

Hezbollah

HYBRID TECHNIQUES AND DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Hezbollah is a hybrid organization that combines conventional and unconventional tactics to achieve its political and military objectives, impacting regional and international security. Its ideology is based on Shiite Islam and the concept of Wilayat Al-Faqih, acting as an element of resistance against Israel and Western influence. Actively involved in Lebanese politics and regional conflicts, such as the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has consolidated its leading role as a geopolitical actor. This paper¹ examines the structure, strategies, and impact of Hezbollah on the stability of the Middle East and the world.

Keywords: Hezbollah, Middle East, geopolitics, hybrid organization, terrorism

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Introduction

In the current security context in the Middle East, marked by numerous conflicts, Hezbollah's involvement in the region is a disruptive factor with a significant impact on regional security.

The modus operandi of hybrid terrorist organizations involves a multi-layered approach that combines both traditional and modern tactics. They continue to employ classic strategies such as suicide bombings, kidnappings, and targeted killings to provoke violence, spread fear, and meet their objectives. At the same time, they have incorporated new technologies to enhance their operations, using encrypted messaging apps, dark web platforms, and cryptocurrencies to hide communications and financial dealings. Additionally, hybrid terrorist groups have exploited cyberspace as a weapon by executing cyberattacks on vital infrastructure, as well as spreading propaganda through social media and running online recruitment campaigns (Jokinen & Normark, 2022).

Hezbollah, with its intricate network spanning both political-social and military areas, is another hybrid entity that blurs the lines between terrorism, insurgency, and state-sponsored activities. By using its political influence and social services, Hezbollah has become a powerful force in Lebanon, while also engaging in acts of terrorism and asymmetric warfare against its adversaries (Gleis & Berti, 2012).

Initially formed to oppose the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, Hezbollah has gradually developed into a powerful political force, wielding significant influence both within Lebanon and across the region. With Hezbollah members joining the Lebanese government in 2009 and the recent forced involvement in the Syrian Civil War (2011-2024), the Shiite political-military organization continues to play a strategic role in the Middle East.

Despite major challenges, including international sanctions and internal opposition, and Hezbollah's declining support in many parts of the Arab world, the organization—which has become a mix of militia, political party, and provider of social services and public works—still remains the most powerful force in Lebanon.

Ideology

Hezbollah's ideology is based on the principles of Shiite Islam and the concept of *Wilayat Al-Faqih*², which translates as "Guardianship of the Jurist," a doctrine developed and expounded by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. It emphasizes absolute loyalty to Iran's supreme leader and the creation of an Islamic state governed by Islamic *Sharia* law. The organization's objectives also included uniting Muslims under an *ummah*³ and supporting national movements globally, with the initial aim of resisting Israel, combating Western influence in the Middle East, and supporting the struggle against entities considered colonial (UANI, 2024).

Hezbollah's basic principles have evolved over time toward a more inclusive approach, attempting to convey a moderate image to the international community while acting as a proxy for Iran to promote its strategic interests in the region (Onciu, 2008).

The organization's close ties to Iran and its militant activities have led to its inclusion (since December 10, 2002, and subsequently in 2013, 2019, and 2021) on the list of terrorist entities by several states, including: the United States, Canada, Israel, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Germany, and Saudi Arabia (Onciu, 2008). These designations are based on Hezbollah's militant activities, terrorist operations, and involvement in regional conflicts, particularly against Israel and its supporters.

The Hezbollah flag, an integral part of the image the organization wishes to disseminate, depicts a globe-reflecting the desire to expand its activities beyond Lebanon—a rifle-symbolizing the organization's militancy—and a quote from the Quran, the slogan of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: "Only the nation of Allah is victorious" (CUFI, 2018).

Organizational structure

Researcher Marc R. DeVore (2012), concerned with the impact of terrorist entities on national and international security, argues that there is a clear leadership structure. Based on the

concept of *Wilayat Al-Faqih*, Hezbollah's organization is pyramidal, concentrating all authority and power in the person of religious leaders, whose decisions are followed by the entire community (DeVore, 2012). Thus, one can speak of respect for the principles underlying the Islamic world, which has had, since its inception, an extremely close connection between the laic and the secular, between religious institutions, the community, and the state (Onciu, 2008).

Since 1992, the organization has been led by Hassan Nasrallah as Secretary General. At the same time, he oversaw the *Shura Council*⁴ (established in 1984, composed of five sub-councils and having seven members—Naim Qassem, Deputy Secretary General; Mohammad Yazbek, President of the Judicial Council; Ibrahim Amin Al-Sayyed, President of the Political Council; Hashem Saffieddine - President of the Executive Council, Hussein Al-Khalil - Political Advisor to the Secretary General, and Mohammad Raad - President of the Parliamentary Council and Head of the Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc), the supreme governing body of both the military and political wings (Robinson, 2023). This is Hezbollah's supreme and central decision-making authority at the national level. According to Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem, from an organizational standpoint, the council is "at the top of the pyramid of strategic objectives, responsible for setting the overall vision and policies, overseeing the general strategies of the party's functions, and making political decisions." Its decisions, taken either unanimously or by majority vote, are final and religiously binding on party members (UANI, 2024).

On September 27, 2024, Hassan Nasrallah was assassinated by Israel, along with other members of the Council and numerous high-ranking Hezbollah fighters. Following his elimination, Hashem Safieddine was appointed Hassan Nasrallah's successor for a short period of time, as he was assassinated in an Israeli air raid on October 3, 2024 (Le Mond, 2024). Since October 29, 2024, the position of Secretary General of Hezbollah has been held by Naim Qassem, who was previously (since 1991) Deputy Secretary of the organization.

To date, the organization has not publicly disclosed the current structure of Hezbollah, most likely due to fears of possible Israeli attacks on its members. The only information found online regarding the individuals in the organization's leadership refers to: Mahmoud

Qamati, Vice-President of the Political Council; Ibrahim Amin Al-Sayyed, President of the Political Council; Ali Damoush, Vice-President of the Executive Council; and Wafiq Safa Safa, President of Hezbollah's Liaison and Coordination Unit (ITIC, 2025).

In terms of operational activity, Hezbollah operates on three distinct but interconnected levels: national, regional, and international. Each of these dimensions plays a crucial role in shaping Hezbollah's strategies and activities, contributing to its evolution as a complex and influential organization.

At the national level, operational activity encompasses military, political, and social actions. This complex approach enables the organization to maintain its influence within the Lebanese state while pursuing broader objectives, such as resistance against Israeli occupation, promotion of Shiite community interests, and Iran's regional agenda.

First, from a political perspective, Hezbollah's operations are deeply rooted in Lebanon's complex sectarian landscape. The organization functions as a significant political entity, operating within a democratic framework while maintaining ties to the Shiite Muslim community. Hezbollah's political wing participates in parliamentary elections and holds seats in the Lebanese government, giving it an official stake in the country's governance. This political presence allows the organization to influence decision-making processes and shape policies in line with its ideological and strategic objectives (Haddad, 2008).

At the same time, Hezbollah's political activities help to legitimize its armed resistance against Israel in Lebanon and across the Arab world. It portrays itself as a defender of Lebanese sovereignty and a safeguard against Israeli aggression, framing its military actions as a legitimate response to Israeli occupation and incursions into Lebanese land. Through its rhetoric and political moves, Hezbollah aims to keep popular support for its resistance narrative, strengthening its position within Lebanon's political institutions (Levitt, 2013).

Second, militarily, Hezbollah operates a well-trained and well-equipped paramilitary force known as the Islamic Resistance. Estimated to have tens of thousands of fighters, it is a vital part of the organization's military efforts, organized into specialized units such as infantry, artillery, and special forces. Hezbollah's military capabilities have been strengthened over decades of

² Or *Velāyat-e Faqih* means the guardianship of the Islamic jurist - a Shiite concept associated in particular with Ruhollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic of Iran; it refers to a political system based on a righteous and capable jurist;

³ The global community of Muslim believers.

⁴ Advisory Council

conflict, especially in its battles with Israel, and the organization has built a sophisticated command structure to coordinate its operations efficiently (Haddad, 2008), investing heavily in advancing the technology of its military equipment (Gleis & Berti, 2012).

Over time, Hezbollah's military strategy has evolved. While in the 1980s and 1990s, frequent operations included suicide attacks against Israeli forces and their allies, as well as assaults and kidnappings of foreign citizens to negotiate with Western and Israeli authorities (Pop & Silber, 2020), the 2006-armed conflict involved using rocket attacks against Israeli strategic infrastructure and civilian centers, resulting in significant casualties. This showed the organization's ability to effectively use weapons and cause physical, psychological, and economic damage to an adversary state (Matthews, 2008).

Besides traditional military activities, Hezbollah has heavily invested in defensive infrastructure, including the construction of a large network of tunnels and underground bunkers in southern Lebanon. These fortified sites act as hiding spots for fighters, storage and transfer points for weapons and supplies, and command centers for coordinating operations. Hezbollah's use of underground facilities makes it harder for Israeli forces to target assets on the ground, providing it with a certain level of strategic resilience and defensive strength (Byman, 2002).

Another crucial strategic aspect of the organization is its extensive network of social services, which aims to provide aid and support to Lebanon's Shiite Muslim community and to enhance education, welfare, and infrastructure development. By offering these social services, Hezbollah seeks to strengthen its popularity and support at the local level among marginalized communities in Lebanon, especially in areas with limited access to government services (Blanford, 2011).

At the regional level, Hezbollah is a key player in the Middle East's geopolitical landscape. The organization maintains close ties with Iran and Syria, which are crucial to its regional strategy (Khan & Zhaoying, 2020). Iran, in particular, provides significant financial, military, and ideological support to Hezbollah, viewing it as a vital ally in its efforts to expand power and influence across the region. Meanwhile, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War and, implicitly, its backing of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad, have given the organization an important partner. Military interventions have bolstered both the Damascus regime and Hezbollah's armed forces, which have gained valuable experience in urban warfare and counterinsurgency (Levitt, 2005). Additionally, since the Israeli withdrawal, the Syrian

border has been kept accessible to facilitate the easy flow of illegal weapons and personnel in and out of Lebanon (Gleis & Berti, 2012).

Hezbollah's regional activities also include forming alliances with other Shiite militias and political groups in the Middle East to expand Hezbollah's influence and create a like-minded geopolitical network, crucial to maintaining the resilience of the Lebanese Shiite organization, but also its ability to operate effectively in different theaters of operations (Levitt, 2005).

Internationally, Hezbollah's operations primarily focus on fundraising from the diaspora, arms smuggling, and political lobbying through a vast network of supporters and sympathizers located on several continents. Despite its illicit activities on the territory of other states and its inclusion on the list of terrorist organizations, Hezbollah enjoys diplomatic access to both state actors, such as Russia and Iraq, and non-state actors, namely militant groups that share ideological or strategic elements, such as the HAMAS Movement or Palestinian Islamic Jihad (Levitt, 2013).

Hezbollah's international dimension includes propaganda and media operations. Through the Al-Manar and Al-Mayadeen television channels, the organization disseminates messages globally, helping to gain support and spread its ideological perspectives. This media presence is crucial to maintaining its influence among the Lebanese diaspora and other sympathetic communities globally (I-Zein, 2014).

Politically, Hezbollah has used religious and ideological elements to form alliances with other sectarian and political groups in Lebanon. Although initially relying on the support of the Shiite community, Hezbollah's political strategy involved reaching out to non-Shiite factions by framing the resistance against Israel in broader pan-Islamic terms. This approach allowed it to gain wider acceptance and position itself as a national resistance movement rather than a purely sectarian one (Hamzeh, 2004).

Internationally, Hezbollah's religious ideology has generated a dichotomy: on the one hand, its alliance with Iran has brought financial and military support, and on the other hand, its opposition to Israel and the West has led to sanctions and, implicitly, its designation as a terrorist organization (Levitt, 2013).

The Lebanese Shiite organization's shift into politics has sparked differing views, both locally and internationally, influenced by various political, religious, and geostrategic perspectives. Hezbollah's policies and rhetoric have evolved as the political environment has changed. In 2009, although it continued to call for resistance against Israel and support for Iran, its updated

manifesto abandoned calls for establishing an Islamic republic in Lebanon, instead advocating for an ideal government that would include a democracy representing national unity over sectarian interests (Levitt, 2013).

Discursive construction promoted in the political context

Hezbollah's political recalibration after the Lebanese civil war involved a reassessment of the organization's ideals and strong nationalist tendencies (Zeidan, 2020). Following the end of the civil war, Hezbollah decided to participate in the 1992 elections, thereby becoming less ideological and more pragmatic. Thus, despite Hezbollah's rhetoric of not abandoning the goal of establishing an Islamic state, the means and tactics were transformed. The change in Hezbollah's views involved modifying the organization's rhetoric and actions to adapt to the new environment, transforming it into a nationalist organization (Rabil, 2012). By balancing Islamism with nationalism, Hezbollah returned to Lebanese politician Musa Al-Sadr's concept of creating a Shiite community within the Lebanese entity. In addition, Hezbollah presented itself as a Lebanese nationalist movement that wanted to liberate the occupied national land, essentially wanting to present itself as the defender of Lebanon against Israeli aggression and occupation, not as a jihadist movement focused on Islamic efforts. However, Islamism remained a powerful tool for mobilization (Al-Aloosy, 2020).

Therefore, in light of these changes, some radical elements broke away from the organization, believing that Hezbollah had strayed from its original agenda. Compared to the 1985 Open Letter and statements made by Hezbollah officials in its formative years, by 2009, the organization had undergone exponential changes (Al-Aloosy, 2020). First, it radically changed its vision of the Lebanese state and Lebanese institutions in the 1980s, considering the Lebanese government to be illegitimate and Lebanon to be part of the *ummah*, with Iran at its helm (Al-Aloosy, 2020). Second, the 2009 manifesto advocates for a pluralistic democracy instead of an Islamic theocracy, but this does not mean that Hezbollah is a liberal democratic party; instead, it considers the democratic system to have more benefits. Shiites are the largest group in Lebanon, and therefore free and fair elections in a genuinely democratic state would primarily benefit Shiites and, by extension, Hezbollah (Rabil, 2012).

Currently, the organization has tempered its political rhetoric. Still, it constantly reiterates that Lebanon

is a finite national home with special characteristics that cannot be part of a larger entity (Al-Aloosy, 2020).

Promoting the discourse of resistance

Hezbollah is a multifaceted network whose social, political, military, and cultural dimensions are all integral to a discourse of resistance. Based on a qualitative analysis of Hezbollah's secretary general's speeches, the term *muqawama* (resistance) is defined as a complex social phenomenon that can manifest in how resistance is framed across various contexts, often addressing different audiences. However, three unifying themes emerged from the analysis of the framework: the diversity of resistance, its normalization, and the social dimensions of resistance (Nilsson, 2020).

Through its holistic approach, Hezbollah has transformed typical Shiite victimization into meaningful values such as justice and solidarity, self-esteem, and pride. Thus, its resistance constitutes an ongoing project of political identity formation, a model achieved not only through force but also through media and discursive practices, in which the articulation of new political identities and the hegemony of new meanings are fundamental tasks (Houri, 2012).

Hezbollah today

In 2023, clashes broke out between Hezbollah and Israeli forces over the Shebaa Farms, a strip of land in the Golan Heights claimed by Lebanon, Israel, and Syria. Tensions escalated after HAMAS, an allied Palestinian militant movement in the Gaza Strip, attacked southern Israel on October 7 (AlJazeera, 2023).

Starting on October 8, 2023, Hezbollah attacked strategic positions of the Israeli armed forces in the Shebaa region and northern Israel, prompting Israeli retaliation. This exchange of fire resulted in casualties on both sides, including Israeli soldiers and Hezbollah fighters/military leaders. The conflict escalated with Hezbollah's involvement, following its support for the HAMAS attack on Israel. The ongoing conflict has led to the displacement of thousands of civilians and is considered the most significant escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah since the 2006 Lebanon War (Zeidan, 2024).

The dispute over the Shebaa Farms is linked to regional politics, historical border disputes, and the complex relations between Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

The unresolved status of this region continues to trigger military confrontations, posing a challenge to peace and stability in the area (Zeidan, 2024).

On November 27, 2024, a ceasefire agreement was signed between Israel and Lebanon, which partially halted the armed clashes between Israel and Hezbollah. Following this agreement, the Lebanese authorities (the new President, Joseph Aoun, and the new Government led by Nawaf Salam) declared their desire for the Lebanese state to have a monopoly over weapons nationwide. In this regard, Lebanese leaders expressed their willingness to engage in dialogue with Hezbollah to ensure the disarmament of the organization to reduce the risk of conflict. At the same time, the Lebanese Armed Forces took control of a significant part of Hezbollah's military infrastructure (south of the Litani River), while the United States intensified pressure on Lebanon to accelerate the disarmament of the Shiite organization by suspending military and humanitarian aid to the Lebanese state. Even though initially, Hezbollah categorically refused to give up its "resistance" against Israel, it gradually softened its position, stating that it was prepared to engage in dialogue with the Lebanese government to formulate a national defense strategy that would allow Hezbollah to retain its military capabilities alongside the Lebanese Army (ITIC, 2025).

Conclusions

The phenomenon of hybrid terrorism highlights the evolving nature of asymmetric threats in the digital age. As these organizations continue to adapt and innovate, governments and security agencies must adopt proactive measures to counter their influence and reduce the risks they pose. By understanding the nuances of hybrid terrorism and addressing its root causes, the international community can effectively combat this complex threat while also ensuring global security and stability.

Hezbollah is shaped by its environment and the interactions among the players around it. Although it is a Lebanese Shiite group closely connected to the

Iranian system, its origins come from the development of social and political processes in Lebanon generally, and within the Shiite community specifically. Gradually, as it expanded and became institutionalized, the organization grew more aware of the procedures and influences of internal and regional systems. Regionally and internationally, it has adopted a controlled policy that combines guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks, considering factors of "profit and loss." The current model of Hezbollah is that of a pragmatic entity, which is far more dangerous than the revolutionary Hezbollah of the 1980s because the organization has not abandoned its objectives but has adjusted the pace of their pursuit. The organization's ability to adapt to political shifts, combined with its strong network of social services and strategic alliances, has maintained its influence in Lebanon. Hezbollah's dual identity as both a political party and a militant organization continues to polarize opinions both in Lebanon and outside, with its consolidation of power over the past decades being unmistakable.

From a global perspective, conflicts will involve hybrid organizations, such as Hezbollah, that will deploy heterogeneous capabilities. Violence will not be a monopoly of states per se, but instead, non-state actors are now present on the political scene. Over the years, one of Hezbollah's main strategies for integrating into Lebanon's political and social environment has been to adapt its discourse and operational behavior. These aspects were also highlighted in the 2009 "political" document, which served as an update to the first Manifesto, in which much of the vehement rhetoric was replaced by nuanced deliberations on a future Lebanese state and the most suitable form of democracy. The organization tends to increase its autonomy without undermining its established relationship with Iran, both by acting as a governing political actor and as a protector of the state's sectarian neoliberal political system.

In conclusion, a constant feature of the organization's interests, particularly at the narrative level, is the continuation of aggressive and critical rhetoric towards Lebanon's traditional "enemies," Israel and the US, as evidenced by the speeches of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah.

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