in the country is projected through the Lebanese Hezbollah. The Iranian interests in preserving this sphere of influence were further cemented during the Syrian Civil War. Hezbollah's secretary-general Nasrallah officially declared its support for the Assad's regime on 25th of May 2013, following the organization's casualties in Syria prior to that. The organization has been active in Syria since 2011, but only clandestinely. In the very same announcement, Nasrallah introduced "a completely new phase" (Barnard, 2013; US Congress, 2017) of the organization's activities. Shifting from its primary defense of the homeland against Israel to protecting its interests abroad, the Syrian conflict could be considered as the first and major challenge to Hezbollah's identity since the group's inception. Not only it risked losing popular support in Lebanon, but its involvement in Syria directly contradicted the organization's ideology. Therefore, one must ask what are the causes and consequences of such action.

Ideology shifting

Zafer Kizilkaya, a researcher into conflict-related phenomena, lists two possible motivations that could explain Hezbollah's entry into Syria. First, Hezbollah went to Syria to aid an ally, maintain a corridor for flow of material from Iran and push back the radical Sunni Islamists. Second, protection of Shia shrines in Syria in a broader Pan-Shia religious casus belli against the insurgents. In order to legitimize its steps and harbor support at home and abroad, Nasrallah argued that its involvement in Syria is an ethical necessity and a moral obligation to those in need (Kizilkaya, 2017, p.211-212). Massaab Al-Aloosy, a researcher on Shia armed groups, leans towards a more pragmatic reasoning behind Hezbollah's support for Assad. Al-Aloosy explains that actor's ideology and interest

frequently oppose each other unless survival becomes a primary objective. In such case, interests win over ideology. The latter is then usually adjusted to complement the actor's interests. This merging of interests and ideology was the case for Hezbollah's entry into Syria since the fall of the Syrian regime would "constitute an existential threat for Hezbollah" (Al-Aloosy, 2022, p.125). Given Assad's long-lasting allegiance to both Iran and Hezbollah, any replacement on the Syrian presidential seat would directly threaten Hezbollah's existence since the Syrian regime fulfills its role as favorable military, political, logistical and social force along the Iran-Syria-Lebanon axis (Al-Aloosy, 2022, p.129-130).

Implications for Hezbollah: Identity, Sectarianism and Baabda Declaration

The impact of Hezbollah's presence in Syria and Iraq was primarily felt on the home front. Following the onset of the war in 2011, Hezbollah tried to cover up its activities in Syria, however the increasing number of body bags and funerals of the organization's combatants did not correlate with any new operations on the Israeli-Lebanese border. Accusations from the Lebanese opposition grew despite Hezbollah's efforts to cover up its involvement in Syria by, for example, arguing that its deceased fighters died on 'jihadi duty' rather than naming the place of their death. The accusations finally resulted in Nasrallah's announcement of Hezbollah's entry into Syria by 2013. Even then, Hezbollah continually shifted its degree of involvement (Al-Aloosy, 2022, p.131,134).

Hezbollah's effort to cover up, or at least minimize, its involvement in Syria has three major reasons. First and foremost, it contradicts the organization's ideology and goals set out in both the 1985 Open Letter and the 2009 Manifesto. The 1985 Letter's four objectives only mention the expulsion of Israel, the US, France and their allies from Lebanon, liberation of Jerusalem, submission of Phalangists, and self-determination of the Lebanese populace (Alagha, 2010, p.43). The 2009 Manifesto mentions Syria briefly in connection with the country's relentless support for anti-Israeli resistance movements in the region (Alagha, 2010, p.129-130). The reference to Syria came only one year after the official establishment of Lebanese-Syrian diplomatic relations (Alagha, 2010, p.113), first time since the two countries' independence from France in the 1940s. Nevertheless, virtually two years later Hezbollah entered Syria, sidelining its Manifesto.

The second reason for covering up its presence in Syria also stems from contradicting its own statements. In "Hizbullah's Understanding With The Salafi

Movement: 18 August 2008”, the organization “condemns any aggression committed by any Muslim groups on another Muslim group” (Alagha, 2010, p.112). According to Hezbollah, Sunni and Shia should focus together on uprooting the Zionists in Israel. While this document only concerns Sunnis as part of the Salafi movement, the 2009 document expresses a more pan-Arabic and pan-Muslim environment in which tolerance to each other should be heeded. Calling on the cessation of strife between Arabs both in Lebanon and the region, the group advocates for the unification of ‘Arab ranks’. Similarly, the Sunni-Shia discord is addressed. The organization uplifts Iran by highlighting its support for Palestinians, despite the two being of different religious schools. Iran’s way of dealing with Israel and the US “must be met with a will for cooperation and brotherhood” (Alagha, 2010, p.131). The statement made by Nasrallah in 2013 that Hezbollah came to Syria to fight Sunni extremists, amongst other arguments, is contradictory to its core values. Not only that, but the Syrian Civil War has a strong underlying religious pretext defined by “a largely Sunni Arab bid to overthrow that ‘coalition of minorities’ regime” (Carpenter, 2013, p.2).

The Sunnis constitute around sixty percent of the Syrian population, while Christian, Alawites, Druze, Kurds and Armenians constitute the other forty percent. Reportedly, the armed rebellion against the Assad’s regime was a Sunni rebellion against a loose coalition of the other minorities, a phenomenon evident from the compositions of both the armed rebels and the Assad forces. Moreover, the rebel Syrian National Council (SNC) is not only a Sunni-dominated faction, but a one dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist radical faction advocating for the establishment of a Muslim state under Sharia Law (Carpenter, 2013, p.2-3). Given the sectarian nature of the Syrian conflict, it is clear why the Lebanese opposition staunchly rejected any involvement in the war. The implications of the war either spilling over or instigating sectarian tensions in Lebanon were eerily frightening for everyone in the country. However, the war had that effect on Lebanon basically from the onset in 2011. “The anti- and pro-regime mobilization along largely Sunni-Shia fault lines led to an increase in conflict and agitation” (Salloukh, 2017, p.69). Hezbollah’s involvement in affairs of another country on basis of sectarian strife further contradicts the organization’s aim in maintaining friendly relations with Sunnis. While it has been established that the context of Hezbollah’s aid to Assad’s regime had a more pragmatic character, the decision to side with one party in a sectarian conflict proves its ideological flexibility.

Third reason for Hezbollah's contradiction stems from its non-adherence to wider Lebanese interests. By 2012, the situation in Lebanon turned volatile as supporters of either warring group started participating in clashes themselves and the Lebanese-Syrian border virtually became non-existent. In June of the same year, the Lebanese President Michel Sleiman issued the Baabda Declaration, in part calling for neutrality of Lebanese groups in foreign conflicts, especially Syria. "Lebanon should eschew block politics and regional and international conflicts. It should seek to avoid the negative repercussions of regional tensions and crises in order to preserve its own paramount interests, national unity and civil peace..." (Baabda Declaration, 2012, p.3). The document further advocated for the disestablishment of a buffer zone on the Lebanese-Syrian border that enabled Lebanon to be "used a base, corridor or starting point to smuggle weapons and combatants (in and out of Syria)" (Baabda Declaration, 2012, p.3). The document, however, did not do much in terms of resolving the issue.

When Hezbollah officially declared its presence in Syria year later, Sleiman responded by further questioning Hezbollah's ideology as an anti-Israeli resistance movement. In return, Hezbollah stopped recognizing Sleiman as the rightful president of Lebanon (Salloukh, 2013, p.73). The failure to accommodate the domestic situation has been a running theme of various Lebanese governments. However, with its military wing stronger than that of the government's armed forces, Hezbollah has over and over again proved its flexibility when interpreting wider Lebanese interests. Such an opinion is accentuated in a 2019 report on Iran's Military Power by the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) where it states that Hezbollah's progression from a solely anti-Israeli force to a more active regional actor has had great impact on its domestic standing. While Hezbollah argues that its involvement in Syria, Iraq and Yemen is in accordance with its original goals, this regional expansionism goes against what the organization originally stood for. These activities challenge the Lebanese policy of non-interference and further amplify the sectarian issues present in Lebanon (DIA, 2019, p.60)

Hamas-Iran

Hamas' relationship with Iran is different from that of Hezbollah's. While Hezbollah is more proactive on behalf of Iran, as it can be seen from its involvement in regional affairs, Hamas maintains its focus on the Palestinian issue. Also, Hamas' Sunni allegiance means that the organization does not recognize a one single religious authority,

as is the case with Shias. Therefore, Hamas' association with the theocratic regime is predominantly seen as "more of marriage of convenience than true ideological kinship" (Frankel, 2012, p.7). On the other hand, this marriage of convenience has originated in 1992, only five years after the organization's establishment, when Hamas leadership sought refuge in Lebanon after their expulsion by Israel. The relationship between Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran is a long-standing one, but due their differing ideologies not always a stable one.

The structure of this section is as follows. As was the case with Hezbollah, the organization's financial network and its implications are explored in context of the relationship between the two actors. Followingly, three chronological events are presented to shed light on Iranian policy and Hamas' actions at the time. First, Sheikh Yassin's visit to Iran in 1998 amidst an increasing US presence in Iran's strategic sphere following the Gulf War. Second, the Fatah-Hamas conflict resulting in the latter's takeover of the Gaza Strip. Here, the implications of Iranian support to Fatah prior to the conflict are considered as a case of Iranian true interests in the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Third and last, the Arab Spring, mainly the case of the Syrian Civil War, and its effects on relations between Iran and Hamas are explored.

Financial side of the relationship

Similarly to Hezbollah, Iran views Hamas as an essential partner in the Middle East. Iranian Palestinian strategy focuses, but is not restricted to, combatting Israel and preventing a successful evolution of the Middle East Peace Process (Report on Military Power of Iran, 2010). To achieve this, Hamas has enjoyed considerable support from state actors in the region. Prior to Iran becoming the major sponsor of Hamas' activities, the period before the 2001 terrorist attacks was mainly defined by Saudi support. Such financial support had reportedly accounted for sixty to seventy percent of Hamas' revenue (Clarke, 2015, p.129). Due to the intervention of the US, Saudi Arabia had been barred to provide Hamas' with funds after the 2001 attacks (House hearing 2014 on Hamas financial network). Following the cessation of funds from its yet biggest supporter, Hamas had to look elsewhere.

In the period between the 2011 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the 2010 Arab Spring, Iran grew into the primary donor of finances, weapons, assistance and military training to the organization. From 2006 to 2011, Iran contributed USD250-300

annually. The outbreak of the Arab Spring and Hamas' decision to sympathize with anti-Assad forces marked a drastic change in Hamas-Iran relations. Iran ceased its support to the organization. Luckily for Hamas, the sectarian strife in Syria and its decision to side with Sunni rebels brought attention of Qatar and Turkey who became the organization's primary donors through this tumultuous period. In 2012, Qatar pledged to donate USD400 million. Turkey had reportedly provided Hamas with USD400 million both in 2011 and 2012 (US government publishing office, 2014). The amends that Hamas' had to make to Tehran following its opinion on the Syrian war will be discussed in the following sections, but despite this challenge Iran still provides funds, among other things, to Hamas till this day.

Jason D. Greenblatt, White House Special Representative for International Negotiations, stated in 2019 that Iran's support to Palestinian resistance groups is estimated at USD100 million annually. While this figure is relatively smaller to the regime's contributions prior to the Arab Spring, and is also divided among other movements – namely Palestine Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the point is that Iran's interests in keeping the Israel-Palestine conflict alive is still relevant (US state department, 2019). While Hamas' other revenue streams are similar to that of Hezbollah's, i.e. activities in both the grey and dark economies, it has been established that charities and, most importantly, Iranian state sponsorship are at the forefront of its revenue (Clarke, 2015, p.124).

All things considered, Iran seems to be the only major reliable sponsor of Hamas' activities. While Hamas enjoyed the support of other, mainly Sunni, actors in the region in its forming years and throughout the first decade of the twenty-first century, the inception of Arab Spring put the organization in a difficult positions. Its support for Sunni rebels in Syria, Iran's strategic partner, meant that Hamas could no longer rely on the state's support. While this action ensured Turkish and Qatari support in the early phase of the Syrian conflict, it also put Hamas in conflict with its main state sponsor. The eventual backtracking of the organization's position towards the Syrian regime annulled the support of Turkey and Syria. Perhaps as a punishment, the annual financial aid of USD100 million annually provided by Iran is shared with other Palestine resistance movements. Of course, other reasons for the reduction of Iranian aid are possible, nevertheless the memory of Hamas' support against Iranian interests in Syria is most likely remembered by the Tehran's leadership. Still, Iran maintains its role as the Hamas' major supporter since the

latter proves to be a reliable conduit for the former's regional interests, mainly the prevention of an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

Yassin's visit to Tehran and dimensions of Iranian foreign policy in the 1990s

Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the founder of Hamas, visited Iran in October 1997 after his release from Israeli prison. The visit marked a historic moment in Palestinian-Iranian and Hamas-Iranians relations, despite the state's established support to the group beforehand. In the meeting between Yassin and the Iranian leadership, Ayatollah Khamenei assured Yassin of continuous support for the Palestinian cause while Yassin thanked Khamenei for the resolute Iranian help. Following Yassin's visit, Tehran stepped up its support for Hamas (Alavi, 2019, p.112). Yassin's visit to Iran in 1997, while being a noble gesture of good will, was preceded by complex talks between the Iranian and Hamas' leaderships concerning the changing dynamics in the region, particularly the Gulf. Following the 1991 US-led coalition victory in the Gulf War (1990-91), Iran felt that its strategic sphere of influence is under a direct threat. While Saddam remained in power in Iraq until his execution in 2006, Iran correctly forecasted the changing dynamics in the region and began building up its sphere of influence throughout the 1990s. However, the threat of a US reaction meant that Tehran had to focus elsewhere.

Through the 1990s, several conferences between the Hamad leadership and Iran officials reiterated the determination in preventing any resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine (US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1998, p.11). Yassin's tour of Middle East could be characterized as a charity collection for the Palestinian cause as is evident from his visit to Saudi Arabia, where he collected USD100 million, and the subsequent visit to Iran, where a similar plight for funds and material support transpired (US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1998, p.11-12). Iran delightedly obliged to increase its support, in part, due to its fear of encroachment following the Gulf War. Seyed Alavi points out that Yassin's visit to Iran was not coincidental and "happened within a context of heightened US penetration of the Persian Gulf area after Operation Desert Storm, the absence of the Soviet Union as a Balancing power and military installations in Iran's geostrategic neighborhood" (Alavi, 2019, p.112-113).

Taking into account Iranian foreign policy at the time – creating strategic depth in the region (Alavi, 2019, p.112), the developments in the 1990s meant that the only viable option for Iran to somehow extend its sphere of influence was through the Palestinian

cause. The Gulf theatre in the 1990s presented a volatile environment for Iran, given the recent conflict between Iraq and the US. While Iraq was ousted from Kuwait, it still retained a powerful influence in the region. On the other side, the US presence was equally worrying, but focused on deterring Iraq. The best way was for Iran to thread lightly, wait and refocus its efforts to other theatres. The staunch support for Yassin and Hamas is a testament to this policy in the 1990s. For Hamas, this development proved fruitful in that it reassured the Iranian support to the cause. However, this example shows the pragmatic nature of Tehran's foreign policy. Were the situation in the Gulf more favorable at the time, would Iran be able and willing to show support to Hamas?

Hamas-Fatah conflict and Iranian interests (2006-2007)

The discord between Fatah and Hamas revolves around the stance towards the Israel-Palestine peace process. While both movements strive for the recognition of Palestine as a state, Hamas could be viewed as a more hardline movement. The main point of contention between the two movements were the 1993 Oslo Accords which Fatah adhered to, while Hamas opposed. Nowadays, Hamas still maintains its original goal, but cedes that the 1967 border to be a formula of national consensus, something that worries Iran greatly. (Al Tahhan, 2017; Principles and Policies, 2017; Abedin, 2017). The 2017 document which we have discussed in the previous chapter brought Hamas and Fatah closer together once again, however the discord between the two movements resulted in an open conflict just a decade earlier.

The Fatah-Hamas conflict (2006-present), as it is aptly named, was the result of various factors ranging from Hamas' political victory in Gaza (Gaza was governed by Fatah, while the West Bank controlled by Hamas), to the leakage of MI6 documents that advocated for the suppression of Hamas and other Islamist movements in favor of Fatah, to the withdrawal of IDF from Gaza in 2005 (BBC, 2011; Alavi, 2019, p.118). Hamas' political victory in Gaza was a shock to Fatah, Israel, the US and the EU, of which the latter two imposed sanctions on the newly-formed Hamas government. Fatah's reaction to Hamas victory was to create a parallel government, further dividing the Palestinian territories. The combination of these factors eventually ended in violent clashes between Hamas and Fatah.

In January of 2006, the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) announced Iran's unequivocal support for Hamas (Menashri, 2007, p.160). In July 2006,

with the world focused on the besieged Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah initiated a rocket campaign in the north to Israel in what was soon to be known as the 2006 Lebanon War. According to Alavi, the coordinated attack on Israel served as a diversion of global, regional, and mainly Israeli attention from Gaza (Alavi, 2019, p.119). After the US invasion to Iraq in 2003 and the country's subsequent occupation, Iran's interests in the region were challenged. "With tandem invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003, the United States appeared to be firmly entrenched on both Iran's eastern and western borders" (Taremi, 2005, p.35). However, choosing neutrality in the US-Iraq conflict, Iran had to refocus its efforts elsewhere.

What had initially started for Israel as a conflict about the future of Palestine governance between two resistance movements was eventually exacerbated by Hezbollah's rocket and cross-border campaigns resulting in the Second Lebanon War. Perhaps Iran's own entrenchment between US-controlled Iraq and Afghanistan inspired Iran to attempt the same on Israel, a US ally. For Palestine, the Iran-Hezbollah hijacking of the Fatah-Hamas conflict further thwarted the Arab-Israeli process (Taremi, 2005, p.31). While the interpretations and opinions on the peace process by various resistance movements and the people of Palestine differ, Tehran's proxy interference with it does not favor Palestine at all. Although Hamas maintained the same opinion about the Palestinian issue until 2017, the Iranian aggravation of Israel, its allies and Fatah did not favor Hamas. Again, this example shows how Iranian interests do not always converge with Palestinian, and hence Hamas' interests.

The Arab Spring and its implications for the Hamas-Iran relationship

The eruption of the Arab Spring in 2010, the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the strife of Sunni rebels in Syria were all critical moments for Hamas' identity. On one hand, the Arab Spring presented an opportunity for Hamas to support its Sunni brethren, on the other, the emergence of some of these revolutionary entities came into conflict with Iranian interests in the region. Had Hamas taken these interests into account, then perhaps the subsequent discord with Iran would not occur. However, Hamas decided to unrestrainedly go all out in its support for the revolutionaries. Emboldened by the Muslim Brotherhood takeover in Egypt, Hamas initiated a series of attacks on the Palestinian Authority and also Israel. Simultaneously, it aligned itself in its support for Syrian rebels in a coalition of Sunni actors – Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia (Karmon,

2013, p.112). By doing so, Hamas had indeed gained new allies but lost its long-standing backers – Iran and Syria (Ezbidi, 2013, p.99).

As shown previously, this period is signified by Turkish and Qatari financial aid to the group and cessation of funds and weaponry from Iran. What was first seen as a safe bet and return to the Sunni sphere had eventually proven to be a mistake. Basem Ezbidi states that the reason behind Hamas' decision to reevaluate its policy and abandon the Iranian sphere had a domestic character. Despite Hamas' victory over Fatah, Hamas found itself "diplomatically isolated, cash-strapped, under international boycott, attacked by Israeli and Palestinian Authority...and cornered (Ezbidi, 2013, p.100). Additionally, the new and promising Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt scarcely showed any support for the Palestinian cause, with the exception of words of encouragement (Karmon, 2013, p.113-114). In June 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood president Morsi was overthrown in a military coup and so any hopes that Egypt would proactively side with Hamas were gone (Ezbidi, 2013, p.101). However, Egypt was not Hamas' only bad bet. In February 2012, Hamas also went against Assad's regime, its established ally in the region, and by proxy turned its back on Iran as well as Hezbollah (Fahmi and al-Mughrabi, 2013). As mentioned earlier, this move was 'rewarded' by the Sunni coalition in terms of support for the organization.

Despite the surprising opposition to Syria, Iranian officials were restrained from openly criticizing Hamas' decision. Realizing the precarious position and the threat to its sphere of influence, Iran downplayed Hamas' support to Syrian rebels by stating that the organization got 'carried away' by the Muslim Brotherhood's success in Egypt (Alavi, 2019, p.134). At this point, Hamas became a point of contest between the Iran-bloc and the Sunni coalition. In 2012, during the Israeli offensive to Gaza, Iran had reportedly provided Hamas with the Fajr-5 rockets (Alavi, 2019, p.134) and thus only cementing the ambiguous nature of enmity between the two. The Syrian conflict showed two things in terms of the Hamas-Iran relationship.

First, it showed the pragmatic character of Iran in dealing with its invaluable asset in Palestine. Perhaps, since Hamas' decision to support the anti-Assad forces came as such a surprise to both Iran and Syria, that the possibility of Hamas' breaking off from their spheres of influence was not even included as an option to Iran. The degree of leeway, bar the financial cutbacks, that Hamas enjoyed from Iran during the conflict is a proof of the regime's pragmatism. It did not really matter to Iran that Hamas backed rebels on basis of religious affiliation, it only mattered that Hamas backed anti-Iranian interests. Hamas'

experimentations during and after the Arab Spring deteriorated as more and more countries in the region made historic ties with Israel (Al-Mughrabi 2017; Alavi, 2019, p.152). Therefore, in case of the Syrian Civil War and the wider Arab Spring, Iran shown restraint and patiently waited for Hamas to remember the value of the relationship.

Second, the Arab Spring showed that Hamas realized the wider implications of its cooperation with Iran. During that time, Iranian interests clashed with what Hamas thought to be a correct course of action. Siding with Sunni revolutionaries, Hamas tried to harbor support from like-minded regimes in the region, however by doing so it contradicted Iran's policy in the region. Fortunately for the organization, Iran could not afford losing Hamas as a strategic partner in its fight against the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Conclusion

Suffice to say, the two relationship are complicated, albeit due to different factors. The author set out to answer how do identities of Hezbollah and Hamas clash with the goals of Iran, considering the latter's role in sponsoring the former. In case of Hezbollah, the group's existence is inherently tied to Iran, for better or worse. When Iran created the organization in the 1980s from the disgruntled Shia followers in Lebanon, it also imprinted its own ideology into the very core of the movement. The founding of Hezbollah on the premise of creating an anti-Israeli Shia resistance movement resulted in a win-win situation for Iran. First, Hezbollah has sworn and always delivered on its role in negating Israeli interests on its northern border. Second, by creating Hezbollah Iran had expanded its sphere of influence towards the Mediterranean. What has begun as an Iranian experiment following the 1979 Revolution had grown into an organization with vast financial, military, social and even political network. However, as the organization became more and more entrenched in the life of Lebanon and the Israeli threat became less and less menacing, Hezbollah's identity as anti-Israeli resistance movement became less relevant to the Lebanese.

With the onset of the Arab Spring in 2010 and its spillover to Syria in 2011, the organization, on behest of its sponsor, certifiably became a regional player when it intervened on side of the Assad regime. Its involvement in the Syrian conflict contradicted not only its principles, but also the will of the Lebanese government and a majority of its people. Moreover, the fight in Syria was virtually underlined by sectarian issues which further pushed Hezbollah away from its Sunni sympathizers and amplified such sectarian

tendencies at home. Hezbollah had crossed the proverbial Rubicon river with the shift from its primary objective in resisting Israel. Although, Iranian plans may have come to fruition during the Arab Spring and the regime's investment into Hezbollah may have finally paid off in form of a strong regional ally. Assessing Hezbollah's relationship with Iran may be harder than expected. On one hand, the organization's recent endeavors in the region on behalf of its sponsor may have the effect of further alienating the group from the rest of the Lebanese socio-political sphere and thus cause a future 'uprooting' of the organization from Lebanon altogether, which would harm Iran's interests as well. On the other hand, Hezbollah with its military prowess combined with own global financial network and Iranian funding does not really need to heed Lebanese opinions. Hypothetically, it could either form its own revolutionary Lebanon by breaking away part of the country, which is essentially the case of its current control of southern Lebanon, or directly challenge the state and overthrow it.

However, the vision of an Islamic republic of Lebanon would most likely not favor Hezbollah in terms of international and regional recognition. What is certain is that Hezbollah needs Lebanon, in almost any shape or form, to at least hinge on fractures of its own identity in deterring Israel. The author of this thesis therefore argues that the group's relationship with Iran is more detrimental than beneficial, given Iranian policies at the time. Perhaps, the reduction of Hezbollah's activities in the region could alleviate the group's standing in Lebanon and thus bring it back to the moderate politics, rather than radical fights.

For Hamas, Iranian support is equally essential, especially now that the Arab nations mended its grievances with Israel. However, the relationship is still viewed as a pragmatic one rather than ideological one. One of the reasons for that still remains the religious difference between the two actors. While this does not stop Iran from funding the group and Hamas from gladly receiving Iran's funds, it is ironic that the largest supporter of a Sunni resistance movement is a Shia regime, a sentiment shared by many. Through Iranian support to the group, we can really discern Iran's overall foreign policy in the region. First, by supporting Hamas, Iran puts even more pressure on Israel. This, coupled with Hezbollah's northern pressure creates an uneasy entrenchment on Israel's forces. Second, by supporting Hamas - an Arab, Sunni and anti-Israeli movement - Iran can boast to the Arab world about its generosity.

The pragmatic and calculative manner of Iran was shown on two cases of their relationships. Sheikh Yassin's historic visit to Iran in the 1990s on the backdrop of the US victory over Saddam in Kuwait was just another means to an end. With the feeling of encroachment from US-occupied Afghanistan and soon to be US-occupied Iraq, Iran decided to increase its support to Hamas so as to put pressure Israel, a US ally. Similarly, the Fatah-Hamas conflict in the first decade of the 21st century saw Iranian assistance to Hamas in Gaza by diverting Israeli attention to Lebanon, where Hezbollah initiated a massive cross-border provocation. The unwavering support to Hamas is due to the group's unwavering opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace accord, something that Iran greatly fears.

The only real discord between the group and Iran came in 2011, when Hamas decided to support the Sunni popular revolts. Its show of support to the anti-Assad forces came as a surprise to Iran, but the failure of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the stability of the Assad regime put Hamas in an awkward situation. However, Iran was also in an awkward position since its strategic partner would mean virtually no influence on the Israeli border. The regime would also lose martyr-like organization, something that Iran could not afford. In considering the relationship between the two, the author suggests that Hamas benefits from Iranian aid, rather than loses. While somewhat evident, it is necessary to expand on it.

On one side, Iran is not Hamas' natural ally in terms of religious and ideological factors. That role was mostly maintained by other nations in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and such. However these states, it seems chose Israel over Hamas, or at least are not as proactive in its support to the group. And despite all the differences between Iran and Hamas, and the pragmatic nature of the relationship, it is still one of the longest one in history of the organization. Stability is one factor. The other is that Hamas really has no choice than to maintain its relationship with Iran. The regime most likely realizes it, but respects Hamas' policy of non-interference of other entities into its own processes. For Iran, the group may be a wild card but delivers on its resistance to Israel. For Hamas, well, unless the regimes that previously supported it do not turn their back on Israel for some reason, there is no other option than to remain being allies with Iran.

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