



Double Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and Translation and Interpreting

**Dissertation in International Relations**

# **HEZBOLLAH: CHALLENGING INTERNATIONAL POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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*To those who believe the Middle East still matters.*

*We do not want to keep this weapon forever. We do not want to continue to shoulder this responsibility. We will forever be grateful when there is a strong state and a strong army that protect Lebanon, its South, villages and all its towns.*

(Hassan Nasrallah, leader of Hezbollah, August 2007)

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## 1. Purpose and reasons

Hezbollah has become significantly stronger since the 2006 Lebanon war against Israel. It has evolved from a Lebanese terrorist organization into much more than that: a powerful political and military group with a communication strategy and popular support. In the words of Augustus Richard Norton, author of *Hezbollah: a Short Story*, we have seen the transformation of “an Iranian-influenced conspirational terrorist group [initially] rejecting participation in Lebanese politics” into “a party with considerable autonomy and a talent for playing politics and winning elections.” Norton explains this as the result of the increasing consciousness among the Lebanese Shiites that their religious identity could bring the necessary force to change their marginal political and economic situation, and as a reaction to the destructive Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. The latter weakened the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) but gave birth to Hezbollah (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 92).

Not only has Hezbollah gained importance at the national level, but it is also a key player in the wider Middle East, including Iran and Syria. These two countries were Hezbollah’s state sponsors during its early years and traditionally used the group in order to advance their objectives. As González-Úbeda Alférez points out (2012, p. 4), despite Hezbollah’s increasing autonomy and efforts to find alternative funding, Iran is still the group’s main financial provider. Syria does not just represent an important source of advanced weaponry; it is also the main transit point for the weapons that Iran sends to Hezbollah (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 5). Furthermore, Iran and Syria provide Hezbollah with a wide base of Shiite popular support, which gives the group a legitimacy that is vital for its survival. Given these interconnections, Hezbollah has become an important force determining the dynamics of the Syrian crisis. Finally, Hezbollah’s determination to fight Israel, as well as its Shiite solidarity, are two of the main drivers of Hezbollah’s behavior and elements of utmost interest to Iran. In other words, Iran sees Hezbollah as an important source of support for its Shiite interests and as an instrument that boosts its capacity to oppose Israel.

Apart from Hezbollah's attacks throughout the Western world, all these factors make Hezbollah a player anyone interested in international politics should understand. Hezbollah's influence in the Middle East conditions the policies and actions not only of Middle Eastern countries, but also of the United States and other stakeholders in the region. The fact that Hezbollah constitutes a movement poorly understood by many Westerners, who tend to "view the Middle East through the terrorist lens," certainly calls for a deeper analysis (Divine, Spring 2008, 92). This dissertation seeks to offer such analysis: to explain Hezbollah's role within the framework of the region's policy dynamics—a role that affects the wider international community.

## **2. The state of play**

### **2.1. Hezbollah today: much more than a radical Islamic terrorist group**

Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and from Gaza in 2006 meant a degradation of defenses along its fragile borders (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 93), increasing its vulnerability to regional terrorism. However, despite the violence that Hezbollah certainly directs towards Israel, the United States, other Western countries, and even the state of Lebanon, the group is nowadays much more than just a terrorist organization (Jain, 2010). In fact, despite U.S. pressure, powerful forces in the international system such as the European Union (EU) have refused for years to officially label Hezbollah a terrorist group (Mix, June 20, 2011, p. 5). Indeed, by including Hezbollah in their terrorist list, countries preclude the possibility to negotiate with the group. As detailed below, this has some members of the Obama administration reconsidering the wisdom of keeping a politically and militarily strengthened Hezbollah designated as a terrorist organization.

Hezbollah has garnered support throughout the Arab world by presenting itself as an advocate for social justice, equity, and the right of the oppressed to resistance (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 1). These are elements the Arab society, and especially the traditionally marginalized Shiites, desperately yearn for. In fact, many scholars emphasize Hezbollah's "success and popularity as a resistance movement and as a powerful advocate for Shiite political interests" (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 92). Hezbollah's army is made up of ordinary Lebanese people. This, together with the group's political presence, favors Hezbollah's integration in the Lebanese national life (Blinder, 2008, p. 6). At the same time, this popular support, earned through the above-mentioned promises and backed by Hezbollah's demonstration of power, particularly in the 2006 Lebanon war, gives the group the necessary legitimacy to maintain its political and military status.

Hezbollah has also developed an international presence as far as Latin America. The cornerstone of Hezbollah Latin America (Hezbollah LA) is Hezbollah Venezuela, which presents itself as Autonomía Islámica Wayuu. It evolved from a leftist revolutionary group into a group that opposes Zionism and imperialism and that expresses its solidarity with Lebanon's Hezbollah. Autonomía Islámica Wayuu is active even on the Internet, where it has its own website (<http://autonomiaislimicawayuu.blogspot.com.es>). The same applies to the next most active faction in Latin America, located in Argentina (Karmon, 2006, p. 3).

The leader of the Latin American network is the Venezuelan Teodoro Rafael Darnott. Like its Lebanese counterpart, Hezbollah LA advocates for the social improvement of the poor and takes an anti-Zionist and anti-American stance. Although Hezbollah LA supports Venezuela's revolutionary process, it does not have a socialist ideology, for "Hezbollah's ideology is theocratic and obeys divine rules" (Karmon, 2006, p. 3). As a consequence, when it comes to Venezuela, the revolution should pursue "the divine and the moral" in order to achieve Hezbollah's "political-military project." On the other hand, Hezbollah Venezuela differs from the main Lebanese faction in that it only conceives "low intensity" violence as a legitimate means to cause a psychological impact and gain public attention (Karmon, 2006, p. 1-3).

Hezbollah Venezuela differs from Hezbollah Argentina in some important ways. While Hezbollah Venezuela has a leftist background and revolutionary rhetoric, Hezbollah Argentina mixes radical rightist elements with leftist populism. Moreover, Hezbollah Venezuela denies any connection with Lebanon's Hezbollah, whereas the Argentinian branch has close ties with the local Arab Shiite community and with Teheran. Hezbollah Argentina also cooperates with Quebracho, an Argentinian militant and political group advocating for "a socially just, economically independent, and politically sovereign country" and



supporting the violent struggle against the regime, Western imperialism, and capitalism (Karmon, 2006, p. 3-5; 10).

What conditions have allowed for Hezbollah to prosper in Venezuela and Argentina in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Venezuela, and Margarita Island in particular, was for many years one of the bases of Lebanon's Hezbollah in Latin America. Margarita Island is a free-trade area where an extensive Arab Muslim community lives. Hezbollah Venezuela became visible there in the early 2000s, when relations between Hugo Chávez and the Iranian President Ahmadinejad were at their highest. Chávez actively supported Iran's nuclear program and accused Israel of committing a "new Holocaust" during the 2006 Lebanon war. In Argentina, many radical right and radical left movements with anti-Semitic and anti-US views can be found. Some, such as the right-wing and anti-Semitic Norberto Ceresole, developed close ties with Venezuela and Hezbollah during the 1990s. The Argentinian governments' tolerance towards radicalism and their slow action regarding the Buenos Aires bombings (discussed below) have forged a permissive atmosphere that allows for Hezbollah's increasing presence. So has the Venezuelan regime's silence regarding Hezbollah Venezuela and the bombing attempts at the U.S. Embassy (Karmon, 2006, p. 6-7; 10).

This tolerant attitude towards radicalism is partly explained by the widespread corruption and lack of organization existent in these countries (Karmon, 2006, p. 6-7). For example, former Argentinian President Carlos Menem, of Syrian origin, is believed to have covered up Iran's involvement in the 1994 AMIA bombing in exchange for Teheran's money (Barrionuevo, 2009). However, the Latin Americans' search for their own identity, as well as the growing solidarity between leftist, anti-globalization, and even rightist elements in Latin America with the Islamists, should also be highlighted. Finally, the 2006 Lebanon war possibly gave a boost to Hezbollah LA, too (Karmon, 2006, p. 8-10).

Some scholars argue that Hezbollah just wants access to Lebanon's political system. According to others, what Hezbollah wants is domination—to control the Lebanese polity, where the group has already become an important force. In order to do so, Hezbollah has not only promised justice and social improvements, it has also promoted fear throughout Lebanon. Hezbollah's mere integration into the Lebanese political system would require changing its sophisticated weapons for compromise and negotiation, which are crucial to the Lebanese policy-making. Instead, Hezbollah would rather use its arms as a waiver from these two imperatives (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 94). Indeed, Hezbollah's evolution points to this second hypothesis, which explains the group's military and political character—as stated before, possible thanks to its popular legitimacy and backed by the group's successful military action.

## **2.2. Hezbollah and the Syrian crisis**

As we will see when we analyze the evolution of Hezbollah, the group became more independent from the state sponsors of its early years, Syria and Iran, after the 2006 Lebanon war. In fact, during the ongoing war in Syria, Hezbollah has evolved from an organization that relies on Syria's government into an organization that supports it. However, the group's increasing involvement in the Syrian crisis as Iran's main subcontractor (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 2) shows the enduringly strong tie between these three actors. Different political interests sometimes divide Hezbollah from Syria and Iran, but more often draw them together. The cooperation and confrontation regarding Amal, the older movement representing the Shiite interests, is just one example (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 92).

The survival of Bashar Assad's regime is indeed of great strategic importance for Hezbollah. Its fall would undermine the group's military

capabilities and political influence in Lebanon, for Assad's regime helps Hezbollah develop offensive and deterrent capabilities against Israel. If the United States or the Arab-Muslim countries supporting the rebels took control of Syria, they would be able to promote their agenda and even Israeli interests—above all, the latter's statehood and security that Hezbollah seeks to undermine. To Hezbollah, Syria is an important source of advanced weapons such as long-range rockets and missiles, as well as the main transit point for the weapons that Iran sends (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 1; 5-6). It is estimated that Iran provides Hezbollah with \$200 million annually, which turns Iran into Hezbollah's main source of funds, too (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 4).

Already during the summer of 2006, there was evidence that Hezbollah had moved from low-tech and inaccurate weapons to Iranian high-tech radar-guided anti-ship missiles. Hezbollah's firing of an Iranian "sophisticated radar-guided missile" at an Israeli warship in July 2006 was possible thanks to the help of Iranian troops. Israel has claimed that Hezbollah also has Iranian-made drones, which are more accurate than missiles (Plushnick-Masti, 2006). A 2007 UN Security Council report confirmed that Syria and Iran had supplied Hezbollah with "sophisticated weaponry" (Cordesman, 2006, p. 72).

On the other hand, Hezbollah seeks to exploit Assad's weakness to strengthen its control of the Golan Heights, from which it can attack Israel (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 2). Indeed, Syria provides Hezbollah with a strategic geographic front that compels Israelis to divide their defenses (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 4). A military presence on Syrian territory and the construction of Shiite and Alawite militias is also a way for Hezbollah and Iran to maintain their influence in Syrian politics and society. The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triangle is fueled by religious-sectarian solidarity with the Shiites and Syria's ruling Alawites. Hezbollah and Iran consider the latter as Shiites. Such solidarity

has become stronger as Syrian Shiites have become targets for harassment by the rebels and jihad-affiliated networks (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 1-2; 5; 7; 18-19).

Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, publicly expressed Hezbollah's interests in Syria on May 25, 2013, date of the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon. According to Nasrallah, by taking part in Syria's civil war, Hezbollah is not only protecting Syria, but also and more importantly, Lebanon—and Palestine (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 5). Nasrallah has firmly supported Assad's claim that the events in Syria are the result of American conspiracy. It should be noted that Syria's support is crucial for Hezbollah not to be seen by the Middle East public opinion as Iran's puppet state—since the 2006 Lebanon war, Hezbollah has become a much more autonomous player and wants to be acknowledged as such. Rumors of Iraq replacing Syria in this role given the weakening of Assad's regime show the high importance of this factor. Syria's support for Hezbollah has been favored by the special relationship between Hezbollah and Bashar Assad, who only trusted Hezbollah in Lebanon (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 4). However, the challenge that the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) currently represents not only to the fragile Syrian regime, but also to Iraq, makes one wonder whether Hezbollah will be able to rely on any of these countries' support in the future. As Qassim Abdul-Zahra and Zeina Karam point out (2014), Hezbollah has recently stated that “now the priority is Iraq,” and Syrian rebels are profiting from this, as well as from the vacuum left by Iraq.

Apart from struggling against the Syrian regime's opponents in Lebanon and securing the Syrian-Lebanese border, Hezbollah has provided Syria with growing military, economic, political, and propaganda support. It has also provided intelligence and military training of the Shiite and Alawite armed militias—“the popular army,” created to prepare for

the possible collapse of Assad's regime. Aid from Hezbollah to Syria has increased since 2013, despite the military and political price that Hezbollah is paying, as well as the detrimental effect on its image. Criticism against the group has increased significantly among its Lebanese opponents and throughout the entire Arab world. Hezbollah's position against Israel has been weakened due to the thousands of operatives that have been transferred to Syria. Sunnis now refer to Hezbollah as "the party of Satan," and even Lebanese Shiites condemn the high number of Hezbollah operatives that have been killed. Therefore, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian crisis threatens the political and social equilibrium of Lebanon, and even Hezbollah's preeminence in the country. Nevertheless, and despite Hezbollah's impact on the Syrian crisis being secondary so far, Hezbollah's involvement is likely to grow as the Syrian regime weakens. While Hezbollah fears that the fall of Assad's regime will undermine its power in Lebanon, its opponents see the end of Assad as an opportunity to change the inter-sectarian relationships imposed on Lebanon by Syria's takeover after the civil war (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 2-3; 14-15; 19; 40-41).

The beginning of the Arab Spring brought public support for Hezbollah to its climax; however, some experts argue that Hezbollah is now going through hard times. Although the Syrian rebellion certainly jeopardizes financial and arms supply from Iran to Hezbollah, this argument lies mostly on Hezbollah's above-mentioned loss of support due to its involvement in the Syrian crisis. The popularity of Sunni Islamic parties opposing Israel but also condemning oppressive Arab dictatorships is rising. Hezbollah cannot count on the support of the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite its close ties with Iran and its backing of Hezbollah during the 2006 Lebanon war, the Brotherhood disapproves of Assad's repression. Leftist secular groups in the region strongly oppose Hezbollah, too, for they consider it an ally of the repressive Syrian regime. Therefore, Hezbollah's promises of justice and social improvement are

less and less credible. All of these negative aspects resulting from Hezbollah's involvement in Syria are undermining two of Hezbollah's main sources of legitimacy: its image as the only force capable of opposing Israel, demonstrated by its survival after the 2006 Lebanon war (Cordesman, 2006, p. 71), and its image as the leader of all the oppressed people's resistance. In other words, by supporting Assad's regime, Hezbollah is losing its credibility in the Middle East. The new regimes that have emerged in the region following the Arab Spring and that also oppose Israel and seek independence from the West look as an attractive alternative to the Sunni majority. Indeed, Hezbollah has lost the crucial support of the Sunnis who, tired of the dictatorships' repression backed by the West and furious at Israel's behavior, had overcome sectarian differences (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 1; 3-4; 5-7).

### **2.3. Theoretical framework**

Let us now briefly look at the definitions of some concepts that are key to the understanding of this paper.

#### **2.3.1. Concept definition: terrorism, insurgency, counterinsurgency, weak state, failed state, Islam, Islamism, Sunnism and Shiism**

- Terrorism

There are many different definitions of terrorism, which stem from the general disagreement on its very nature and from the profound changes that this kind of activity has experienced over the past decades.

Bruce Hoffman takes a general approach: terrorism is "the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in pursuit of political change." Terrorist acts are aimed at causing a psychological impact on an audience larger than the immediate victims. The target group might be an ethnic or religious community, an entire country, a particular government or

political party, or the public opinion in general. Through the creation of fear and the media impact of their acts, terrorists try to either generate or consolidate power—a power they need to promote a political change at the national or the international level (Hoffman, 2006, p. 1-41).

Brian Michael Jenkins' understanding of terrorism fits today's Hezbollah quite well. As Jenkins explains, terrorism has changed dramatically over the last forty years. Although the term *terrorism* dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in the 1970s it did not yet refer to a distinct mode of armed conflict. Jenkins defines *terrorism* as “a generalized construct derived from our concepts of morality, law, and the rules of war.” He also highlights that *terrorists* “are shaped [and motivated] by culture, ideology, and politics.” Jenkins points out that terrorists are not “monolithic,” but neither are they isolated: terrorists innovate, exploit new technologies, cooperate and learn from each other, debate tactics, and use doctrines and theories to justify their acts (Jenkins, 2006, p. 117).

To sum up, Jenkins asserts that, while terrorists have increased their violence, found new sources of funds, created new organizational models, successfully exploited new communication technologies, and undertaken global approaches, none of them have achieved their “stated long-range goals.” However, some of them might materialize in the future, for no one would have predicted in the past how contemporary terrorism would be like (Jenkins, 2006, p. 128-129).

The disagreement on whether Hezbollah should be considered a terrorist organization or not perfectly illustrates the existence of different definitions of terrorism. However, Hezbollah, which is today much more than a “classical” terrorist group, fits in both Hoffman's and Jenkins' explanations of terrorism.

- Insurgency

Insurgency and counterinsurgency are the struggle between a state and non-state actors for a contested political space. As David Kilcullen states, today's insurgencies differ significantly from those of the 1960s at the level of policy, strategy, operational art, and tactical technique (Kilcullen, 2006-2007, p. 111). By looking at the main aspects of insurgencies today, we can consider Hezbollah within the framework of the Lebanese state.

First, while classical insurgency represented a challenge to a functioning but fragile state, contemporary insurgency might either follow state failure or pre-date the government. Such is the case in Afghanistan and, in a way, also in southern Lebanon, where Hezbollah has taken advantage of a vacuum of power. Contemporary insurgency might not be aimed at taking over a functioning government, but at contesting an ungoverned space, as is the case in Chechnya and Somalia and, again, in southern Lebanon. This implies that the goal of insurgents is often to fragment the state rather than to govern. In the case of religious insurgencies seeking God's favor, there is a complete lack of a practical objective. However, in the case of Hezbollah, we will see that not only does the group seek to fragment an already divided state, but also to dominate. On the other hand, modern insurgency often lacks a unified strategy—competing groups with different agendas can be identified. Whereas according to classical theory the insurgent initiates the fighting, nowadays the government or the invading coalition forces are often the ones causing the rise of a reactive insurgency. To many, Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon was the direct cause of Hezbollah's rise. In Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Chechnya, counterinsurgents indeed represented a revolutionary change, whereas insurgents sought to either preserve the status quo or to repel an occupier (Kilcullen, 2006-2007, p. 111-115).



Kilcullen also emphasizes the importance of the “globalization effect,” referring to the rise of a worldwide audience and to the existence of instantaneous means for insurgents to publicize their cause. Global communications make it easier to build moral, financial and personnel support. They allow for cyber-mobilization, also known as “electronic levee en masse.” The latter has become vital for Hezbollah and other insurgent groups, since it has allowed them to create a “virtual sanctuary” beyond the reach of counterinsurgent forces. As for the operational level, although insurgency and counterinsurgency remain a competition of sides seeking to gain the support of the population, nowadays actions can have immediate strategic impacts. Globalization has also given modern insurgencies a transnational character: they cooperate with insurgencies in other countries. With regards to Hezbollah, cooperation sides with the Syrian regime *against* the insurgency. Furthermore, collaboration between cells has replaced formal and unified organizations. Kilcullen also highlights the urban character of today’s insurgencies. In cities, the increased media presence enhances the disruption potential. The coexistence between the population and the insurgencies in cities, together with the fact that many insurgents are now much wealthier than classical insurgents, explains the often close ties between current insurgencies and the population (Kilcullen, 2006-2007, p. 116-119).

- Counterinsurgency

Kilcullen’s description of today’s insurgency inevitably needs to be taken into account when assessing contemporary counterinsurgency (“COIN”). Despite many fundamentals of classical counterinsurgency theory remaining significant today, these are not enough to deal with modern insurgency: new mental models are

needed. Bernard Fall declares that, “if it works, it is obsolete” (Kilcullen, 2006-2007, p. 119; 122).

Kilcullen names seven elements to take into account when fighting modern insurgencies. First, the clash between insurgency and counterinsurgency should be seen as a competition to mobilize local, regional, and global support, which will be critical to succeed. The areas of interest and influence of modern counterinsurgency therefore need to be global, since, as mentioned before, 21<sup>st</sup> century insurgents exploit a global “virtual sanctuary.” This makes diplomacy and the pursuit of global intelligence operations very important. Cooperation between the government forces and international organizations, global media, and religious leaders is more likely to succeed over trying to impose a formal unity of effort. Global communications also imply that perception is often more important than actual military success. Moreover, modern counterinsurgency needs to control a complex “conflict ecosystem” rather than a single adversary, and should take into account that defeating the insurgency might not be enough: it is also necessary to prevent it from evolving into terrorist groups, which is a likely outcome in a climate of cell-based organization, bomb-based tactics, improved lethality, and, again, the useful tool that global communications represent. Finally, Kilcullen declares that basic intelligence related to the knowledge of the physical, human, cultural, and informational terrain might be more critical than secret intelligence (Kilcullen, 2006-2007, p. 119-122).

- Weak state

Two main components define a weak state: institutional weakness and the lack of legitimacy (Atzili, 2010, p. 758).

The state is institutionally fragile, to the point that the efficiency and penetration of state institutions into the civil society is

minimal, and the state lacks a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. As we will see, this was the case in southern Lebanon between the withdrawal of Israel in the year 2000 and the 2006 Lebanon war. There is also weakness when it comes to the state's bureaucracy, taxation system, and provision of public goods. As for the lack of legitimacy, the state is weak to the point that, due to its inability to provide essential services and security, a large part of the population does not see it as legitimate. Therefore, the population does not identify with the state neither is it loyal to it (Atzili, 2010, p. 758).

- Failed state

Essentially, a failed state is one in which “the inability of the state to control its own territory creates a vacuum of power from which the non-state actor can usurp state power and enjoy a freedom of action within the state.” In such a state, the lack of police or military control allows non-state groups to establish and organize themselves (Atzili, 2010, p. 760). To this basic definition, we must add all the characteristics of a weak state outlined above.

- Islam

Islam is one of the three main monotheist religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. It was revealed by the Prophet Muhammad in Arabia in the year 632 and later spread throughout the world (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 2). The followers of Islam are known as Muslims, and they believe in only one God, Allah (BBC, 2009). Despite Islam's religious center being the Middle East (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 2), only 20% of today's more than 1.5 billion Muslims live in the Middle East and North Africa (BBC, 2013)—the MENA region. Indonesia, Pakistan, India, and Nigeria are some of the countries with the largest Muslim population. As a consequence, contrary to popular belief,

Arabic is not the language spoken by most Muslims (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 2).

Islam is based on the Koran, which is the holy book of Islam containing the words of Allah, and the Sunnah, containing the tradition and sayings of the Prophet. For Muslims, these books represent a sacred doctrine that needs to be interpreted. In other words, their meaning depends on the subjective interpretation they receive (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 2).

- Sunnism and Shiism

Muslims identify themselves with different aspects of the Islamic tradition. Sunnism and Shiism are the two main branches of Islam (BBC, 2013). The split originated after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, and was the consequence of a dispute over who should lead the Islamic community. Whereas the Sunnis considered Prophet Muhammad as the final prophet—the following Muslim figures are seen as temporary—the Shiite claimed the right of Ali, the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad, and his descendants to lead the Muslim community. Although both sects have co-existed and share many beliefs and practices, there are differences in the fields of doctrine, ritual, law, theology, and religious organization (BBC, 2014). Tensions have existed between Sunnis and Shiites from time immemorial, including armed conflicts between the two communities, and continue today. As Ladeveze Piñol explains (2013, p. 7), the frustration of the Shiite given the leadership of the Umayyad Caliphate after Prophet Muhammad's death led to the configuration of Shiism as a political and religious theory of power between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Approximately 85-90% of the world's Muslims are Sunnis. In the Middle East, Sunnis are concentrated in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi

Arabia and represent about 90% of the total population (BBC, 2013). On the other hand, Shiites make up roughly 10% of all Muslims. According to a 2009 report from the Pew Forum, the total Shiite population is estimated between 154 to 200 million. Iran hosts the largest Shiite majority, with more than 66 million citizens that account for almost 90% of the country's population. Shiites are a majority in Iraq and Bahrain, too. Large Shiite communities can also be found in Kuwait, Yemen, Lebanon, Qatar, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (BBC, 2013).

Finally, it should be noted that, in Sunni countries with large Shiite minorities, the latter are usually among the poorest. They also tend to see themselves as oppressed and discriminated against (BBC, 2013). However, in Lebanon and in some places in Iraq, it is Sunnis who feel that the other sects oppose them. Consequently, the Lebanese Sunnis see hope for salvation in the Syrian insurgency (Khashan, Summer 2013, p. 74).

- Islamism and fundamentalist Islam

As opposed to the Islamic religion, Islamism is an ideology based on the Koran and the Sunnah. Islamism attempts to solve social problems by strictly applying the political and religious principles in the Koran and the Sunnah, as well as the moral code and religious law inspired on these two and embodied in the Sharia. Islamism also aims at creating an Islamic State based on the Sharia, which would be applied to all spheres of society—economy, politics, etc. In other words, Islamism is based on the literal interpretation of the Koran and the Sunnah and does not separate religion from politics (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 2; 14-15). It represents an attempt to turn the Islamic religion into an ideology with a systematic program to deal with the different spheres of life. Therefore, Islamism offers a way to control both society and state power (Pipes, 1998).

In short, Islamism is an ideology based on Islam and with certain political objectives (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 3). At present, Islamism runs, for instance, the governments ruling in Iran and Turkey, and represents a significant force of opposition in Lebanon and Egypt, among other countries. However, Islamists only represent about 10% of the Muslim population (Pipes, 1998).

Finally, fundamentalist Islam also interprets the Koran and the Sunnah literally. Moreover, Islamic fundamentalists defend this interpretation, sometimes violently, as the only valid one. In other words, fundamentalist Islam is the sometimes-violent defense of Islamism as the only correct interpretation of Islam (Gil Pérez, 2010, p. 6). Some examples of contemporary fundamentalist Islamic groups are Hamas, al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, al-Shabaab, and the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban.

### **2.3.2.Hypotheses: Hezbollah has had an impact on the conduct of policy in the Middle East, particularly since 2006/Hezbollah: terrorism and insurgency**

This paper sets out the following main hypothesis: that particularly since the year 2006, when Hezbollah fought the Second Lebanon war against Israel, Hezbollah has influenced the policies of several international actors in the Middle East. The paper also considers a secondary hypothesis: that Hezbollah can be defined as a hybrid between a terrorist organization and an insurgent group.

The analysis that follows looks at Hezbollah's evolution throughout the years in order to afterwards be able to test the main hypothesis. This paper will first examine how Syria and Iran have used Hezbollah since well before 2006 in order to pursue their political and strategic interests in the region. In other words, Hezbollah served as an instrument for these two countries before the 2006 Lebanon war. After this conflict, the increasingly autonomous Hezbollah has represented somewhat of an ally for Syria and Iran. On

the other hand, Hezbollah has been a serious threat to others, especially to Israel. Indeed, Hezbollah's terrorism has soon had political consequences. Hezbollah's increasing violent actions led to Israel's launching of "Operation Accountability" already in July 1993. In 1996, Israel's "Operation Grapes of Wrath" was launched in retaliation for Hezbollah's rocket attacks. Most notably, the loss of Israeli lives led to increasing domestic pressure on the Israeli government to end the occupation of southern Lebanon in the year 2000 (Anti-Defamation League, 2001). Many observers state that it was again Hezbollah's violence that caused Israel's decision to invade southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. The group's capability of opposing—and defeating?—Israel was also demonstrated by the 2006 Lebanon war (Cordesman, 2006, p. 71). As a result, since this war, the group has remained a key reference point for Israel's security calculations (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 93).

Hezbollah's demonstration of power in the 2006 Lebanon war even caused Syria, Hezbollah's traditional sponsor, to increase its own irregular warfare capabilities (Cordesman, 2006, p. 10). Regardless of whether the different Western states consider Hezbollah as a terrorist organization or not, they are certainly compelled to take its role in the Middle East into account, too. In short, this paper argues that especially Israel—the state that is most threatened by the group—and the US—the Jewish state's main ally—are aware of the change in the region's status quo stemming from a more autonomous Hezbollah with means to pursue its own agenda, and have responded trying to counter this threat. To prove the secondary hypothesis, this paper looks at the various activities of the group. It focuses on suicide attacks, Hezbollah's role as a surrogate state in Lebanon, and the group's communication strategy and popular support. This will allow us to see if the group fits the definitions of terrorism and insurgency outlined above.

### **3. Objective**

The aim of this paper is to prove the main hypothesis through the analysis of Hezbollah's evolution. This will allow us to measure the group's impact on the conduct of policy in the Middle East and to assert that, compared to the years previous to 2006, when Hezbollah was a Syrian and Iranian instrument, the group's influence in the region has increased significantly. Therefore, this dissertation attempts to measure Hezbollah's strategic importance in the Middle East as a political and military actor.

Indeed, the 2006 Lebanon war changed the perception of Hezbollah in Israel and the rest of the world. The fact that Hezbollah managed to oust the Israelis from Lebanon in 2006 shocked most observers. This made Hezbollah appear as a powerful player in the region. By looking at the group's evolution since its creation in 1982, this dissertation's aim is to provide the reader with a comparative overview that backs the main hypothesis: certainly, since 2006, Hezbollah has become a much more autonomous group, focused on its own agenda and with the means to pursue its interests—not only those of Syria or Iran—and, therefore, to alter regional policy. The paper will focus on Israeli and American reaction to this new status quo in order to prove the main hypothesis.

Secondarily, a brief study of Hezbollah's activities—overall, suicide attacks, the group's role as a surrogate state in Lebanon, and its communication strategy and popular support—aims to back the proposed definition of Hezbollah as a hybrid between a terrorist organization and an insurgent group.



#### **4. Methodology**

In order to prove the hypotheses, this dissertation uses a variety of scholarly and newspaper articles, as well as information and diverse opinions obtained from different books and websites in English, French and Spanish. All of the sources used are reliable and their authors have been properly cited. One of them—Mr. Cordesman—was contacted in order to request his permission to use one of his works. The structure of the paper is based on a first descriptive and then analytical and comparative approach, aimed at providing the reader with the historical background upon which the analysis is later carried out. The comparison of Hezbollah's role and impact before and after 2006 allows us to highlight key changes that support the dissertation's main hypothesis and that make its veracity evident. When it comes to the secondary hypothesis, suicide attacks, Hezbollah's role as a surrogate state in Lebanon, and its communication strategy and popular support have been considered as key elements because of their importance within Hezbollah's strategy and because they clearly illustrate the definitions of terrorism and insurgency presented before.

After outlining its purpose and reasons, this paper reviews the relevant background: it briefly goes through Hezbollah's role in the Middle East—how the organization has become more than just a radical Islamic terrorist group, currently involved in the Syrian and Iraqi crisis, which will indeed have important consequences in the region and on Hezbollah itself. The definition of a few basic concepts that are necessary to properly understand this paper comes after that, followed by the statement of the main and secondary hypotheses, which later connects with the objective of the dissertation. Then, after the present "Methodology" section comes the main part of this paper: the analysis of Hezbollah's impact on the conduct of policy in the Middle East, based on an overview of Hezbollah's evolution between 1982 and the 2006 Lebanon war. Suicide attacks, Hezbollah's role as a surrogate state in Lebanon, and the group's communication strategy and popular support, which are significant elements within the group's strategy, are also analyzed. This allows

us to prove the secondary hypothesis. Finally, the paper looks at the actual consequences of Hezbollah's activities especially on Israeli and U.S. policies in the Middle East since 2006 in order to back the main hypothesis. The conclusion includes a summary of the paper and the result of the hypotheses. It also looks at future expectations.

## **5. Analysis: What impact has Hezbollah had on the conduct of policy in the Middle East since 2006?**

### **5.1. The 1982-2006 years: the origins and evolution of Hezbollah**

#### **5.1.1. The 80s: Iran, Syria and Lebanon. Hezbollah and suicide attacks**

Hezbollah, trained and financed by Iran, was established in the Lebanese Bekaa region following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 (Atzili, 2010, p. 765). With this invasion, Israel aimed at ending the PLO's strikes that had been going on since the organization was ousted from Jordan in 1970. The Israelis also attempted to end the regional instability stemming from the clashes between Christians, Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, and the different political forces, including the PLO, struggling to occupy the country's vacuum of power. In order to stop Israel's advance, Syria consolidated its military presence in Lebanon, too (Blinder, 2008, p. 3).

In this context, Hezbollah started to operate in southern Lebanon, where Israel and its proxy militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), had a monopoly over the use of force (Atzili, 2010, p. 765). Hezbollah built its power on the grounds of the Shiite alienation from the Lebanese state. In the early 1980s, the Shiite community in Lebanon was poor and marginalized, and suffered the most from Israel's retaliation strikes against the Palestinian attacks, since it lived near the border. This situation and a lack of administrative and institutional void due to the absence of the Lebanese state, which we will analyze in depth when we look at the 2006 Lebanon war, allowed Hezbollah to build a base of popular support. The group did so by providing the necessary services in a comprehensive manner (Atzili, 2010, p. 765; 767-768).

Iran also needs to be mentioned when talking about the establishment of Hezbollah, which resembles quite closely Iran's radical ideological version of Islam and which has allowed the latter to increase its political influence in the region. Indeed, after the 1982

Israeli invasion, Lebanon became a spot from which Iran's proxies—Hezbollah among them—could directly attack Israel and Western forces in Beirut. Iran managed to do so by building the first training facilities for Hezbollah in the Lebanese Bekaa Valley. It also assumed the responsibility of Hezbollah's training and religious and political indoctrination. Although Hezbollah has developed some independent financial sources over the years, Iran is to this day its main financial provider, accounting for millions of dollars annually, both for military activity and for the provision of social services. On an operational level, although Iran does not currently control Hezbollah's agenda, there is significant ideological, financial and military cooperation between both sides (Atzili, 2010, p. 770-771). Hezbollah's leader in the 80s, Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, did not fully support Iran's revolutionary concept that equated Khomeini with the Mahdi (the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam in occultation) and called for the respect of Lebanon's religious diversity within an Islamic context. However, nowadays Hassan Nasrallah promotes a maximalist and rightist program in which a Lebanese Islamic republic would be followed by a pan-Islamic movement (Levitt, 2013).

Syria, which has been Iran's main ally since the Iran-Iraq War, cooperated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in the training and financing of Hezbollah in the 1980s (Atzili, 2010, p. 771). We should highlight Syria's military and political isolation from Israel's main Arab neighbors, resulting from Israel's peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan and which makes Syria's ties with Hezbollah and Iran quite important (Cordesman, 2006, p. 8). Indeed, Hezbollah has ended up becoming a valuable strategic asset of Syria in its relations with Israel and the West. For instance, Hezbollah's continuing resistance even after Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in the year 2000 allowed Syria to pressure Israel to give up the Golan Heights (Atzili, 2010, p. 771-772). The latter had been occupied by the Israelis since the 1967 war. Apart from representing an advance of the Syrian

regional hegemonic aspirations, Syria's presence in Lebanon during the 1980s allowed the former to benefit from the fertile Bekaa region. This area became an important source of food and raw materials for drug trafficking (Blinder, 2008, p. 3-4). Lebanon became a major drug production and transit zone, increasingly dependent on illicit drug and cash flows as a result of the country's division and occupation. Hashish and opiates are the main drugs obtained from the Bekaa region (Gootenberg, 2012). In turn, by cooperating with Syria, Hezbollah was watching over one of the pillars of its ideology, which gives the organization legitimacy, popularity, and the justification for its armed status—its resistance against Israel. Therefore, we can state that the character of the relations between Hezbollah and Syria has been more strategic than ideological (Atzili, 2010, p. 771-772).

The changes in the Syrian leadership after Hafiz Assad's death, together with the 2005 Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and the 2006 war with Israel, changed the relationship between Hezbollah and Syria, allowing Hezbollah to become a much more autonomous group (Atzili, 2010, p. 772). Despite all this, as we have seen, nowadays Hezbollah still depends heavily on both Iran and Syria.

Finally, suicide attacks became a key feature defining Hezbollah in the 80s. In fact, the terrorist group became worldwide known because of this "deadly new form of terrorism," which had never been seen on such scale before (Michaels, 2013).

About thirty years ago, three devastating suicide attacks in Beirut over an 18-month period presented the world with the Shiite Hezbollah militia. First, on April 18, 1983, a suicide bombing hit the U.S. embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people. Six months later, the October 23, 1983 bombings of Multinational Force bases in Beirut killed 241 Americans and 58 French. The first was carried out by a young Lebanese Shiite man who blew up a truck full of explosives at the United States Marine Battalion Headquarters Building. Seconds later, another member of Hezbollah carried out a similar attack on

the French Multinational Force (MNF) building, located just about four miles away (Levitt, 2013).

Hezbollah's targeting not only of fellow Lebanese but also of international peacekeeping forces represented a turning point. Later, as we will see in the following section, Hezbollah and Iran's interest in forcing foreign forces out of Lebanon would expand to attacks on Western interests abroad. Actually, already in 1985, the CIA considered "Iranian-sponsored terrorism" as the biggest threat to U.S. presence in the wider Middle East. Hezbollah also carried out attacks in countries like the Republic of Congo and Germany, attempting to have its jailed members set free (Levitt, 2013).

The bloody outcomes of suicide attacks allow perpetrators to maximize their goal of instilling fear on a wide audience. The 1990s bombings in Argentina, which will be analyzed in the following section, brought about massive destruction once more. These actions aimed at provoking fear on a wide audience certainly suggest that Hezbollah meets the characteristics of terrorist groups as defined earlier in this paper.

#### **5.1.2. The 90s: the bombings of the Israeli Embassy (1992) and the AMIA (1994) in Buenos Aires**

Hezbollah increased its violent activities significantly during the 1990s. The killing of 7 Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon led to Israel's launching of "Operation Accountability" in July 1993 against Hezbollah's terrorists. Three years later, Israel's "Operation Grapes of Wrath" was aimed at retaliating for Hezbollah's rocket attacks (Anti-Defamation League, 2001).

In 1992 and 1994, two bombings hit the Jewish community in Argentina and marked the arrival of Islamic terrorism to Latin America. The first bomb exploded on March 17, 1992 at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 people and injuring more than 250. Despite Islamic Jihad had claimed responsibility, six Lebanese

nationals and a Brazilian, all members of Hezbollah, were arrested. They had to be released shortly after due to the lack of evidence. The slow investigation brought no results (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015). Then, in 1994, Hezbollah carried out another bombing: that of the Jewish AMIA cultural center (the Argentine-Jewish Mutual Association, *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* in Spanish), killing 85 people (Karmon, 2006, p. 4; 7). About 300 were injured (Kershner, 2013).

In 1996, there was a breakthrough: findings suggested that the first bomb had exploded inside of the Embassy instead of outside in a car. The Argentinian Supreme Court started blaming the Israelis (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015). Rumors said that what had exploded was an arsenal held by the latter in the basement of the Embassy (Salbuchi, 2009). However, a phone call intercepted in 1998 from the Iranian Embassy in Argentina provided evidence that Iran had been involved. Argentina reacted by expelling six Iranian diplomats. The terrorists responsible for the attack were themselves not identified (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015).

Investigations stalled until 2005, when false testimonies and the burning of incriminating evidence related to the attack on the AMIA came to light. President Nestor Kirchner admitted that the former Argentinian government had covered up vital information. Finally, in November 2005, the Lebanese member of Hezbollah Ibrahim Hussein Berro was identified as the suicide bomber in the 1994 AMIA catastrophe. In October 2006, top Iranian officials were formally accused of organizing and financing the bombing, and Hezbollah of perpetrating it (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015). Among the accused, former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Culture and Islamic Guidance Ministry representative in Argentina, Mahsan Rabani, were included (Karmon, 2006, p. 7). The ultimate approval of the bombing appeared to have

been made by Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. In 2007, Argentina obtained Interpol arrest orders for five Iranians and a Lebanese over the AMIA bombing. In 2012, Argentina's former President Carlos Menem and other officials were put on trial for concealing evidence regarding Iran's involvement and for protecting accomplices, among them the Syrian-Argentinian businessman Alberto Kanoore Edul. Arrest warrants were also issued for Iranian Defense Minister Ahmad Vahidi and former Prime Minister Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Argentinian, Israeli, and U.S. officials widely blamed Hezbollah and Iran for the attack on the AMIA (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015). However, some questioned the allegations, claiming they were based exclusively on intelligence provided by the CIA and Mossad (Salbuchi, 2009).

Surprisingly, in 2013, Argentina signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran, outraging Argentinian-Jewish leaders (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015). Israel summoned the Argentinian ambassador to explain such agreement, which intended to establish a joint Argentinian-Iranian commission to investigate the 1994 AMIA bombing, for which we have seen Iran is widely blamed (Kershner, 2013).

In January 2015, the prosecutor investigating the attacks, Alberto Nisman, was due to present evidence that Iran was behind the bombings and that the Argentinian government had covered things up. However, he was found dead just hours before his scheduled testimony. Evidence suggests he was murdered, which seems rather plausible given that Nisman had identified the Iranian leaders and Hezbollah members involved in the attacks, as well as Iran's terror cells in Latin America. He had also unveiled the efforts of Argentina's current President Cristina Fernández and Foreign Minister Hector Timerman to cover up both Iran and Hezbollah's involvement. However, President Cristina Fernández claims that Nisman's allegations against her government are groundless. To date,



no one has been convicted for either of the attacks (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015).

It is interesting to point out the view on these attacks of some radical right-wing thinkers, such as the Argentinian sociologist and political scientist Norberto Rafael Ceresole, author of the anti-Semitic and anti-American texts titled “The Falsification of the Argentinean Reality in the Geopolitical Space of the Jewish Terrorism” and “The Attacks in Buenos Aires, a Product of the Infiltration of the Jewish Fundamentalism in the Service of the Israeli Counter-Espionage.” After the bombing of the AMIA, Ceresole contacted the Iranian regime and visited both Iran and Lebanon, where he got to know “an important, intelligent Arab movement, a patriotic group active in southern Lebanon,” and accused the Jews of the bombing (Karmon, 2006, p. 4).

In short, the early 1990s saw a significant increase of violent acts perpetrated by Hezbollah abroad. As a result, the group gained more visibility internationally. Another example of a recent bombing by Hezbollah abroad is the attack on a bus of Israeli vacationers in Bulgaria in July 2012 (Kershner, 2013).

### **5.1.3. The 2006 Lebanon war: a weak state allows Hezbollah to become stronger**

Despite the many different views, the 2006 Lebanon war certainly allowed Hezbollah to gain momentum and to evolve into something more than a terrorist organization.

In the year 2000, Israel unilaterally withdrew from southern Lebanon, which left the Lebanese government confused and a vacuum of power in the south of the country. This situation clearly reflected Lebanon’s political and military weakness: the state’s military was unable to physically control the south, and there was also a political inability to reach and implement difficult decisions without the consent of all segments of the Lebanese society (Atzili,

2010, p. 765-766). In Blinder's words (2008, p. 1), the political and territorial space—more precisely, the “space-world”—of southern Lebanon was unoccupied. Given that politics are, according to this scholar, a struggle to occupy a limited physical or symbolical space and taking into account that Syria aspired to regional hegemony (Blinder, 2008, p. 1), until 2005, this situation allowed the latter to control Beirut's decisions (Atzili, 2010, p. 766). Indeed, the Syrian interests determined the continuation of Hezbollah's anti-Israeli attacks after Israel's withdrawal in the year 2000. Also in line with the Syrian interests, Hezbollah took control of the south in the aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal, instead of the LA and the Lebanese government. Therefore, the inexistence of the Lebanese government's power, coupled with the Syrian influence, allowed Hezbollah to strengthen militarily and to develop the responsibility of a sovereign in southern Lebanon between the years 2000 and 2006 (Atzili, 2010, p. 766).

At the start of summer 2006, Lebanon appeared to be flourishing. Its economy was showing signs of revival following years of stagnation, tourism was back, and many new buildings were being constructed. Moreover, democracy was being restored after Syria had been ousted from the country thanks to popular resistance and international pressure. The Israeli occupation of the South was also over. Summing up, things were looking up, until the war that brought Israel and Hezbollah face to face. Some blame it on Hezbollah's provocations, others on Israel's overreaction. Either way, the main factor that allowed for the 2006 Lebanon war to take place was Lebanon's above-mentioned state weakness. Indeed, Lebanon constitutes a sanctuary where Hezbollah—and also the PLO in the 1970s, after being ousted from Jordan (Blinder, 2008, p. 3; 5)—has been able to act with autonomy, given that there is no force that can prevent it from doing so (Atzili, 2010, p. 757-758; 764). Lebanon's power is very weak, since the state does not have the monopoly over

the use of force neither is it seen as legitimate by the national non-state actors and the other states making up the region's system of power (Blinder, 2008, p. 1).

These conditions set the stage for the 2006 Lebanon war. The latter was triggered by Hezbollah's July 12<sup>th</sup> raid into Northern Israel (United States Department of State, 2006, p. 10). The group launched several rockets into Israel, crossed the border, and attacked an Israeli patrol. Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and killed three others (Shevtsov, 2007). Five more Israelis were killed when a mission was launched to rescue the two captured soldiers (Borneman, 2009, p. 132). These events were followed by a series of rockets coming from both sides, and Israel ended up launching a full ground offensive into southern Lebanon. The conflict ended on August 11, 2006, when the UN Security Council passed resolution 1701 calling for the immediate cessation of all military operations by both sides (Shevtsov, 2007).

The conditions that Lebanon's weakness offers non-state violent actors such as terrorists or insurgents create the link between state failure and the propensity of the state to be dragged into external conflict. Indeed, since 1982, Hezbollah has been able to use Lebanon's weakness to advance its own transnational agenda. A failed state such as Lebanon lacks law enforcement capability—the weak Lebanese Army (LA) has never been able to monopolize the legitimate use of force, given that there is a lack of political consensus on what its role should be. Lebanon cannot control cross-border refugees neither resist external attempts to use terrorist organizations as proxies. Its bureaucracy, built on sectarian principles, functions like that of a feudal and fractured society, where the political, social and economic power lies in the hands of only a few families. Lebanon has also been unable to create a centralized taxation system that enables the government to collect the necessary revenue both for military and civilian purposes. As a consequence, the low level of state legitimacy stemming from the Lebanese state's

inability to provide essential public services facilitates the terrorists' recruitment task. The lack of state institutions has allowed Hezbollah to operate as a "surrogate state," gaining the popular legitimacy that achieving its goals requires (Atzili, 2010, 758-759; 761). This strategy of making the most out of southern Lebanon's vacuum of power in order to gain the population's support is coherent with the definition of insurgencies we looked at before. It therefore backs our secondary hypothesis that Hezbollah is partly an insurgent group.

The National Pact that the Maronite and Sunni communities reached and that has served as the basic principle of the Lebanese polity since the 1940s has not ended sectarian conflict. Basing state institutions on the principle of "consociationalism"—power-sharing between communities—favors the perpetuation of sectarian identities. In other words, the Lebanese population, which does not feel identified with the dysfunctional state, clearly lacks a common identity. The 2006 Lebanon war further exacerbated the sectarian divide and, therefore, the Lebanese propensity to conflict (Atzili, 2010, p. 762-763).

In response to the continuous attacks perpetrated from Lebanon against Israel in 1996, the latter had launched "Operation Grapes of Wrath." Despite this operation failing, in 2006, Israel responded to Hezbollah's attacks following the same strategic doctrine. While some scholars—Norton among them—argue that both Israeli campaigns were launched to undermine popular support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, the explanation that Israel was just being consistent with past strategic doctrine seems more plausible (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 93). "Massive retaliation" has been consistently used by Israel in the realms of both conventional and unconventional warfare. Israel has repeatedly sent its enemies the message that, if they crossed some explicit "red lines"—for instance, carry out the military invasion of Jordan or a maritime blockade of Israel's sea lanes—a disproportionate military response would inflict such a

defeat on them that the costs of going to war would surely outweigh the benefits (Rodman D., September 2001, p. 77).

The fact that Israel resorted to this strategy means that Hezbollah, whose asymmetric and irregular tactics proved successful against the IDF (Cordesman, 2006, p. 10), managed to provoke significant anxiety among the Israelis. It did so by threatening to unleash an arsenal of rockets that not only would cause many Israeli casualties, but would also destroy the country's economy. To some observers, the main reason behind Hezbollah's instigation of the 2006 clash was not the group's resistance ideology against Israel, but rather the need to turn attention away from the investigation of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination, which pointed to one of Hezbollah's main partners, Syria (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 94). Hariri's assassination indeed advanced Syrian and Iranian interests. Had Hariri's project been successful, Syrian hegemony in Lebanon and Iran's aim to become a more important regional actor would have been undermined (Khashan, Summer 2013, p. 70).

Despite the deficiencies of the Israeli campaign in the 2006 Lebanon war leading many to label it a failure—Syrian President Bashar Assad praised Hezbollah for “defeating the Israeli Army” (Cordesman, 2006, p. 8)—it should be noted that Hezbollah's provocation also brought great damage to its Shiite base of support. The Lebanese Shiite incurred casualties and the destruction of most of the buildings they had constructed with the help of Hezbollah. Therefore, while the idea of perpetual resistance against Israel turns Hezbollah into an agent of Syrian and Iranian power, it also brings problems for the Lebanese Shiite, and for Lebanon's political system. As a consequence of the 2006 conflict, the sectarian divide has grown. The Lebanese Sunnis strongly oppose Hezbollah, and the country's economy and polity have been debilitated.

Despite the negative effects of the 2006 war against Israel on Lebanon, the conflict boosted Hezbollah's overall popularity in the

Middle East. Syria has tried to increase its own irregular warfare capabilities, and the 2006 Lebanon war left Israel especially concerned about the probabilities of another proxy war against Hezbollah, as well as about the transfer of weapons to the latter. Moreover, Israelis realized the need to expand and improve the quality of their manpower. Certainly, although Hezbollah did not achieve a military victory, it outperformed Israel in the political and informational realms, where such asymmetrical conflicts are won or lost. For instance, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) failed to counter Hezbollah's rockets due to a lack of information regarding the location of Hezbollah's launchers (Cordesman, 2006, p. 10; 13; 23; 72; 83; 144).

Hezbollah's popularity later reached a peak when the Arab Spring began, to the point that some young Sunni Egyptians converted to Shiism. The circumstances at the time did indeed help: the Arab public was tired of the dictatorships' repressions—dictatorships that were often backed by the West—and angry at Israel's behavior regarding the Palestinian territories. Therefore, many Egyptians found Hezbollah's criticism of Mubarak's cooperation with the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia—the main opponents of Shiism—rather appealing. Moreover, Hezbollah backed the rebels' cause in the name of the Arab dignity. It also supported the uprisings in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain. However, as we have seen before, Hezbollah's greater involvement in the Syrian crisis has meant a radical turn of events for the group, which has been seen as supportive of Assad's repression and lost credibility and support throughout the Arab world (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 3; 5-6).

On the other hand, the 2006 Lebanon war showed that Syria and Iran could put significant military pressure on Israel by giving military and financial assistance to Hezbollah. Actually, without the Iranian and Syrian arms transfers, the 2006 Lebanon war would never have been possible, neither would Hezbollah have emerged as a

significant force in Lebanon. This is not to say that Hezbollah was a Syrian or Iranian proxy in this war: Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria all seem to have been using each other to pursue their own interests. In fact, Iran and Syria lost many of the missiles they had given Hezbollah without receiving any military benefits in return, and using Hezbollah against Israel has the danger of provoking Israel in ways that risk creating a backlash (Cordesman, 2006, p. 139; 194).

## **5.2. Hezbollah's communication strategy and popular support. Hezbollah as a hybrid between a terrorist organization and an insurgent group**

So far, this paper has focused on Hezbollah's political, military and terrorist branches. However, as we have seen, Hezbollah also counts on an important social branch or popular support base, mostly integrated by the oppressed Shiite population, and earned through the group's portrayal as an advocate for the latter's political interests (Divine, Spring 2008, p. 92). They seek social justice, equity, and the right of the oppressed to resistance (González-Úbeda Alférez, 2012, p. 1). This yearning for a fairer society, which is present throughout the poor and authoritarian Arab world, certainly has the potential to bring Hezbollah the support of non-Shiite Arabs as well. As mentioned before, this was the case with some Egyptian Sunnis at the time of the Arab Spring.

Indeed, Hezbollah needs this popular support, for it gives the group the legitimacy needed to maintain its political and military status, backed by Hezbollah's demonstration of power since the 2006 Lebanon war. But, how does Hezbollah gain popular support? Well, terrorism is—or, at least, it is intended to be—a persuasive tool (Thériault, 2009, p. 14); however, this statement also works in the opposite direction: as Marshall McLuhan once said, “without communication, terrorism would not exist” (Fortner & Fackler, 2014, p. 803). Hezbollah's communication strategy is rather sophisticated compared to that of other terrorist groups (Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC), 2013). Let us have a

closer look at it, for it is of utmost importance in order for Hezbollah to maintain its popular legitimacy, and, ultimately, for the group's very survival.

Hezbollah is perfectly aware of the power of rhetoric, and masters the use of media as an instrument to influence public opinion and increase its number of adherents throughout the Middle East and even the West (Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium (TRAC), 2013). Among the communication tools that the group uses, the propagandistic videos broadcasted on Al Manar TV, Hezbollah's TV channel since 2011, and on the group's radio station (Radio Nur), as well as the information published on Al-Ahad and Al-Intiqad newspapers, should be highlighted. However, today Hezbollah considers its cyberspace presence especially important, given that it permits the spread of both internal information and external propaganda aimed at the Arab-Muslim and Western public. Indeed, the Internet allows Hezbollah to counter the limitations placed on traditional communication channels by Western powers, particularly the United States (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013a, p. 1-2).

Hezbollah has developed its cyberspace presence over the last decade, since the 2006 Lebanon war. As of March 2013, the group was not only active on more than 20 websites in 7 different languages—for instance, the Al-Ahad/Al-Intiqad website in Spanish and the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon website, which is Hezbollah's leading media website and is available in Arabic, Hebrew, Azeri, and English—, but also on several social networks, Youtube, and the Lebanese media, such as the newspaper Al-Akhbar and the TV channel Al-Mayadeen. The last two are affiliated with the group and publicize its ideology and political agenda. Given the high degree of sophistication that Hezbollah's media system has attained, some scholars believe it is supported by Iran. Among the main themes of the group's propaganda are the following: the glorification of the organization, represented as a successful force against



Israel, the existence of which must be rejected; the fostering of the cult of the leader's personality, Hassan Nasrallah, and of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei; the legitimation of terrorism directed towards Israel and the West, based on the ideologies of *shahada* (death as a martyr in the name of Allah), *muqawama* ("resistance"), and jihad; and the dissemination of the Iranian Islamic Shiite ideology as established by the Ayatollah Khomeini. All this reflects on and justifies the different activities carried out by Hezbollah, such as the group's current involvement in Syria (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013a, p. 2-7)—even if the latter in fact owes to Syria's strategic importance for Hezbollah analyzed before.

The group's sophisticated communication strategy and popular support, together with its violent actions and political organization, confirm our secondary hypothesis: Hezbollah is a hybrid between a terrorist and an insurgent group. Its communication strategy is indeed aimed, on the one hand, at maximizing the psychological impact of terrorist acts—in other words, at spreading fear on a wide audience, which terrorists seek—and, on the other, at legitimizing its discourse, especially among the Shiite population, which is key to gain the popular support any insurgency relies on. Actually, as we have seen, Hezbollah's popularity reached its climax at the beginning of the Arab Spring thanks to propaganda aimed at the wider Arab public, tired of oppressive regimes backed by the West and angry at Israel's behavior in the occupied territories. The importance that Hezbollah places in popular support backs the categorization of the group as an insurgency. Such classification is upheld if we take into account Hezbollah's activity in Lebanon since its very beginnings—in the 1980s, the group made the most out of the vacuum of power in southern Lebanon in order to build its territorial and support base; now, it is struggling to dominate the Lebanese politics.

### **5.3. The consequences of Hezbollah's activities on Israel's and other states' policies in the Middle East since 2006**

As we have seen in the previous sections of this paper, Israel has been the primary focus of Hezbollah's terrorism, which continues threatening Jewish targets around the world (Anti-Defamation League, 2001). Hezbollah also targets Western countries with a presence in the Middle East or supporting Israeli objectives. The group is considered responsible for several attacks in the Middle East, Western Europe, Latin America and Asia (Anti-Defamation League, 2001).

Although Israel conducted some operations in retaliation for Hezbollah's attacks in the 1990s, the first significant political move caused by Hezbollah's violent actions was Israel's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000. The latter took place alongside the flight into Israel of members of the SLA and even of some Lebanese families, who feared the advance of Hezbollah. In Israel, the loss of Israeli lives had led to increasing domestic pressure to end the occupation (Anti-Defamation League, 2001). Many observers state that Hezbollah's violence was also the factor leading to Israel's decision to invade southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Even if Israel did not feel threatened, but just overreacted to Hezbollah's provocations, the ultimate outcome of that invasion was Israel's second depart from Lebanon after incurring a significant number of casualties (Atzili, 2010, p. 757)—164 Israelis died and 1489 were wounded (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, n.d.). Not only did the 2006 Lebanon war leave Israel fearing another war against Hezbollah; the Jewish state also realized the need to expand and improve the quality of its forces. What is more, Hezbollah's success in the 2006 war caused Syria, Hezbollah's traditional sponsor, to increase its own irregular warfare capabilities (Cordesman, 2006, p. 10; 13; 144). To put it another way, Hezbollah's violent actions have indeed had an effect on the Jewish state and on other states' policies in the Middle East, particularly since the 2006 Lebanon war.

What might seem more surprising is the impact that Hezbollah's actions have had on the policies of a more powerful stakeholder in the region and in the wider international system: the US, Israel's main ally. Indeed, the 2006 Lebanon war also changed the U.S. policies in the Middle East. The Americans have tried to undermine the threat posed by Hezbollah through the attainment of three main policy goals: the end of arms transfer, disarmament, and putting an end to Hezbollah's "state within a state" by giving control of the whole territory to the Lebanese government (Jain, 2010). This last objective is consistent with Max Weber's assertion that the monopoly of force is crucial to the modern state. Demilitarizing Hezbollah is considered by some U.S. observers as a means to weaken Iran and strengthen Lebanon and Israel (Simon & Stevenson, 2010). In order to achieve these three goals, the United States has opposed the Hezbollah's status as an armed militia by backing the March 14 political coalition (Jain, 2010). The latter, formed in the context of the Cedar Revolution after Hariri's assassination, brought together Sunnis, Druze, and Maronite Christians. The March 14 Coalition won a majority of seats in the parliament in 2005. However, the 2006 Lebanon war altered the balance of power towards Hezbollah, which accused Fouad Siniora's government of conspiring with the United States and Israel to destroy a patriotic Lebanese party (Khashan, Summer 2013, p. 70).

The United States has actually invested significant amounts of money in strengthening the Lebanese government's capabilities—it has devoted more than \$600 million to security assistance programs and \$500 million to civilian assistance programs since 2006 (Jain, 2010). However, the Sunni Future Trend Party that Hariri led and that was part of the March 14 Coalition was weak. It was completely dependent on the Saudi royals for political direction, and the fact that the Saudis decided not to pursue an aggressive Lebanon policy limited its options. After Hariri's assassination, there was a vacuum of power in the Sunni community, which did not oppose the appointment of the pro-Syrian

Najib Miqati as Prime Minister (Khashan, Summer 2013, p. 70-72). The latter resigned in March 2013 as pro-Hezbollah parties and a Sunni-led rival bloc supporting opposing sides in Syria's conflict struggled for power. Sunni Prime Minister Tammam Salam was appointed in April of that year, but was not able to form a cabinet until February 2014 due to rivalries between the March 8 bloc, led by Hezbollah, and the March 14 Coalition, led by the Sunni Future Trend Party. The ministries are controlled by members of one or the other bloc (Bassam & Solomon, 2014) pursuing their own agenda. Political rivalries stemming from sectarian issues are such that, as of December 29, 2014, foreign intervention might take place given the "inability of the domestic political powers to reach an understanding to elect a new president." Indeed, Lebanon has been without a president since the end of Michel Suleiman's tenure on May 25, 2014 (Shanghai Daily, 2014).

Washington has also attempted to constrain Hezbollah's financial activities and to undermine its popular support base. All these efforts appeared to be working when Hezbollah failed to obtain a majority in the 2009 parliamentary elections; however, the group's overall political power did not decrease. On the contrary, Hezbollah has consolidated its influence in Lebanon and strengthened its legitimacy in the eyes of the Shiite population (Jain, 2010). At the same time, Lebanon's main Sunni leaders have been marginalized by a Shiite-Christian-Druze alliance, while radical anti-Hezbollah and pro-Sunni figures have gained popularity (Khashan, Summer 2013, p.73). This reality supports the previously discussed argument that Hezbollah wants to dominate Lebanon's political system.

The truth is, neither brute force nor U.S. diplomatic efforts have so far succeeded in weakening Hezbollah (Jain, 2010). Regarding the limited success of the United States, the halting of Lebanon's deportation of the Sunni Syrian refugees could be mentioned. However, the Lebanese Christian- and Shiite-dominated security forces systematically coerce the refugees. Furthermore, despite its official policy of dissociation from the

Syrian crisis, Lebanon's government has permitted Hezbollah's direct involvement in it and has violated the sanctions imposed on Syria (Khashan, Summer 2013, p. 73). Today, Hezbollah has even larger and more sophisticated military capabilities, as well as greater political influence. As a consequence, some members of the Obama administration, who believe it is possible to achieve some kind of ideological moderation, are considering direct engagement with the group (Jain, 2010). The view that demilitarizing Hezbollah requires talks is also based on the fact that the other actors cooperating with the group—namely, Syria and Iran—cannot be ousted from Lebanon just using military force. Supporters of engagement suggest persuading Hezbollah to “reassess its priorities and ultimately subordinate its objective of extinguishing the state of Israel to that of competing for political primacy in Lebanon” (Simon & Stevenson, 2010).

Actually, the United Kingdom has already directed its political action towards engagement with a group it perceives as a threat. Former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband publicly stated that he wanted the UK's talks with Hezbollah to continue (Simon & Stevenson, 2010). However, other observers fear that engaging in talks when Hezbollah is so strong both politically and militarily might turn out counterproductive. Hezbollah remains determined to challenge the Western interests in the Middle East. Its anti-American stance, first proclaimed in 1985, was emphasized again in the group's 2009 manifesto, where Hezbollah reasoned that the resistance was necessary to counter the U.S. “terror” and plans of domination of the Arab world “politically, economically, culturally, and through all aspects.” Hassan Nasrallah has referred to the armed resistance as a “national necessity.” The group has used violence even against its own people, particularly against political opponents who have challenged its aim to control the Lebanese state (Jain, 2010). On the other hand, Hezbollah's violence coexists today with the group's rising popular legitimacy and political power: why would Hezbollah then be interested in changing its strategy? Prospects for Hezbollah's

demilitarization got even slimmer when a bill was passed in April 2011 allowing Hezbollah to be in government while keeping its weapons. Nevertheless, some Lebanese are suspicious of Hezbollah's military status due to the group's apparent willingness to sacrifice Lebanon in the name of its hatred towards Israel. Thus, Hezbollah is increasingly aware that it needs to build a more mainstream image (Simon & Stevenson, 2010).

To sum up, Hezbollah's activities and rebirth since 2006 have certainly influenced some states' policies in the Middle East. Not only have Israel, the UK, and the United States reacted trying to counter the direct threat that the group represents—especially to the first—but also Syria, which has traditionally used Hezbollah to pursue its strategic objectives, has felt the need to take Hezbollah's asymmetric strategy as an example to follow. However, Israeli and Western efforts have not yielded many substantial results and Hezbollah seems to be getting stronger in the political, military and social realms.

## **6. Conclusion. What can we expect in the future?**

This dissertation aimed to test two hypotheses: first, that Hezbollah has influenced the conduct of policy by several international actors in the Middle East, particularly since the 2006 Lebanon war, and second, that Hezbollah can be defined as a hybrid between a terrorist organization and an insurgent group. Both of them have been proven.

Hezbollah has become significantly stronger since the 2006 Lebanon war against Israel. It has evolved from an emerging terrorist organization and insurgent group, profiting from Lebanon's institutional weakness and from the Lebanese government's lack of legitimacy, into a powerful political and military group with an advanced communication strategy and popular support. The latter comes mainly from the Shiite population in the Arab world. This popular support, fueled by Hezbollah's demonstration of power since the 2006 Lebanon war, gives the group the legitimacy needed to maintain its political and military status. Hezbollah holds a theocratic ideology and an anti-Zionist and anti-American stance. As a terrorist organization, it uses violence, including suicide attacks, to cause a psychological impact and bring public attention to its cause. Its sophisticated communication strategy allows Hezbollah both to maximize the psychological impact of its terrorist acts and to legitimize its actions to secure the popular support insurgencies rely on. Today, the group does not only seek integration into Lebanon's political system: it wants to dominate it. Despite the recent loss of support stemming from Hezbollah's intervention in Syria in favor of Assad's oppressive regime, the group has strengthened militarily and been relatively successful at gaining popularity and political weight since 2006, therefore managing to influence policy both in Lebanon and in the wider Middle East.

Hezbollah became more independent from the state sponsors of its early years, Syria and Iran, after the 2006 Lebanon war. Since then, not only has the group maintained its international presence, first made evident with the 1992 and 1994 bombings in Buenos Aires, but it has also developed its own

agenda and the means to pursue it. However, Hezbollah's increasing involvement in the current Syrian crisis as Iran's main subcontractor shows the enduringly strong tie between these three players, whose different political interests have tended to converge since the very birth of Hezbollah. Syria, together with Iran, which is Hezbollah's main funder, helps the group develop offensive and deterrent capabilities against Israel. Additionally, Syria represents the main transit point for the weapons that Iran sends to Hezbollah. The Iran-Syria-Hezbollah triangle has historically been fueled by religious-sectarian solidarity with the Shiite and Alawite communities. More importantly, Syria is strategically important for Hezbollah to attack Israel and not to be seen as a mere Iranian instrument—Hezbollah wants its increasing autonomy to be acknowledged. Therefore, during the current crisis, Hezbollah has provided Syria with growing military, economic, political, and propaganda support, as well as with intelligence and military training of militias. In other words, during the ongoing war in Syria, Hezbollah has evolved from an organization that relies on Syria's government into an organization that supports it.

Hezbollah is paying a military and political price for its involvement in Syria, as well as undermining its popular image. As a consequence, some observers argue that the political and social equilibrium in Lebanon is being jeopardized, together with Hezbollah's preeminence in the country. Hezbollah's backing of Syria's repressive dictatorship is undermining two of the group's main success tools and sources of legitimacy: its image since the 2006 Lebanon war as the only force capable of opposing Israel, and its image as the leader of all the oppressed people's resistance. In other words, by supporting Assad in the worry that its collapse would jeopardize the arrival of funds and arms and undermine its power in Lebanon, Hezbollah is losing its credibility in the Middle East. In turn, the popularity of Sunni Islamic parties also opposing Israel but condemning oppressive Arab dictatorships backed by the West is rising.

However, Hezbollah's power is still very significant in the political, military, and social realms in Lebanon. The importance that Hezbollah has always attached to popular support given its status of an insurgency, which



profited from the vacuum of power in southern Lebanon in the 1980s in order to build its territorial and support base, makes it highly unlikely that the group's popularity will decrease significantly in the long-term. The fact that Hezbollah's base of popular support is founded on its portrayal as an advocate for social justice, equity, and the right of the oppressed to resistance indeed gives the group the potential to gain the loyalty of the many dissatisfied sectors of the Arab population. This was the case with some Sunni Egyptians during the Arab Spring. As long as Hezbollah maintains its popular legitimacy, its political and military status will probably keep strengthening. This scenario seems even more likely if the findings of this paper are taken into account: Hezbollah has already had an impact on the conduct of policy in the Middle East, particularly since its success in the 2006 Lebanon war, and is an insurgency determined to control Lebanese politics. As Sa'ad al-Hariri, former Prime Minister of Lebanon (Khashan, Summer 2013, p. 69-70), stated,

Hassan Nasrallah is erasing Lebanon from the political map and turning Hezbollah into an alternative for the state and its constitutional, security and military institutions. [...] Nasrallah has declared the establishment of a Shiite defense army to defend Lebanese Shiites regionally and in the world, as if Shiites were his own private property. [...] The country is captive in the hands of Hezbollah, and with it other Lebanese groups and sects. (The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2013b, p. 12; 41-42).

Therefore, Nasrallah's words opening this dissertation need to be revisited, bearing in mind that Hezbollah is an insurgency that has decided both to rule in Lebanon and to have an impact outside of it, anywhere its interests might be jeopardized—no alternative will be accepted, even if it provides Lebanon with the strength that Nasrallah once claimed to be Hezbollah's objective.

Recent events on the Lebanese border suggest that Hezbollah is not willing to give ground at the international level either. For instance, clashes between Israel and Hezbollah in January 2015 caused the death of two Israeli soldiers and a Spanish UN peacekeeper (BBC, 2015). Hezbollah's power in the wider Middle East is certainly evident given the consequences of Hezbollah's

activities on other countries' policies in the region. Israel and the US, the Jewish state's main ally, are aware of the change in the region's status quo stemming from a more autonomous Hezbollah with the means to pursue its own agenda, and have responded trying to counter this threat. Many scholars argue that it was the loss of Israeli lives that led to increasing domestic pressure on Israel to end the occupation of southern Lebanon in 2000. Hezbollah's activity at the time also caused the flight into Israel of members of the SLA. These observers state that it was again Hezbollah's violence that led Israel to invade southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Even if Israel did not feel greatly threatened, but simply overreacted to Hezbollah's provocations, the ultimate outcome of that invasion was Israel's second withdrawal from Lebanon after incurring many casualties. Furthermore, not only did the 2006 Lebanon war leave Israel fearing another war against Hezbollah, but the Jewish state also realized about the need to expand and improve the quality of its defense forces. Hezbollah's success in this war even led Syria to increase its own irregular warfare capabilities. Finally, the 2006 Lebanon war also changed the U.S. policies in the Middle East: the United States has since tried to undermine the threat posed by Hezbollah in three ways—ending arms transfer, promoting disarmament, and putting an end to Hezbollah's "state within a state" by giving the control of all the territory to the Lebanese government. However, neither force nor U.S. diplomatic efforts have weakened Hezbollah. The latter now counts on a remarkable communication strategy based on the use of cyberspace that the group has developed since 2006 and which guarantees Hezbollah the popular legitimacy necessary for its survival. Additionally, Hezbollah has developed even larger and more sophisticated military capabilities, as well as expanded its political influence.

In conclusion, by studying Hezbollah's evolution since its birth in 1982, this dissertation offers a descriptive and then analytical and comparative overview that backs its main hypothesis: since 2006, Hezbollah has become a much more autonomous group, focused on its own agenda, with the means to pursue its interests—not just those of Syria or Iran—and, therefore, able to

alter regional policy, which it has certainly done. Hezbollah has opposed Israel and the West by behaving like a terrorist group. Finally, it has also attacked political opponents in Lebanon, for, as an insurgency that gained the population's support by providing the necessary services Lebanon's government was unable to provide, it is now determined to rule itself, as well as to continue defending its ideals and interests abroad.

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**Annex. Map**

