



HEZBOLLAH – BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

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Hezbollah (Allah's Party) is a non-state actor that has a decisive influence on how political and security dynamics in Lebanon evolve but also manages to have an important impact on the evolution of the entire security complex in the Middle East. However, in order to understand the behavior of this actor, we must understand its main ideological landmarks. Thus, the research question which formed the basis of this study is: How the ideology assumed by Hezbollah leaders influenced the behavior of the organization? Through this study we aim to highlight the historical context of Lebanon during the '80s, as well as make an analysis of the main factors that determined the materialization of the Hezbollah organization; to understand Hezbollah's main ideological pillars and how they influence the organization's goals and actions; to examine how Hezbollah and Western states perceive each other; and to present the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah from the perspective of the motivations and interests that decision-makers in Teheran have in relation to the growth of their area on influence in the Middle East.

Keywords: *Hezbollah; security; strategy; terrorism; Iran; Israel.*

Introduction

In terms of security dynamics, the Middle East has a unique feature being characterized as a volcano in activity of geopolitics (...) whose interrupted eruptions (...) destabilizes the region (...) and makes it the most virulent outbreak of religious, civil and/or interstate and terrorist wars.¹ Thus, one of the researched fields in the academic literature on the security complex in the Middle East is represented by

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¹ Pascal Lamy, Nicole Gnesotto, Jean Michel Baer, *Where is the world going?*, Niculescu Publishing House, Bucharest, 2018, p. 105.



how religious terrorist organizations manage to destabilize this region. To be more specific, the concept of religious terrorism implies what is posited as a distinct category of political violence, namely violence perpetrated in the name of religion by religiously motivated militants.²

Hezbollah (Allah's Party) is a religious entity that has a crucial influence on how political and security dynamics evolve in Lebanon, while also having a significant impact on the regional security complex in the Middle East. Therefore, through this paper, we would like to highlight Hezbollah's main ideological features, the way leaders of the organization perceive its actions, as well as the position of Western states in relation to this non-state actor.

In this regard, the research this study presents is focused around the manner ideology assumed by Hezbollah leaders influenced the behavior of the organization. The research methodology is based on a systematic approach with a double dimension, one stands in the historical narrative from the perspective of the factors that favored the emergence of Hezbollah as well as the analysis of the ideological pillars of this organization, and the latter stands in its attitude towards Western states and its relationship with Iran. Therefore, the essential elements used for this purpose are represented by the analysis of official documents, speeches, but also the consultation of books and specialized articles dealing with this subject.

The paper is divided into four main sections. The first presents the historical context of Lebanon during the '80s, as well as the analysis of the main factors which determined the materialization of the Hezbollah organization. The second part highlights the main ideological pillars of Hezbollah and how they influence the organization's goals and actions. The third part examines how Hezbollah and Western states perceive each other. Thus, this section analyzes the strategy of Hezbollah leaders to build a moderate image of the organization within the international community, as well as the attitude of Western leaders who fail to understand this mechanism of manipulation. The last part presents the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah in terms of motivations and interests that the decision-makers in Teheran have in relation to the growth of the area on influence in the Middle East.

1. The Factors that Favored the Emergence of Hezbollah

Analyzing the evolution of radical Islamist movements, one can be notice that they have been increasingly influential in the Arab world since the late '70s and they have consolidated their presence since the beginning of the '90s. This revival

² Gunning Jeroen, Jackson Richard, "What's so religious about "religious terrorism"", in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 2011, pp. 369-388.



was accompanied, more generally by a worldwide Islamic resurgence.³ The rise of Islamic revivalist movements, in general, and the rise of Hezbollah, in particular, have been connected to the crises conditions that beset the Middle East: the Arab defeats by Israel, the failure to achieve balanced socioeconomic development, the pervasiveness of political oppression, gross uneven distribution of wealth, and the disorienting psycho-cultural impact of Westernization.⁴

This state of affairs has contributed to the growing political and social cleavages in Lebanon, leading to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1975. From the point of view of the Shi'a militias involved in the war, the Amal organization (Movement of the Deprived) led by Musa al-Sadr's had the most important role. However, this organization was only the first prototype of Shi'a militia organized in southern Lebanon, later assimilated into Hezbollah, which by far exceeded the performance of the first.

One of the main factors that led to the emergence of the terrorist organization Hezbollah was the reorientation of the foreign and security policy of the state of Iran, following the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Thus, since 1979, Iran has been one of the world's most active sponsors of terrorism. Iran's leaders have sought the support of Shiite communities in neighboring states and turned them into its proxy agents, providing them with weapons, training, and inspiration.⁵ Therefore, given the geopolitical importance of Lebanon (access to the Mediterranean Sea and position on the border with Israel) and the fact that the southern part of the country was inhabited by a majority of Shiite population, Iranian leaders wanted to control this region through a proxy agent.

Another important aspect that led to the emergence of Hezbollah was represented by the invasion of Lebanon by Israeli military forces in June 1982. The main objectives of the invasion were to eliminate the infrastructure of the Palestine Liberation Organization from southern Lebanon and withdraw Syrian troops from Lebanese territory. Israel imposed itself militarily and led to the eradication of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon, but the radicalization of the Shiite population in southern Lebanon (who initially supported the Israeli invasion because they perceived the Palestinians as a factor of instability, but who with the prolongation of the invasion turned against Israel), contributed to the emergence of a new terrorist organization – Hezbollah.⁶ In the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Hezbollah appeared as the result of the mobilization of several groups of

³ Rosita Di Peri, "Islamist Actors from an Anti-system Perspective: The Case of Hizbullah", in *Politics Religion and Ideology*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2014, pp. 487-503.

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections States that Sponsor Terrorism*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 79.

⁶ *Idem.*



Islamic Shi'i militants (clerics, al-Da'wa Party members, and dissidents members of Amal) that wanted to go to war against the Israeli occupier.⁷ The dispatch of 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards to the Syrian controlled Biqa region in the summer of 1982, under the pretext of fighting Israel, brought Iran into Lebanon. Therefore, the Syrian-Iranian agreement on stationing the Iran Revolutionary Guards contributed to consolidating the emergence of Hezbollah.⁸

Also, another factor that allowed the materialization and emergence of this organization, until today's "state in state" status, was generated by the lack of strong institutions in Lebanon to ensure state cohesion. Due to the fact that the loyalty of Lebanese citizens is directed primarily to the religious group they belong to (fragmentation of civil society), as well as the Lebanese political system (based on a compromise that allows each major religious group in Lebanon to be represented in leadership structures, but which at the same time is too weak and leads to the paralysis of the state), represents vulnerabilities that Hezbollah has managed to exploit in its interest, and without the possibility of foreign intervention, there is little chance that it will give up.

However, Hezbollah waited until 1984 to declare its birth publicly through a communiqué, on the second anniversary of Sabra and Shatilla's massacre, promising to "continue the march for the liberation of Palestine"⁹. In February 1985, Hezbollah officially adopted the political manifesto of the organization, highlighting the characteristics of the movement: Islam is the only solution to bring mankind out from the darkness and the need to implement Jihad against the influence of the West and of the Soviet Union.¹⁰

2. The Pillars of Hezbollah

To understand Hezbollah's motivations and actions, we need to identify the main ideological coordinates of the organization. According to Naim Qassem (deputy secretary general of Hezbollah since 1992), from the moment Hezbollah was founded, it had three pivotal objectives: Islam is the comprehensive, complete, and appropriate program for a better life; resistance against Israeli occupation (this necessitates the creation of a jihad structure that should complete this obligation, and in favor of which all capabilities were employed); and the legitimate leadership

⁷ Daniel Meler, "(B)ordering South Lebanon: Hizbullah's Identity Building Strategy", in *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2015, pp. 1-13.

⁸ Nizar Hamzeh, "Lebanon's Hizbullah: From Islamic Revolution to Parliamentary Accommodation", in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1993, pp. 321-337.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ ***, "An Open Letter-The Hizballah Program", in *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 48, 1998, URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20060821215729/http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/Hiz_letter.htm, accessed on 06.03.2021.



is designated to the Jurist Theologian who is considered to be the successor of the Prophet and the Imams (his commands and proscriptions are enforceable).¹¹ Therefore, these three pillars represent the fundamental foundation of Hezbollah, providing both an ideological framework (inspired by Islam), an immediate concrete goal against an enemy (the destruction of Israel), and the hierarchical model of the organization (The Jurist Theologian representing the supreme leader of the organization).

Regarding the first pillar (Belief in Islam), Naim Qassem mentions eleven subcategories: Belief in God Almighty; Worship; Self-discipline; Concern for Politics; Jihad in the Name of God (“to be carried out even using the dearest of man’s belongings of soul and wealth without hesitation and whenever obliged to”); Economics; Joint Social Responsibility (“invoked through the distribution of charity (zakat) funds among society’s needs”); Using reason and refusing subordination; Communication; Justice; Piety.¹² He summarizes this section, mentioning that “Islam is both worship and policy applicable for both life and afterlife, relevant to the individual and society, the mosque and the ruling authority, calling for mercy and firmness, jihad and peace”¹³. In other words, what Qassem is trying to argue through the first pillar refers to the fact that Islam is the best form of political organization because it prevails in successfully combining theological, political, and social fields.

Naim Qassem argues that the ultimate goal of the organization is to establish an Islamic state based on the free choice of the Muslim population: “Where the freedom of choosing a governing system is attributed to our people in Lebanon, they will not find a better alternative to Islam. Hence, we call for the implementation of the Islamic system based on a direct and free choice of the people, and not through forceful imposition as may be assumed by some”¹⁴. This idea of laying the foundations of a religious state is one of the goals of radical religious organizations, including using terrorist actions to materialize it. Naim Qassem is trying to promote the idea that Hezbollah is not a radical religious organization because it is unwilling to use violence in order to establish an Islamic state. However, using the Iranian model (which Hezbollah also wants to implement), it can be seen that once the Islamic States materializes and its institutions gain enough power to control the population, any kind of opposition to the regime is not accepted.

Moreover, Naim Qassem said in 2008 that “the Party’s final objective, in its political jihadist vision and program of work, is not to reach ultimate ruling power

¹¹ Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah. The Story from Within*, Saqi Books, London, 2005, p. 64.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 67-75.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pp. 75-76.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 81-82.



within the current sectarian system”¹⁵. The real reasons why Hezbollah promotes the idea of an Islamic state, as a result of the desire of the population, is that it tries to create an image of moderate both to the non-Shiite population in Lebanon and the international community, but also because at the moment it does not yet have the necessary power to be able to fully impose its will in Lebanon.

Thus, in order to achieve its political and military ambitions in Lebanon, Hezbollah needs to gain the support of the population. Hezbollah was able to find a role within Lebanese society and state by exploiting the principle mentioned above “Joint Social Responsibility”. Hence, Hezbollah established a dynamic social program, funded by sources of zakat (Islamic alms), financial support from Iran (financing 90 percent of Hezbollah’s social programs),¹⁶and donations from wealthy Lebanese abroad, through which it has managed a nationwide network of social, educational, and charitable programs. This social services network included: Jihad for construction (Jihad Al-Bina’); the Islamic Health authority; the non-interest loan society; Islamic beneficiary support society; the Martyr association; the Islamic institution for education. In addition, there were also sports, cultural, and informational institutions such as the Imam Khomeini center, Al’hd magazine, and the al-Manar TV channel.¹⁷Therefore, it can be seen that Hezbollah has managed to develop an entire social network which proves to be one of the most successful propaganda tools of the organization.

The important investments in the social field can be understood as the political step in its general strategy to spread resistance values on its image of a Shiite movement able to build social welfare institutions to bring the Shi’as out of marginalization.¹⁸This argument is supported by Hassan Nassrallah statement (Hezbollah’s leader): “the main aim of the social, educational, political, media, cultural, organizational, and service-related aspects which Hezbollah undertakes in all the regions and with all political forces, is to support and reinforce the resistance and preserve its continuity”¹⁹.

Furthermore, in order to succeed in attracting the sympathy of the Lebanese people to other denominations than the Shiite, Hezbollah also allows their members access to social facilities. Last but not least, regarding the social capabilities that Hezbollah controls, we can highlight that it plays an important role in increasing

¹⁵ Lina Khatib, “Hizbullah’s Political Strategy”, in *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, vol 52, no. 2, 2011, pp. 61-76.

¹⁶ Daniel Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁷ Mariam Farida, “Field Notes on Hizbullah’s Recruitment, Training and Organisational Structure”, in *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism*, vol 5, no. 2, pp. 71-72.

¹⁸ Daniel Meler, “(B)ordering South Lebanon: Hizbullah’s Identity Building Strategy”, in *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 2015, pp. 1-13.

¹⁹ Adham Saouli, “Hizbullah in the Civising Process: anarchy, self-restraint and violence”, in *Third World Quarterly*, vol 32, no. 5, 2011, pp. 925-942.



the number of the members of the organization. In a poor country like Lebanon, Hezbollah members receive 150-200 USD per month, along with free education and medical care²⁰ and their families enjoy much better socioeconomic conditions than most Lebanese citizens.

The second pillar of Hezbollah is represented by the materialization of the concept of Jihad (Holy War). First, Naim Qassem accepts the existence of two types of jihad: the military (directed against unbelievers) and the heart one (representing the believer's struggle against his sinful nature)²¹. Regarding this topic, he mentions that "Jihad with the soul is the larger of the two challenges, as it is a daily and permanent struggle, present in any conflict between virtue and vice, between obedience to God and the soul's impulses. Struggle with the enemy is the lesser test, for it is called upon during specific occasions of one's life as part of rising to the triumph of principles, morals, righteousness and the victory of the nation, when the nation is subject to oppression, occupation or humiliation"²². Therefore, according to Naim Qassem vision, the two notions of jihad are complementary and represent a duty for every true believer.

Regarding military jihad, Naim Qassem is a follower of defensive jihad (which means to preserve the independence of the Muslim country and the repulsion of foreigners, also any territory ever captured by Islam belongs to Islam for eternity and therefore an attack on a once Muslim land ruled by non-Muslims is considered defensive and can be carried out by individuals and not just organized military), claiming that: "This is the defense by Muslims of their land, their people or their own selves upon facing aggression or occupation. This is considered not only legitimate, but a duty"²³. Also, Naim Qassem points out that: "To the extent that jihad achieves honor and freedom, so does its abandonment lead to disgrace, loss, demise and crumbling of the individual and the nation"²⁴. These statements made it very clear that the concept of military jihad is one of the most important ideological features of Hezbollah.

Another topic of debate chosen by Naim Qassem refers to the issue of martyrdom, which he mentions: "We thus notice that a large number of martyrdom seekers hope to be assigned a martyrdom mission as part of their aim to please God and win His acceptance of their obedience. This is only a result of spiritual cultivation, a product of active religious worship"²⁵ and "Martyrdom is thus the supreme manifestation of self-giving, a form of confrontation with the enemy within

²⁰ Daniel Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

²¹ Naim Qassem, *Hezbollah, the Story from Within*, Saqi Books, London, 2005, pp. 85-86.

²² *Idem.*

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 94.

²⁴ *Idem.*

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 102.



clear, legitimate Shari'a guidelines"²⁶. For a better understanding of the concept of Islamic martyrdom, we must point out that one of the main aims of radical terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah is represented by the desire to eradicate the "infidels" (the unfaithful within their tradition or in other religions).²⁷ Naim Qassem goes further with his argument, extending the implications of the concept of military jihad on women as well, claiming that: "Some women went as far as requesting permission to carry weapons and go to battle. But religious commandment does not require this form of sacrifice from women given the sufficient number of men, which renders female participation in combat unnecessary. The woman's role in this context is in the back ranks, through support and recruitment. This is deemed more befitting of a woman's physical capabilities and of the sharing of responsibilities between her and man. Her Godly reward is thus not diminished, for reward is linked to religious commandment, which she fulfills from her own position"²⁸. Therefore, in Hezbollah's view, all members of the Muslim community must participate in one way or another in the military jihad. I would go further and say that Hezbollah membership is due to the desire of its member to contribute to military jihad. As a result, of its rigid ideology, Hezbollah cannot be reformed, abandoning the military jihad would cause the organization to disintegrate.

The third pillar of Hezbollah is referred to the Jurisdiction of the Jurist-Theologian (al-Wali al-Faqih). Regarding this topic, Naim Qassem quotes Imam Khamenei on the need for the function of Jurist-Theologian: "The purpose of such absolute custodianship by the Jurist-Theologian, who fulfills all qualifications, is that Islam, this true religion—the end of all heavenly religions and one that shall remain until the Day of Resurrection—is the religion of ultimate verdict and societal organization. As such, Islamic society needs a curator, a jurist and a leader who would guard the nation of Islam and Muslims against enemies protect the nation's structure and ensure justice among its constituents, deterring the might of the strong from the weak, securing the means for cultural, political and social developments and prosperity for all"²⁹. Subordination to the supreme Iranian leader is also provided in the Hezbollah program: "We are the sons of the umma (Muslim community) – the party of God the vanguard of which was made victorious by God in Iran" and "We obey the orders of one leader, wise and just, that of our tutor and faqih (jurist) who fulfills all the necessary conditions: Ruhollah Musawi Khomeini"³⁰.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 107.

²⁷ Gregg Heather, "Defining and Distinguishing Secular and Religious Terrorism.", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2014, pp. 36-51.

²⁸ Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah. The Story from Within*, Saqi Books, London, 2005, p. 105.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

³⁰ ***, "An Open Letter-The Hizballah Program", *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 48, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 1998, URL: https://web.archive.org/web/20060821215729/http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/Hiz_letter.htm, accessed on 06.03.2021.



Moreover, Naim Qassem claims that the Jurist-Theologian has the authority to decide on issues of war and peace and sets the guidelines for any Islamic state upon its inception, directing it towards abidance by doctrinal jurisprudence and to the preservation of its constituents' interests following Islam.³¹ Therefore, according to this argument, the Jurist-Theologian represents a continuation of the Prophet becoming infallible and representing the supreme authority of the believers on earth. In accordance with this principle, we can conclude that there is no distinction between religious and political leadership within Hezbollah.

3. Hezbollah and the West

Regarding the way in which the western states position themselves in relation to Hezbollah, it can be noted that only one of the two actors manages to implement a successful strategy.

One of the mistakes that Western policymakers make when are referring to the relationship between Hezbollah and the state of Israel lies in the fact that they are trying to promote a compromise solution, through which to reach an agreement between two warring parties. This naive approach has its origins in the fact that Western policymakers believe that Hezbollah is an actor that can make compromise decisions in relation to political reality.

The truth is that Hezbollah operates according to Jihadi logic which means that this organization must win in the end and there can be no mutual recognition. However, Hezbollah does not want to accept a compromise solution to Israel, and this is very clear from the organization's program: "Our primary assumption in our fight against Israel states that Zionist entity is aggressive from its inception, and build on lands wrested from their owners, at the expense of the rights of the Muslim people. Therefore, our struggle will end only when this entity is obliterated. We recognize no treaty with it, no cease fire, and no peace agreements, whether separate or consolidated"³². Thus, given that Hezbollah has declared jihad on Israel, there is no compromise solution to persuade or force them to give up their aggression. Indeed, Hezbollah may temporarily abandon its attacks on Israel or reduce their intensity, but this only happens when it faces weaknesses and needs time to recover.

Although Westerners have major concerns about how they should relate to Hezbollah, the leaders of the terrorist organization perfectly understand how to negotiate with the West. Naim Qassem states that in recent years, the Western perception of Hezbollah has changed, especially on a popular level. He points out the fact that even governments have started to look for a reason to communicate and

³¹ Naim Qassem, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 117.

³² ***, "An Open Letter - The Hizballah Program", *doc. cit.*



have relations with Hezbollah. His argument is based on the fact that most European countries have refused to put Hezbollah on the list of terrorist organizations.³³

This is generated by the fact that Western politicians prefer to distinguish between the political and military factions of Hezbollah. In their representation, on the one hand, they refer to Hezbollah as a legitimate and responsible political party, being composed of moderate politicians willing to reach a compromise. On the other hand, Western policymakers believe that Hezbollah's terrorist actions are generated exclusively by the military faction, which is made up of extremist, but which is in minority relation to the political faction of the organization.

This confusion is highlighted by Naim Qassem, who states regarding the Western powers that they establish "relations with Hezbollah by distinguishing two different sections that don't actually exist– the so-called political and military wings-because the party is by nature unified"³⁴. Also, Naim Qassem states that "All political, social and jihadi work is tied to the decisions of the leadership. The same leadership that directs the parliamentary and government work also leads jihadi actions in the struggle against Israel"³⁵. Therefore, Hezbollah must be perceived as a single organization, which uses political, military, and social means to achieve its goals.

Moreover, Hezbollah leaders try to inoculate the West with the idea that their organizations is independent of Iran. They claim that "Hezbollah works in the Lebanese arena. It does not work for regional or international interests"³⁶, but this is impossible given that the Jurist-Theologian is both the supreme leader of Iran and the *de facto* leader of Hezbollah. However, given Iran's reputation in the international community, Hezbollah's official association with it would lead to its total discredit, because it would be perceived only as an instrument through which Iran seeks to materialize its interest in the Middle East and not as a legitimate representative of the Shiite population in Lebanon.

Another aspect found in the approach of Western politicians is the assumption that initiating and intensifying diplomatic negotiations with Hezbollah represent a successful strategy to persuade the organization to give up the use of violence. The limitation of this approach is highlighted by one of the mottos of the organization, which claims that "Hezbollah's weapons are part of the resistance, not separate from it"³⁷. The main problem for Western policymakers regarding maintaining a diplomatic dialogue with Hezbollah is that they refuse to explicitly condemn the

³³ Naim Qassem, "Hezbollah: Islamist Resistance Comes of Age", in *New Perspective Quarterly*, 2009, pp. 8-11.

³⁴ *Idem.*

³⁵ *Idem.*

³⁶ *Idem.*

³⁷ *Idem.*



organization's terrorist actions.

To analyze Hezbollah's perspective in relation to the negotiations with the West, we must point out Naim Qassem's statement: "We are open to dialogue with the West as long as both parties are equal and the dialogue is not just superficial"³⁸. In other words, it is not enough for the West to show indulgence in Hezbollah's actions, but it must agree with the legitimacy of the organization's goals. Hezbollah's approach is not original; it was first used successfully by Arafat in emancipating Palestine Liberation Organization as a legitimate player in the international community.

Thus, Hezbollah seeks to create an image of a moderate organization within the international community, arguing that the organization represents the interest of the Lebanese people and that they are willing to reach a compromise with Israel (which is, of course, denounced as an oppressive state, whose geopolitical interests contradict the national interests of Lebanon), if Israeli political and decision-makers are willing to make certain concessions. Nevertheless, even if Israel compromises, Hezbollah will not change its policy, taking advantage of the new benefits, while calling for even more international pressure on the Israeli authorities.

Moreover, the lack of implementation of a coercive mechanism by the international community in relation to Hezbollah creates the optimal conditions for the development of the organization: "When Hezbollah gains international friendship and support, it is better for its position. It helps gain members and expend among peoples instead of the whole being against this party"³⁹. The fact that most Western states prefer to tolerate Hezbollah's actions allows the organization to expand its influence in Lebanon and become an increasingly important non-state actor in the Middle East security complex.

Also, at the one hand, an important aspect that I want to highlight is the misperception of Western leaders that Hezbollah's hostile actions are directed exclusively against Israel. In the Hezbollah program, it is mentioned that "We see in Israel the vanguard of the United States in our Islamic world. It is the hated enemy that must be fought until the hated ones get what they deserve"⁴⁰. We can deduct from this statement that Israel is an extension of the Western world to the Middle East and for this reason must be destroyed. We must not forget that in the rhetoric promoted by Teheran and taken over by the Hezbollah, the United States of America is perceived as the "The Great Satan" and Israel as the "Little Satan". Therefore, one of the reasons why Hezbollah declared jihad on Israel is that it promotes values and principles associated with the Western culture (secularism, democracy, etc.). Hezbollah is not content with just destroying Israel but wants to eliminate the Western influence in the Middle East.

³⁸ *Idem.*

³⁹ *Idem.*

⁴⁰ ***, "An Open Letter - The Hizballah Program", *doc. cit.*



Western leaders prefer to delimit themselves from Israel's military actions against Hezbollah (which considers that the only solution to end the conflict is the destruction of Israel), considering that such a strategy ensures a position of mediators. As I pointed out above, such a strategy is wrong because Hezbollah leaders see the West as an enemy and not as a mediator. The only effective solution that could lead to the stabilization of security dynamics in this region would be the full cooperation between Israel and Western states on neutralizing the threat posed by the existence of Hezbollah.

Unfortunately, Naim Qassem intentionally omits when describing political Islam is the concept of Jihad which represents one of its pillars. If we analyze the Quran, we can see that the use of violence against the non-Muslim population is encouraged and even rewarded by Allah. According to Quran, unbelievers must be punished for not listening to the message of Allah, promoted by his messenger (Mohammed).⁴¹ Moreover, the killing of the unbelievers is done under the guidance of divinity, and the believer acts only as a tool: "It was not you believers who killed them, but it was Allah Who did so. Nor was it you 'O Prophet' 'who threw' a handful of sand at the disbelievers, but it was Allah Who did so"⁴². Also, there can be no definitive armistice between believers and unbelievers.⁴³ Of course, we can consider that these Quranic verses are no longer relevant, or we can go even further, stating that at present the concept of Jihad is associated only with the inner struggle, no longer a connotation that would involve violence in relation to unbelievers.

Nevertheless, analyzing the Hezbollah program, as well as the pillars of this organization, we can see that the military jihad represents the ideological foundation of the organization. Also, in order to understand the true meaning of the political Islam assumed by Hezbollah, all we have to do is observe Iran's behavior after 1979, in which jihad was used both as a means of internal repression (against any form of resistance – anyone who opposes the regime is an unbeliever) as well as foreign counteract (against Western secularism and Israel).

4. The Relationship Between Iran and Hezbollah

Regarding the Iran and Hezbollah relationship, we need to point out that is perhaps the strongest and most effective alliance between a state sponsor and terrorist group in history. Iran helped to the foundation, organization and training of Hezbollah. In exchange, Hezbollah has served Iran by striking Iran's foreign enemies, assassinating Iranian dissidents, and advancing the interest of the Islamic

⁴¹ *Qur'an*, Chapter 8, URL: <https://quran.com/8>, accessed on 06.03.2021.

⁴² *Idem*.

⁴³ *Idem*.



Republic in the Middle East.⁴⁴ In this sense, one of the leading Hezbollah figures declared in 1985: “Our relationship with the Islamic revolution [in Iran] is one of a junior to a senior, of a soldier to his commander”⁴⁵. Therefore, from the beginning of Hezbollah’s foundation until now, this organization has been under the tutelage of Iran.

However, Naim Qassem tries to argue that the relationship between Iran and Hezbollah is not based on subordination, but represents a partnership generated by common goals: “The relationship between Hezbollah and Iran was forged through the Party’s efforts to make use of this innovative experience in the region and to secure a champion for the cause of confronting Israeli occupation. Iran’s choice of an Islamic republican government coincided with the Islamic principles held by Hezbollah. Harmony at the general guideline or theoretical level was thus present, although the detailed application of these guidelines was subordinate to the particular characteristics of each country in question”⁴⁶. As I already mentioned above, this narrative has the role of increasing the legitimacy of Hezbollah in Lebanon and also within the international community, but it does not correspond to the political reality.

One of the most important reasons Iran backed Hezbollah was the desire of Teheran’s leaders to spread its Islamic revolution in the Middle East. Given the fact that Iran after the 1979 revolution faced diplomatic isolation (that determined the reorientation of foreign and security policy), as well as the desire to increase the internal legitimacy of the new regime, led the Iranian leaders to promote its Islamic revolution in the Middle East (by organize and found radical Shiite groups). The theological justifications of the Iranian revolution emphasized the spread of Islam regardless of state boundaries. Ayatollah Khomeini declared, “We should try hard to export our revolution to the world...we [shall] confront the world with our ideology”⁴⁷ and Iran’s constitution “extend the sovereignty of God’s law throughout the world”⁴⁸. In retrospect, we can point out that in terms of the export of the Islamic revolution in the Middle East, the Teheran regime failed. However, Hezbollah can be considered a success, as the organization has accepted the authority of Iranian leaders, as well as the goal of laying the foundations of an Islamic state in Lebanon (following the Iranian model).

This view is also shared by Naim Qassem, who believes that the Islamic revolution has had a positive impact on the Middle East, as it has contributed to the emancipation of an Islamic regime in Iran, as well as to the decline of Western

⁴⁴ Daniel Byman, *op.cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

⁴⁶ Naim Qassem, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 236.

⁴⁷ Daniel Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 92.



influence in the Middle East: “It is also in harmony with Hezbollah’s conviction of the soundness of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s approach and practice, in the change it brought to the region’s map through independence from subordination to the West and adoption of a promising Islamic version”⁴⁹. Moreover, another evidence of Hezbollah’s strategic relationship with Iran is represented by the statement of Iranian Shiite cleric Mohtashemi: “The relationship between Hezbollah with the Iranian regime exceeds the simple relationship of a revolutionary regime with a party or a revolutionary organization that exists outside of Iran’s borders. It seems clear that Hezbollah has been part of the Iranian regime and a major factor in its military and security institutions”⁵⁰.

To achieve its ambitions in Lebanon and in other countries in the Middle East where Hezbollah operates, Iran provided military support, training, financial backing, organizational aid, and numerous other forms of assistance.⁵¹ Some Lebanese leaders, such as Walid Jumblatt and Samir Geagea pointed out the fact that Hezbollah is serving Iran’s “ambitious Islamic project that considered Lebanon an advanced combat front against Israel, and when necessary, the West”⁵². Hezbollah’s actions are aimed at destabilizing the Middle East region and implicitly Lebanon (in order to be able to control it more easily), to maintain a climate of insecurity that will favor the increase of Iranian political and military influence.

Furthermore, Iranian officials provided Hezbollah with both tactical and strategic direction. A relevant example in this regard is represented by Iran’s Ambassador to Syria, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour who helped supervise attacks such as the bombing of the US and French multinational forces contingents, the bombing of the US Embassy in Beirut. Also, in the 1990s, Iranian intelligence officials helped coordinate and direct many Hezbollah operations, particularly those that occurred outside Lebanon (bombing of the Israeli Embassy from Argentina-1992, car bombing of the Jewish welfare center in Buenos Aires-1994).⁵³ Iran and Hezbollah have also been involved in the Syrian Civil War, fighting to keep the Assad regime in power.

Another important reason why Iran supports Hezbollah is due to strategic reasons. Thus, Hezbollah fought Iran’s enemies (Israel and other Western powers) and served as a proxy of Iranian influence in the Middle East. In addition to combat Iran’s new enemies, Hezbollah also allowed Iran to project power well beyond

⁴⁹ Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah. The Story from Within*, Saqi Books, London, 2005, p. 123.

⁵⁰ Ohannes Geukjan, “Which State for Lebanon in the Aftermath of the Hizbullah-Israeli War of July-August 2006? A Critical Analysis”, in *Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, vol 17, no. 2, pp. 135-153.

⁵¹ Daniel Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

⁵² Ohannes Geukjan, “Which State for Lebanon in the Aftermath of the Hizbullah-Israeli War of July-August 2006? A Critical Analysis”, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-153.

⁵³ Daniel Byman, *op. cit.*, p. 88.



its borders. Given that Israel poses the greatest threat to Iran's interest in the region, Tehran's leaders are using Hezbollah in order to destabilize their adversary without attacking directly. Moreover, support for Hezbollah allowed Iran to obtain advantages over the United States of America (the hopes of gaining the release of hostages held by Hezbollah led the United States in 1985 and 1986 to send weapons to Iran).⁵⁴ Also, Iran in order to be perceived within the international community as a moderate actor is reluctant to use its military power directly, but it uses its armed branch in the region (Hezbollah) to implement such actions.

Therefore, given the reasons mentioned above, it can be seen that there is a clear relationship of subordination between Iran and Hezbollah (even if the leaders of this organizations prefer to use the phrase of partnership). Thus, Hezbollah's actions are interdependent with Iran's interests in the Middle East.

Conclusions

To understand Hezbollah's actions and its role in the Middle East regional security complex, it is important to identify the main factors that have allowed this organization to materialize, its ideological pillars, its strategic partnership with Iran, and its attitude toward the Western state.

Thus, we can say that the emergence of Hezbollah took place in the context of the growing influence of radical Islamist organizations from 1970-1990 and as a result of political, social, and religious fragmentation in Lebanon. Also, a crucial role in the emergence of Hezbollah was the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution, whose new leadership sought the support of Shiite communities in neighboring states and turned them into its proxy agents, providing them with weapons, training, inspiration, and money. Last but not least, Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon led to the radicalization of Shiite communities in the region, creating all the conditions for Hezbollah to gain as much influence as possible.

Regarding the ideological pillars of the organization, we must highlight the three main ones: Belief in Islam, Jihad, and the Jurist-Theologian). Through the first pillar, Hezbollah leaders try to argue that Islam is the best form of political organization because it succeeds in successfully combining theological, political, and social field, having as fundamental objective the establishment of an Islamic state according to the Iranian model. By mentioning the second pillar, Hezbollah leaders are trying to argue the need to adopt military jihad as a tool of resistance against Western influence in the Middle East, as well as against Israel. The third pillar is the official recognition of Hezbollah's subordination to the supreme Iranian leader and the prerogatives he has over it.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 96.



Given the ideological pillars of the organization, Hezbollah's negotiating strategy in relation to Western states can be understood. At the one hand, Hezbollah leaders have used propaganda instruments to promote a moderate image of the organization in the international community representing a legitimate actor that seeks to promote the interests of the Lebanese people. On the other hand, Western leaders and international organizations still perceive the Hezbollah party as a separate entity from the military wing of the organization and negotiate with it as if it were a rational actor that may be willing to reach a compromise solution.

Finally, analyzing the motivations for its creation, its ideology and its type of relationship with other actors, Hezbollah is a proxy for Iran, acting in following Iran's strategic interests in the Middle East. Iran's motives for supporting Hezbollah are due to its desire to use the organization as a propaganda tool to spread Islamic radicalism and combat Western influence in the Middle East, to attack Israel, and to carry out other destabilizing actions in the region that cannot be directly implemented by Teheran.

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