

HEZBOLLAH'S MOTIVES, STRENGTH, SIZE, TACTICS, TARGETS, AND PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS IN MEETING ITS DECLARED GOALS

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ABSTRACT

Hezbollah was conceived in 1982 by a group of Muslim clerics after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, with the help of Islamic Republic of Iran. And within several years, it compelled Israel to withdraw from most of Lebanon (except the “security zone” it occupied until 2000). It is a designated terrorist group by the U.S Department of State. With regard to Hezbollah’s military strength and size, many scholars have confirmed that it is hard if not impossible to get official confirmed figures from Hezbollah. The researcher of this paper would like to show that the organization [Hezbollah] acts as a proxy for Iran in the continuing Iranian-Israeli conflict, but also it does help to serve the Iranian interest in the Middle East region. Hezbollah’s future depends not only on its main funder, the Islamic Republic of Iran, but also its prospect for success relies on its own internal, financial, organizational and administrative governance and it gained a huge experience from its previous military training with Palestinian organizations.

Keywords: Hezbollah, Iran, Israel, Proxy war, U.S. Department of State

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1980s Shia’s Muslim clerics who were followers of Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran, created a Shiite military movement with support from Iran, and it started launching attacks against the Israeli armed. According to BBC’s article of July 4th, 2010 Hezbollah was conceived¹ in 1982 by a group of Muslim clerics after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, with the help of Islamic Republic of Iran. And within several years, it compelled Israel to withdraw from most of Lebanon (except the “security zone” it occupied until 2000), Marc R. and Armin B. (2015, P.9). Although Hezbollah, as a Shiite terrorist organization which would aim, as it sometimes does, to fight against “*takfiris*” a term meaning Sunni Islamist forces, or as Sunnis understand it to include the whole Sunni communities; the organization [Hezbollah] acts as a proxy for Iran in the continuing Iranian-Israeli conflict.

Hassan Nasrallah, a hardliner Shiite cleric is the third and current Secretary General of the powerful non-state actor in the world, Hezbollah. It is a designated terrorist group by the U.S Department of State. As an organization created by Lebanese Shiite clerics with the assistance of, and facilitated financially, militarily, and technically by Iran, has main motives which stem from the Iranian political thoughts and religious ideology emanating from the Islamic Revolution

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of 1979. With regard to Hezbollah's military strength and size, many scholars argue that it is hard to get official confirmed figures as Hezbollah does not disseminate sensitive information about its military wing, Khatib, L. (2015, p. 309). Hezbollah's future depends not only on its main funder, the Islamic Republic of Iran, but also its prospect for success relies on its own internal, financial, organizational and administrative governance and it gained a huge experience from its previous military training with Palestinian organizations. Let me elaborate more in the following section about its motives.

Hezbollah Motives:

the main reasons behind the organization is to spread Shiite Islam, create Islamic state in Lebanon, destruction of the state of Israel, liberation of Palestine and restoration of Palestinian rights¹ and get rid of foreign military from the region. In December 2009, Hezbollah announced a change in their political platform in which they no longer aim to create an Islamic state in Lebanon, but rather implement Islamic fundamentalism into Lebanon's democratic system. The past and current successes of Hezbollah rely on how the organization managed to attract the Lebanese Shiite social community by using Iranian money to attract new recruits. For the implementing its motives, Hezbollah does have political and military wings that make the organization gets strong position not only in Lebanese government but also far beyond the country's borders. The following section will discuss its size and strength.

Size and Strength of the organization:

As I said in my introductory section, Hezbollah does not reveal its armed strength. According to *Agence France Presse* of July 18, 2006, with the data received from "the Dubai-based Gulf Research Centre" estimated, at the time that Hezbollah's armed wing was comprised 1,000 full-time Hezbollah members, along with further 6,000–10,000 volunteers. Furthermore, the data from START¹ of 2012 shows that Hezbollah had 6,000 members. According to START report, there are many factors that make Hezbollah a regional powerful non-state actor in the Middle East, such as having state-sponsors: Iran and Syria. Iranian government is a major ally, and Syria became also an ally of the organization since 2005. Hezbollah gets stronger and stronger from various internal activities, 'political and financial'; it does participate in Lebanese politics since 1989 following the Taif Agreement: this allows Hezbollah to gain political momentum not only for political power but also for having influence over passing its political agenda through both executive power and legislative branch. Moreover, following the Doha agreement, Hezbollah's political influence grew again in May 2008 after the party was granted veto power in order to end an eighteen month-long political stalemate. We have seen how Hezbollah got stronger as nonstate actor in the region; now let's shift to another third and final section of our discussion, the prospects of success of the organization.

Hezbollah prospects for success in meeting its declared goals

As I discussed its size and strength in the previous section, which, of course helps in projecting its future success and meeting its goals; here the focus is on the side of how and by what means Hezbollah is able to operate successfully. Hezbollah started with Iranian government support: it gets three forms of support from Iran: financial, sanctuary, and political, Marc R. DeVore & Armin B. Stähli (2015, p.351). And according to START, Hezbollah gets almost \$200 million¹

every year, and Ambassador Nathan Sales¹, who handles the counterterrorism portfolio at the U.S. Department of State, asserted that Iran still provides Lebanese Hezbollah alone with upward of \$700 million per year. Regardless to agree or disagree with one or both figures as the latter seems to be a point of disagreement; the true is that Iranian government does support financially and technically Hezbollah to achieve its goals. And the financial portion is a good enough to help the organization not only finance its internal current activities but also it does help Hezbollah to project for future activities and spread its hardline Shia religious thinking. The same data from START reveals that Hezbollah receives funding through illegal drug activities; it receives donations from Shiite communities throughout the world. According to the Colin P. Clarke’s article of September 19, 2017, Hezbollah maintains a unit solely dedicated to psychological warfare that specializes in burnishing Hezbollah's public image, and in doing so, the terrorist organization is able to gain an advantage over an adversary through the management of information. It does usually use newspapers, social media outlets and television programming.

In the beginning, Hezbollah was aiming at evicting Israel from Lebanon. However, it has later set a new goal which is to destroy Israel and establish ‘‘Palestinian Islamic State’’; as it is in the plan of Iran. In this article, I am going to show ‘‘tactics and targets’’ for Hezbollah in the following table and paragraphs:

Tactics and Targets

Table1: Hezbollah tactics and targets

| Terrorist organization | Tactics | Target | City /Country | Source (date) |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hezbollah | Ambush | Israeli Military 3 fatalities Abducted 2 soldiers | Shtula/Israel | RAND: 2011 The event occurred on 07/12/2006 Web. Accessed on May 24 th , 2020 |
| | Explosives bombs: A roadside bomb was used in the attack | Israeli Military 2 Injured | Nahal Sion/Israel | GTD: 10/07/2014 Web. Accessed on May 24 th , 2020 |
| | Explosives/bombs: Anti tank missiles | Israeli Military 2 fatalities 7 Injured | Ghajar/ Israel | GTD: 01/28/2015 Web. Accessed on May 24 th , 2020 |

Hezbollah’s tactic success came from its cadres during Lebanon’s Civil War and through their prior involvement with Palestinian groups; among its tactics, according to Marc R. and Armin B. (2015, P. 15) are irregular=guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, and hostage-taking. In 2006 Hezbollah militia crossed the Israeli border and ambushed an IDF patrol killing three soldiers and capturing two more promptly taking them across the border into Lebanon. This was one of

its tactics in order to force negotiations with Israel to win the release of numerous Islamist terrorists who were being held captive in Israel, (RAND, 2011, p. 55).

On October 7th, 2014, a roadside bomb detonated targeting an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) outpost in Nahal Sion area, Golan Heights, Israel. Two Israeli soldiers were injured in blast. Hezbollah claimed the responsibility for the incidents, stating that the attacks were in retaliation for its member (Hassan Ali Haidar) who was killed by Israeli security forces in the previous month.

On January 28th, 2015, assailants launched missiles at a military convoy in Ghajar village, Golan Heights, Israel. Two soldiers were killed and seven others were wounded in the attack. And Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the incident and stated that the attack was in retaliation for an Israeli airstrike that killed six Hezbollah members and an Iranian general.

Twenty years after withdrawal from Lebanon², Israel still follows carefully Hezbollah movements, and Friedler, the Israeli commander, said if there is another war; Israel will have no choice but to cross the border to halt Hezbollah fire. And he insisted that his troops are ready. Hezbollah, on its side has also vowed to cross into Israel in any future war. In late 2018, Israel uncovered and later destroyed what it said was a network of cross-border tunnels.

2. CONCLUSION

Hezbollah generally uses different tactics: guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, ambush, rockets, abductions, etc. and it has rockets that could range farthest into Israel and has used them against the state of Israel. As Hezbollah receives financial, material assistance and directives from Iran through Quds Force under the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, IRGC; many if not all of its goals fall under proxy for the Iranian government because of its political, religious and financial influence. And Israel is its main target. I have to assert that Hezbollah is one of the terrorist groups with a complex nature, it acts as political party, provides with social services to needy; spreads Shia beliefs, and it exercises paramilitary power. Hezbollah is an Iran and Syria's ally and because of its terrorist actions, it has ultimately been designated as Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. Department of State. And according to Tabatabai and Clarke (2019), Hezbollah's covert activities abroad are the least understood aspect; which makes this organization spread its heinous religious ideology to new Shia generation across the world, but also enables it to get funds from different world's Shiite communities, and from its illegal international trade. The nature of its organization helps its leaders to accumulate the wealth and plan for future terrorist acts against the state of Israel and the United States' interest in the Middle East. Thus, U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, [as Hezbollah is supported by Iran and Syria], should put more emphasis on collaboration with the state of Israel and on counterterrorist measures that could help to deter, prevent or mitigate Hezbollah's future terrorist acts and planning.

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