Explaining Hezbollah’s Effectiveness: Internal and External Determinants of the Rise of Violent Non-State Actors

MARC R. DeVORE
School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews, The Scores, St. Andrews, Scotland, UK

ARMIN B. STÄHLI
Centre for Security, Economics and Technology (C SET), University of St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland

Few issues are more important to scholars of security studies than understanding the impact of state sponsorship on the capabilities of non-state armed actors. The subject of our study—Lebanon’s Hezbollah—was selected based on its reputation amongst scholars and policymakers alike as an exceptionally capable organization. In our inquiry, we seek to answer the following questions about Hezbollah’s rapid emergence during the 1980s as one of the world’s premier armed non-state actors: (a) how did Iranian sponsorship contribute to Hezbollah’s effectiveness?; and (b) to what extent did Hezbollah’s success depend on characteristics endogenous to the organization itself? To preview our conclusions, state sponsorship can contribute markedly to non-state actors’ capabilities by providing resources and sanctuary. However, the ultimate effectiveness of non-state armed groups depends heavily on such internal characteristics as their decision-making processes and members’ backgrounds. Thus, while state support may be necessary for non-state actors to achieve their goals, it is insufficient as a guarantee of their effectiveness.

Keywords Hezbollah, Iran, Lebanon, state sponsorship, tactics
Introduction

Few issues are more important to scholars of security studies than understanding state sponsorship’s impact on violent non-state actors’ capabilities. Since the end of the Cold War, intra-state wars and internationalized civil wars have outnumbered inter-state conflicts by a factor of more than twenty-to-one. As a consequence, most contemporary conflicts’ outcomes hinge on violent non-state groups’ capabilities. Because many of these groups are sponsored by states, questions must be posed as to how far state support contributes to these organizations’ effectiveness and, conversely, to what degree non-state groups’ performance depends on innate characteristics that outside sponsorship cannot ameliorate. To address this issue, we examine the extent to which one violent non-state group’s successes can be attributed to an external state’s support or the organization’s internal attributes.

The subject of our study—Lebanon’s Hezbollah—was selected based on its reputation as an exceptionally capable organization. From its beginnings, Hezbollah demonstrated a high aptitude to conduct successful attacks against more powerful foes and has displayed continued effectiveness over the course of three decades. Consequently, the organization has been referred to as the “A-Team of terrorists” and is widely considered to be one of the world’s most innovative non-state actors. In our inquiry, we seek to answer the following questions about Hezbollah’s rapid emergence during the 1980s as one of the world’s premier violent non-state actors: (a) how did Iranian sponsorship contribute to Hezbollah’s effectiveness?; and (b) to what extent did Hezbollah’s success depend on characteristics endogenous to the organization itself?

To preview our conclusions, state sponsorship can contribute markedly to non-state actors’ capabilities. However, the ability to use the resources sponsors provide depends heavily on such characteristics internal to the non-state groups themselves as their decision-making processes and members’ backgrounds. In Hezbollah’s case, although Iran’s provision (with Syria) of weaponry, financial aid, and sanctuary enabled Hezbollah to equip large insurgent forces, the organization’s operational successes were a product of tactics devised and implemented by its Lebanese cadres, who drew more heavily on their prior experience in Lebanon’s Civil War than on the inexpert advice offered by Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps. Consequently, Iranian support strengthened Hezbollah only insofar as the organization creatively adapted its inputs to Lebanon’s unique environment. Thus, while state support may be necessary for non-state actors to achieve their goals, it is insufficient as a guarantee of their effectiveness.

The Problématique of State Sponsorship

Scholars and policymakers alike have long asserted that active support from states enhances the overall capabilities of armed non-state actors. Indeed, a condition of international isolation has generally proven inimical to groups’ survival. For example, organizations as formidable as Greece’s communist guerrillas, Turkey’s Kurdish separatists, and the Islamist Al-Qaeda withered once abandoned by their sponsors. Contrarily, state sponsorship paved the way for certain non-state actors to achieve their strategic objectives and has even permitted terrorist groups with limited domestic appeal, such as the Abu Nidal Organization and As Saïqa, to soldier on for decades. However, the varying fates of state-sponsored groups, with some remaining weak or ineffective, highlights the reality that external support does not
uniformly strengthen organizations. Before exploring why even equivalent levels of state sponsorship yield uneven results in different organizations, it is necessary to examine the variegated forms of assistance states can provide.

As Daniel Byman and Bruce Hoffman have demonstrated, states offer non-state actors several forms of assistance, including: financial assistance, material aid, sanctuary, political backing, and organizational support.3

Financial assistance from states can dramatically enhance violent non-state groups’ capabilities. One reason for this is that well-resourced non-state organizations can pay their personnel regular salaries. Salaries, in turn, improve non-state groups’ ability to attract promising recruits and permit a higher degree of professionalism by freeing individual operatives from the need to hold jobs on the side.4 Without the ability to remunerate members, group effectiveness will likely suffer from limited recruitment and operational amateurism, as exemplified by Greece’s 17 November Organization.5 Besides the provision of salaries, economic support also enables non-state groups to offer welfare benefits, such as health care, education, and pensions for widows and orphans. By thereby reducing the perceived cost to families of losing breadwinners, such benefits further enhance non-state organizations’ ability to recruit qualified personnel.6

While financial support constitutes one way that states can materially support non-state organizations, the provision of weaponry constitutes another. Because international law prohibits non-state actors from importing armaments, state decisions to transfer even small arms have dramatically enhanced group capabilities, such as occurred when Libya shipped the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) firearms and explosives in 1985–1987.7 Although the post-Cold War glut of small arms has lessened the difficulties groups formerly faced in obtaining them, certain categories of light weapons, such as sophisticated Man-Portable Air Defense Systems and anti-tank missiles, are still largely unobtainable without state sponsorship.8

Besides supplying money and weaponry, states also indirectly affect group decision-making when they provide violent non-state organizations with sanctuary. As Al-Qaeda’s travails since 9/11 demonstrate, it is extremely difficult for organizations to formulate effective policies and plan intricate operations when they are constantly on the run.9 Moreover, organizations bereft of safe havens cannot competently manage their assets and draw lessons from past operations because the standard bookkeeping and archival procedures necessary for routinized organizational management is a liability when financial records and archives are liable to seizure. Consequently, state sponsors foster conditions conducive to both better decision-making and more effective organizational management when they provide sanctuaries where their protégés can plan and organize in safety. Furthermore, it is easier for such organizations to transmit tactical lessons and tacit knowledge between different groups and generations of fighters when they can locate permanent training camps in safe havens.10

In addition to providing materiel or sanctuary, states also assist non-state groups when they provide them with political support. Diplomatic recognition and support in international forums provides non-state groups with an aura of legitimacy and complicates their opponents’ efforts to repress them. For example, Arab states increased the diplomatic costs of France’s counterinsurgency campaign and limited its political options by formally recognizing Algeria’s anti-Colonial Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN), raising the “Algerian question” at the UN and criticizing French forces’ use of torture.11 States can also aid their non-state clients by mobilizing their diplomatic services to negotiate on their protégés’ behalf.
A fifth and final manner in which states can provide aid lies in the provision of organizational support. Because governments are generally more capable of developing bureaucracies than are non-state organizations, and, therefore, of mastering a wider range of specialized tasks, states can offer non-state groups valuable organizational support. This aid can range from advising groups on how to structure themselves to providing training courses on subjects such as: propaganda, intelligence, counterintelligence, demolitions, and assassination. States can also aid groups in crafting an appropriate strategy to achieve their ends and in selecting tactics for pursuing that strategy. Indeed, certain states maintain organizations—such as Cold War-era Cuba’s Direction General de Inteligencia and the Iranian Revolutionary Guards’ Qods Brigade—that specialize in providing organizational assistance to non-state groups.

For all of these reasons, groups’ access to state sponsorship often determines whether they will be quickly dismantled or rise to strategic significance. Given the extreme attrition rate of violent non-state actors—with 90 percent of terrorist groups collapsing during their first year of existence—a sponsor’s expertise, sanctuary, and resources frequently mean the difference between being relegated to the status of historical footnote and developing the power to inflict meaningful damage on their opponents. However, although state support can strengthen non-state groups, we will soon see that there are compelling reasons why this is not necessarily always the case.

Sponsorship’s Limits

The fact that states can offer armed non-state organizations multitudinous forms of support does not mean that a group’s effectiveness depends entirely on how much assistance it receives. Thus, while organizations such as Saiqa and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) achieved only modest results in spite of the high levels of state support they received, the PIRA exhibited a higher level of operational effectiveness despite the lower and more intermittent nature of the assistance it was given. Indeed, in certain cases, such as the Soviet Union’s guidance to the Chinese Communist Party in the 1920s, Soviet state sponsors led their Chinese clients to adopt disastrous courses of action. As Byman demonstrated, some of the variation in the impact of state sponsorship on non-state organizations can be attributed to the actions of sponsors themselves, who sometimes undermine their clients in attempts to improve their control over them. However, there are powerful reasons for anticipating that characteristics, endogenous to non-state groups themselves, determine whether state sponsorship will enhance their effectiveness.

Scholars working on the analogous question of whether great power military aid enhances the capabilities of smaller allies have frequently been confronted with cases where aid recipients used similar inputs with varying degrees of effectiveness. For example, during the Cold War the United States supplied the Israeli and South Vietnamese armed forces with similar equipment, and the Soviet Union furnished its Arab allies and North Vietnam with the same weaponry. However, while some of the superpowers’ clients—Israel and North Vietnam in this instance—forged efficient military organizations, others—such as South Vietnam and the Soviet Union’s Arab allies—despite having weaponry and advice lavished upon them—did not.

To explain anomalies such as these, analysts concluded that recipients’ internal attributes determine how effectively they use foreign inputs. Although differing as to the details of their analyses, scholars identified three factors endogenous to
recipients that shape how they absorb aid, including: the organizational culture of the institutions receiving aid, whether recipients possess the human capital needed to exploit the aid, and the relevance of sponsors’ own experiences to the problems faced by their clients.

It has long been acknowledged that organizational culture shapes aid recipients’ ability to benefit from assistance. For example, organizations that tolerate a high degree of corruption suffer when members appropriate foreign financial aid for private purposes. Within this context, South Vietnamese generals acquired reputations for sequestering large proportions of the aid given them and, thereby, starving rank-and-file combatants of resources. In principle, organizational culture’s impact on financial management will be even greater in violent non-state organizations than in states because the necessary opacity of the former’s finances increases the possibilities for corruption. Another way that organizational culture can impede effectiveness lies in how human capital is managed. When promotions and assignments are made on the basis of personal relations or political reliability rather than on technical expertise, then foreign training will rarely have the desired impact, either because poor candidates are sent away for training or because they are not subsequently given positions of responsibility.

While organizational cultures constitute one obstacle to the effective use of foreign aid, a recipient’s inability to mobilize human capital can constitute another. For example, organizations can maintain and use sophisticated weaponry only when they possess personnel with the requisite levels of education, which sometimes includes university degrees in engineering or the sciences. Terrorist groups that operate abroad also need personnel who speak foreign languages and can blend into different environments. When non-state armed groups cannot obtain the human resources they need, they will likely misuse the resources their sponsors provide. Many conventional armed forces have faced precisely this problem. For instance, one history of Iran’s military build-up under the Shah concluded that, “Without sufficient numbers of adequately trained personnel, the Iranian military was simply unable to assimilate the high-tech equipment pouring into Iran in a timely or systematic manner.”

Another reason state support may accomplish less than sponsors anticipated lies in the relevance of a sponsor’s expertise to the problems that its protégés face. Indeed, sponsors can harm aid recipients when they provide training and advice that is inappropriate to their clients’ needs. For example, by attempting to reorganize the South Vietnamese Army along the same lines that it had rebuilt South Korea’s Army, the United States imposed organizational formats and doctrines that were inappropriate to the unconventional war South Vietnam was fighting. Likewise, Cuba harmed many revolutionary movements by encouraging them to adopt the same “foco strategy” that Fidel Castro’s guerrillas had used to overthrow Batista’s regime in what is retrospectively acknowledged to have been an atypical insurgency. Thus, unless there is either a close match between a sponsor’s expertise and their client’s needs, or the client applies foreign advice critically, state sponsorship can hinder non-state organizations as much as help them.

While these insights have largely emerged from studies of conventional military organizations, they apply equally to violent non-state organizations. An examination of the PLO of the late-1970s confirms this reality. After launching a terrorist and guerrilla campaign in the 1960s, the PLO won recognition from the Arab League in 1974 as the Palestinian people’s sole representative. This, in turn, opened the door
for petroleum-rich Arab states and the Communist Bloc to provide the PLO with substantial monetary and material aid.\textsuperscript{27} By the late-1970s and early-1980s, the PLO was receiving an estimated $1.25 billion per year—an unprecedented sum for an organization of its type and one larger than the budgets of many small states.\textsuperscript{28} However, contrary to expectations, this massive inflow of aid weakened rather than strengthened the organization.

The PLO’s organizational culture played a role in this process. Because the PLO had always been marked by ingrained norms of neo-patrimonial leadership, the large infusion of funds fuelled rampant corruption in the organization. Consequently, many PLO leaders grew rich, bought expensive cars, and acquired luxurious apartments. Not surprisingly, these “bourgeoisified bureaucratic” cadres gradually lost touch with the PLO’s rank-and-file members, who were now alone in making personal sacrifices for the organization’s greater good.\textsuperscript{29} To make matters worse, large inflows of aid also strained the PLO’s human capital resources. Indeed, simply managing the organization’s new resources diverted many of the organization’s best educated personnel into non-combat roles, such that the PLO came to employ 10,000 full-time clerks, accountants, and support personnel by the early 1980s.\textsuperscript{30} Finally, misguided advice from the PLO’s sponsors also harmed the organization. Soviet and East Bloc advisors, in particular, urged the PLO to remodel itself as a conventional military force. Thus advised, the PLO reorganized its guerrilla forces into five conventional military brigades from 1976 onwards and equipped them with Communist-supplied heavy weapons.\textsuperscript{31}

Ultimately, foreign sponsorship’s adverse effect on the PLO’s effectiveness became apparent when Israel invaded the organization’s Lebanese sanctuary in 1982. The PLO’s ponderous and ill-conceived conventional brigades disintegrated during the conflict’s first hours when attacked by Israeli forces.\textsuperscript{32} Then, once the PLO’s combatants were forced to exile themselves to Tunisia, the unpopularity of the organization’s cadres drove important Palestinian and Lebanese groups to attempt to extirpate the PLO’s presence from Lebanon’s Palestinian refugee camps. Thus, state sponsorship undermined the PLO’s effectiveness because of both the PLO’s internal attributes and the misguided advice proffered it.

In sum, the experiences of both armed state and non-state organizations demonstrate that factors endogenous to violent groups themselves determine whether they can benefit from state sponsorship. Groups will waste resources and misuse armaments when their organizational cultures are rife with corruption and nepotism. Sophisticated equipment will remain unused or be misused if an organization cannot cultivate the right types of human capital. Finally, when the problems facing an aid recipient are qualitatively different from those understood by the donor, the latter’s organizational guidance may prove counterproductive. Thus, an armed non-state actor’s effectiveness is likely to be a product of both its sponsor’s generosity and the recipient’s own internal attributes.

Case Selection

This article focuses on Hezbollah’s relationship with Iran during Hezbollah’s first decade of existence in order to assess how factors endogenous to individual non-state groups condition how they employ aid provided by sponsors. Because our objective is to describe under what conditions violent non-state groups effectively use foreign inputs, we deliberately focused on an organization regarded as one of the most
formidable of its kind—Hezbollah—whose relationship with its sponsor—Iran—has been both close and stable. Now thirty years old, Hezbollah has acquired a reputation for competence and innovation second to none amongst violent non-state groups. This fact led terrorist scholar Daniel Byman to refer to Hezbollah as “the single most effective adversary Israel has ever faced” and (former) Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to opine that “Hezbollah may be the ‘A-Team of Terrorists’ and maybe al-Qaeda is actually the ‘B-Team.’” Perhaps even more remarkable than its current reputation is the fact that Hezbollah proved effective during its first decade of existence—a period during which many armed non-state groups fare poorly.

From the onset Hezbollah enjoyed a close relationship with a state sponsor—Iran. Because many of Hezbollah’s founding clerics had studied under Iran’s future ruler Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Qom and Najaf, the new movement acknowledged Khomeini’s supreme political authority, according to the doctrine of wilayat al-faqih (rule of the supreme jurist), and looked to Iran for aid. Iran, in turn, extended to Hezbollah every form of assistance it could, sending armaments, money, and advisors drawn from its own Revolutionary Guards.

Reportedly, Iran’s material assistance was annually valued at approximately $140 million during the 1980s, and subsequently declined to between $50 million and $100 million per annum. This magnitude of financial aid was high and endowed Hezbollah with greater resources than Lebanon’s other sectarian armed groups. However, Iranian support for Hezbollah is hardly unprecedented when put in a broader international context and compared with the much larger volumes of aid that certain armed groups—such as the PLO or Algeria’s FLN—received from their sponsors. Besides financial resources, Iran also offered Hezbollah’s cadres a safe haven on its own territory and negotiated with Syria to procure it a sanctuary closer to home, in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley. Moreover, compared to the turbulent relations that many non-state groups have with their sponsors, Hezbollah’s relations with Iran have been a model of stability.

In addition to its suitability for exploring the impact of state sponsorship of non-state organizations in a broad sense, shedding new light on Iranian support for Hezbollah should be empirically valuable to scholars and policymakers alike. Iran is amongst the world’s most active sponsors of violent non-state organizations and has supported movements in countries as diverse as Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Iraq, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia. If Iranian assistance alone accounts for Hezbollah’s meteoric rise, then Iranian advisors and weaponry should yield similar results elsewhere. Indeed, this image of Iran cultivating “mini-Hezbollahs” underlines some of the more alarmist assessments of Iran’s evolution as a regional power. Contrarily, if Hezbollah’s effectiveness depends on that organization’s unique internal characteristics, then Iran’s assistance to other groups will produce results that will be comparatively disappointing from their perspective.

Considering the fact that Hezbollah proved highly successful in realizing its goals from the outset, the following pages aim to ascertain how Iranian support and Hezbollah’s internal characteristics combined to generate this outcome. To this end, we will first examine the conditions of Hezbollah’s founding and the nature of the assistance Iran offered it. Once this has been accomplished, we will explore the origin of the three tactics—irregular/guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, and hostage-taking—that Hezbollah used to great effect during its first decade.
Our focus on Hezbollah’s early years has led us to examine only Iran’s role as a state sponsor. Despite Syria’s later emergence as an important second sponsor, its relations with Hezbollah were problematic throughout that organization’s first decade. Although recognizing Hezbollah’s potential value as an ally for combating Israel, Syrian leader Hafez al-Asad also considered Hezbollah an uncontrollable force that could potentially weaken Syria’s control over Lebanon. Indeed, Iran only convinced him to permit Iranian aid to transit its territory by promising to annually provide Syria with nine million tons of free oil. Even this arrangement did not prevent Syria’s armed forces and its Lebanese clients from clashing with Hezbollah repeatedly during the years 1987–90. Thus, it was only later, towards the end of the period examined, that Hezbollah’s efficiency at combating Israel gradually convinced Syrian leaders that it could play a key role in Syria’s regional strategy.

Because of inevitable lacunae and contradictions amongst published accounts, this study relies heavily upon primary sources and data collected during field research in Lebanon. In addition to systematically examining published primary sources, we interviewed leaders from Hezbollah, the Lebanese Army, the United Nations’ Peacekeeping Mission in Southern Lebanon (UNIFIL), and the rival Shiite organization, Amal. Building on these sources, it is possible to distinguish between the external and internal factors that rendered one armed non-state organization successful.

The Militarization of Lebanon’s Shiites

Beginning in 1982, a nebulous Shiite movement, later to become known as Hezbollah, started launching attacks against the Israeli armed forces that had invaded Lebanon in June of that year. Surprisingly, whereas many armed non-state organizations prove ineffective at first and only gain in competence once they have survived their first years of existence, Hezbollah demonstrated a remarkable level of skill almost from its inception. Within several years, Hezbollah compelled Israel to withdraw from most of Lebanon (excepting the “security zone” it occupied until 2000), convinced a Euro-American peacekeeping force to abandon the country, and proved its mettle in internecine wars with Lebanon’s established militias. To understand Hezbollah’s precocious success, it is necessary to examine how the movement emerged and was led and the ways in which Iran attempted to assist it.

As will be shown, Hezbollah’s success owed much to favorable internal characteristics, which were themselves a product of Shiites’ gradual political mobilization at a time when Lebanon was wracked by sectarian violence. Because Shiites had been historically marginalized by Lebanon’s Maronite and Sunni communities, they were comparatively late in developing their own confessional political party despite being Lebanon’s largest religious group. This absence of political organization left Shiites vulnerable because confessional parties served as the basis for militias, which protected their constituents during Lebanon’s inter-confessional civil wars (1958 and 1975–1990). Consequently, from the 1950s onwards, Shiites joined militias created by the radical, secular parties opposed to Lebanon’s status quo, including the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, the Lebanese Communist Party, and Lebanon’s two Ba’ath Parties.

Later from the late 1960s onwards, many more Shiites joined armed Palestinian groups. Having obtained de facto authority over much of southern Lebanon from the 1969 Cairo Agreement, the PLO became the dominant force over much of
Lebanon’s Shiite heartland. Wealthy and well-armed, the PLO recruited large numbers of Shiites into both its own ranks and those of closely-allied Lebanese militias.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, during interviews we conducted in southern Lebanon, we discovered that most Shiite families counted at least one male relative who had fought for the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{45} Certain Shiites even attained considerable expertise and responsibility within Palestinian organizations. For example, the future head of Hezbollah’s intelligence and security service, Husayn al-Khalil, was a prominent operative for Fatah.\textsuperscript{46} Even more significantly, the future leader of Hezbollah’s Jihad Council, Imad Mughniyah, was personally trained in the mid-1970s by a renowned Palestinian terrorist and former confederate of Ilich Ramirez Sanchez (a.k.a. Carlos the Jackal).\textsuperscript{47} Mughniyah then rose to command a Shiite unit within Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat’s elite Force 17 and reported directly to the head of Fatah’s secret service.\textsuperscript{48}

The first explicitly Shiite politico-military movement emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s thanks to the efforts of the Iranian-born scion of one of Shiism’s premier clerical families, Imam Musa as-Sadr.\textsuperscript{49} From the onset of his Lebanese ministry in 1958, as-Sadr considered his mission one of promoting social justice and combating the economic inequalities that afflicted both Lebanon’s Shiite and non-Shiite inhabitants. To this end, he co-founded the “Movement of the Deprived” with a Greek Catholic archbishop to alleviate poverty and struggle for socioeconomic equality amongst all Lebanese. However, the increasingly ominous tone of Lebanese politics in the mid-1970s led as-Sadr to create a militia to defend Shiite interests. Recognizing that Lebanon’s Shiites were late to establish paramilitary structures, as-Sadr convinced the PLO to train his militia, which became known as Amal (short for \textit{Afwaj al Muquwamah al-Lubnaniyah}), in its training camps.\textsuperscript{50} Ultimately, the former schoolteacher Husayn al-Musawi rose to command this militia before later defecting to help establish Hezbollah’s military wing.\textsuperscript{51}

Lebanon’s Civil War, which erupted in April 1975, both tested and steeled the Shiite combatants who served with Lebanon’s many militias and Palestinian guerrilla groups. Approximately 100,000 Lebanese perished in this conflict even before Israel’s invasion and Hezbollah’s foundation in 1982.\textsuperscript{52} Battles pitting these factions against one another and against the intervening Syrian and Israeli Armies brought talented leaders to the fore and drove the development of novel tactics. Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of Lebanon’s fighting was the prevalence of small self-contained combat teams, with four to six men, who used the tightly choreographed fire of RPGs (shoulder-launched rockets) and assault rifles to lay ambushes and conduct “storming” raids in urban environments.\textsuperscript{53} Besides these fundamental tactics, Lebanon’s warring parties used car bombs to assassinate opponents and kidnapped individuals to ransom or coerce their relatives.\textsuperscript{54}

While war was a major formative experience for all Lebanon’s factions, its impact on Amal was disproportionate. Having barely existed before the war, Amal’s militia rapidly expanded to a large paramilitary force of 30,000 militiamen, including 4,000 full-time combatants, by the 1980s.\textsuperscript{55} This force was severely tested after fighting broke out between Amal and the PLO in the period preceding the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.\textsuperscript{56} Furthermore, the collapse of governmental services precipitated by the Civil War confronted Amal with the unprecedented challenge of providing social services to its constituents. Amal’s struggle, yet failure to adequately supply such services, provided invaluable administrative skills for some of Hezbollah’s future leaders, including future Secretary General Hasan Nasrallah, who served in Amal’s politburo.\textsuperscript{57}
The Birth of the Islamic Resistance to Israel

Between 1978 and 1982, a series of distinct yet interrelated events set the stage for veteran Shiite fighters affiliated with Amal and Palestinian groups to gravitate towards a new Shiite movement, Hezbollah. The disappearance and probable murder of Amal’s founding leader, as-Sadr, during a 1978 trip to Libya revealed hitherto muted divisions within Lebanon’s Shiite community. While alive, as-Sadr’s fundamentally secular political program, emphasizing the Shiite quest for sociopolitical equality, attracted non-religious Shiites, yet his status as a prominent theologian satisfied those conservative Shiites who favored theocratic governance.58 As-Sadr’s succession in 1980 by a foreign-born lawyer, Nabih Berri, opened a rift between the secular Shiites who supported Berri and their more religious counterparts.59

Internal dissatisfaction within Amal coalesced around a group of religious scholars who had studied at Iraq’s Najaf seminary under as-Sadr’s cousin, Ayatollah Muhammed Baqir as-Sadr. Since the late 1950s, Baqir as-Sadr had served as the intellectual force behind Iraq’s ad-Da’wa Party, which argued that clerics should have an oversight role vis-à-vis secular government, whereby executive laws could be struck down as “un-Islamic.” While under Baqir as-Sadr’s tutelage, many of these scholars also forged personal ties with Iran’s future ruler, Ayatollah Khomeini, who was an exile in Najaf at that time.60 Baqir as-Sadr’s Lebanese students returned to Lebanon and joined Musa as-Sadr’s Amal movement after Iraq’s government cracked down on ad-Da’wa in the 1970s.61

Although integrated into Amal, these Najaf-trained scholars and their recruits came to constitute a distinct ad-Da’wa faction within that organization, which increasingly opposed Berri’s authority. For ad-Da’wa’s militants, the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 offered a powerful example of what a pious and well-organized movement could achieve.62 Motivated by this precedent, the ad-Da’wa faction in Lebanon began to unobtrusively splinter away from Amal’s mainstream over the issue of whether the movement should pursue essentially secular or theologically motivated goals. A key event in this process occurred when members of Amal’s ad-Da’wa faction (who subsequently joined Hezbollah) voted at ad-Da’wa’s international congress to adhere to the Iranian doctrine of wilayat al-faqih (rule of the supreme jurist), thereby recognizing Khomeini as their supreme political authority.63

Although ideological fissures had already begun to emerge within Amal, it was Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon that enabled ad-Da’wa’s religious scholars to forge a new politico-military movement. By defeating and driving into exile the Palestinian groups that had hitherto controlled South Lebanon, the Israelis left the Shiites who had fought alongside these groups both unemployed and footloose. Meanwhile, Amal, too, came apart when its leader, Berri, joined the “Committee of National Salvation,” formed by Lebanese President Elias Sarkis one week after Israel’s invasion to negotiate with the Israelis. This decision to bargain with, rather than fight against, the Israelis prompted many Amal members to defect to form the movement initially known as the Islamic Resistance and later known as Hezbollah (literally Party of God).64

From a military point of view, the most important defection was that of Husayn al-Musawi, who seceded from Amal with many of his ablest lieutenants.65 At a grassroots level, many Amal fighters spontaneously disobeyed Berri’s instructions not to resist the Israeli forces and joined the Palestinians and left-wing Lebanese militias in combating their advance on Beirut.66 Perhaps even more critical from a political
perspective, the religious scholars of ad-Da’wa also officially broke with Amal over the Committee of National Salvation. Indeed, ad-Da’wa’s comparatively thin ranks furnished all three of Hezbollah’s successive secretary generals (Sobhi Tufayli, Abbas al-Musawi, and Hassan Nasrallah) as well as its Vice-Secretary General (Naim Qassem) and the principal early organizer of resistance in Southern Lebanon (Ragheb Harb).67

As the situation unfolded, those Shiites desiring to resist Israel’s invasion increasingly viewed Iran as the only power likely to assist them. From the beginning, their effort to lobby Iran was facilitated when Amal’s own representative to Iran—another ad-Da’wa member—defected to the resistance. Two other Najaf-educated ad-Da’wa members (Tufayli and Harb) subsequently travelled to Tehran to add their voices in pressing for Iranian aid in resisting Israel’s invasion. These three scholars had all known Khomeini in Najaf and were therefore well placed to obtain his support.68 Convinced by these entreaties, Iran’s government agreed to help Lebanese Shiites resist the invasion.

To this end, Tehran sought Damascus’s approval to send Iranian military advisors, weaponry, and armaments via Syria to Lebanon’s Beka’a Valley. Syria’s motivations during these negotiations were complex and mutually contradictory. Ruled by a secular Ba’athist regime, Syria’s government was reluctant to allow a religiously radical, armed movement to emerge in Lebanon, which Syria had long sought to dominate.69 However, Syria also needed local allies willing to confront Israeli. Although Syria could draw on support from the Lebanese Ba’ath Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and the Lebanese Communist Party, its largest Lebanese ally—Amal—had declared its non-belligerence.70 Therefore, Iran’s proposal offered Syria a means for both augmenting the forces opposed to Israel and coercing Amal into joining the resistance as well.71 Weighing these factors, Syrian President al-Asad decided that, in exchange for free Iranian oil and guarantees that Hezbollah personnel would not set foot in Syria, Iran could use the sanctuary provided by the Beka’a Valley, which was under Syrian military control, to outfit Hezbollah in comparative safety. Thus, Iranian diplomacy proved critical in procuring the sanctuary in the Beka’a Valley and the supply routes through Syria that would enable Hezbollah to develop into a formidable organization.

Iran’s Sponsorship of Hezbollah

In July 1982, Iran dispatched 5,000 members (soon reduced to 1,500 once the region was considered secure) of its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to the Beka’a Valley. Sent in a hurry, this force arrived unarmed and initially devoted itself to spreading propaganda for the Islamic Resistance.72 This overt show of state support galvanized the Lebanese Shiites who wanted to resist Israel to federate their efforts under Iran’s loose guidance. The concrete manifestation of this Iranian-inspired federation came about when nine delegates from Shiite groups agreed on a common political platform, which called for a jihad against Israel and declared their common adherence to the doctrine of wilayat al-faqih.73 The nine architects of this platform, which has been referred to as Hezbollah’s founding act, included veterans of Lebanon’s interminable conflicts, three of whom were ad-Da’wa members and another three defectors from Amal.74

After agreeing to this platform, the nine established a directing committee and sent a delegation to swear loyalty to Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini.75 Soon thereafter,
Iranian money flowed into the Beka’a through the Revolutionary Guards’ hands. Although far less than the PLO had previously received from its sponsors, the $140 million that Iran annually provided proved catalytic to Hezbollah’s growth. Hezbollah’s ability to pay regular salaries of $150-200 per month attracted Shiite fighters formerly employed by Amal and Palestinian groups, enabling Hezbollah’s combat wing to rapidly expand to 7,000 combatants. Although combatants with Palestinian groups had earned comparable salaries, Amal’s fighters were notoriously underpaid and especially liable to be lured away by Hezbollah’s higher salaries.

While Iranian money attracted Shiite recruits, Iran’s ideological and political support played a more ambivalent role. On the one hand, Iran’s Islamic Revolution served as a model to many disaffected Lebanese Shiites about how a political transformation could be achieved through social mobilization and adherence to a politicized version of Shiite Islam. Moreover, Ayatollah Khomeini’s uncompromising hostility to his opponents appealed to those fighters and militants that wanted to combat, rather than negotiate with, Israel and other enemies. On the other hand, however, Hezbollah’s deep ideological connection with the Islamic Republic repelled many Lebanese Shiites from the movement. Most of the Lebanese Shiite business community and expatriate diaspora, for example, were disgusted with the excesses of the Iranian revolution (e.g., summary executions and torture). Likewise, Hezbollah’s injunctions to Shiites to accept Ayatollah Khomeini as their supreme jurist clashed with most Lebanese Shiites’ preference to choose their models for spiritual emulation (marja’iyya) from amongst Arab clerics (particularly Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah).

Amongst the recruits that Iranian money and ideology helped attract was the future leader of Hezbollah’s Jihad Council, Imad Mughniyah, who brought with him his Shiite veterans from Arafat’s Force 17. Another seasoned recruit was the Fatah operative, Husayn al-Khalil, who rose to manage Hezbollah’s security service and advise its secretary general. Money also enabled Hezbollah to amass an arsenal because Lebanon had been awash in armaments ever since the Israeli invasion prompted Palestinian groups to open their arms caches to anyone willing to resist Israel’s armed forces.

Thus, Iran’s political and financial support proved vital for Hezbollah’s early expansion. However, sponsorship exerted such a beneficial effect in this instance only because the characteristics of Hezbollah’s founding cadres and the situation in Lebanon provided a fertile terrain for it to do so. Politically, Hezbollah’s founders were already influential figures within Shiite political circles, such as Amal and ad-Da’wa. They therefore possessed the social capital needed to organize a mass organization. Thus, Iranian political support did not so much legitimate hitherto unknown individuals as guarantee that a fledgling movement could draw on external resources.

Similarly, Iran’s financial aid proved to be such a boon only because Hezbollah’s founders fostered an organizational culture where financial aid would reinforce rather than enervate its members’ zeal to fight. Based on their personal experience, these leaders concluded that corruption had sapped the effectiveness of both Arafat’s Fatah and Berri’s Amal. Moreover, they believed that these groups’ leaders had created financial incentives that undermined their soldiers’ willingness to fight. By paying overly large bonuses, they inadvertently encouraged combatants to retire, rather than continue risking their lives. To make matters worse, by providing inadequate benefits to widows, orphans, and crippled combatants, these groups also prompted families to discourage their members from joining.
To redress its predecessors’ errors, Hezbollah’s founders emphasized the need for scrupulous honesty in financial matters. They also developed a new financial model, designed to maximize combatants’ dedication to the cause. By paying adequate, albeit limited salaries, Hezbollah ensured that its rank and file would have difficulty “retiring” from the organization. However, the limited remuneration of its able-bodied combatants was matched by a generous welfare system designed to both secure families’ approval for their men to serve Hezbollah and win the “hearts and minds” of Lebanon’s Shiites. Indeed, one of Hezbollah’s welfare agencies forthrightly argues, “The martyr goes forward welcoming martyrdom while relying on resistance institutions, which take care of his son and family after him.” Examples of such welfare provisions include: comprehensive medical care for injured fighters and vocational schools and employment in subsidized workshops for fallen fighters’ dependents.

While it was a combination of external Iranian aid and Hezbollah’s internal characteristics that facilitated the nascent organization’s success at political mobilization and financial management, Hezbollah’s internal attributes clearly outweigh the external impact of Iranian advice in enabling the movement to raise an effective irregular military force. The primary reason for this outcome can be found in the relative levels of relevant military expertise possessed by Hezbollah’s early military leaders on the one hand and Iran’s Revolutionary Guard on the other.

As has been seen, Hezbollah began its existence with leaders, such as al-Musawi, al-Khalil, and Mughniyah, who had proven their competence in the crucible of Lebanon’s Civil War. Beneath leaders such as these was the large stratum of trained, veteran combatants who had come from Palestinian groups and Amal. Moreover, the training and experiences these men brought to Hezbollah were exceedingly pertinent for the irregular conflicts the organization would conduct against occupying Israeli forces and intervening Western powers. Indeed, most of Hezbollah’s cadres had received paramilitary training in Palestinian camps, where the basic curriculum prepared combatants for guerrilla warfare against Israel. During the battles of Lebanon’s Civil War, these Shiite fighters had perfected their craft in both clashes between irregular forces and battles against invading armies (e.g., Syria after its 1976 intervention or Israel during its 1978 offensive).

In comparison with the expertise of Hezbollah’s founding cadres, the Iranian IRGC detachment sent to Lebanon had little relevant experience to share. Indeed, since being founded in 1979, the IRGC had amassed no experience in conducting an insurgency and had never before advised a non-state organization on how to do so. Originally, the IRGC’s raison d’être was serving as the new Iranian regime’s internal security force. As such, it spent its formative years combating the internal threats posed by the Mujahedin-e Khalq, Tudeh (Communist) Party, and the Iraq-backed Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran. After the 1980 Iraqi invasion of Iran, the IRGC’s mission expanded to include conventional warfare. However, the IRGC’s inexperience in this domain led it to substitute religious zeal for military expertise, mounting costly “human wave” attacks on fortified Iraqi positions and grimly defending urban areas. While such tactics were of debatable utility in a conventional war, they proved counterproductive when transmitted to irregular forces, such as Hezbollah.

To make matters worse, the IRGC’s expansion to a size of 50,000 men in 1981, after barely two years of existence, created educational and material demands that the organization had imperfectly met. From the beginning in 1979, Iran’s leaders
had to seek assistance from Arafat’s Fatah to train the IRGC’s first recruits. While this gave the 1,200 Palestinian-trained IRGC members a knowledge base similar to Hezbollah’s experienced cadres, the impact of this training on the organization as a whole was diluted by the IRGC’s rapid growth, which saw many poorly educated recruits inducted into the organization. Furthermore, Iran’s elected president, Abo-Hasan Beni-Sadr, starved the IRGC of resources until 1981 because he rightly feared that Khomeini would use it to suppress his civilian government. In light of this background, the IRGC’s members possessed neither the training nor experience needed to guide an irregular military campaign when they deployed to Lebanon in 1982.

Because of the disparity of relevant experience between Hezbollah’s founding cadres and the IRGC detachment sent to advise them, the IRGC trainers’ guidance fell short of expectations. This process first asserted itself in the domain of training. With its 1,500 advisors sent to the Bekaa Valley, the IRGC trained Hezbollah’s first two groups of recruits, each having 150 men. However, as the inadequacy of IRGC tactics became apparent and Hezbollah improved the management of its own formidable human capital, Hezbollah cadres gradually replaced Iranian instructors. Within time, Lebanese Hezbollah fighters were not only conducting all training within Lebanon, but also managing specialized courses held in Iran. As Lebanese personnel assumed an increasing proportion of training functions from the IRGC, the latter downsized its contingent in Lebanon to between 300 and 500 personnel, who served in logistic and liaison functions.

Just as the expertise of Hezbollah’s cadres, rather than Iranian assistance, proved critical in the domain of training, their experience with Lebanese Civil War tactics laid the base for the organization’s operational successes. Indeed, rather than coming from the IRGC’s early tactical training, Hezbollah’s success came from tactics learned by and improved upon by its cadres during Lebanon’s Civil War and through their prior involvement with Palestinian groups. To demonstrate the internal Lebanese, rather than external Iranian, genesis of the three principal forms of operation Hezbollah employed during its first decade of existence, we will examine below how the organization embarked upon: irregular/guerrilla warfare, suicide bombings, and hostage-taking.

**Irregular/Guerrilla Warfare**

Although Hezbollah’s suicide bombs and kidnappings caught the world’s attention in the 1980s, the organization’s survival depended on its combatants’ ability to employ irregular and guerrilla tactics. Indeed, ambushes and “hit and run” attacks accounted for approximately two-thirds of the Israeli soldiers killed by Hezbollah between 1983 and 1985. Perhaps more importantly, Hezbollah’s aptitude for irregular warfare proved crucial to the organization’s success in combating its rivals for Lebanese Shiites’ allegiance, including the Lebanese Communist Party (1985–1986) and Amal (1988–1990). Ultimately, Hezbollah succeeded at this genre of warfare because of its founders’ expertise in Civil War tactics and despite, rather than because of, Iranian advice.

Despite the unsuitability of the IRGC’s experience to the war in Lebanon, Iranian advisors initially encouraged Hezbollah fighters to employ tactics similar to those the IRGC had used during the Iran-Iraq War. The hallmark of these IRGC tactics was a belief in the psychological impact of human wave assaults and a reckless disregard for casualties. Although such tactics achieved tangible results during
the Iran-Iraq War, where the IRGC could mobilize tens of thousands of new volunteers each year, they were woefully inadequate against Israel's well-trained armed forces.97

As a consequence, Hezbollah accomplished little and suffered heavy casualties during its first months of war. Observing this phenomenon, one United Nations official remarked, "They [Hezbollah] were very amateur, foolhardy in many ways, but very brave. They just walked into the line of fire and were cut down very badly. It was just like watching the Iranian assaults against Iraq."98 For their part, Israeli commanders were lulled into a false sense of confidence by these tactics, which sacrificed combatants' lives for no concrete gains.99

However, the shock of these first tactical reverses suffered against the Israelis prompted veteran Hezbollah leaders to revert to the tactical formulae developed during Lebanon's Civil War, including an emphasis on small combat teams and irregular warfare. For example, in the South it was a former ad-Da'wa member, Ragheb Harb, who reorganized the movement's fighters into groups with five or six fighters, which Israeli intelligence failed to infiltrate. Elsewhere, it was veterans from either Amal or Palestinian groups that led the transformation from mass attacks to small combat groups.100 Almost immediately, Hezbollah's small units proved that they could strike quickly at targets of opportunity and then, just as suddenly, disappear into Lebanon's population.101

This return to the Civil War's tactical recipes led to an improvement in Hezbollah's performance. By December 1983, Israeli soldiers began to fall victim to complex ambushes, wherein Hezbollah combat teams attacked their patrols with grenades and automatic weapons, and then detonated prepositioned improvised explosive devices to destroy nearby units that came to their comrades' rescue.102 Hezbollah also employed small units to assassinate Lebanese discovered collaborating with Israeli intelligence, thereby preventing the Israelis from establishing an adequate human intelligence network.103 Because of its own growing effectiveness and Israel's inability to anticipate its actions, Hezbollah constantly increased the pace of its operations such that, by mid-1984, it was conducting over 100 attacks per month.104 In its own quasi-official history, Hezbollah Vice-Secretary General Qassem emphasized the collective impact of "ordinary operations conducted daily with explosive charges, ambushes, sniping and many other means."105

In the second half of the 1980s, once Israel had withdrawn from most of Lebanon, Hezbollah increasingly found itself challenged by rival Lebanese militias. Ultimately, Hezbollah prevailed in these struggles because of its aptitude in employing traditional Civil War tactics in a more disciplined and coordinated manner than its rivals. Hezbollah's first quarrel with a domestic opponent occurred in 1985 and 1986 when it fell out with the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP). In the desultory fighting that followed, small groups of combatants mounted surprise attacks, gunning down their rivals in their homes or public places.106 In short order, Hezbollah gained the upper hand over the LCP's small but veteran militia in what one observer referred to as a "gangster style of warfare."107

Hezbollah's conflict with the LCP was followed in 1988 by a more intense struggle with its Shiite rival, Amal. Despite the defection of many veteran Amal fighters to Hezbollah since 1982, Amal's militia remained larger than Hezbollah and had the advantage of possessing tanks and artillery.108 However, Hezbollah compensated for its numerical inferiority with superior discipline and small unit tactics. This tactical superiority, in turn, was possible in part only because Iranian
financial support enabled Hezbollah to pay higher salaries, which attracted many of the best Shiite fighters to join that organization.

In fighting that raged episodically for two years in Lebanon’s Shiite population centers—Beirut, the Beka’a Valley, and South Lebanon—both sides deployed the whole panoply of Civil War tactics. As one analyst put it, “all of the operative methods that characterized militia battles in Lebanon were utilized.”

Through its superior use of these methods, Hezbollah prevailed in Beirut and Beka’a, and was only narrowly defeated in the South. Indeed, Hezbollah’s victory over Amal would have been even more decisive if Iran and Syria had not intervened to end the conflict. Because Amal had been Syria’s closest ally in Lebanon and Hezbollah was clearly Iran’s protégé, the Amal-Hezbollah conflict threatened to spoil Iran’s strategic partnership with Syria.

To prevent this, Iran pressured Syria into accepting the creation of a quadripartite committee (composed of representatives from Amal, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran) to negotiate the dispute’s resolution. Thus, as one Lebanese general observed, “Hezbollah and Amal basically used the same tactics, which were those of all Lebanese militias. . . . Hezbollah was just much more disciplined in how it used them.” However, although the tactics employed were fundamentally Lebanese, Iranian financial support was critical in enabling Hezbollah to attract the best Lebanese Shiite practitioners of these tactics.

Suicide Bombing

While irregular and guerrilla tactics were critical to Hezbollah’s success, the tactic that won it the greatest publicity and disconcerted its opponents most was the use of suicide car bombs. Beginning in 1982, Hezbollah conducted carefully planned suicide attacks against vulnerable targets, such as Israeli command posts and motorcades. The difficulty Israeli forces experienced protecting these assets contributed palpably to their 1985 decision to withdraw from most of Lebanon. While Hezbollah may have been the first modern organization to conduct suicide bombings, its success has since inspired many other groups to adopt the tactic.

As will be seen below, although the IRGC’s military emphasis and theological apologies for martyrdom created a supportive psychological environment, the actual tactical development of suicide car bombs was pioneered by Hezbollah’s veteran Lebanese cadres.

In many respects, Hezbollah’s precocious development of suicide attacks can be seen as a development of traditional Lebanese car bomb attacks. Beginning in the late 1970s, car bombs became a notable feature of the Lebanese Civil War. Considering their later use against Israeli targets, Israel ironically introduced the car bomb into Lebanon when they used one to assassinate a Palestinian activist in 1972.

As this inaugural attack demonstrated, the mobility, ubiquity, and carrying capacity of automobiles renders them an efficient means of surreptitiously delivering explosives to high-value targets. Consequently, all of Lebanon’s militias embraced car bombs during the Civil War as a means to destroy their rivals’ headquarters, kill their leaders, and terrorize their neighborhoods. In total, Lebanon’s warring factions detonated at least 245 car bombs during the 15-year war.

Hezbollah’s major innovation with respect to Lebanon’s traditional car bombs was inserting a driver desiring martyrdom. With drivers, car bombs became vectors that could deliver heavy explosives against both secure and mobile targets. However, as Lebanese militias had done with car bombs, Hezbollah reserved suicide attacks for high-value targets. As the organization’s Secretary General Nasrallah later stated,
I come under pressure, every day, from young men eager to go out on martyrdom operations. I could easily tell any of them: take this explosive device inside the occupied zone, and when you meet two [enemy] individuals...detonate it. [However] we do not execute operations of this kind; if the operation is not productive and effective...we cannot...justify giving an explosive device to our brothers.119

The development of suicide bombing, as an improvement upon car bombs, was driven by two leaders with extensive Civil War experience—al-Musawi and Mughniyah. The IRGC, by way of contrast, appears to have played virtually no direct role in this process. Indeed, while Iranian “human wave” attacks depended on the willingness of thousands of youths to martyr themselves, the IRGC had never used suicide attacks per se. Moreover, in a frequently ignored precedent for Hezbollah’s suicide bombing campaign, Lebanon’s ad-Da’wa members organized the world’s first suicide car bomb attack in December 1981, seven months before the IRGC deployed to Lebanon.120 Considering that ad-Da’wa’s militants later joined Hezbollah, the latter organization absorbed the architects of this inaugural suicide attack.121 Nevertheless, while irrelevant to the development of suicide bombing as a tactic, the IRGC fostered a favorable psychological environment by emphasizing the military virtues of martyrdom and diffusing Khomeini’s theological justification for it.122

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 11, 1982</td>
<td>Israeli Military Headquarters, Tyre</td>
<td>75 Israeli soldiers and 15 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 4, 1983</td>
<td>Israeli Military Headquarters, Tyre</td>
<td>29 Israeli soldiers killed, 30 wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 13, 1984</td>
<td>Dair Qanun an-Nahr</td>
<td>6 Israeli soldiers killed, 14 wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 3, 1985</td>
<td>Military command post, Khiam</td>
<td>12 Israeli soldiers killed, 14 wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 19, 1988</td>
<td>Military motorcade, Tall an-Nahas</td>
<td>1 Israeli soldier killed, 3 wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 19, 1988</td>
<td>Kfar Kila</td>
<td>8 Israeli soldiers killed, 8 wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 9, 1989</td>
<td>Motorcade, al-Qalia</td>
<td>1 Israeli soldier killed, 5 wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21, 1992</td>
<td>al-Jarmaq, al-Aischiya</td>
<td>25 Israeli casualties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 25, 1995</td>
<td>Infantry patrol, al-Jarmaq, Bint Jubayyil</td>
<td>11 Israeli soldiers wounded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20, 1996</td>
<td>al-Adisa</td>
<td>2 Israeli soldiers killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1996</td>
<td>Command post in Rab-Thalathin</td>
<td>No casualties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 30, 1999</td>
<td>Military camp, Marjayoun</td>
<td>7 Israeli soldiers killed, 8 wounded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With this background, Hezbollah launched its first suicide attack against the Israeli armed forces’ headquarters in Tyre on November 11, 1982, killing 75 Israeli military personnel. This attack, which was allegedly orchestrated by Fatah veteran Mughniyah on his own initiative, constituted the greatest blow the Israelis had yet suffered in Lebanon. After this attack proved the efficacy of suicide bombing, al-Musawi spearheaded the planning of 12 further attacks against Israeli military targets (as illustrated in Table 1). Although the IRGC did not develop the suicide car bomb, Iranian leaders quickly recognized the tactic’s potential and drove Hezbollah to launch attacks on American and French military forces in October 1983. Killing 299 military personnel, these attacks played a key role in convincing the quadripartite Multinational Force to withdraw from Lebanon.

Hezbollah’s suicide attacks disconcerted Israel’s armed forces. At first, Israel responded with improved security at its military headquarters, which had served as the target for Hezbollah’s first two attacks. However, this merely led Hezbollah to shift its focus to vulnerable Israeli logistics convoys and motorcades. Ultimately, Israel’s 1985 withdrawal to a smaller “security zone” in Southern Lebanon dramatically reduced the number of “soft” targets Hezbollah could strike. Consequently, Hezbollah’s suicide attacks, as illustrated in Figure 1, yielded diminishing returns, which gradually led the organization to abandon a once promising tactic.

In sum, Hezbollah’s innovative use of suicide attacks can be seen as an incremental development of the typical Lebanese Civil War tactic of employing car bombs against high-value targets. It was veteran Lebanese operatives, such as Mughniyah and al-Musawi, who led the way in introducing suicide car bombs. Indeed, the similarities between the skill sets needed to plan traditional car bomb and suicide car bomb attacks were such that other Lebanese groups, such as Amal and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, seamlessly followed Hezbollah’s lead in transitioning from the former to the latter. Compared to the importance of Hezbollah’s preexisting human capital in developing this tactic, the contribution of Hezbollah’s external sponsor—the IRGC—appears minimal. At most, the IRGC fostered a climate conducive to self-sacrifice by emphasizing the virtues of martyrdom and arguing that it was theologically justified.

**Hostage-Taking**

Even as Hezbollah was launching its first suicide attacks in 1982, networks affiliated with it began kidnapping Westerners in Beirut. Within seven years, Hezbollah’s
affiliates kidnapped approximately 87 European and American hostages. Although less lethal than its suicide attacks or guerrilla assaults, hostage-taking provided the most effective means either Hezbollah or Iran possessed for influencing Western states’ policies. To begin with, the risk of being abducted sparked an exodus of Europeans and Americans from Lebanon, which reduced the ability of their foreign ministries and intelligence agencies to influence events in that country. In addition to accomplishing this objective, Hezbollah and Iran used hostages to extort concessions from Western states. To obtain their hostages’ liberation, the United States and Europe paid ransoms, released imprisoned terrorists, expelled Iranian dissidents, and covertly sold Iran weaponry. Although it was Iran that benefitted materially from these kidnappings, it was Hezbollah’s affiliates that organized the abductions using networks and techniques developed during Lebanon’s Civil War.

Although the kidnapping of Westerners took the world by surprise in 1982, hostage-taking was already a defining characteristic of the Civil War. According to one study, 13,968 Lebanese were abducted during the conflict. Although the vast majority of kidnapping victims were Lebanese prior to 1982, at least nine foreigners (Syrians, Saudis, Egyptians, and Italians) had been abducted before Hezbollah’s creation. Most Civil War kidnappings were economically motivated and extorted ransoms from victims’ families. However, a minority of kidnappers sought to advance their political agendas, demanding concessions in exchange for hostages’ release. For the most part, Lebanon’s kidnappers were only loosely affiliated with the country’s militias and relied on family networks to preserve their security.

The event that triggered the Shiite kidnappings of foreigners was the disappearance of four Iranian embassy personnel travelling in Christian-controlled Northern Lebanon. To compel the United States to help locate its missing diplomats, Iranian agents kidnapped David Dodge, President of the American University of Beirut, and smuggled him into Iran via Syria. However, Iran’s direct involvement in this hostage-taking backfired because the United States quickly ascertained Dodge’s whereabouts and lobbied Syria into pressuring Iran for his release. After this setback, Iran entrusted Hezbollah’s special security apparatus with masterminding future abductions.

As a consequence, subsequent kidnappings were conducted using the techniques and organizational structures characteristic of Civil War-era kidnappings. Targets were abducted by small, tightly-knit Lebanese groups organized around extended families and then transferred between safe houses until many ended up imprisoned in Hezbollah- or IRGC-controlled facilities in either Beirut’s southern suburbs or the Beka’a Valley. To conceal Hezbollah’s role, kidnapping networks employed a variety of aliases—17 in total—whereby nonexistent or “phantom” organizations claimed responsibility for kidnappings. The two Hezbollah operatives who played the greatest role in this process were seasoned Civil War veterans Mughniyah and al-Musawi.

Although the Iranian embassy personnel’s disappearance was the trigger for Dodge’s kidnapping, both Iranian and Hezbollah aims expanded once their leaders understood the leverage hostages provided. Indeed, the rate of hostage-taking climbed dramatically between 1984 and 1986. One of the objectives of the expanded kidnapping campaign was to degrade the ability of Western intelligence agencies to operate in Lebanon. Put simply, Hezbollah reasoned that Western intelligence agents would be extremely conspicuous in Lebanon once kidnappings had driven other Westerners to flee the country. In addition to this overall objective, Iran sought specific gains from different Western countries. For example, Iran hoped...
to pressure France into cracking down on the Mujahedin-e Khalq’s Paris-based leadership and resolving the dispute over the Shah’s $1 billion loan to a French state-owned corporation, Eurodif. In a similar vein, Iran used the hostages in Lebanon to coax the Reagan Administration into selling it weaponry, despite Congress’ ban on arms sales to Iran.

The Lebanese kidnapping networks that actually abducted the Westerners also pursued their own agendas. At the apex of these networks, Mughniyah and al-Musawi had a personal interest in freeing 17 terrorists affiliated with Iraq’s ad-Da’wa Party from Kuwaiti jails. This group, known as the “ad-Da’wa 17,” included al-Musawi’s first cousin and Mughniyah’s brother-in-law. As a consequence, Mughniyah and al-Musawi added their relatives’ release to the list of demands and reportedly kidnapped the Archbishop of Canterbury’s envoy, Terry Wait, for this purpose. Besides the ad-Da’wa 17, Mughniyah also sought to coerce France into releasing his imprisoned Palestinian terrorist mentor, Anis Naqqash. Complicating matters even further, certain Shiites worked as “freelancers,” kidnapping Westerners and then exchanging them for their own economic or political purposes.

Because of the diverse motivations driving Lebanon’s Shiite hostage-takers and their Iranian sponsors, negotiating an end to the hostage crisis became inherently problematic. Syria discovered this to its chagrin as it repeatedly sought to end the hostage crisis. Despite Syria’s status as Iran’s only Middle Eastern ally and the fact that Hezbollah’s hostage-taking undermined Syria’s claim to have restored order in Lebanon, Syria’s government proved unable to end hostage-taking in Lebanon. Reflecting on this reality, United Nations hostage negotiator Giandomenico Picco concluded that Syria had no influence over the hostage-takers and even Iran’s leverage was operationally limited.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah, Iran, and the individual kidnapping networks achieved important objectives before they liberated their last hostages in 1991. Faced with the spree of hostage-taking, the United States’ State Department prohibited American citizens from travelling to Lebanon in 1987, thereby reducing the United States’ influence in that country. France, for its part, both expelled the Mujahedin-e Khalq’s leadership and settled the Eurodif dispute on terms favorable to Iran in 1986, and later freed Mughniyah’s mentor, Naqqash, in 1990. Going even further, the United States’ Reagan Administration reversed its official position of not dealing with terrorists and covertly sold weapons to Iran.

Throughout this process, the kidnapping networks themselves received undisclosed yet large ransom payments. Thus, Hezbollah and Iran were able to leverage the skills of Lebanon’s preexisting Shiite kidnapping networks to achieve strategic objectives. As with the other tactics we have explored, this was possible because of the veteran Amal and Palestinian operatives that Hezbollah was able to recruit early in its existence.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, our analysis of Hezbollah demonstrates the complex interplay of external state sponsorship and the nascent organization’s internal characteristics in the development of one particularly effective violent non-state group. Within this context, Iran fuelled Hezbollah’s rapid rise from a dissident faction of Amal to an irregular force capable of challenging the Middle East’s foremost military power by providing every category of assistance that states can offer non-state...
actors. Nevertheless, although Iranian sponsorship was a necessary condition for Hezbollah’s growth, it was insufficient in and of itself to guarantee the organization’s success. Indeed, Iran’s support yielded tangible results only because Hezbollah’s innate characteristics enabled the organization to efficiently employ Iranian inputs to good effect.

Iran provided Hezbollah with three forms of assistance—financial, sanctuary, and political—that proved invaluable for the organization’s development. Iranian financial aid, estimated at $140 million annually during Hezbollah’s early years, enabled the organization to buy weapons, recruit seasoned fighters, and build a formidable welfare system. Of equal importance, Iranian statesmen’s ability to obtain Hezbollah a sanctuary in the Syrian-controlled Beka’a Valley gave the organization a safe haven where it could plan operations and train recruits. Finally, Iran provided Hezbollah with valuable ideological and political aid in terms of Khomeini’s endorsement of the movement, his theological justification of martyrdom (i.e., suicide) attacks, and Iran’s lobbying for Hezbollah vis-à-vis Syria’s government. Taken as an ensemble, Iranian aid was vital to Hezbollah’s development and it is unlikely that the organization could otherwise have grown to its present dimensions.

Although Iran’s aid contributed palpably to Hezbollah’s development, certain innate characteristics of the organization itself proved indispensable to its success. Indeed, foreign aid has enervated certain armed non-state actors when the receiving organization’s administrative capacity and/or organizational culture have been unequal to the task of soundly managing large financial inputs. Hezbollah avoided this fate because its founding political cadres were a group that was both tightly knit as a result of their common background in the ad-Da’wa movement and experienced at administering large organizations (e.g., future Secretary General Nasrallah was a member of Amal’s politburo). These founding cadres instilled in the movement an organizational culture that elevated honesty and discipline to the level of cardinal virtues; and justified the necessity of each in theological terms. Drawing on their intimate knowledge of the shortcomings that afflicted Amal and Palestinian groups, Hezbollah’s founders also developed a financial model—combining modest salaries and elaborate welfare benefits—that incentivized professionalism and self-sacrifice.

While important to Hezbollah’s ability to use financial aid efficiently, the organization’s endogenous characteristics were even more critical to its military success. Despite its desire to tactically guide Hezbollah, Iran’s IRGC had few relevant skills to impart. Indeed, IRGC training and advice inspired Hezbollah to launch costly and ill-considered operations early in its struggle. Hezbollah, therefore, started accumulating military successes only after veterans from Amal and Palestinian groups assumed responsibility for planning attacks. The essentially Lebanese, rather than Iranian, character of Hezbollah’s ensuing campaign appears even more starkly when individual tactics are analyzed. Thus, whether one examines Hezbollah’s use of irregular/guerrilla warfare, suicide bombing, or kidnapping, all of the organization’s principal tactics had important antecedents during Lebanon’s Civil War and were enacted by veterans of that conflict.

If, as we argue, armed non-state actors’ internal characteristics determine whether or not they can transform the support provided by states into combat power, then there is likely no direct relationship between the level of state sponsorship organizations receive and how effective they are. A cursory comparison of Hezbollah and the PLO confirms this reality. Although the approximately $140 million that Iran annually provided rendered Hezbollah one of the best endowed
armed actors on the Lebanese scene, it was Hezbollah's use of these resources that made the organization as successful as it was.\textsuperscript{150} Indeed, the organizational skills and integrity of Hezbollah's political leaders, combined with their military cadres' relentless effort to perfect a small set of asymmetric tactics, proved most critical to the organization's effectiveness.

In sharp contrast to Hezbollah's experience, despite annually receiving annual aid infusions nine times greater than those Hezbollah later obtained, the PLO accomplished comparatively little.\textsuperscript{151} Indeed, much of the money the PLO received fed the vast patron-client networks its leaders maintained. Besides being wasteful, such institutionalized corruption enervated the organization because wealth and bourgeois comforts led many PLO cadres to abandon the crude existence of guerrilla camps and clandestine safe-houses for villas in secure Arab capitals.\textsuperscript{152} To make matters worse, the organization squandered resources on prestigious heavy weaponry, such as tanks, that it could not use effectively and were even counter-productive to the organization's asymmetric conflict with Israel.\textsuperscript{153} Because the necessary opacity of violent non-state organizations' finances means that there are few obstacles to corruption within them, other non-state groups are more likely to resemble the PLO than Hezbollah in how they exploit state sponsorship.

Ultimately, this fact—that the internal composition of many armed non-state actors renders them incapable of effectively using the resources sponsors provide—constitutes a powerful disincentive to states that may be tempted to use non-state actors as policy instruments. Within this context, Hezbollah appears to be the exception that proves the rule about the poor returns on investment that sponsors of armed non-state organizations achieve in most instances. Thus, while Iran's support of Hezbollah was a success story, this success hinged on a series of propitious circumstances, including Hezbollah's founding by experienced political and military leaders and its ability to attract the footloose Shiite veterans that had been employed by Amal and Palestinian groups. Because few armed non-state actors possess the same advantageous internal characteristics as Hezbollah, few will likely use the support sponsors provide as effectively. Indeed, the realization that the sponsorship of violent non-state actors—be they insurgents or terrorists—frequently generates meager results has led such states as Algeria, Cuba, Libya, and North Korea to abandon this practice.

Notes

2. The focus of this study is violent non-state actors in a general sense, rather than insurgencies, militias, or terrorist groups per se. In the 1980s, Hezbollah possessed characteristics of all three types of violent non-state actor. See Daniel Byman, “Should Hezbollah Be Next?,” \textit{Foreign Affairs} 82, no. 6 (2003): 54–66; and Judith Harik, \textit{Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism} (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 163–175.


12. Jackson, “Technology Acquisition by Terrorist Groups” (see note 4 above).


15. Byman, *Deadly Connections* (see note 3 above), 75–78.


30. Ibid., 459–460.

32. Even after reorganizing itself as a conventional force, the PLO lacked the human capital to employ much of its weaponry. Consequently, most of its rockets, anti-tank guns, and anti-aircraft guns were captured unused, still wrapped in plastic covers. The stiff resistance that the Israelis later encountered in Beirut was offered by part-time Palestinian militiamen, Lebanese left-wing parties, and individual escapees from the conventional brigades, who made their way to Beirut after their units’ collapse in South Lebanon. Martin van Crevald, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force* (New York: PublicAffairs, 1998), 288–299; and Khalidi, *Under Siege* (see note 27 above), 61–66.
33. Byman, “Should Hezbollah Be Next?” (see note 2 above).
37. Byman, *Deadly Connections* (see note 3 above), 79–115.
43. Ibid., 33–38.
45. Interviews conducted in Southern Lebanon, April 2011.
49. Musa as-Sadr was a cousin of Ayatollah Muhammed Baqir as-Sadr, Iraq’s most politically active Shiite cleric of this period, and his niece married Ayatollah Khomeini’s son. See Rodger Shanahan, “Shi’a Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Da’wa Party,” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (2004): 943–954.
54. Interview with (ret.) General Nizar Abdel Kader, former Deputy Chief of the Lebanese Army, April 6, 2011; and Harik, *Papers on Lebanon 14* (see note 35 above), 19.
56. Interview with Talal Hatoum, Amal, April 7, 2011.
57. Harik, *Papers on Lebanon 14* (see note 35 above), passim.
58. Interview with Ali Hamdan, Senior Advisor to Nabih Berri, April 5, 2011.
60. Rabil, *Religion, National Identity* (see note 34 above), 41–43.
64. Hezbollah’s nomenclature was complex during its early years. The term “Islamic Resistance” was selected by future secretary general Abbas al-Musawi. The term “Hezbollah” apparently first entered common usage in March 1983, but was not officially adopted until 1984. For simplicity’s sake, Hezbollah is used throughout this text, even when it might be anachronistic. See Blanford, *Warriors of God* (see note 40 above), 51–53; and Rabil, *Religion, National Identity* (see note 34 above), 46–47.
68. Blanford, *Warriors of God* (see note 40 above), 47.
69. Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (see note 39 above), 468–469.
70. Ibid., 396–397.
73. Qāssem, *Hezbollah* (see note 66 above), 32–34.
74. Shanahan, “Shi’a Political Development in Iraq” (see note 61 above), 949.
75. Qāssem, *Hezbollah* (see note 66 above), 34; and Rabil, *Religion, National Identity* (see note 34 above), 44.
76. The salaries Hezbollah paid its combatants were reportedly significantly greater than those offered by Amal, which hardly paid them at all, but equal or slightly inferior to the PLO’s lowest pay grade ($200 per month). Harik, *Papers on Lebanon 14* (see note 35 above), 25; Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (see note 2 above), 40; and Sayigh, *Armed Struggle* (see note 29 above), 459.
80. Rabil, *Religion, National Identity* (see note 34 above), 49; and Blanford, *Warriors of God* (see note 40 above), 46.
81. Ranstorp “The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon” (see note 46 above), 251.
82. Badran, “Lebanon’s Militia Wars” (see note 53 above), 176.
83. Interview with Dr. Ibrahim Moussawi, Hezbollah Chief of Media Relations, April 8, 2011.
84. Interview with (ret.) General Fauzi Abou Farhat, Lebanese Air Force, April 8, 2011; and interview with Judith Palmer Harik, Professor at the American University of Beirut, April 6, 2011.
86. Islamic Health Society, *Islamic Health Society—21 Years Promoting Health Services* (Beirut: Islamic Health Society, 2005).
88. Because of a 1974 agreement between Arafat and as-Sadr, the PLO trained Amal’s combatants. Therefore, both sources of Hezbollah cadres—Palestinian groups and Amal—trained their personnel similarly.
91. Interview with Timur Gökşel, (ret.) official with UNIFIL, April 2, 2011.

97. Interview with (ret.) General Faouzi Abou Farhat, Lebanese Air Force, April 8, 2011.


100. Interview with Nicholas Blanford, Journalist Specialized in Lebanese Affairs, April 7, 2011.

101. Interview with (ret.) Brigadier Elias Hanna, Lebanese Army, April 5, 2011.


105. Qassem, *Hezbollah* (see note 66 above), 137.

106. Interview with Mohammed Ajami, Fixer for International Media, April 8, 2011.

107. Interview with Harik, April 6, 2011.

108. Interview with Hatoum, April 7, 2011.

109. Interview with Brigadier Hanna, April 5, 2011.


113. Interview with Brigadier Hanna, April 5, 2011.

114. It is worth noting that Hezbollah never clashed with Lebanon’s most effective militias—the Maronite Christian Lebanese Forces and Druze Popular Socialist Party. Although Amal’s militia was large, it was generally considered of poor quality, leading one historian to describe it in the following terms: “Amal wasn’t particularly well organized and effective in battles and needed bailing out by the Syrians.” Therefore, although Iranian financial resources and the perspicacity of Hezbollah’s military cadres enabled the organization to triumph over the small, under-resourced LCP and large, poorly organized Amal militia, they were never tested against Lebanon’s two principal Civil War-era militias. These militias, with approximately 12,000 and 5,000 combatants apiece, would have likely proven more capable foes than Amal. Badran, “Lebanon’s Militia Wars” (see note 53 above), 161–186; and Regina Sneider-Perri, *Guerres Maronites, 1975–1990* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 1995), passim.


121. Interview with Harik, April 6, 2011.

122. Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (see note 89 above); and Qassem, *Hezbollah* (see note 66 above), 67–70.


Explaining Hezbollah’s Effectiveness

125. Interview with Brigadier Hanna, April 5, 2011.
126. Labaki and Rejeily, Bilan des Guerres du Liban (see note 52 above), 38.
127. Ibid., 42.
128. Interview with General Abou Farhat, April 8, 2011.
129. Blanford, Warriors of God (see note 40 above), 73.
130. Unbeknownst to the United States, a Christian militia had already killed the Iranians. See Robert Baer, See No Evil: A True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA’s War on Terror (New York: Three Rivers, 2002), 73–104; and Avon and Khatchadourian, Le Hezbollah (see note 59 above), 38.
131. Ranstorp, “The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon” (see note 46 above), 252.
132. Ibid., 252–253; and Blanford, Warriors of God (see note 40 above), 73.
133. Jaber, Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance (see note 98 above), 113.
135. Ranstorp, “The Hizballah Training Camps of Lebanon” (see note 46 above), 92–140.
136. Interview with Harik, April 6, 2011.
137. Avon and Khatchadourian, Le Hezbollah (see note 59 above), 41.
139. Ibid., 253.
140. Blanford, Warriors of God (see note 40 above), 76.
141. Jaber, Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance (see note 98 above), 121.
142. Seale, Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East (see note 39 above), 468–490.
144. Norton, Hezbollah: A Short History (see note 67 above), 74.
145. Avon and Khatchadourian, Le Hezbollah (see note 59 above), 41–42.
147. Interview with (ret.) General Abdel Kader, April 6, 2011.
148. Harik, Papers on Lebanon 14 (see note 35 above), 41.
149. Interview with Dr. Moussawi, April 8, 2011.
150. Harik, Papers on Lebanon 14 (see note 35 above), 41.
151. Alexander and Sinai, Terrorism: The PLO Connection (see note 28 above), 33.
152. Sayigh, Armed Struggle (see note 29 above), 454–460.