

## HEZBOLLAH IN TRANSITION: MOVING FROM TERRORISM TO POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

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LEGITIMACY**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Since the 1970s, Hezbollah has transformed itself from a shadowy militant group known primarily for terrorist attacks into Lebanon's pre-eminent political, social, and military force. Today it has an armed militia more powerful than the Lebanese Army and a far-reaching network that delivers welfare goods and social services to its Shiite constituency throughout Lebanon. Hezbollah's power and influence in the Levant drastically complicate the United States' aspirations to advance peace, security, and opportunity in the Greater Middle East.

This paper explores the factors and circumstances that contributed to Hezbollah's ascendancy as a political, social, and paramilitary organization. It further explores the sometimes-counterintuitive manner in which non-state actors not only

stress the traditional Westphalian concept of state sovereignty, but can also reaffirm its validity and utility in the modern world.

## HEZBOLLAH IN TRANSITION: MOVING FROM TERRORISM TO POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

September 11, 2001 made Al Qaeda a household name in the United States and around the world. Since that day, the United States has been at war with this transnational terrorist organization and its affiliates in many corners of the world. Operations from September 2001 to March 2003 removed Al Qaeda's principal ally – the Taliban – from power in Afghanistan but failed to capture or kill Al Qaeda's top leadership. In March 2003, the United States shifted its attention to waging war against Iraq, prompted by the perceived nexus among Saddam Hussein's regime, weapons of mass destruction, and Al Qaeda. For six years, this engagement drained resources from the war in Afghanistan against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. With the change of administrations and the drawdown of the Iraq war in 2009, the United States shifted its attention once again to prosecuting the Afghan campaign against Al Qaeda leadership operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Today, disrupting, dismantling, and defeating Al Qaeda is one of the Obama Administration's highest national security priorities.<sup>1</sup>

For nearly a decade now the United States has focused on Al Qaeda and a resurgent Taliban while other more powerful and potentially more dangerous actors developed virtually unchecked. Hezbollah in Lebanon is bigger, better organized, more technologically advanced, better funded, better trained, and better armed than Al Qaeda and has the ability to sow far greater instability in the Middle East. Since the late 1970s, Hezbollah has transformed itself from a shadowy militant group known primarily for terrorist attacks into the country's pre-eminent political, social, and military force. Today it has an armed militia more powerful than the Lebanese Army and a far-reaching

network that delivers welfare goods and social services to its Shiite constituency throughout Lebanon.

The United States regards Hezbollah as a terrorist group financed by Iran to extend Iranian influence into the Levant. Hezbollah's rising power, both hard and soft, its bellicose anti-Semitic rhetoric, its support for the violent Palestinian group *Hamas*, and its close relationship with the governments of Syria and Iran all create the potential for a major confrontation with Israel – a key U.S. ally. Hezbollah's power and influence in the Levant drastically complicate the United States' aspirations to advance peace, security, and opportunity in the Greater Middle East.<sup>2</sup>

In comparing Al Qaeda with Hezbollah, former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff said Hezbollah "makes Al Qaeda look like a minor league team."<sup>3</sup> Richard Armitage, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, described Hezbollah as the "A-Team of Terrorists" and Al Qaeda as the "B-Team."<sup>4</sup> If this is the case, why is Al Qaeda rather than Hezbollah still the United States' top national security priority? What is Hezbollah and how much of a threat does it present to U.S. national security and interests in the region? What are the policy implications for the United States vis-à-vis Hezbollah?

This paper explores these questions, identifying along the way the factors and circumstances that contributed to Hezbollah's ascendancy as a political, social, and paramilitary organization. It further explores the sometimes-counterintuitive manner in which non-state actors not only stress the traditional Westphalian concept of state sovereignty, but can also reaffirm its validity and utility in the modern world.

Our modern system of international states – and modern international relations theory itself – trace their origins to the exhaustion of the Thirty Years’ War and the 1648 *Peace of Westphalia*, which framers designed to establish a better system for the peaceful interaction of states. Principles derived from the Westphalia settlement that remain most important to international order include 1) the sovereignty of states and the fundamental right of political self-determination within those states; 2) the *legal* equality between states, regardless of size or power; 3) the non-intervention of one state in the affairs of another; 4) a state monopoly on the legitimate use of force. In this system, states are the primary agents in an interstate system of dialogue.

By the late 19th century, although powerful nation-states still sought to influence the affairs of others, forcible intervention by one European state in the domestic affairs of another was less frequent. Two devastating world wars in the first half of the 20th century, however, cast doubt on the state’s claim to absolute sovereignty within its borders. The suffering and destruction caused by the violent clash of states and state violence against its own people left many ready to entertain proposals that would surrender a bit of sovereignty in exchange for a more peaceful means of conflict resolution.

The post World War Two era thus saw the emergence of a global political system based on international law, international agreements, and international organizations, pre-eminently the United Nations, to which all member states agreed to yield some part of their sovereignty in deference to its globally accepted legitimacy. Some predicted the demise of the sovereign state in the “new world order.” By the end of the century, international corporations and non-governmental organizations were also perceived to

be further eroding the economic and political importance of nation-states, and added to predictions of the eventual irrelevance of states and borders. The 20th century saw the creation of new sovereign states that embraced the right of political self-determination (external sovereignty), but often struggled – and continue to struggle – to maintain control within their borders (internal sovereignty).

There is a growing concern that non-state armed groups are becoming major players in a world once dominated by states. The Federation of American Scientists (FAS) refers to the largest of these groups as “para-states” since they are entities that challenge the state’s “monopoly on the use of violence within a specified geographical territory.”<sup>5</sup> The Federation of American Scientists tracks 385 active and defunct entities that in principle dispute the theoretical legitimacy of existing state regimes. Prominent examples include Abu Sayyaf, Al Qaeda, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), Hamas, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Islamic Jihad, Jemaah Islamiya (JI), the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Taliban. In an interconnected world, the destabilization of one country can have major political, military, and economic repercussions in neighboring countries. These countries can become havens for transnational criminals, terrorists, and other violent non-state actors (VNSAs). As a result, many states now face external threats that come increasingly from *within other states* rather than from the *states* themselves.

The loss of the monopoly on the use of force within sovereign territory not only erodes the nation-state itself but also presents serious challenges to the current international order. Can a state unable to: physically control its territory; keep a monopoly on the use of physical force; provide reasonable public services; or

legitimately make collective decisions for its people claim to be a sovereign state? Is it entitled to be regarded by other states as a legal equal and full member of the international community? How can the interstate dialogue be effective if states can no longer be held accountable for what happens on their soil?

In this context, what are the implications for Lebanon and the region, and international order itself, given Hezbollah's ascendancy in power, military capability, and potential for both violent and humanitarian action?

In his 1919 lecture *Politics as a Vocation*, Max Weber offered a definition of the state that remains pivotal in Western social and political thought today. He said,

Today the relation between the state and violence is an especially intimate one. . . We have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. . . Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence.<sup>6</sup>

Anything that threatens a state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force threatens the state itself. When this monopoly on the use of force is broken by warlords, paramilitary groups, or terrorists, the very existence of the state becomes questionable. This has been under-appreciated as a global phenomenon partly because the violent challengers have taken different forms in different parts of the world. These forms include tribal and ethnic groups, warlords, drug-trafficking organizations, youth gangs, terrorists, militias, insurgents, and transnational criminal organizations. In many cases, these groups are challenging the state; in others, they are cooperating and colluding with state structures; in some, the state is a passive bystander while they fight one another.<sup>7</sup>

In a highly globalized economy in which the principal underpinnings are stability and international order, the implications of powerful non-states actors becomes clear. Sophisticated VNSAs like Hezbollah not only threaten the state's monopoly on violence, they provide alternative forms of governance, as well as selectively distributed goods and services that the state is unable or unwilling to provide. When non-state actors are able to provide a form of governance in an area where the state is weak or absent, the organization can become empowered by building a loyal constituency. In doing so, the organization can become a quasi-state unto itself and present a serious challenge to the legitimacy of the state.<sup>8</sup>

These violent non-state actors share certain characteristics. They also present a common challenge to national and international security, a challenge that is far greater than the sum of the individual types of group, and one that is likely to grow rather than diminish over the next several decades.<sup>9</sup> These groups exploit the vulnerabilities in the Westphalian system and utilize the technology and interconnectivity of the globalized world to advance their radical agendas.<sup>10</sup>

Today, nobody understands this and does it better than Hezbollah. For three decades, with assistance from its state sponsors Iran and Syria, Hezbollah has waged an evolved form of Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW) against the western-backed government of Lebanon and the state of Israel. Fourth-generation warfare is any war in which one of the major participants is not a state but a VNSA. Fourth-generation warfare harks back to the period before the Peace of Westphalia, when no single entity possessed a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. It blurs all the lines between politics and warfare. Israel's confusion and missteps during the 2006 war with Hezbollah

underscore the special challenge that fourth-generation warfare poses for the state and international community. Fourth-generation war undoes the state monopoly on war and is marked by a return to a world of cultures, not merely states, in conflict. At its core lies a universal crisis of legitimacy of the state.”<sup>11</sup>

One reason Hezbollah is so dangerous is the power of its example as a VNSA. It gained *de facto* legitimacy through its political, social, economic, military, and informational activities. As an organization, it is currently transitioning from *de facto* to *de jure* legitimacy by successfully participating in Lebanon’s electoral process. The fact that Hezbollah, as a VNSA, is so effective in using all elements of power, from the tactical to the strategic levels, is what makes it so exceptional – and scary. It is a model for hundreds of other para-states on the Federation of American Scientists’ list to emulate in order to sow instability and usurp power.

Hezbollah today is a major provider of social services, operating schools, hospitals, and providing agricultural services for thousands of Lebanese Shiites. Hezbollah also operates Al Manar (*The Beacon*), a satellite television station formally designated by the U.S. as a terrorist entity in 2006. With Iranian funding, Hezbollah sponsors Al Manar politically and financially so it can continue to broadcast Hezbollah’s anti-Israel and anti-Western agendas.<sup>12</sup>

Since the late 1970s, Hezbollah has transformed itself from a shadowy militant group known primarily for terrorist attacks, into the country’s pre-eminent political, social, and military force. The United States regards Hezbollah as a terrorist group that Iran finances to extend Iranian influence into the Levant. Originally inspired by Iran’s 1979 Islamic revolution, Hezbollah’s interests have paralleled those of Iran for nearly

three decades. The financial relationship between Iran and Hezbollah is very much akin to that of grantor and grantee.<sup>13</sup>

Hezbollah first captured international headlines in 1983, when the United States accused it of bombing the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 Marines and sailors. Today it has an armed militia more powerful than the Lebanese Army – one that bested Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in 2006. It has a far-reaching network that delivers welfare goods and social services to its Shiite constituency throughout Lebanon.

Hezbollah was born in the late 1970s when Shiites began organizing to demand greater rights in the Lebanese state. Shiites account for 27% of Lebanon's total population (1.04 million out of 3.87 million total). They constitute the largest Muslim community in Lebanon, as well as the largest of the 18 recognized religious sects in Lebanon.<sup>14</sup> Historically the country's poorest and most mistreated community, Shiites have long been marginalized by Lebanon's political and social elite. When Israel invaded the Shiite heartland of South Lebanon in 1982 to expel the members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) who had fled there after expulsion from Jordan, Shiites initially blamed the PLO for the invasion. When Israel failed to end its occupation after removing the PLO, the outraged Shiites formed a resistance movement against Israeli occupation. This provided an opportunity for young, militant Shiite leaders to lead a popular uprising to replace or co-opt traditional Shiite leadership in the south. Iran seized this opportunity to export its Islamic revolutionary ideology and to boost Shiite influence in Lebanon. It dispatched its Revolutionary Guards – or Quds Forces – to Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and began funding, training, and organizing radical and militant Shiite groups. Hezbollah was the most ambitious and competent of these

groups. Its charismatic leadership, coupled with Iranian and Syrian support, soon enabled Hezbollah to develop a network of social services, as well as a paramilitary wing, that together would eventually rival the capabilities of the Lebanese government itself.

Throughout Lebanon's 15-year civil war, Hezbollah acted as an insurgency with a goal of expelling Israel and Western troops from Lebanon, using terrorist tactics such as suicide bombings, hijackings, and kidnappings to achieve it. In the final phase of Lebanon's civil war, Syria – one of Hezbollah's regional sponsors – emerged as the dominant powerbroker. It helped end the civil war in 1990. Under the terms of the settlement, Hezbollah was the only faction outside the state allowed to keep its weapons. Hezbollah then began to play a double game. In 1992, it worked to integrate itself into the Lebanese body politic by successfully running parliamentary candidates in elections, while simultaneously fighting a guerrilla war against Israeli occupation forces remaining in South Lebanon. Hezbollah's overarching objective, however – one that remains relevant to this day – was to diminish Israeli and Western influence across the region and throughout the Arab world. To this end, it has consistently blurred the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate politics, and virtually erased the government's monopoly on the "legitimate" use of force.

When Israeli forces withdrew from South Lebanon in July 2000, Hezbollah rightly took credit for driving them out. The now politically powerful group resisted calls to disarm, stating they were still needed to protect Lebanon from Israel, a clear usurpation of one of the primary duties of a sovereign state.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a Sunni billionaire with close ties to Saudi Arabia, who led the city's reconstruction efforts, Beirut began its rehabilitation as the prosperous Arab capital it had once been.<sup>15</sup> In February 2005, however, assassins killed Prime Minister Hariri in a Beirut car-bombing. Outrage over the killing, which was initially attributed to Syria, led to Syria's military withdrawal from Lebanon. With Syria gone, only two groups remained to vie for control of Lebanon. On one side were Hezbollah and its allies, backed by Syria and Iran; on the other side a coalition allied to Saudi Arabia and the West, led by Rafik Hariri's son, Saad Hariri.

In 2006, during a small cross-border raid into Israel, Hezbollah militants kidnapped two Israeli soldiers who were patrolling the Israeli-Lebanese border. In retaliation, the Israeli air force pounded Hezbollah positions in south Beirut and South Lebanon for 34 days. Hezbollah militants fired thousands of rockets into Israeli towns and fought Israeli ground forces in Lebanon's border villages. This month-long war between Israel and Hezbollah killed 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and 128 Israelis, mostly soldiers, in the most intense fighting in Lebanon since the end of its civil war in 1990.

Hezbollah emerged more confident from the conflict with Israel, performing better than anyone would have thought possible. It claimed victory in its resistance to Israel and it capitalized on its popularity after the war by shrewdly and swiftly embarking upon a massive, heavily financed reconstruction effort to rebuild Shia homes, communities, and road networks devastated by Israeli bombing. It also provided a wide variety of social services and funds to assist ordinary Shia families directly affected by the conflict. In doing so, Hezbollah cemented its de facto political legitimacy vis-à-vis its Shia

constituency by providing goods and services that normally the sovereign government provides. A media blitz via Al Manar highlighted Hezbollah's military accomplishments against the IDF as well as its economic reconstruction efforts. Hezbollah's public relations supervisor summed it up best when he said, *"Hezbollah is not just about rockets and fighting; otherwise people would have left us long ago. We will be victorious in the reconstruction, just as we have been victorious against Israel's army."*<sup>16</sup>

Hezbollah's success also amplified its tensions with the U.S.-backed Lebanese government, which it suspected of conspiring with Israel and the West to destroy Hezbollah's military power. For its part, the government blamed Hezbollah for provoking the conflict and resented its spike in popular support in the wake of the war. Hezbollah itself seemed to recognize the perils of its position, and has struggled to maintain the right balance between enjoying popular support for its insurgent actions without drawing condemnation for the human and financial costs of such behavior. After the 34-day war with Israel, Hassan Nasrallah claimed victory for Hezbollah, but at the same time apologized to the Lebanese people; he would not have ordered the precipitous raid, he said, had he known that Israel would respond so brutally. Many of Lebanon's citizens lost homes in the conflict and the nation's economy suffered yet another blow.<sup>17</sup> While Nasrallah claimed victory, he also realized that the brief war had damaged Hezbollah's self-appointed status as Lebanon's protector.<sup>18</sup>

Walking the same fine line, Hezbollah has continued to build its military capability while exercising strategic restraint in its use. Under the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) that ended the 2006 war, Hezbollah was to demilitarize an 18-mile wide area between the Israeli border and the Litani River in South Lebanon. It did just

the opposite, openly patrolling strategic border towns, interrogating foreigners and outsiders, and recruiting scores of new fighters to replenish its ranks.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, Hezbollah has largely restrained its militants since the 2006 war. Instead, it has focused internally on its political disagreements with the Lebanese government, demanding a greater say in the conduct of the state.

Hezbollah has played a similar game with Israel and the region; replenishing its missile capacity and deliberately mirroring Israel's policy of "strategic ambiguity" about Israel's undeclared nuclear program by refusing to confirm or deny whether it has acquired a sophisticated anti-aircraft capability, advanced SCUD missiles or other military equipment that could change the balance of combat power with Israel. Many believe any new clash between Hezbollah and Israel would likely be more destructive than the 2006 conflict and could rapidly escalate to draw in Syria or Iran. This complicates risk calculations for any security policy in the region, making any potential conflict an even higher-stakes game.<sup>20</sup>

Hezbollah has used all the instruments of power at its disposal, including physical force and the potential for violence, to coerce an agreement between Lebanon's political factions that gave Hezbollah and its opposition allies the right to veto any cabinet decision. In 2008, Hezbollah became part of the Lebanese government for the first time. In January 2011, it demonstrated its political influence and mastery of legitimate political instruments by bringing down Lebanon's coalition government and securing enough votes to seat a prime minister of its own choosing.

In the 2006 conflict with Israel, Hezbollah was not supposed to win. It had taken on the vaunted IDF and survived. In fact, it fired more missiles against Israel on the last

day of the conflict than it had fired on the first. Hezbollah emerged as the single most powerful political and military force in Lebanon because it had stood up to Israel -- and VNSAs like Hezbollah win by not losing. Rather than destroying Hezbollah, Israel had handed it something it has lacked since the end of Israeli occupation in 2000: a clear-cut justification in the eyes of both its constituency and the region for its refusal to disarm.

In contrast, Hezbollah's adversaries -- Prime Minister Saad Hariri and others -- had fewer options and less support than they once had, testimony to the sea-change wrought by Hezbollah in Lebanon's political situation. Even the U.S., which firmly backed Mr. Hariri and his allies in 2005, has not promised the same kind of support in 2010, at least not publically. Hezbollah has proven to be a formidable political opponent in Lebanon's domestic and international affairs. While it lost popular support after the Hariri assassination in 2005, it quickly regained it in 2006 due to Israel's (and the United States') strategic bungling in escalating the war. The lesson for Israel and the U.S. after 2006 is that there is no military solution for Hezbollah because any military action taken against it has the undesirable effect of justifying its existence. Hezbollah effectively characterized the Hariri government as supporting Israel and the U.S. in the conflict, which damaged Hariri while catapulting Hezbollah politically.

In addition, Syria, whose influence was waning in 2005, has since re-emerged in Lebanon as a player with whom- even its former critics now seek to engage. It must be recognized that even without an immediate threat to prosecute an aggressive war in the region, Hezbollah's massive military capabilities have a deterrent effect on those who

oppose its overarching strategic objectives. It has made the use of physical force against it or its allies more expensive and more dangerous.

How does Hezbollah use its legitimate political power in Lebanon? Most recently, to paralyze the government for its refusal to end its cooperation with the UN Special Tribunal investigating the 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri, former prime minister and father of the current prime minister. Hezbollah has always denied any involvement in the killing, but reportedly fears that the Tribunal will list some of its members in the indictments. After Hariri refused its demands, Hezbollah and its allies withdrew from the Cabinet and dissolved the coalition government. This demonstration of Hezbollah's political power illustrates the impact it can now wield within the government it once attacked, but it may also provide a clue to a possible vulnerability. As Hezbollah strives increasingly for legitimate political power, its leaders must be concerned about the impact of any such indictments on the organization's standing not only in Lebanon, but also throughout the Arab world. Under the terms of the 1990 settlement ending Lebanon's civil war, Hezbollah, as the only faction outside of government allowed to retain its weapons, promised that its weapons would only be used to defend Lebanon from Israel, not be turned against the Lebanese people.

In many ways, Hezbollah has come full circle, from a non-state insurgent resistance movement relying on terrorist tactics to threaten the internal security of one state and the external security of another, to a full participant in the legitimate government of a state. In so doing, it has had to modify its behavior, restrain its use of terrorist violence, and open itself to the vagaries of public opinion, maintaining the good will of significant sections of the Lebanese public or risking losing its political base. This

is not the behavior of a group that seeks to destroy the sovereign state, but of one that seeks to control it. Hezbollah aspires to consolidate its own legitimate power in Lebanon; to eliminate Israeli influence in Lebanon and throughout the region; and to reduce as much as possible U.S. and Western influence in the region. It remains to be seen whether it will be more or less vexing to U.S. national security interests as a terrorist organization or as a legitimate political power.

The ways in which Hezbollah has prodded the state, pre-empted it, supported it, or attacked it, depending on which course of action it wished to cause the state to take, are often confusing to the outside observer, and have, on occasion, led otherwise smart states to pursue unwise or ineffectual policies vis-à-vis Lebanon. The most dramatic example may be the miscalculation of Israel and the U.S. in escalating the 2006 34-day war against Lebanon.

For its part, the Israeli government pursued a strategy of requiring the Lebanese government to force Hezbollah to meet Israeli demands. This strategy assumed that the Lebanese government knew what Hezbollah was doing and had the power to make it stop. Immediately after the cross-border raid precipitating the 2006 war, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared the raid an “act of war” and blamed the Lebanese government. “Our response will be very restrained,’ he said, ‘but very, very, very painful.’ In fact, a bewildered Lebanese government, which knew nothing of Hezbollah’s plans beforehand, announced that it ‘was unaware of the operation, does not take responsibility for it, and does not endorse it.”<sup>21</sup> Israel’s strategy was clearly “based on a misunderstanding of the relationship between Lebanon’s government and the leadership of the forces confronting the IDF.”<sup>22</sup> The “very, very, very painful” Israeli

attacks fell almost entirely on Lebanese civilian non-combatants, boosting public support for Hezbollah's continued military response, and leaving a more powerful anti-Israeli sentiment in Lebanon. Attacks on Lebanese civilians had the negative effect of alienating groups that could have had some influence on Hezbollah in the years following the conflict. Israelis, once masters of the operational art, seem to have miscomprehended the very nature of the conflict at hand, which had the unintended strategic consequence of strengthening Hezbollah rather than weakening it.<sup>23</sup>

The Israeli misunderstanding of the 2006 war with Hezbollah underscores the conundrum that is fourth-generation warfare. Furthermore, it complicates the ability for most states to assess the nature and degree of the potential threat posed by Hezbollah. One way to approach this question is to assess the threat in terms of an adversary's capability to conduct hostilities as well as its intent to do so. An important distinction to make here is that *threats* are acts or conditions that can harm interests, whereas *adversaries* are people, groups, organizations, or states that are hostile to interests. Adversaries by themselves do not necessarily constitute a threat; it is the *capability* and *intent* of an adversary that constitute a threat. These two essential elements are the basis of any threat assessment of an adversary, be it Al Qaeda or Hezbollah.

Michael Chertoff and Richard Armitage were correct when they argued that Hezbollah's capabilities greatly exceeded those of Al Qaeda. This is certainly true. It would be wrong, however, to conclude from this that Hezbollah somehow represents a greater threat to the United States and its interests than Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda represents a more *immediate* and a more *direct* threat to the United States than Hezbollah due to its stated and brutally demonstrated intent to attack the U.S. and its interests wherever it

can. While it is true that Hezbollah has a far greater ability to harm the U.S. (being better funded, armed, trained, and organized), this does not itself translate into a greater threat. The lesson of September 11, 2001 is that 19 committed terrorists with nothing more than box-cutters can hijack four planes and kill nearly 3,500 people on American soil. Hezbollah, on the other hand, has not thus far demonstrated the same intent as Al Qaeda to conduct large-scale attacks outside the Arabic world. (The 1992 Israeli embassy bombing and the 1994 bombing against the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association in Buenos Aires are noteworthy exceptions.)<sup>24</sup> Al Qaeda is also committed to acquiring nuclear weapons. The potential for acquiring this capability, coupled with Al Qaeda's certain willingness to employ it against a major U.S. or allied city, constitutes the greatest national security threat to the United States.

Hezbollah is a threat to U.S. interests in ways that are more *indirect* and far *less urgent* than the threat Al Qaeda poses. The threat posed to U.S. interests by Hezbollah is two-fold. First, Hezbollah contributes to regional instability and tensions by stoking the prospects of renewed war with Israel. Thus far, it has been unwilling to risk direct attack on U.S. targets. While it does not conduct attacks on U.S. targets themselves, it has most certainly been helping those who would. This includes everything from training and arming Shia militias in Iraq to the similar operations it performs for Palestinian groups in the West Bank and Gaza. The extent to which Hezbollah works with other violent non-state actors in the region ( Hamas in Gaza and Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq), and maintains close ties to its state sponsors (Syria and Iran) could undermine U.S. efforts to bring peace to the greater Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

Second, Hezbollah is *the* model organization for those violent non-state actors that seek to challenge the United States and its allies. Hezbollah has provided a blueprint not only for Hamas and militias in Iraq, but also for "resistance" groups everywhere. It has created a culture of resistance that has helped frame Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab issues. All along, it avoided becoming an overt target of the United States while successfully complicating U.S. efforts in the region. Moreover, the tactical success of Hezbollah (a lesser military power using irregular tactics) against the IDF (a Western-style conventional military) in 2006 offers a model that, if adopted by other irregular forces, should give all conventional armies reason for concern.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Hezbollah seems to have stressed the state beyond endurance by functioning not only as the most heavily armed violent non-state actor, but also the most politically powerful party in the legitimate government of the sovereign state of Lebanon.

There are, however, both risks for Hezbollah and possible opportunities for the United States and its allies as well. Clearly Hezbollah poses the greatest direct threat, primarily to the people of Lebanon and then, secondarily, to Israel. While Hezbollah will likely never constitute an existential threat to the state of Israel, it may continue to be an annoying and deadly violent non-state actor on its northern border against which no real military solution exists. The Israeli Defense Forces can march northward and push Hezbollah around for a few weeks, and they can even level the border towns. However doing so would merely feed the narrative Hezbollah uses to garner support for its arms and operations. Hezbollah leaders' rhetoric over the years makes it hard to conclude that Hezbollah's *raison d'être* is anything other than protecting Lebanon from attack by the State of Israel. Even if Israel were to prove insufficiently bellicose to justify

Hezbollah's refusal to disarm, Hezbollah might count on Israel to overreact to any provocation and thus bolster Hezbollah's position. This should worry both Israelis and Lebanese – including many of Hezbollah's supporters in southern Lebanon, who suffered more than anyone in 1993, 1996, and 2006.

Even if Hezbollah's leadership should decide that armed conflict is no longer in the rational interests of the organization or the Shia of Lebanon, it faces the challenge of changing the organizational culture. The young men who signed up with Hezbollah following the 2006 war, for example, did not do so merely to direct traffic in the southern suburbs of Beirut or the border towns in South Lebanon. An unemployed and disaffected Hezbollah militia might not be in the best interests of Lebanon either.

Hezbollah has long been a multifaceted organization aware of its dependence on its Shia constituency. It has provided many aspects of governance to its constituency, including protection, health and human services, and some forms of justice. Since 2008, it has taken important steps to advance and solidify its legitimacy within Lebanon's body politic. As Hezbollah continues down the path to legal legitimacy, there may be ways to encourage it to temper its radical behavior. Without question, a sovereign Hezbollah-led government will not guarantee a rational government friendly to the United States. Hezbollah, like Iran, will likely continue to complicate efforts to bring peace to the region. Political legitimacy, however, does confer a degree of responsibility and accountability in interstate dialogue, which may compel Hezbollah to improve its behavior.

Hezbollah's regional focus in recent years may not serve the best interests of its constituency but could present an opportunity for the United States to exploit. Without an active Israeli threat, Hezbollah may gradually lose support for its weapons

procurement program unless it is done legitimately under the auspices of the Lebanese government. Furthermore, the absence of an Israeli threat may reduce passions and prevent young Shia men from taking up arms. A possible path forward for the U.S. would be one that seeks to temper Hezbollah's behavior by helping to shut off all avenues other than increased legitimacy. Restraining Israel from playing into Hezbollah's narrative, undercutting Hezbollah's ability to provide services to its supporters outside legitimate channels, and rewarding Hezbollah for working through legitimate means may all help ensure that Hezbollah's capability comes under the control of a sovereign state, and that its intent is subject to the will of the people of Lebanon. Such a transition from violent non-state actor to legitimate political power would ultimately prove the most eloquent tribute to the validity and utility of the sovereign state.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Barack H. Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010), i.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> "Michael Chertoff Q&A: Hezbollah Makes Al Qaeda Look 'Minor League'," May 29, 2008, linked from the *Fox News Home Page* at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,359594,00.html> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Leung, "Hezbollah: A-Team of Terrorists," April 18, 2003, linked from *CBS News Home Page* at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/04/18/60minutes/main550000.shtml> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Phil Williams, "Violent Non-State Actors and National and International Security," November 25, 2008, linked from *International Relations and Security Network, Center for Security Studies (CSS), Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich) Home Page* at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=93880&lng=en> (accessed on January 15, 2011), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," January 1919, <http://www2.selu.edu/Academics/Faculty/jbell/weber.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Williams, "Violent Non-State," 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> "Vulnerabilities" refers to weaknesses inherent in the system and weaknesses emerging from a breakdown of the system.

<sup>11</sup> "Challenges to Military Operations in Support of U.S. Interests," linked from the *U.S. Department of Defense Home Page* at <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/ADA491393.pdf> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> "U.S. Designates Al-Manar as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist Entity Television Station is Arm of Hezbollah Terrorist Network," linked from the *U.S. Department of the Treasury Home Page* at <http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/js4134.aspx> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Grants are funds disbursed by one party (Grant Makers), often a Government Department, Corporation, Foundation or Trust, to a recipient, often (but not always) a nonprofit entity, educational institution, business or an individual. Most grants are made to fund a specific project.

<sup>14</sup> "U.S. Department of State Background Note: Lebanon," linked from the *U.S. Department of State Home Page* at <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35833.htm> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to Al-Qaeda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 173.

<sup>17</sup> "U.S. Department of State Background Note: Lebanon"

<sup>18</sup> Russell W. Glenn, *All Glory is Fleeting: Insights from the Second Lebanon War*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND), xi.

<sup>19</sup> "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701," August 11, 2006, linked from the *United Nations Home Page* at <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8808.doc.htm> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey White, "Policy Focus # 106: If War Comes: Israel vs. Hezbollah and Its Allies," linked from *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy Home Page* at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC04.php?CID=334> (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Glenn, *All Glory is Fleeting: Insights from the Second Lebanon War*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> There are reports of Hezbollah activities in West Africa and South America but there is not much evidence that Hezbollah is doing more than what the U.S. would classify as terror *financing* as opposed to terror *operations*. Hezbollah sends money back from these regions and elsewhere but there is no convincing evidence that they are plotting actual attacks in any of these regions.

<sup>25</sup> Kata'ib Hezbollah (KH) or Hezbollah Brigades is a Shia Iraqi Insurgent group that has been active since 2007 in the Iraq War. Not to be confused with Lebanese Hezbollah, the U.S. military believes it is an offshoot of the *Special Groups*, which are the Iranian-backed elements of the Mahdi Army. Kata'ib Hezbollah is a separate and independent organization and not part of the Mahdi Army and its Special Groups. According to the U.S. military, KH receives funding, training, logistics, and material from Iran's Quds Force. The U.S. state department claims Lebanese Hezbollah has provided weapons and training for the group. Known for uploading videos of its attacks against American forces on the internet, KH is responsible for numerous IED, mortar, rocket, RPG, and sniper attacks targeting U.S. and Iraqi Forces and the Green Zone, including a November 2008 rocket attack that killed two U.N. workers.

<sup>26</sup> It is possible to overstate the transferability of the Hezbollah "blueprint" as the poor showing of Hamas in Gaza has shown. Other groups may lack the resources of Hezbollah (personnel, equipment, operational- and strategic-depth, command and control, intelligence, sustainment, etc.) and the training and discipline to make it all work effectively.