Survival through restrained institutionalization: The case of Hezbollah in Lebanon

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an in-depth exploration of the evolving nature of domestic strategies adopted by Lebanon's Hezbollah since its foundation in 1985 until the contemporary time. Based on Joel Migdal's contributions to the literature on state-society relations, and Samuel Huntington's understanding of institutionalization, it seeks to highlight and explain important transformations in Hezbollah's political program, its sustained acquisition of arms, its social mobilization strategy, and its sensitive relationship with a de jure sovereign yet de facto weak Lebanese consociational system. The study proposes an explanation that combines Hezbollah's ability to take advantage of the segmental autonomy that characterizes the power-sharing arrangements governing the Lebanese political system, and the overall existing political opportunity structure. The core argument is that Hezbollah has been able to become a powerful non-state actor through a process of restrained institutionalization which takes into consideration the need to sustain popular support on one hand, and the sensitive intricacies of Lebanon's consociational system on the other hand. In other words, Hezbollah has invested its capacities in a way that maximizes its power in the existing political system, while remaining institutionally autonomous to a relative extent from it, and therefore becoming able to pursue its independent interests. However, the line demarcating the boundaries between Hezbollah and the Lebanese government has become finer. That said, study also aims to address the conceptual ambiguity resulting from Hezbollah's penetration of the Lebanese political system, thus becoming a hybrid actor whose power encompasses both state and non-state attributes.

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List of Abbreviations

FPM:	Free Patriotic Movement
FTO:	Foreign Terrorist Organization
GCC:	Gulf Cooperation Council
GCL:	Grand Confederation of Labor
HIFPAA:	Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act
IDF:	Israeli Defense Forces
IRGC:	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRSO:	Islamic Resistance Support Organization
ISIL:	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
LAF:	Lebanese Armed Forces
LCP:	Lebanese Communist Party
LNM:	Lebanese National Movement
LNRF:	Lebanese National Resistance Front
LRB:	Lebanese Resistance Brigades
MB:	Muslim Brotherhood
MNF:	Multinational Forces
MoU:	Memorandum of Understanding
PLO:	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PR:	Proportional Representation
QSG:	Qornet Chehwan Gathering
SG:	Secretary-General
SLA:	South Lebanon Army
SSNP:	Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party
STL:	Special Tribunal for Lebanon
TBCC:	Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination
UN:	United Nations
US:	United States
UNSCR:	United Nations Security Council Resolution

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to Aya, my gorgeous gem and support system, who embodies the perfect manifestation and meaningfulness of the word “sister”.

Introduction

Ever since its official foundation in 1985, Lebanon's Hezbollah has been a subject of controversy in numerous academic and policy circles in the Middle East and beyond (Ranstorp, 1997; Jaber, 1997; Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2002; Hamzeh, 2004; Byman, 2003; Early, 2006). Born in a highly volatile domestic environment torn through civil war, and amidst regional turmoil fueled by critical developments, Hezbollah has struggled to enhance its popularity and achieve key objectives on its agenda. The 1989 Taef Agreement and the subsequent era of Syrian tutelage served to terminate the violent hostilities of the Lebanese Civil War, nevertheless creating new challenges for Hezbollah, which has successfully sustained its acquisition of arms in a weak post-civil war political system and even accomplished consecutive political victories.

Academic debate has revolved around various dimensions of Hezbollah's changing behavior. Once deemed an Islamic group with anti-Western sentiments and a radical project that aims towards establishing an Islamic Republic modeled after Imam Khomeini's ideas, controversy and suspense heightened when the group announced its acceptance of the 1989 Taef Agreement, becoming a partner in a political system it consistently attacked in the past but maintaining its arms, nonetheless. Questions arose specifically as to whether Hezbollah's political integration has been authentic or opportunistic. Did the group really abandon the project of the Islamic Republic? Or does it still harbor hegemonic ambitions? What explains its shift from militancy to pragmatism? How has Hezbollah's relationship with its Shiite social base evolved? What is the nature of its relationship with the Lebanese government, a sovereign yet weak entity that does not monopolize the means of violence? Can this coexistence between a strong-armed non-state actor and a weak state last? How so?

In the quest of answering these questions, this thesis undertakes an in-depth exploration of the evolving nature of domestic strategies adopted by Lebanon's Hezbollah since its foundation in 1985 until the contemporary time. Based on Joel Migdal's contributions to the literature on state-society relations, and Samuel Huntington's understanding of institutionalization[1], it seeks to highlight and explain important transformations in Hezbollah's political program, its sustained acquisition of arms, its social mobilization strategy, and its sensitive relationship with a sovereign yet weak Lebanese consociational system. The study suggests an explanation that combines between Hezbollah's ability to take advantage of the segmental autonomy that characterizes the power-sharing arrangements governing the Lebanese political system, and the overall existing political opportunity structure. The core argument is that Hezbollah has been able to become a powerful non-state actor through a process of restrained institutionalization which takes into consideration the need to sustain popular support on one hand, and the sensitive intricacies of Lebanon's consociational system on the other hand. In other words, Hezbollah has invested its capacities in a way that maximizes its power in the existing political system, while remaining institutionally autonomous from it, and is, therefore, able to pursue its independent interests.

Taking the proposed theoretical tripod as a point of reference, the empirical examination yields the following findings: Hezbollah's survival and durability as a non-state actor is the

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[1] Huntington talks about political institutionalization as an important process for every political organization that wants to employ social mobilization to further its own objectives (1968). Institutionalization generates and defines the interests of socio-political organizations, rendering the institutional interest distinct from the interests of the individual components of this institution. Huntington adds that the presence of autonomous institutional interests means the political organization itself has become autonomous in one or another from society: "A political organization that is the instrument of a social group—family, clan, class—lacks autonomy and institutionalization (Ibid, p. 20).

product of a highly flexible and adaptable domestic strategy. The group attempts to balance its agenda between the need to sustain social control over its popular base, and the urge to maintain/impose domestic power over other Lebanese actors. The group's institutionalization, or development, has been restrained by this domestic trap. However, it is this relationship with the state and society in Lebanon that provides a valuable cover for Hezbollah as non-state actor with a regional outlook. Therefore, despite the power Hezbollah developed on all levels (military in particular), the group has reordered its preferences in a manner that led to a process of hybridizing within the Lebanese political system rather than eliminating it. In line with Saouli's findings, Hezbollah's actions have been somewhere between value-rational and instrumentally-rational (2018). Yet, the group's creative moves on the domestic chessboard have also created new problems, as with increasing domestic power, comes increasing responsibility. In order to maintain its survival as a strong non-state actor, Hezbollah will have to cautiously reap the benefits of its domestic strategy, while paying its costs and honoring its commitments.

The study is structured and organized as follows: First, I review the literature on Hezbollah, present the predominant claims and counter-claims, the theoretical and methodological approaches utilized, and engage in a critical discussion of their strengths and pitfalls. Second, I introduce and frame the theoretical tripod which constitutes the backbone of this study. After that, I outline the research and strategy and conceptualize the dependent and independent variables, with a brief discussion of this study's strengths and shortcomings.

Literature Review

Hezbollah's uniqueness lies the in the fact that the group is an exemplary model of an armed non-state actor that, despite its radical roots, has demonstrated a great deal of flexibility and adaptation in its quest for survival; although Hezbollah's military capacity and experience dwarf those of the Lebanese state, it hasn't sought to overthrow the Lebanese political system and in fact exercised a sort of cautious yet self-serving domestic strategy[2]. The academic corps caught up with this current, and a handful of scholars, both in the Middle East and beyond, have undertaken the challenging task of conceptualizing Hezbollah, as well as attempting to offer accurate accounts of its history, development and behavior. Understandably though, a great deal of what has been written on Hezbollah lacks a well-defined theoretical framework; the focus has been more on historical and descriptive narratives, given the organization's secrecy and blurry image particularly in the West. The early clandestine character of the group hence necessitated a descriptive lens, and the ambiguity of Hezbollah's character obfuscated capturing the group within a theoretical framework. Nevertheless, the scholarship on Hezbollah today is voluminous, and the fact that several scholars have shed light on different aspects and dimensions of the group provides the richness which enables a careful step into theorizing.

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[2] Since the term 'strategy' holds a variety of meanings and definitions, depending on context or area of interest, it's necessary to elucidate the utility and definition of the term throughout this study. By Hezbollah's domestic strategy, the author means the combination of actions, violent or non-violent, which a socio-political organization undertakes in order to secure the leverage its possesses on the domestic political landscape, defend this leverage from threats, and/or seek additional objectives on its political agenda. Carrying out the domestic strategy necessitates interaction with the populace, other political parties and group, and of course, the state itself. Another usage of the term strategy appears later in this paper, where I discuss Migdal's state-in-society model, highlighting what he calls *strategies of survival*.

It's useful to prepare the ground for this literature review by indicating the overarching themes that have dominated the body of scholarship on Hezbollah. In general, I identify five primary research trends or approaches: historical-descriptive focusing on the organization's foundation, its agenda, and its organizational features; analytical and quasi-theoretical schemes that aim to discuss the ideational controversy between terrorist and resistance movement labels; theory-based groundworks that attempt to conceptualize the group and explain its development from a radical Islamist movement to a moderate pragmatic political party with a military wing in post-civil war Lebanon; and more or less a bulk of academic and policy-oriented studies that echo the concern about Hezbollah's hijacking operations and suicide attacks, growing regional role as a proxy group for Iran and an ally for Syria, in addition to alleged global criminal enterprises particularly in Latin America. It's important to note that those themes are interdependent and navigate between multiple levels of analyses. In fact, they all include arguments, whether explicitly or inferentially, as to how the Hezbollah has been able to enhance its military power and political influence (locally and regionally) and survive alongside a sovereign but weak Lebanese state.

Various historical sketches have competed to reconstruct the official birth of Hezbollah in 1985 as an Islamic resistance movement owing its allegiance to Iran's Imam Khomeini and his idea of the guardianship of the jurisconsult (Sharara, 1997; Ranstorp, 1997; Jaber, 1997; Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2002; Hamzeh, 2004; Harik, 2004; Norton, 2014). Moreover, they all include a brief background and contextual analysis concerning the circumstances surrounding the emergence of Hezbollah: socio-economic marginalization and political disenfranchisement of Lebanese Muslim Shiites in the post-colonial era; gradual mobilization of Lebanese Shiites under secular and Arab Nationalist banners since the early 1960s; the displacement of the Palestinian

Liberation Organization (PLO) guerilla fighters and Palestinian refugees to Lebanon upon their expulsion from Jordan; outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975; the religious sectarianization of the conflict; the successful overthrow of Iran's Shah in 1979 and Khomeini's declaration of the Islamic Republic; and last but not least, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the creation of a Security Zone in South Lebanon. Certainly, Hezbollah was formed in quite a hectic period, and there's no decisive monocausal argument capable of explaining its establishment nor its growth.

Although the previously mentioned scholarly works have much in common, the way they approach the nature of Hezbollah's evolution is not exactly the same. The Lebanese sociologist Sharara (1997), for instance, examined the nature and development of Hezbollah's relationship with the local Shiite society while stressing on its commitment to Islam, especially to Khomeini's ideological program. Norton (2014) identified four major trends that serve to explain Shiite mobilization: secularism, liberation, Islamism and reformism; he views Hezbollah as a group shares elements of national liberation, Shiite Islam and political reformation. Saad-Ghorayyeb relied to a great extent on modernization theory to explain the transformation of Shiites from political quietism to active mobilization and seeks to examine how Hezbollah reconciled between political Islam, on one hand, and Lebanese nationalism, on the other hand (2002). Ranstorp (1997) utilized the crisis management procedure to study how Western powers (The United States, France, and the United Kingdom) responded to hostage-taking operations allegedly performed by Hezbollah, and he relates his analysis to a regional foreign policy perspective, highlighting the triangular relationship between Hezbollah, Iran and Syria. Furthermore, Hamzeh (2004) offered a comprehensive in-depth study whose central focus is Hezbollah's internal organizational structure. Capitalizing on his intricate knowledge of Islamic

movements and theology, he skillfully relates Hezbollah's decision-making to the clerical factionalism extant in the administration of Iran's Islamic Republic. Interestingly, he argues that the group's pragmatic approach in the post-civil war era (exemplified by the latter's decision to participate in the Lebanese political system) does not guarantee that it has abandoned the goal of establishing an Islamic republic in the future (2004)[3].

In another perspective, Harik (2004) engages in the controversial debate on whether Hezbollah is a terrorist organization or a resistance movement; to do so, she undertakes a dual approach that accentuates the relationship between the US administration and Hezbollah[4]. Second, she argues that Hezbollah has employed two major strategies to increase its power in Lebanon: the first is a guerilla warfare military strategy whose objective is to force the illegal Israeli occupation to withdraw from Lebanese territory; and a political strategy that engages in a cross-religious dialogue with Lebanese political parties in order to demonstrate that Hezbollah's moderation is authentic rather than opportunistic

While the first leaps into theory-based frameworks can be captured in Sharara's sociological approach, the more well-defined theoretical configurations in the works by Joseph Alagha (2011), Eitan Azani (2009) and Joesph Daher (2016). Alagha, in his book "Hizbullah's Identity Construction" (2011) draws upon three theoretical perspectives: social constructivism, resource mobilization and Pierre Bourdieu's idea of religious (symbolic) capital to understand various controversial dilemmas ranging from Hezbollah's moderation in post-civil Lebanon, the

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[3] Hamzeh's argument is exceptional here. Most of the academic works on Hezbollah tend to favor the argument that the group's moderate stance resembles its acceptance of the Lebanese confessional system, or at least its decision to drop the Islamic Republic project.

[4] Hezbollah has been held responsible by the US Administration for the suicide bombing that targeted the US Marines Base in Beirut in 1983, which resulted in 243 casualties.

differentiation between terrorism and national liberation, not to mention the group's rapidly increasing political power[5]. Azani (2009) conceptualizes Hezbollah as a revolutionary social movement and draws on the social movements literature as a backbone for his arguments about what he describes as the "Hezbollah Model". His book does not provide an empirical contribution that significantly adds to the formerly reviewed bodies of work, and it is difficult to trace the connection between the theoretical model proposed earlier in his book and his empirical discussions. However, he categorizes Hezbollah's lifespan into five main phases: foundation, consolidation, expansion, institutionalization, and ascendancy, adding that Hezbollah has yet to succeed in the last stage (2009). Yet, Azani's utilization of the social movement literature neither suffices to explain Hezbollah's birth nor analyze its growth. Hezbollah has built an overarching set of institutions that are highly disciplined and organized, gaining support from different socio-economic classes. Conceptualizing it as a social movement fails to capture the full potential and nature of the group.

The books reviewed so far can be compiled under the label "classic literature" on Hezbollah. Authors such as August Norton (2014) have continuously updated their books by adding new chapters which incorporate significant events relevant to the research on Hezbollah (e.g. assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 followed by withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese territory[6]; July 2006 War between Lebanon and Israel; the May

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[5] Alagha has written other books on Hezbollah, and of particular interest for this paper is "Hizbullah's Documents from 1985 Open Letter to the 2009 Manifesto" (2011, Amsterdam University Press); it compiles Hezbollah's primary documents, translated from Arabic, with a clear chronology clarifying the major historical developments in the group's lifespan until 2011.

[6] The Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) ended through a peace settlement known as the Taef Agreement. Syrian troops, which entered Lebanon during the war in 1976, were to remain in the country in the post-civil war era to maintain order and prevent violence between post-civil war parties and groups. Consequently, Syria and Lebanon

2008 crisis and Doha Accords; Syrian Crisis and Hezbollah's intervention on Asad's behalf). There are two new scholarly works, however, that deserve careful attention before closing this section. The first, "Hezbollah: The Political Economy of the Party of God" (2016) by Joseph Daher, scrutinizes Hezbollah from a historical materialist perspective[7], while maintaining that any explanation of Hezbollah's survival and growth should not only focus on its early foundational period, but also should incorporate a careful observation of contemporary variables at play. While acknowledging the vital role of political Islam in Hezbollah's agenda, Daher notes that the group's behavior has walked hand in hand with the capitalist and neoliberal environment characteristic of post-civil war Lebanon[8]. Therefore, Daher contends that Hezbollah's evolution has reached a stage where the group has become a supporter of the status quo, i.e. the power-sharing system institutionalized via the Taef Agreement. There is a strong link between the theoretical approach he presents (historical materialism) and the empirical evidence he discusses

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signed two agreements in 1991: The Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination, and the Lebanon-Syria Defense and Security Agreement. Thus, the period spanning from 1991 to April 2005 became known as the Syrian tutelage era. However, the presence of Syrians troops on Lebanese soil was not unanimously applauded by all Lebanese political factions. As it happens, the domestic political landscape was divided between those who supported Syrian presence (later known as the March 8 Coalition) and those who opposed it (March 14 Alliance).

[7] Daher is not the first to borrow from Marxist thought in approaching Hezbollah. In his article, "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon: Islamization of Leninist Organizational Principles" (1991), As'ad AbuKhalil questions the purely Islamic nature of Hezbollah' ideology often discussed and taken for granted by other scholars. He compares Hezbollah's elite clerics to the communist elites in Marxist movements and shows the similarity between Hezbollah's organizational structure and to what he calls the "Leninist theory of democratic centralism" (p. 394). Plus, Hezbollah's guerilla fighting style which predominated its operations against Israel during the 1990s closely resemble Maoist recommendations and guidelines in the latter's book on guerilla warfare. (Love, 2008).

[8] Prime minister Rafiq Hariri spearheaded the neoliberal economic policies aimed at reconstructing Beirut in the post-war period. Most of government resource allocation flowed into building convenient infrastructure in Beirut and supporting the banking and services sector, in order to attract foreign investment and restore the status of tourism (Daher, 2016).

and analyzes throughout the study; not only does he offer an interesting chapter on the changing nature and emerging socio-economic heterogeneity within Hezbollah's social base (by indicating that Hezbollah mobilize Shiites across different class structures), but he also presents three detailed qualitative case-studies as examples of Hezbollah's support to the government's neoliberal policies.

As for the second book, "Hezbollah: Socialization and its Tragic Ironies" (2018), its author Adham Saouli disagrees with the thesis that Hezbollah's evolution[9] masks its underlying determination to establish the Islamic Republic, but he also does not clearly assert that Hezbollah has decisively renounced its long-term goals. Conceptualizing Hezbollah as an armed political movement (APM), and situating it within two anarchical orders[10], Saouli argues that war-making with Israel is the main driver of Hezbollah's socialization[11] process and political trajectory. Building upon Elias's theory of the civilizing process, he underlines Hezbollah's transformation as a continuous learning process, rather than a unilinear track, where the group has exercised restraint, rationalized its behavior and took advantage of available opportunities. Therefore, Saouli does not see in the May 2008 incident when Hezbollah resorted to domestic violence an

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[9] Hezbollah's transformation from a radical militant socio-political organization into a more pragmatic (yet armed) political party that holds a considerable share in the Lebanese political system has been famously termed as 'Al Labnana' which translates into Lebanonization.

[10] Saouli draws on International Relations theory to distinguish between two types of anarchical orders. The first is the Lockean anarchical order, characterized by rivalry, and it resembles the Lebanese political system as the institutionalization of sectarian divisions. The second is the Hobbesian anarchical order, and it differs from its Lockean counterpart in that enmity (rather than rivalry) defines the relationships of its actors. For Hezbollah, the Hobbesian anarchical order is embodied in the vulnerable and war-prone Middle East region, and the ultimate enemy is Israel.

[11] Saouli defines socialization as the "the purposeful participation of political actors in a society with the aim of integrating in, preserving or reforming existing power structures". (2018, p. 26).

indicator that the group still harbors hegemonic ambitions and an Islamic project. Instead, he argues that Hezbollah's choice between violence and restraint depends on the socio-political context, its assessment of the challenge it faces, as well as the experience it has accumulated via being a political actor of growing influence on Lebanese politics.

It is undeniable that Hezbollah's struggle against Israel has been an essential element of its popularity in Lebanon and the Arab World, and that the group has taken advantage of that momentum in critical historical junctures, one can counter-argue that Hezbollah's balance of terror with Israel, a dominant strategy for both parties for a considerable time now, is not pr. It's true that Hezbollah managed to cause trouble for the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) during the Second Lebanon War, but this type of conflicts is costly; domestic political dissent against Hezbollah is always a possibility if the IDF's response is highly indiscriminate. And with challenging conditions such as US economic sanctions on Iran and Hezbollah, securing the resources necessary to execute a satisfactory post-war reconstruction plan has become more elusive. Moreover, Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian crisis demonstrates that its war-making strategy is not necessarily exclusive to Israel, but is open-ended and responsive to emerging regional dynamics and menaces such as the threat to Asad's regime. Saouli makes a great point when he emphasizes that Hezbollah's socialization has depended to a great extent on the non-compromising and decisive stance it took towards Israel; a stance that translated into a dedicated and efficient military resistance (war-making), which characteristically set it apart from its other Lebanese groups both during the Lebanese Civil War and afterwards. After all, Hezbollah's enmity toward Israel remains to be a fixed constant the shapes its identity and behavior. Yet, the changes in Hezbollah's military strategy were shaped not only by the level of professionalism and access to technology the group attained but also by the costs of engagement on the Lebanese

domestic arena. Therefore, politics influenced Hezbollah's strategy towards Israel, while the enmity is constant. The non-violent, or to say, the political aspect of Hezbollah is also important and has come to stand on a more equal ground with its military prowess.

Before wrapping up this section, it's worth mentioning that the West's (esp. US Administration) concern with Hezbollah's activities and increasing power has driven numerous policy-oriented studies that, albeit standing on a quasi-theoretical ground, do not reinforce it with decisive empirical evidence and value. I say that because Hezbollah's alleged attacks in the 1980s (hijacking, suicide bombings, hostage-taking) have won the group a seat on the US Department of State's list of designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs)[12] in 1997 onward. Hence, the conceptual complexity surrounding Hezbollah recurrently highlighted throughout this paper is substituted in those studies by a reductionist classification of the group as terrorist and sometimes criminal organization (e.g. Byman, 2003; Abbot, 2004; Salem, 2006; Noriega & Cardenas, 2011; Hernandez, 2013; Levitt, 2013 & 2014). This is not to say that the hitherto cited policy reports do not contain any element of truth, but the inherent bias and simplistic framing they use ignores the socio-political and socio-economic functions those actors can play (Berman and Laitin, 2008). To add, observation and analysis through a terrorist-freedom fighter lens contradict with this paper's dedication to a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of Hezbollah's strategy. Having said that, they do not serve the objectives highlighted and the questions posed in this study's introduction.

Summing up this volume of scholarship in a few sentences is almost impossible. The variety of theoretical foci employed in studies on Hezbollah mirrors the complexity and ambiguity that characterizes the group. It has been observed as a revolutionary social movement,

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[12] List of Designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm

an Islamist movement, a national liberation force, a terrorist group, a proxy for Iran and Syria, a pragmatist political party with a military wing, and as a Lebanese non-state actor with transnational criminal enterprises. Our scholars of interest consensually admit that each perspective from the above-listed cannot in itself be individually exhaustive and subscribe to the claim that Hezbollah incorporates several layers of conceptualization. They all fill certain gaps in the party' identity and strategy, and this multidimensionality further reinforces Hezbollah's flexible and amorphous nature.

To add, the mosaic of theoretical and analytical frameworks necessitated the resort to more than one level of analysis; one can observe Hezbollah's internal structure at the organizational level, its relationship with the society and state on the local and national levels respectively, and its intervention in Syria at the regional level. Also, research on suspicious Lebanese transnational criminal activities in Latin America or elsewhere (tied to Hezbollah's funding activities) switch the observation to a transnational and global level. Now the study moves on to the section on theory and research design, where it presents the argument that guides this exploratory study, the research strategy, the challenges facing both the thesis and methodology. Preceding that is a brief section on why this study is important.

Motive

The key scholarly outputs reviewed in the prior section, alongside other journal articles and Hezbollah's primary documents, represent a rich empirical base that allows understanding how the group's relationship to the state and society Lebanon shapes its strategy. Experts on Hezbollah have all inevitably engaged in a discussion of how Hezbollah capitalizes on Shiite mobilization to increase its popularity and thus legitimacy. As for its relationship with the state, there's a unanimous approval that its decision to participate in the Lebanese political system since the 1992 Lebanese parliamentary elections and its subsequent entry into cabinet in 2005 were smart moves on the Lebanese chessboard (Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2001; Hamzeh, 2004; Harik, 2004; Azani, 2009; Norton, 2014; Saouli, 2018). Hezbollah's presence as an armed non-state actor in a constitutionally sovereign yet actually weak Lebanese state is a sui generis phenomenon that demands an explanation.

Early (2006), and Salloukh & Mikaelian (2016), are among the few who noted the relevance of the literature on state-society relations to the case of Hezbollah. Early remarkably captures Hezbollah's puzzle his article titled "Larger than a Party, yet Smaller than a State". He states that,

"On the basis of the intricate relationships that exists between Hezbollah, the Lebanese state, and foreign powers, viewing Hezbollah from the prism of Joel Migdal's state-in-society theory, as both a societal organization and a quasi-state entity, could clarify its positions relative to the Lebanese state and its foreign sponsors, and how changes in one could affect the others" (2006, 115).

Later on, I build upon Early's suggestions in order to justify the adequacy of state-in-society approach. Similarly, Salloukh and Mikaelian (2016) situate Hezbollah as an armed non-

state actor in "the context of Lebanon's perpetually weak state structure" (p. 120). Interestingly, they also connect two crucial nodes: Joel Migdal's state-in-society model (2001) where the state is considered as one actor among other socio-political organizations vying to gain mobilizational capacity; and the Taef Agreement of 1989 which institutionalized the power-sharing arrangements on a confessional basis[13], granting each sect its own segmental autonomy[14].

Delving more into Migdal's writings, noticeable became the connection between his ideas on state weakness in the developing world on one hand, and Huntington's earlier writings on social forces, political organizations, and political development on the other hand (1968). Huntington observed a sort of zero-sum game between social forces and political institutions: strong social forces simultaneously reflect weak state political institutions (Ibid, 11). Along this line of thinking, Hezbollah can be viewed as a strong socio-political organization; it enjoys overwhelming popularity among Lebanese Shiites (local social base) which legitimizes its existence and continuity, and possesses a politico-ideological program that reconciles between elements of Khomeini's interpretation of Shiism (the idea of *Wilayat al Fakih* or Guardian of the Jurisconsult) and national liberation (struggle against Israel).

Through benefitting from the literature on state-society relation and institutionalization, this study aims to broaden the theoretical framework in the study of non-state

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[13] Confessional power-sharing arrangements have governed the Lebanese political system since independence, in accordance with the 1943 National Pact, a gentlemen's agreement between Lebanese leaders that assigned the seat of presidency to Christian Maronites, the seat of prime minister to Sunni Muslims and that of head of parliament chamber to Shiite Muslims. However, the 1943 National Pact distributed the parliamentary seats between Muslims and Christians on a 6 to 5 ratio that favors the latter. In 1989, the signing and ratification of the Taef Agreement changed this distribution equating representation between Muslims and Christians in the parliament chamber and other government bodies.

[14] The fourth pillar of Arend Lijphart's consociational democratic model, deemed suitable and conducive for political stability in societies deeply divided along ethnic lines. See pp. 26-27.

actors, conceptualizing them as sociopolitical organizations capable of developing remarkable potential, even in an international system where ‘the state’ is the norm. With the predominantly high attrition rate of violent non-state actors (DeVore and Stahli, 2014), Hezbollah will celebrate its 4oth birthday in six years. The group’s durability stands as an object of puzzlement and thus demands an explanation. Having said that, the next section zooms in on the theoretical tripod on which I depend on to explain Hezbollah’s domestic strategy. It consists of Joel Migdal’s state-in-society model, Huntington’s understanding of institutionalization, and Lijphart’s model of consociational democracy.

Theoretical Tripod

A) State-in-Society Model:

Echoes of Joel Migdal's state-in-society model appear first in his book, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (1988), then more solidly in *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Constitute and Transform One Another* (2001). Migdal is a skeptic toward the once prevalent premise that the road for development and state-building in the Third World can smoothly replicate the Western experience and the recipes prescribed by the United Nations (UN) (1988, 12). More boldly, he sought to provoke a process of rethinking the concept of state predominance that is tilted towards Weber's ideal-type state and tends to appear as a "part of the natural order as the rivers and mountains around us" (Ibid, 17). The state's ability to mobilize society, secure social control, and achieve a level of autonomy from society are hence not guaranteed in every type of political system, and the process through which state leaders arrive at such a reality is a very daunting challenge, particularly when talking about developing countries.

What is social control? According to Migdal, it's the power a socio-political organization gains when it succeeds at satisfying and supporting individuals' strategies' of survival[15] (Ibid, 27). A close example that echoes the relationship between socio-political organizations and their local base is the club model Berman and Laitin used to test the relationship between religion, public goods, and terrorism[16] (2008). There is no organization that can fully claim a monopoly

[15] Strategies of survival refer to material rewards, sanctions and symbolic norms that shape the experiences of individuals and groups and sustain their survival.

[16] Berman and Laitin argue that the sacrifices demanded by religious clubs are "economically efficient" (2008, 17). In a similar vein, Migdal argued that socio-political organizations seek to offer "viable strategies of survival" (2001, 53), which makes the sanctions and costs conceded tolerable given the rewards and benefits accrued.

over social control in developing societies, which produces a conflictual and competitive environment in which different organizations are vying for the capacity to mobilize society. This logic perfectly aligns with the socio-political reality of Lebanon well before its independence in 1943; the deeply divided nature of Lebanon's society across politico-sectarian lines has rendered the state's quest for monopolizing social control an impossible task. Added to that is the lack or even absence of a coherent political base that enables the state to confront and transform the pattern of power distribution extant in society from a fragmented heterogeneous configuration to a more a unified one under the auspices of state institutions (Migdal, 2001, 55). Alternatively, various sectarian groups have competed to mobilize the fragmented society, consequently undermining state capability and power (Salloukh and Mikaelian, 119-121).

Hezbollah's emergence in this context as a champion of a particular sectarian group (in this case Shiites) is not a new phenomenon[17], but rather another manifestation of how a socio-political organization succeeds in enhancing its social control (ergo popularity and legitimacy) through capitalizing on the socio-economic and political grievances of Shiites in Lebanon, a sect that was lying at the periphery and was marginalized for so long under a political system that privileged Christian Maronites.

B) Institutionalization:

Acknowledging that social control is a crucial component that prolongs the survival of a socio-political organization and augments its power is one thing; understanding *how* this

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[17]As a matter of fact, the trends of Shiite mobilization did not always carry an Islamic message. Norton (2014) classifies the mobilization of Shiites into four categories: secularism (under Communist and Arab Nationalist banners); Islamism under Al Da'wa Party and later Hezbollah); national liberation (a multiplicity of Lebanese secular and religious movements); and reformism (The Movement of the Disinherited or Amal under Imam Sadr's leadership).

component is developed and sustained is another dimension for which a mechanistic explanation is necessary. Fortunately, Migdal's state-in-society model implicitly reverberates in the earlier writings of Samuel Huntington[18], particularly his discussion of institutionalization as a process necessary for political development.

Huntington defines institutionalization as the "process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability" (p. 12). One characteristic of institutionalization he emphasizes is its scope (Ibid, 12). The larger the segment of society benefitting from functions performed by a certain institution means the wider its scope becomes. For example, a political party whose electoral program targets the demands and interests of the poorest segments of society has a narrower scope than another that appeals to voters regardless of socio-economic status. Similarly, a party whose social base of mobilization is inclusive of voters across ethnic groups is said to have a wider scope than another which depends exclusively on a specific ethnic group for social and political mobilization. Scope is important here because the wider the circle of appeal, the more legitimate an organization becomes. The indicators of a healthy institutionalization process manifest themselves in four dimensions: Adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence (1968, 12-24). In the section on research methodology, I delve into these four components in a more elaborate manner, as they constitute important indicators guide process-tracing and interpretation.

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[18] Migdal concedes in the *Acknowledgments* section of his book *Strong Societies and Weak States* (1988) to the benefits he acquired from working at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs headed back then by Professor Samuel Huntington. This explains the continuity in the logical reasoning and stream of ideas between the two. But Migdal at the same time addresses the serious challenge of power centralization as a mechanism for state-building in the developing areas.

Whereas Huntington mainly relates the discussion on institutionalization to the political development of nation-states, he admits that the distinction between a social force and a political institution is somehow blurry (1968, 9). This statement is perhaps very true in ethnically divided societies, where the fragmentation of social control makes it easier for leaders to mobilize support along ethnic cleavages without the need to build strong state institutions, but instead through penetrating those institutions. In other words, and connecting this thread to Hezbollah's case, one could argue that Lebanon's divided sectarian makeup is a sufficient condition that guarantees the support of a certain sect (say Shiites) to Hezbollah (a Shiite ethnopolitical organization), rendering the need to build strong public institutions unnecessary if not obsolete. However, the empirical evidence in this case does not corroborate this argument; despite Lebanon's sectarian mosaic, Hezbollah has managed to build its own network of efficient institutions and is actually the most institutionalized political party in Lebanon (Salloukh and Mikaelian, 2013, 516). The diversity of social welfare services it provides is, to a large extent, unmatched by any of its peers in the Lebanese political system, not even the Lebanese state itself. Thus, structural conditions are not sufficient in themselves to explain Hezbollah's puzzle.

There is a missing component in this discussion of institutions outlined above. Surely, institutions do not form and develop merely to satisfy the demands of their subjects. Stated more specifically, socio-political organizations are not just machines designed to fulfill the demands of their social base. They rather possess their own interests; interests that are extraneous and independent from the needs and demands of the populace. Likewise, Huntington distinguishes between the interest of the institutions and those of the individual members of the institution (1968, 25). Putting that in connection with Migdal's concept of social control, it becomes obvious that groups like Hezbollah do not consider social control as an end in itself; popularity is

an essential element to secure legitimacy, but it serves as a means to advocate the interests of the group above all the individual aspiration its constituent members and supporters. This discussion, although common-sensical[19], is indispensable, especially when it comes to analyzing certain decisions taken by the group early in the past (violent clashes with the Amal movement) or the contemporary present (intervention in Syria).

Up to this point, I have tackled two dimensions of the proposed argument for Hezbollah's strategy. The first deals with the group's relationship with its social base, where it fulfills the strategies of survival of Shiites in return for compliance, participation, and legitimation (social control). The second relates to the mechanism through which Hezbollah acquired and internalized more values and improved the quality of its functions (institutionalization). The last pillar of this theoretical edifice concerns the circumstances influencing the continuity and change in the patterns of institutionalization. After all, institutions undergo a learning process and respond to the changes and developments occurring in their surrounding environment. This means new functions are added and removed according to need assessment.

C) Political Opportunity Structure:

In his discussion of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)'s violent uprising against Syria's leader Hafez Al Assad in the early 1980s, Azani (2009, 32) illustrates how political opportunity structures shape both an actor's decision as well as the outcome. The Syrian regime's violent and decisive response against the insurgency exemplifies not only the regime's high coercive capacity but also implies that the MB's uprising was a miscalculation (Ibid, 32). Still, it demonstrates that when a window of opportunity is perceived to be favorable, political

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[19] Or more simply reduced to concepts such as "ideology" or "political project".

organizations are likely to act upon it. Success or failure are determined by the intelligent reading of political developments, regime capacity, the Muslim Brotherhood's own capabilities and a variety of other factors. Similarly, Hezbollah's decisions and actions are shaped by the political opportunity structure extant in its environment. This is not equivalent to overestimating the role of opportunity and downplaying that of ideology. Non-state actors engage in a learning process, which bestows on their leaders the experience and vision that render them more capable of making wise decisions that prolong the survival of their groups and increase their power. I keep this point in mind throughout the study, as it shapes the structuring of the time periods under which Hezbollah operated and consequently the analysis of the obtained empirical evidence.

Among the most influential political opportunity structures are the type of political system and its stability[20]. Here, I dedicate some time to deliberate about Lebanon's consociational democratic system. The domestic dilemma for Lebanon's leaders was and remains the reconciliation between the deeply entrenched and highly institutionalized sectarian divisions on one hand, and the aspiration for building a nation-state marked by stability and capable of development on the other hand. Arend Lijphart observed this dilemma in both Western and Third World states and tackled it in his book, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, by advancing the consociational model as a convenient political system for societies suffering from deep ethnic cleavages. Not only did he debunk the replacement of those segmental loyalties as an easier-said-than-done task, but also warned that any attempt at imposing a homogenized political system will be counter-productive and likely to have ensuing dire outcomes on the system's

[20] This also rings a bell in an article on insurgency and civil war by Fearon and Laitin, where they argue that greed and grievance are necessary but insufficient to motivate people to join insurgent groups. For more information on the centrality of state capacity political stability/instability as a window of opportunity, see Fearon and Laitin (2003, p. 81).

stability (1977, 24). Lijphart outlines four essential components of a consociational political system: government by grand coalition/ elite cartel including leaders of all significant ethnic groups; mutual veto as a guarantee for the interests of minorities; proportional representation in government institutions and administrations; and segmental autonomy allowing each ethnic group to manage its own internal affairs[21] (Ibid, 25). A definitive aspect of consociational democracy, evident in all the above-listed components, is its defiance to majority rule and hegemonic exercise of power, and its encouragement of consensus.

Michael Hudson accurately captures the dilemma of democracy in plural societies in Lebanon, when he observes the substantial political role of certain Lebanese families and the sectarian fragmentation of the political system (1985, 18). Two implications can be inferred from this observation: one is that social organizations such as families and religious groups have long had a fundamental say in the Lebanese political process[22]; secondly, the state as the central political entity is not autonomous and separate from society but rather plays by the latter's rules. The manner in which Lebanon has dealt with the puzzle of nation-building in a deeply divided (plural) society is interesting. In contrast with Huntington's argument that political development and modernization can only take place through the rationalization of political authority, secularization of politics and building a political system that stresses the national character over narrow parochial tendencies (1968, 34), Lebanese leaders have done quite the opposite; they agreed upon a consociational democratic model that respects and preserves the long-standing political value of sectarian cleavages. In Hudson's words, and in tandem with Lijphart's

[21] I avoid engaging in an assessment of consociationalism's performance in Lebanon at this stage and leave it to a future section where I present a historical brief of the few decades up towards Hezbollah's establishment.

[22] and the fact that their roles have been continuously reinforced over a long period of time has institutionalized sectarianism and political familism as the normal features of Lebanon's politics.

argument, traditional pluralism was institutionalized in Lebanese politics (1985, 18). Thus, society was not transformed in the quest of a new political system; on the contrary, a power-sharing political system was carved out in accordance with sectarianism.

The domestic political structure (consociationalism) is only one component of the overall political opportunity structure. Regional and international developments naturally constitute a second component that influences Hezbollah's strategy, especially that the group is both a domestic and regional player at the same time.

D) Knitting All the Threads Together:

Hezbollah is an armed non-state actor in a weak Lebanese consociational system. The theoretical tripod outlined in the previous subsections frames to an extent its behavior and illustrates the strings attached to its range of available options. Its relationship with the society (summarized by the concept of social control) and with the state (exemplified by the need to sustain the established power-sharing arrangements) are two key variables to be taken into consideration by the group if it were to acquire new functions and increase its power (institutionalization). Hence, Hezbollah is in a sort of political game, a game that has its rules and procedures, and in turn, constrains the group's institutionalization process. Following the rules has its benefits and compromises. Breaking the rules as well has its gains and tradeoffs.

On the domestic level, gains may range from social control and legitimacy to increasing political representation and perhaps hegemony. Tradeoffs may include loss of popular support and legitimacy, condemnation from allies/foes, and in the extreme case, political disorder and violence on the domestic landscape. This not only applies to Hezbollah's domestic moves, but also to its regional ventures. Given its acquisition of arms, and its relationship with Tehran and Damascus (ideological, material and strategic), the group has developed much larger capabilities

relative to its Lebanese counterparts. More power translates into a higher capacity for action, but it also means there's a higher responsibility incurred by adopting one strategy over another. This sort of cost-benefit calculation and risk assessment takes place ipso facto within Hezbollah's inner circles. Having said that, I now proceed to outline my research strategy.

Research Strategy

A) Issues of Conceptualization and Operationalization:

This study is a theory-based exploration of Hezbollah's evolving domestic strategy since its official birth in 1985 until our contemporary time. Accordingly, the scrutiny and analysis of the empirical data present will take place simultaneously in light of three lenses: state-in-society model, institutionalization and the political opportunity structure. To do so, I rely on well-defined indicators of social control (Migdal 1988 & 2001) and institutionalization (Huntington, 1968; Dix, 1992), in addition to the four components of consociationalism (Lijphart, 1977):

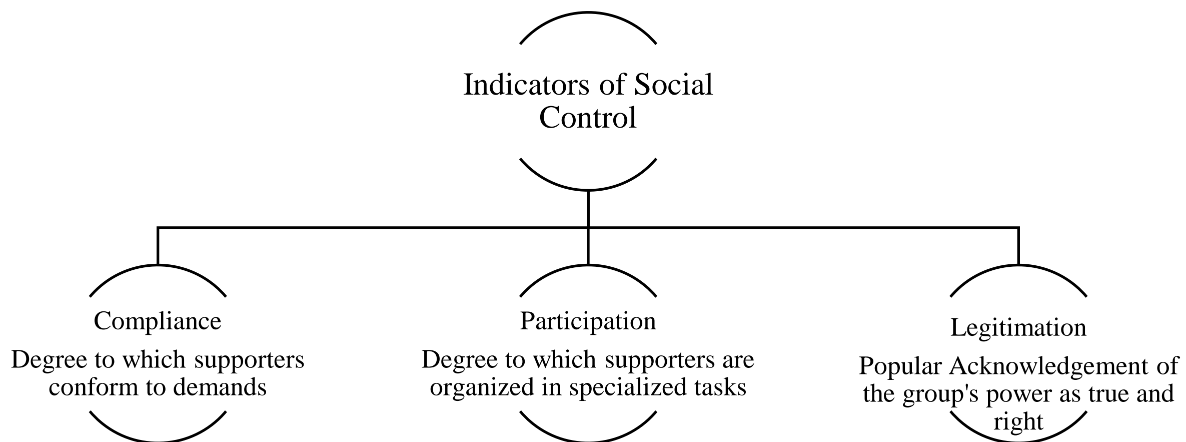

Figure 1: Elements of Social Control (Migdal, 1988)

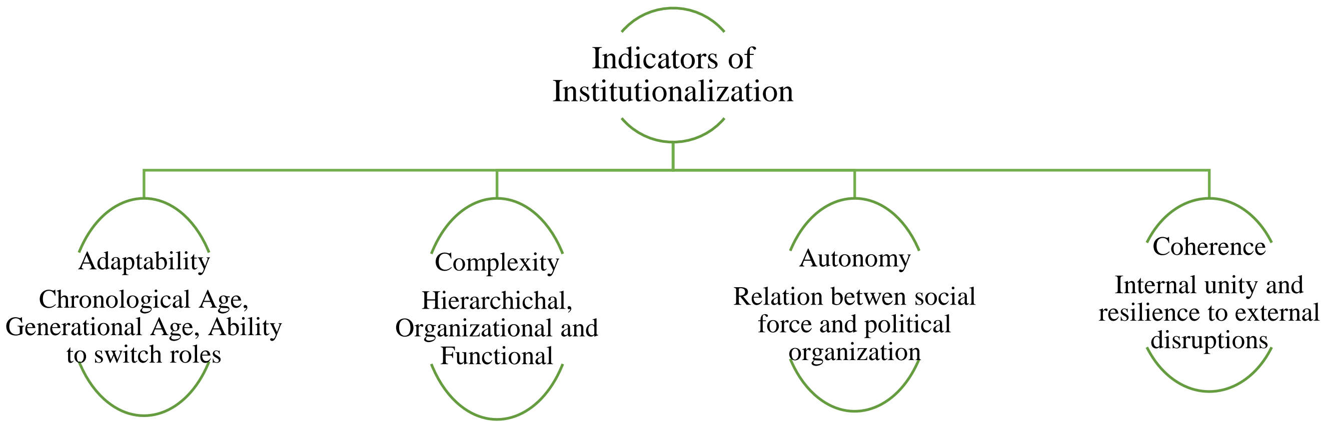

Figure 2: Indicators of Institutionalization (Huntington, 1968)

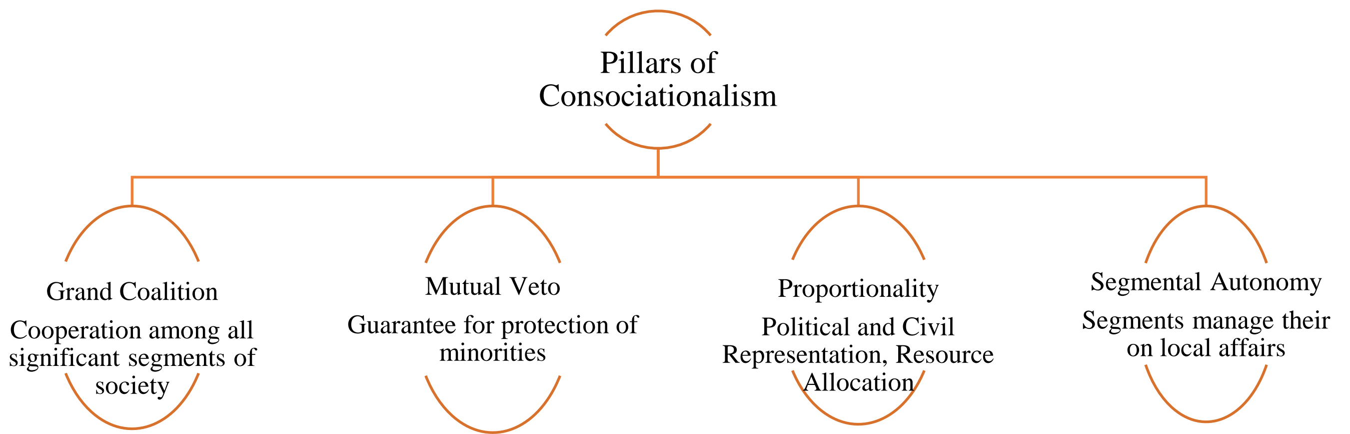

Figure 3: Pillars of Consociationalism (Lijphart, 1977)

The three figures briefly summarize the indicators for social control, institutionalization, and consociationalism. They are quite helpful in guiding the way the study approaches Hezbollah's growth and interaction with the state and society. As for the empirical base, I will utilize primary sources ranging from Hezbollah's documents, communiques, public statements. Key documents

such as the Taef Agreement, the treaties with Syria and the Doha Accords[23], and relevant United Nations Resolutions are also available and accessible. Moreover, the study will benefit from the vast literature on Hezbollah as well as local newspaper accounts for better contextual clarity.

The term "domestic strategy", which denotes the dependent variable" will commonly appear throughout this paper. A domestic strategy is defined as the set of decision and policies taken, based on cost-benefit calculations, rationalization of preferences and the need to sustain and enhance the odds of survival in the domestic arena. Thus, this thesis advocates a rational approach to understand Hezbollah as a socio-political organization striving to enhance its social control, and instrumentalize this control to achieve its objectives. However, the paper does not propose that Hezbollah's domestic strategy has always been rational. In fact, the focus here is Hezbollah's rationale, which was governed by changing political opportunity structures shaped by intermixed domestic-regional dynamics. The major concern of this thesis is Hezbollah's domestic-level behavior, mainly its relationship with the state and society, because Hezbollah's center of gravity remains to be rooted in Lebanon. Despite the fact that the group expanded its scope and presence regionally and globally, the threats Hezbollah has faced in Lebanon remain to be the most dangerous because they might shake its foundations and compromise its legitimacy among its constituency.

B) Methods

Given that the thesis's focus is Hezbollah, and the variables of interest are at the subnational level (micro-level), within-case analysis and historical interpretation will prevail

[23]The Doha Accords is an agreement among rival Lebanese factions, signed in Doha, Qatar, on May 21, 2008. It ended an 18-months political crisis and government deadlock. See https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/wp-content/uploads/Lebanon%20S2008392.pdf

throughout this study. Process-tracing will serve the function of capturing indicators of institutionalization and social control. In his chapter on case-study methodology, Venesson describes process tracing as a “procedure designed to identify processes linking a set of initial conditions to a particular outcome” (2010, in Porta & Keating). Process tracing permits investigating the causal arrow of the hypothesized relationship in order to evaluate the validity of the argument. When applied, scholars can observe whether or not the proposed logical reasoning they hypothesized is actually evident in those cases (theory-evaluation). Also, they might refine certain ideas and explore new insights about the relationship they’re testing (theory-building).

Moreover, and given the nature of the research question and argument posed in this thesis, the methodological approach is focused on delineating and formulating causal mechanisms or causal processes rather than causal effects. This justifies the adequacy of process-tracing and the method of structured focused comparison (George & Bennett (G&B), 2005) in order to discover and explain patterns in Hezbollah’s strategy, militancy, and political pragmatism across time. On top of that, and having mentioned patterns, it’s expected to observe continuity and change in Hezbollah’s strategy, depending on the political opportunity structure. That said, it’s important to note that the theoretical tripod proposed earlier guides the examination of the empirical evidence, through set of indicators that capture the variables of interest (see figures on pp. 26-27). Therefore, the research conducted throughout this thesis will attempt to remain “variable-oriented” and centered upon “diagnostic pieces of evidence” (Ibid, 92; Brady and Collier, 2010, 201-202). The method of structured focused comparison is quite helpful for variable-oriented empirical examination for two reasons: first, it enhances the process of data-collection through tying it closely to the research objective via a set of questions relevant to the explanatory and dependent variables (G&B, 2005, 67). In the case of Hezbollah, for

example, the collection and examination of empirical evidence aims to answer questions such as: How did Hezbollah harness its *social control* during the period 1985-1990? Or what are the developments characterizing Hezbollah's *complexity*, *adaptability*, *autonomy* and *coherence* between 1990 and 2005? By focusing the questions that guide empirical examination on the indicators of interest, the researcher not only is able to offer a clearer portrayal of the proposed causal mechanism (structure), but also enjoys a degree of maneuverability when the historical evidence is complex (focus) (G&B, Ibid, Brady and Collier, 2010, 191).

Following this train of thought, the analysis will pinpoint critical junctures in the chronological timeline of the group. Those junctures, or major events, may directly affect the group itself (for example assassination), or indirectly through altering the political opportunity structure (for example, the Taef Agreement ending the Lebanese Civil War). The utility of critical junctures mainly lies in their framing and structuring of the temporal domains extant in this study, as well as the significant long-term impact they have on decision-making and institutional development (Kelemen & Cappocia, 2007). The 1989 Taef Agreement, for example, represents a critical juncture that differentiates between two historical periods, where the first was characterized by a war-torn political opportunity structure and the second governed by Syrian tutelage and post-civil war political stability.

C) A Discussion of the Approach's Strengths:

The emphasis on the domestic level in this paper will provide a rich insight into how an armed non-state actor has been able to coexist with the state for more than three decades now. It goes beyond the national level of analysis, where one might answer the dilemma of Hezbollah's persistence by indicating state weakness as the main factor at play. Using the state-in-society approach, while accounting for the existing window of opportunity, provides a fine-grained

outlook that zeroes in on how the need to sustain popular support and legitimacy interact with political opportunity structure and Hezbollah's agenda to eventually shape its power dynamics.

Methodologically, the approach undertaken in this thesis lies under the category of within-unit analysis, or type II case-studies in Gerring's typology (2004, 343). The major advantage of within-unit analysis is that it qualifies researchers to temporally observe and compare the variation of the independent and dependent variables in cases drawn from this unit (Ibid; King, Keohane and Verba (KKV, 2012, 91-93). Thus, the essential assumption of unit homogeneity is well-accounted for through reliance on within-unit case study comparison. To compare two cases across time or space is to control for the effects of confounding variables on the phenomenon under observation (Sartori, 1970, 57), which in turn allows for more accurate observations and inferences.

While acknowledging that the findings of this study would be idiosyncratic and context-specific, I argue that the theoretical tripod expanded upon in this thesis is a valuable approach that may be extended to other armed non-state actors and incorporated under the literature on the politics of armed orders, rejuvenated by Paul Staniland (2017). Last but not least, the integration of three theoretical frameworks, or as nicely put by Howard Wiarda as traveling along "islands of theory" (quoted in Early, 2006,116), paints a more vivid picture of the behavior of armed non-state actors and diminishes the likelihood of misunderstanding and fallacious conclusions.

Lastly, the study of conceptually ambiguous groups presents a conceptual dilemma for students and scholars. This is evident in the multiplicity of approaches utilized in the literature on Hezbollah, whereby each scholar attempts to advocate the merit of his/her own approach by demonstrating the compatibility between its conceptual blocks and the object of observation. For instance, Hamzeh (2004) focused on Hezbollah's Islamist perspective, Azani (2009) benefitted

from the concepts and ideas of the social movement literature. Saouli presented a new hybrid view of Hezbollah, defining the group as an Armed Political Movement, which reflects his reliance on two ideas: Norbert Elias's civilizing process and Charles Tilly's war-making as state-making.

Similarly, this thesis builds upon Joel Migdal's state-in-society approach, Huntington's deliberations on institutionalization, and the extant political opportunity structure in order to explain the continuity and change characteristic of Hezbollah's domestic strategy in Lebanon. Consequently, it benefits from concepts and terms such as social control, institutionalization, complexity, adaptability, and strategies of survival. The author contends that the lack of rigid distinctions between states and non-state actors in Migdal's state-in-society model provides the suitable conceptual and analytical framework to study groups such as Hezbollah, whose durability has walked hand in hand with their adjustments in their characters and priorities. Last but not least, the theoretical tripod proposed in this thesis, combining the state-in-society approach (Migdal, 2001), the process of institutionalization (Huntington, 1968) and the significance of political opportunity structures (Fearon and Laitin, 2003) is a broad framework that does not focus on one dimension or function performed by Hezbollah. The wide scope of this framework is beneficial because it enables the argument to encompass the historical contextual settings observed (G&B, 92), and ultimately permits moving from narrow contextual description towards a more general theoretical articulation (Ibid, 92-93).

D) A Discussion of the Approach's Shortcomings:

Overemphasizing the domestic landscape has its disadvantages, however. After all, domestic Lebanese politics are highly influenced by geopolitical and regional dynamics and the ubiquity of cross-border politics. This is most evident in the fifteen-year civil war that tore the

country apart from 1975 to 1990, where Lebanon witnessed the presence of a multinational force, Syrian intervention, the presence of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israeli invasion. Add to that Hezbollah's relationship with Iran and Syria, a regional power and a neighbor that have provided substantial support. Besides, scholars like Ranstorp (1997) and Hamzeh (2004) have argued for a relationship between clerical factionalism in Iran and Hezbollah's decision-making. Thus, the political opportunity structure cannot be just captured only in the consociational nature of the Lebanese political system. Yet, for a study that's concerned with Hezbollah's domestic strategy, I tend to prefer this theoretical tripod as it is, while retaining the right to trespass outside its boundaries whenever not doing so completely obscures understanding. That said, the separation between the domestic and regional levels of analyses limits the scope of this study but endows it with a degree of coherence and discipline.

Another point of concern is the availability of data. It's true that we know much more about Hezbollah today than two decades ago. But it is still an armed non-state actor that enjoys a high level of secrecy. Not to mention the difficulty of digging into the group's early grassroots development predating its formal establishment in 1985. Nonetheless, this fact does threaten the research project in an existential manner but necessitates proceeding with caution when examining the group's strategy during that gray period.

As for methodological concerns, the choice of Hezbollah as the center of this thesis undermines to an extent the representativeness of proposed theoretical framework. This is particularly true because the political opportunity structure entails a contextual element (consociationalism), which is characteristic of the power-sharing arrangements and the deeply divided nature of society in Lebanon. However, since the thesis's main purpose is the observation of Hezbollah's domestic strategy over time, which implies the priority of within-case

comparison over concerns of external validity (Gerring, 2004, 349), this approach is convenient to meet the outlined objectives. Nevertheless, the logic underlying this theoretical tripod, which depends on social control, institutionalization and the political opportunity structure can possibly apply to cases other than Hezbollah, since the impact of those three components is observable almost for all non-state actors, and is not unique to Hezbollah. The approach itself is therefore replicable in other settings, but does not guarantee the same conclusions and outcomes noted in the case of Hezbollah's domestic strategy.

Historical Background on Shiite Political Mobilization and Hezbollah's Emergence

The aim of this brief section is not to offer a full-fledged account of the various interconnected and overlapping historical circumstances leading up to Hezbollah's emergence. Fortunately, this bulk of work has already been quite well-covered by prior scholarly work (Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2002; Hamzeh, 2004; Norton, 2014; Todd et al, 2012). Rather, this section zooms in on the domestic dynamics that favored the creation of Hezbollah, while at the same time giving the geopolitical aspect of its birth its fair share. This approach is helpful here, as it provides the author the privilege of avoiding the unnecessary elaboration on historical particularities. Also, it situates the context within the proposed theoretical tripod, through focusing on concepts such as the state, non-state actors, strategies of survival, and social control. In short, this brief historical background is interpreted here in terms of Migdal's state-in-society model, by looking at Hezbollah and other domestic actors (including the state) as socio-political organizations vying for social control, that allows them to fight for their objectives through mobilizing the populace.

Although the volume of literature dealing with the Hezbollah, or "The Party of God", is diverse in nature and focus, experts in this area agree that Hezbollah's foundation is the product of a complex set of factors, all of which are not necessarily harmonious with one another. Whereas on one hand it was the strength and oppression of foreign actors, say Israel's 1982 invasion (Abu Khalil, 1991) or the intervention of the multinational forces, which contributed to the birth of Hezbollah (Ranstorp, 1997), it was also the relative dilapidation of the PLO's position in Lebanon during the mid-1980s and the Da'wa Party's demise (Abu Khalil, 1991, 292) which offered Hezbollah the window of opportunity to rapidly rise toward prominence and seize

the banner of the resistance (Saouli, 2018, 88). I mention this because it's important to see Hezbollah's emergence as that of a late-comer in a highly vulnerable and competitive environment, where the group not only nourished via its own capacities but also bred its popularity by capitalizing on other group's incapacities and strategic miscalculations.

At its core, the foundation of Hezbollah is the outcome of the convergence between domestic, regional and transnational currents (Azani, 2009). The Shiite sect, which later came to constitute the overarching majority of Hezbollah's popular backbone, has suffered socio-economic and political marginalization under a Lebanese confessional system dominated by Christian Maronites and Sunni Muslims (Norton, 1987 and 2014). Socio-economic hardships and lack of political significance coupled with Lebanon's changing demography and urbanization to produce a grievous sect that is highly responsive to ideological mobilization (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002). In fact, the early phases of Shiite political mobilization, which dates back to the mid-1960s, and culminated with Sadr's efforts[24], hasn't been unidirectional (Norton, 2014); Arab Nationalism, Communism, and Syrian Nationalism also attracted significant numbers of Shiite supporters well before religious influences epitomized by Khomeini's revolutionary idea of Wilayat al Fakih (the guardianship of the jurisconsult) gained momentum. The marginalization of the Shiites from the Lebanese power-sharing system severely undermined the impact and role of the state in Shiite-dominated areas, which were located near the peripheries (South Lebanon and Beqaa region). Simultaneously, the long-standing feudal elitism of the Shiite zu'ama was becoming a target of growing contempt due to its active participation and interest in preserving

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[24] Imam Musa Sadr (1928-disappeared in Libya in 1978), is a Lebanese-Iranian religious scholar and one of the early key figures that championed Shiite political mobilization in south Lebanon, through establishing the Higher Shiite Islamic Council during the late 1960s (Harik, 2004, 22) followed by creating the Movement of the Deprived, Amal. Sadr's words elucidate his determination to enhance the role of religious scholars in society: "The only reason is that I took the man of religion, *rajul al din,* into the social realm, that I removed from him the dust of the ages" (Ajami, 1986, 85).

the miserable status quo (Daher, 2016). The Shiites' old strategies for survival (material and symbolic) could no longer withstand the forces of modernization. Hence, it became indispensable to resort to alternative survival strategies and achieve a decent political representation that satisfies the expectations of the renaissance they've witnessed. Certainly, the Shiites disagreed on how to push forward such a change. Sadr's Amal movement, for example, advocated a reformist inclusive agenda that asserted the primacy of the state and called for restoring its eroded sovereignty and legitimacy through eliminating confessionalism and establishing a system that offers a more equitable distribution of economic resources and political power. Amal competed with Arab Nationalists, Communists and traditional elites for popular support and recruits.

What exacerbated the situation was a series of regional disturbances, including recurrent Israeli aggression on Lebanon's southern borders, the expulsion of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) from Jordan in 1970 and the latter's relocation of its field of operation to Lebanon. Not only did the second put further pressure on Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance, but also increased the pro-government Christian Maronites' perception of threat as the PLO coalesced with the diverse leftist movements against status quo government forces, which escalated into violent clashes between the Palestinian guerillas and the Lebanese government as early as 1973 (Traboulsi, 2007, 182). Accordingly, it created a severe dilemma within the Shiite movement of Amal regarding the extent to which the cost of PLO's struggle against Israel can be tolerated. Though both Amal and the PLO shared their enmity toward Israel, Amal and its supporters were unwilling to pay the expensive bill of the protracted Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Stork, 1985, 5). The surging tensions polarized and militarized the Lebanese political parties, and religious sectarianism became instrumentalized by various political leaders to mobilize

support. The fighting erupted on April 13, 1975, after a series of mutual attacks between the PLO and the pro-government Christian Phalanges Party (also known as Al Kata'ib). The conflict rapidly evolved from a domestic battle towards a regional and international playground with the intervention of Syria (1976) and Israel (1978 and 1982) on geopolitical grounds. Syria sought to sustain a balance of power in Lebanon, whereby no party or militia gets strong enough to dominate Lebanon (Seale, 1988). Israel's argument for intervention was based on the need to eliminate the PLO's threat and creating a buffer security zone to ensure the safety of its northern settlements in occupied Palestine. It was only a short while before the Lebanese Army split between pro-government and anti-government factions, and the state's monopoly over violence was rapidly exchanged with an oligopoly of competing warlords and regional players.

In addition to domestic and regional variables, the role of the Shiite transnational clerical network, extending from Iran and Iraq to Lebanon, played a significant role in promoting a religio-political Shiite discourse that tapped on the sensitive chords of marginalization and disenfranchisement (Ranstorp, 1997; Hamzeh, 2004; Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2007; Hage, 2018). The rise of prominent clerics as key community leaders and agents of political mobilization among the Shiites, such as Imam Musa Al Sadr, Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine, and Sayyid Fadlallah, presented a breakaway from the quietist agenda which characterized Shiite attitudes in the past (Alagha, 2006, 77-79). Iran transformed the intimate clerical network into a strategic asset, providing generous support, training, recognition and an exemplary ideological model that revolves around the idea of Wilayat Al Fakih[25] . Khomeini's extreme anti-western and anti-

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[25] Khomeini criticized the concept of *taqiyya* (quietism) and advocated *ta'bi'a* (mobilization), as a call upon Shiites to break away from the tradition of political quietism into active political mobilization. He also argued that the jurisconsult, that is the scholar who is the most knowledgeable on religious matters, should not only be entitled to rule on religious and social issues, but also political ones (Ibid, 89).

Israeli narrative became fatefully more convenient and appealing following the Israeli invasion in 1982, which radicalized the Shiite populations (Hamzeh, 2004, 17) and led to the further convergence between Iranian and Syrian interests (Saouli, 2018, 60). Consequently, an agreement between Syria and Iran took place, by which the latter dispatched 1500 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) members into Baalbek. This strategic move perhaps represents the decisive step toward nurturing the organization which would later become Hezbollah. The success of the Iranian Revolution under Khomeini's leadership attributed credibility to his theory, especially at a time when the progressive and secular ideas of Arab Nationalism have gradually lost their charm, following the 1967 Arab defeat and the ensuing wave of Arab-Israeli normalization. In other words, the revival of Islam as a machine for political mobilization initially represented a reaction against the growing appeal of secular and nationalist ideas during the 1950s and 1960s, then managed to exploit the latter's weakness and gradual decline during the 1970s and 1980s (Abdul Hussain, 2009, 79).

Through the tides of urbanization and shifting demographic realities, and pushed by domestic grievances, regional geopolitics, and transnational clerical networks, the Shiites aspired for political status and socio-economic well-being, through a mosaic of ideological currents. Therefore, different socio-political organizations, with a lot of agenda commonalities albeit some vital differences, competed for social mobilization. That is, the state's lack of reach in the South and Beqaa regions did not lead to a political vacuum, but rather fostered an environment where non-state actors hold the reins of authority and mobilizational capacity. It is at the intersection of those domestic, regional, and transnational currents that Hezbollah was formed. While acknowledging the blurry lines between the domestic and regional levels of analysis, the paper's scope will be limited to Hezbollah's domestic strategy, which constitutes the primary focus of

this study. Although such an approach seems unusual given the central role Iran and later Syria played in empowering Hezbollah, there is compelling evidence that the group's domestic behavior and struggle for survival does not solely rely on direct orders from Tehran or Damascus.

Empirical Analysis

This chapter provides an empirical analysis of Hezbollah's survival strategy. It is divided into several sections and subsections that are framed within the proposed theoretical tripod (state-in-society approach, institutionalization and political opportunity structure). In other words, dividing Hezbollah's history into stages is grounded in the critical changes in the extant political opportunity structure, with which Hezbollah interacts and upon which it molds its domestic strategy. The classification of Hezbollah's chronological history into characteristically unique eras, stages or phases is not novel and has grounded previous scholarly works on the group's behavior (Saad-Ghorayeb 2002; Hamzeh, 2004; Norton, 2014; Azani, 2009; Saouli 2018)**.** Such a classification is helpful because it builds upon observed and recurrent patterns of behavior and elucidates the conditions conducive to one dominant strategy or another. Worth noting here that the main argument posited in this study, that Hezbollah's survival and rise to prominence is the product of what I call "restrained institutionalization", does not aim to exaggerate the rationality of its leadership and in fact is cautious towards the excessive rationalization and intellectualization of policy and decision-making (G&B, 98). In reality, and as the empirical evidence below will show, Hezbollah's buildup of domestic power and social control has been the outcome of a learning process, one that involved both well-planned endeavors and costly miscalculations, favorable and challenging political opportunity structures, as well as timely exploitation of rivals' weaknesses.

I. Foundational Stage (1985*-1990)- Hezbollah as a Latecomer to War-torn Lebanon

"Violence, being instrumental by nature, is rational to the extent that it is effective in reaching the end which must justify it."

Hannah Arendt (1970)

Hezbollah's birth was officially announced on February 16, 1985[26], although a handful of academics claim the group's roots can be traced back to 1982, following the Israeli invasion that year (Todd et al, 2012). The 1985 Open Letter, considered to be Hezbollah's foundational manifesto, described the group as a revolutionary Islamic Shiite movement loyal to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and an adherent to Khomeini's theory of the rule of the jurisconsult (Wilayat al Fakih)[27]. Ideologically inspired by this novel militant religio-political vision, trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC or Pasdaran), and generously endowed with financial support flowing from Iran through Syria to the Baalbek and Beqaa regions, Hezbollah constructed its identity and program according to a well-defined set of positions: it sought to liberate Lebanon from all forms of foreign occupation through military resistance or jihad,

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[26] During a ceremonial commemorating Sheikh Raghib Harb, one of the early key figures of the Islamic Resistance in South Lebanon. Harb was assassinated by Israeli forces in his hometown Jibsheet in February 1984.

[27] In Hezbollah's Open Letter, the group describes Khomeini as the one who "detonated the Muslims' revolution and the one who is bringing about the glorious Islamic Renaissance." (Alagha, 2011, 40).

*Check footnote 29 on the next page.

denounced the Lebanese power-sharing system as a corrupt and unjust, and advocated for an alternative political project: the Islamic Republic of Lebanon[28] (Alagha, 2011).

A) Hezbollah, the State, and Society:

As a socio-political organization, Hezbollah's pursuit of social control in the areas it operated in began at a grassroots level. This included very simple functions such as clearing snow in villages in the Beqaa Valley and expanded to include the provision of clean water and collecting garbage (Saouli, 2018, 93-94). Those baby-steps helped the group gain an early reputation as a social service provider, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that the Beqaa and Baalbek regions, located in Eastern Lebanon and bordering Syria, suffered from a long-standing political and socio-economic marginalization under consecutive Lebanese governments since 1943. Accompanying the provision of territorial security and necessary services, Hezbollah marketed its activities through its weekly newspaper *Al Ahd* (The Promise), which featured news about the group's operations against the Israeli Defense Forces, its social welfare initiatives and religious publications endorsing jihad against the foreign occupiers (Szekely, 2012, 116). The newspaper was circulated among mosques and community centers, where the group's religious sermons and courses were held. As early as 1984[29], Hezbollah has sought to formulate a bundle of material resources and symbolic capital that drew the rural populations of the Beqaa Valley to its side.

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[28] As to the manner of establishing the Islamic Republic, the Open Letter declares Hezbollah's commitment to Islamic rule as the best system that can ensure justice protect the interests of Lebanon against colonialism, but affirms the populace's right for self-determination in choosing the political system they want (Ibid, 43-44).

[29] Although Hezbollah's official birth took place in 1985, there is evidence that the group's activity and influence go back as early as 1982 (Norton, 2007, 34; Traboulsi, 2007, 229-230).

Socio-political organizations attempt to provide material needs and rewards that align with society's strategies of survival (Migdal, 1988). Those rewards become more valuable in light of the state's fragmented or absent sovereignty. However, those organizations often set rules and impose sanctions (Migdal, 2001, 11). Hezbollah sought to exercise a code of values that defines pious Islamic behavior. It forbid alcohol sale, banned parties, enforced a dress code on women, and displayed posters of Khomeini and the leaders of the Iranian Revolution in the territories it controlled (Jaber, 1997; 51-53; Ranstorp, 1997, 35). Hezbollah thus enforced an alternative strategy of survival on the inhabitants of the Beqaa region. In other words, behaving according to Hezbollah's rules of the game not only guaranteed escape from punishment but also permitted access to benefits. Hezbollah's influence grew rapidly because it was able to convince a large number of Shiite youngsters with the feasibility of its agenda over the agendas of other movements. In particular, the decline of progressive, secular and Arab Nationalist ideas, following consecutive defeats against Israel and emerging Arab tendencies towards reconciliation with what was considered to be a colonial implant and exclusivist entity, revived the general appeal of Islam as an alternative system of ideas for social mobilization and upward political mobility[30].

Religious schools (Hawzahs), formed by Lebanese Shiite clerics who completed their religious education in the cities of Najaf in Iraq and Qom in Iran[31], served as vehicles for religio-

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[30] The divergence from political quietism in the Shiite communities manifested itself in the writings of Muhammad Baqr Al Sadr, architect of the Da'wa Party in Iraq, and the theorizing of Ayatollah Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran (Shanahan, 2007, 943-944).

[31] The city of Najaf used to be the primary destination of aspiring students of Shiite Islamic theology. When Saddam Hussain took over power in 1979, he sought to undermine and dismantle the clerical networks for fear that might mobilize against his regime and support Iran. This included driving Khomeini out of Iraq in 1978 and the assassination of the Iraqi Da'wa Party's prominent ideologue and founding father, Mohammad Baqir Al-Sadr in

political mobilization (Norton, 2014; 31). Hezbollah demanded popular compliance toward its new set of rules, crafting a system of sanctions and rewards in order to firmly consolidate its social control. The religio-political mobilization it fueled underscored the injustice of the Lebanese political system, as a corrupt system that consistently neglected Shiite's socio-economic well-being. Simultaneously, it marked Israel as the archenemy and the antithesis of dignity and freedom, calling on Shiites to wage jihad against all forms of foreign occupation. This militant rhetoric found appeal among many disenfranchised Shiites, especially in Southern Lebanon, another Shiite-majority region Hezbollah expanded into. In Saouli words, "Hezbollah activated religio-political elements that were already latent in the Shiite society." (2018, 93-94).

Winning the hearts and minds of the local population is not a process that takes place in a smooth and uniform manner. It is rather an endeavor characterized by prudent observation and strategic decisions where socio-political organizations not only capitalize on their strengths but also learn from their weaknesses and get to know their limitations. Early notes that Hezbollah's imposition of rules over behavioral conduct and its coercive reinforcement of those rules at its premature stage generated a great deal of resentment amidst the more liberally inclined Shiites (2006, 119). As Norton (2014) indicates, militant Islamism has been only one, and precisely the last, manifestation of Shiite political mobilization. Consequently, Hezbollah's agenda and ideology, though channeling support for Shiite upward mobility, did not receive equal attention and support across the community. At least, the power and popularity of the Amal movement and the presence of Arab-nationalist and secular progressive forces shows this ideological heterogeneity across the Lebanese Shiite community. Society's reaction to the imposition of

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1980 (Todd et al, 2012, 205, 211). Ever since, Qom became a more significant religious center, as it offered an alternative for many Lebanese Shiite students.

rules creates a dilemma for socio-political organizations. Actually, one of the central premises of the state-in-society approach is the fact that the state and society constitute and influence *one another*. Hence, the interaction between the two is not unidirectional. Following this line of reasoning, and extending it to other socio-political organizations, society does possess the ability to influence the strategies of groups seeking social control. Early adds that Hezbollah gradually liberalized its policies and minimized its coercive behavior in the territories it controlled (2006, 120). This sort of moderation goes along with previous scholarly works on rebel violence, which find that non-state actors are less likely to engage in civilian abuse and more likely to adopt selective violence once they consolidate territorial control (Kalyvas, 2006; Salehyan et al, 2014).

Hezbollah could have retained exercising the strict rules, justified by Islamic law, but such a policy would have narrowed the appeal of the group to a radical minority, and subsequently limited its ability to recruit fighters and amass support. Meanwhile, relaxing the imposition of Islamic rules is the outcome of a learning process through which Hezbollah interacted with the populace inhabiting the territories it controlled. It allowed the group to gradually expand its scope of appeal among the Shiite community. Huntington emphasizes scope expansion as a vital characteristic of institutionalization because it corroborates institutions' adaptability and therefore survival (1968, 12).

Furthermore, and as the state-in-society approach posits, socio-political organizations do not operate in a power vacuum (Migdal, 107, 2001). In fact, Hezbollah is considered to be a relatively newcomer to Lebanon's war-torn political landscape, born almost a decade following the eruption of the civil war 1975. Also, the Shiites in Lebanon were the last group to establish their own sectarian-based political parties as well organize paramilitary forces (DeVore and

Stahli, 2015, 338-339)[32]. The absence of state control inevitably led to the proliferation of various non-state actors which competed for mobilizational capacity and resources across territorial space. Social control, in this case, was not monopolized by the state, but rather unevenly distributed over heterogenous socio-political organizations (Migdal, 1988, 28). As much as this reality looks promising for non-state actors, it is also characterized by a condition of vulnerability that demands constant caution and renders competition with other groups over territory, recruits and social control unavoidable. Saouli emphasizes this domestic anarchical order prevalent during the Lebanese Civil War, "Each community fabricated its own national myth and political vision; each had its various militias, political thugs and external patrons" (2018, 19). The Lebanese Civil War represented the collapse of Lebanon's Lockean anarchical order (Ibid, 18), into a Hobbesian jungle where violence speaks louder than politics and diplomacy.

The employment of violence, both in the form of jihad against Israel as well as a tool of competing against rival Lebanese socio-political organizations proved to be an efficient and convenient method given the presence of a political opportunity structure governed by coercive warlords. The presence of 186 armed groups in Lebanon by 1984 (Ibid, 89) did not imply chaos, but the prevalence of the coercive order of warlords. Hezbollah's struggle against Israeli occupation is only one dimension of the group's militant strategy. The group's quest for territorial expansion, particularly to Southern Lebanon and Beirut's suburbs meant trespassing into other groups' spheres of influence and control. For example, the group stigmatized the

[32] This is probably the effect political and socio-economic marginalization have had on the majority of the Shiite community in Lebanon. Disenfranchisement and poor living standards delay the process of social mobilization and political awareness.

secular vision of the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) as un-Islamic and heretic, even though both parties shared their enmity for the Lebanese confessional system, and more importantly, their opposition towards foreign occupation. Daher links Hezbollah's competition with the LCP to a series of assassinations that targeted Communist leaders and members of the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF) during the mid-1980s (2016, 162-163), suggesting that Hezbollah's struggle for mobilizational capacity legitimized the use of violence against groups that, although did not share the former's Islamic project, have had a longstanding history of resisting Israeli aggression. This might sound surprising if one hastily presupposes Hezbollah's automatic alignment with other groups that endorse military resistance. The state-in-society approach, on the other hand, offers a strong explanation of such a behavior; Migdal argues that competition between socio-political organizations is not necessarily about the content of the rules, but may also involve a bigger question of greater significance: the question of who makes the rules (1988; Migdal et al, 1994; 2001).

Speaking in terms in competition, the presence of Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF)[33], Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) and Amal militant groups that fight Israel also meant those groups would compete with Hezbollah for recruits, resources and even the legitimacy endowed by popular support. Thus, the violent clashes between Hezbollah and other resistance-oriented groups do not revolve around the question of who the enemy is or represents. Instead, it deals with the question: who gets to fight Israel? Saouli interprets this competition in terms of Charles Tilly's war-making as state-making argument. He contends that waging war

[33] The LNRF is a military alliance between several secular and progressive groups that united under the front's umbrella and emerged following Israel's invasion in 1982. It included groups such as the Lebanese Communist Party, the Organization of Communist Action, and the Arab Baath Party. The LNRF was known by its Arabic acronym, "Jammoul".

requires internal security, which entails eradicating domestic rivals (Saouli, 2011, 926-929; Tilly, 1985, 184). At the core, Hezbollah's competition with other militant organizations thus represents the group's attempt to monopolize and centralize the means of violence under its own control. Hezbollah's pursuit of consolidating territorial control further led the group to clash with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in Baalbek, where the group coalesced with the IRGC to take over the LAF's Sheikh Abdallah Barracks on November 22, 1982, establishing the barracks as Hezbollah's military headquarters in north-east Lebanon (Ranstorp, 1997, 35). It was a strategically important location that is close to the Syrian borders and simultaneously out of the Lebanese government's reach. Accordingly, Hezbollah enjoyed a relatively safe haven where it can receive and capitalize on Iranian financial and military assistance, with the blessings of a still cautious Syria.

Having consolidated its control in Baalbek and its surroundings, Hezbollah sought to expand its influence into two other Shiite-majority regions: Beirut's suburbs and southern Lebanon. As of 1985, Amal was the dominant Shiite-affiliated socio-political group in those regions (Norton, 1985, 109). As is the case with other Lebanese political parties during the 1970s, Amal had formed paramilitary forces as socio-economic and political tensions escalated, which served according to the words of Augustus Norton, as a "vehicle of communal security" (1987, 59). Trained by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Amal's fighters sought to fill the extant security gap in southern Lebanon, as the Lebanese government neglected Shiites' complaints about recurrent aggression from both the IDF and Lebanese militias (Hage, 2018, 9). Amal's alliance with the PLO, grounded in their mutual support to the Palestinian cause and opposition to the Lebanese government, deteriorated after growing Shiite concern over the heavy costs the population of south Lebanon had to endure due to Israeli retaliation. Amal's leader,

Nabih Berri, voiced those concerns in 1982, saying that "The people of the south, including the Shiites, have given the Palestinian cause more than all the Arabs combined have given it. They have given the cause their land, their children, their security, their orchards- everything but their honor and dignity" (Norton, 1987, 60). Berri's statement reflects Amal's fear of losing social control in the territories where it exercised power and influence. The continuity of PLO operations threatened the strategies of survival of south Lebanon's inhabitants and had already resulted in a large-scale displacement northward ever since the early 1970s. The resultant antagonism between Amal on one hand, and the PLO and its supporters within the anti-government Lebanese National Movement (LNM) on the other hand, became inevitable. Violent clashes spread in south Lebanon and Beirut during the late 1970s and early 1980s and peaked during 1985-1987, during the War of the Camps[34] (Azani, 2009, 145).

The previous paragraph partially sets the ground for an analysis of the Hezbollah-Amal relationship. Hezbollah denounced Amal's conflict with PLO as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause, even though the former launched attacks against LRNF figures, whom themselves advocated the cause. Yet, by the time Hezbollah would attempt to expand its territorial control into south Lebanon, the PLO was no longer a daunting obstacle[35]. Considering a counterfactual scenario, where Hezbollah's initial support and power emanates from south Lebanon rather the Beqaa Valley, the group would have probably clashed with the Palestinian guerillas in the same

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[34] Hafez Al Assad, wary of the PLO's growing power, opted to support Amal against the Palestinian guerillas and their allies (Stork, 1985, 6). This goes in line with Syria's policy of maintaining that neither the Lebanese Front (pro-government faction) nor the Lebanese National Movement (anti-government coalition) gains excessive control in Lebanon. For further discussion regarding this point, check pp. 37-38.

[35] The 1982 Israeli invasion considerably undermined the authority of the PLO, forcing the organization's leadership to escape Lebanon and relocate in Tunisia.

manner Amal did, if not in order to safeguard the security of the populace, then to monopolize military operations launched against Israel.

Amal's conflict with the PLO was one among a handful of catalysts that fed the Hezbollah-Amal rivalry. This friction, which spiraled out of control from 1988 to 1990, in what became known as the Brothers-Enemies War (Nir, 2011, 76), has been traced to several other factors: Sadr's refusal to subscribe to Khomeini's revolutionary rhetoric and theory of *Wilayat Al Fakih*[36] (a position also adopted by his successor Nabih Berri[37]) (Roschanack Shaery-Eisenlohr, 2007, 21), Amal's wait-and-see stance regarding the Israeli invasion in summer 1982 (Operation Peace for Galilee)[38] (DeVore, 2012, 92); and Berri's decision to participate alongside the Lebanese Forces leader and Israel's ally Bashir Gemayel, in the National Salvation Committee headed by Lebanese President Elias Sarkis (Nir, 2011, 156). Amal's decision alienated its religious and militant members, which led them to split away and form the Islamic Amal. It's worth noting that while Hezbollah busied itself with conducting resistance operations against the IDF and developing its capacity to provide social services to Lebanese Shiites, Berri attempted to counter Hezbollah's growing popularity through government funds. While serving in the government of Prime Minister Rashid Karami in 1984 as Minister of justice, he created a portfolio for Southern Lebanon and controlled the Council of the South, a body established by the government to foster socio-economic development in the historically marginalized southern

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[36] Having mentioned in a prior footnote that Najaf and Qom were the two leading centers of Shiite Islamic thought, they competed for hegemony over the Shiite community. In other words, the competition between transnational Shiite schools of thought manifested itself in Lebanon in the form of intra-sectarian ideological division.

[37] Berri rose to Amal's leadership following Sadr's disappearance while on a visit to Libya.

[38] Amal, unlike Hezbollah, adopted a rather defensive position vis-à-vis Israel, because it wanted to put an end to the heavy human costs accrued by the Shiites in Southern Lebanon (casualties, damage to infrastructure and displacement).

Lebanon (Ibid, 56). However, Amal's operation a patronage network rather than an institutionalized body, its organizational under-development as a party (Norton, 1987, 6) in addition to Shiite resentment against the confessional system and its bodies (the Council of the South has a traditional symbol for rampant corruption and clientelism) only favored Hezbollah's odds to become a major Shiite player of considerable weight.

Hezbollah complemented its refusal to work within Lebanon's notorious institutional framework with its ability to build its own network of institutions, modeled after social welfare organizations adopted by Iran's Islamic Republic. Iran's sponsorship helped Hezbollah expand its primitive social welfare functions into a sophisticated body of organizations that are highly efficient. Hezbollah's official genesis in 1985 was accompanied with the foundation of two key institutions: Jihad Al Binaa (Holy Struggle for Construction) and Al Mahdi Scouts. The first sought to alleviate the infrastructural damages caused in Shiite areas as a result of the Lebanese Civil War as well as Israeli aggression (Saouli, 2018, 93). Al Mahdi Scouts has been a machine of youth indoctrination and mobilization (Bortolazzi, 2015, 36-37), which consequently allowed Hezbollah to spread its religio-political ideas to the younger generation. It also served as a channel through which ambitious Shiite youngsters seek membership in the group and participate in the group's military activities against Israel.

Alongside Jihad Al Binaa, the Martyr's Foundation and the Association for the Wounded have been two institutional bodies closely related to Hezbollah's military struggle against the IDF, working to compensate for and ensure the well-being of Hezbollah's injured fighters as well as the families of deceased Hezbollah fighters (Todd et al, 2012, 60). Bortolazzi elaborates on the activities of the Association for the Wounded:

"Eighty percent of the men the association assists were resistance fighters. The rest were wounded during the civil war or by Israeli attacks in the South. Once a fighter or civilian is hurt, the association steps in and pays all medical bills, including trips abroad for any needed surgery or therapy." (2015, 35).

It's important to note that the activities conducted by the above-mentioned institutions not only represent an outstanding performance on Hezbollah's behalf in the health sector but also reduced the opportunity cost of joining Hezbollah's military corps for potential recruits. After all, Hezbollah has been marketing its struggle against Israel (via *Al Ahd* newspaper and *Al Nour* Radio Station[39]) and instrumentalizing religious symbols of martyrdom and self-sacrifice, but coupling this ideological approach with a concrete system of benefits to families of its members is necessary. It is less costly for Hezbollah fighters who are convinced with the cause they're fighting for to head to the battlefield, knowing that the well-being of their families is guaranteed.

B) The Hezbollah-Syria-Iran Triangle:

The 1975-1990 conflict in Lebanon was by no means a merely domestic conflict between Lebanese factions, but an internationalized civil war that involved a handful of regional and international actors (Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2002; Harik, 2004; Norton, 2014; Azani, 2009; Saouli, 2018). Accordingly, where the state-in-society approach manages to explain the competition for social control between different socio-political organizations, a more comprehensive understanding of the conflict demands shifting between the domestic and regional levels of analyses. The political opportunity structure that governed the strategies of Hezbollah and other

[39] Al Nour (The Light) Radio Station was established in May 1988. http://www.alnour.com.lb/about

groups in Lebanon illustrates that the 'internal versus external' distinction was ambiguous and blurred, not to say senseless.

In light of those circumstances, the argument that Hezbollah is a domestic actor per se is as myopic and reductionist as the argument that Hezbollah is an export of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Having elaborated earlier in this study on the close transnational networks and links between Lebanese Shiite clerics and their Iranian and Iraqi fellows, this section is more oriented towards the geopolitical calculations that governed Hezbollah's strategy and decisions during the Lebanese Civil War, as a domestic group with serious ideological and financial dependence – and automatically strong commitment – to its major sponsor, Iran, and its neighboring regional power and facilitator, Syria.

Abu Khalil argues that the creation of Hezbollah came about through the "convergence between Lebanese Shiite domestic interests and Iranian foreign policy" (1991, 392). This is exemplified by Hezbollah' s ideological commitment to Khomeini, emphasized in the group's founding document (The 1985 Open Letter). From another perspective, Hezbollah's creation also resulted from an Iranian-Syrian rapprochement, as Iran convinced wary Syria to permit the infiltration of a 1,500 strong IRGC force into Baalbek during the early 1980s. In return, Iran would provide Syria with nine million barrels of oil free of charge, alongside a promise that the former would constrain Hezbollah's behavior (DeVore and Stahli, 2015, 338). On the basis thereof, Iran has been a central actor in shaping Hezbollah as a group. With an estimated annual Iranian assistance of around 140 million US dollars during Hezbollah's early years (Ibid, 342), the organization has thrived and carried on its institution-building and social service provision processes. To add, the erected institutions such the Martyr's Foundation and the Association for

the Wounded were replications of organizational bodies extant in Revolutionary Iran (Hage, 2018).

However, state sponsorship entails commitment and consequently involves the vital interaction between the sponsor's demands and the client's willingness and ability not only to meet those demands but also to make sure the demands are not too risky as to endanger its own survival. While one dimension of Iran's investment in Hezbollah reflects Khomeini's plan to export the model of the Islamic Republic to Lebanon (Harik, 2004, 144), another dimension involved instrumentalizing Hezbollah to target Western interests in Lebanon and gain bargaining leverage with Western powers. Such instrumentalization is a less costly and very common technique used by states to engage in conflicts against other states indirectly (Salehyan et al, 2014; Bapat, 2011). However, the costs saved by the sponsors are sometimes accrued by the clients. DeVore articulates this point well by arguing that state sponsors can undermine the power of their client groups by demanding that they radically exercise violence, or by excessively constraining their ability to resort to violence (2012). It is alleged that Hezbollah has been involved in suicide bombing attacks[40], hostage-taking and flight hijacking operations during the 1980s (Norton, 2014; Harik, 2004; Ranstorp, 1997). Unsurprisingly, there's no decisive evidence that Hezbollah was directly involved with those operations, and the group has consistently denied having any connection with the attacks. On the other hand, Hezbollah publicly and proudly declared its responsibility for suicide attacks against the IDF[41] and the

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[40] The most infamous were the suicide bombings which targeted the US Marines Base in Beirut in 1983, in which 243 Marines were killed, followed immediately by another attack against the French troops serving in the Multinational Force dispatched in Lebanon.

[41] Hezbollah claimed responsibility for the attack on the IDF's headquarters in the city of Tyre in South Lebanon in 1984, which resulted in 75 casualties (Ranstorp, 1997, 156).

South Lebanon Army (SLA, Israel's proxy militia in Southern Lebanon), or martyrdom operations as the group and its supporters call them (Hamzeh, 2004). Moreover, Ranstorp notes the pattern of using multiple aliases and cover names by groups that perpetrated suicide attacks and abducted Western citizens (for example, the responsibility for the abduction of a French citizen in 1987 was adopted by a group with the nom de guerre "Revolutionary Justice Organization") (1997, 63).

The fact that the hostage-taking incidents and suicide bombing campaigns have targeted the interests of major powers (mainly the United States and France), and sometimes involved non-combatants, is likely to perpetuate the gloominess and ambiguity surrounding the identity of the main perpetrator. It is quite possible and reasonable to point the finger of accusation at Hezbollah; the organization holds among its members ex-PLO and ex-Amal operatives who are experienced in the art of irregular warfare and utilizing terrorist tactics (DeVore & Stahli, 2015). Plus, the attacks on the Multinational Forces (MNF) did result in their subsequent evacuation, and hence aligned with one of Hezbollah's main objectives, that is liberating Lebanon from foreign occupation. In addition, Hezbollah has overtly and consistently denounced the government of the United States as an enemy. Yet, identifying a major power as an enemy does not carry the same weight and consequences as claiming responsibility for an attack as devastating as those that took place in 1983. The same logic can be extended to account for the ambiguity surrounding the abduction of Western citizens. In fact, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, who acts today as Secretary-General (SG) of Hezbollah, has expressed in 1986 the group's interest in putting the hostage crisis to an end, because it might backfire against Hezbollah (Noe, 2007, 140).

Hezbollah's relationship with Syria was less amicable and more practical than its ties with Iran. In fact, the Syrian-Iranian deal resulting in dispatching the IRGC troops into Baalbek via the Syrian borders entailed the condition that Hezbollah exercises restraint and avoid clashing with Syria's interests in Lebanon. Although a comprehensive discussion of the Syrian strategic interests in Lebanon is beyond the scope of this paper, it's important to mention that Lebanon represented Syria's soft underbelly (Salloukh, 2005; Salloukh et al, 2015), and the developments that escalated towards the eruption of the Lebanese Civil War pushed Syria to intervene in 1976 in order to prevent either the status quo forces or the anti-status quo coalition from dominating the Lebanese political landscape[42]. Not to mention that Syrian leader Hafez Assad's Baathist secular orientations rendered him suspicious and careful when dealing with religiously motivated groups (Seale, 1988). This explains Syria's support for the Amal movement, for the latter is more moderate and less radical in ideological terms. But the Israeli invasion of 1982 led to further convergence of interests between Iran and Syria (Saouli, 2018, 60), especially with Syria's attempt to abrogate the American-facilitated May 17, 1983 Agreement[43] between the Lebanese government and Israel, which marginalized Syria's interests. Similarly, Hezbollah condemned the agreement as evidence of collaboration between Israel and Lebanese president and leader of the Phalangist Party Amin Gemayel, stating in its 1985 Open Letter that "the agreement aimed at

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[42] Briefly stated, Syria feared that the total annihilation of the Christian Maronite government by the anti-status quo force would provoke an Israeli invasion, which would undermine the security of Syria's western borders. At the same time, Syria worked hard to prevent an Israeli-Lebanese settlement that would exclude the question of the Golan Heights, a strategic territory, captured by Israel during the 1967 war with the Arab states (Seale, 1988).
[43] The May 17, 1983 Agreement was the result of US diplomatic efforts to bring a sort of Lebanese-Israeli settlement that guarantees Israeli's security concerns in southern Lebanon and granted it significant influence over Lebanon's foreign policy. Although the agreement was ratified in parliament, President Amine Gemayel did not sign it because it did not receive Syrian approval (Traboulsi, 2007, 223).

making Lebanon an Israeli protectorate and an American sphere of influence" (Alagha, 2011, 43).

Yet, this convergence between Iran and Syria suffered its fluctuations, particularly in the wake of the extant politico-military vacuum that resulted from the expulsion of PLO forces following the Israeli invasion (Daher, 2016, 23), and this is reflected in Syria's attempts to constrain Hezbollah's behavior and put an end to the hostage-taking incidents, because they raised questions about Syria's ability to maintain security in Lebanon. In other words, Syria's strategic presence in Lebanon contributed to the political opportunity structure that limited Hezbollah's scope of activity either through direct crackdown[44], or via supporting Hezbollah's rival, Amal. That said, the domestic competition between Amal and Hezbollah outlined by the state-in-society approach in the previous section also mirrors a regional balance of interests between Iran and Syria. In other words, groups like Hezbollah and Amal had a dual domestic and regional-strategic function during Lebanon's internationalized civil war, governed by their relationships with external sponsors.

Consequently, the resolution of the protracted conflict between Amal and Hezbollah (1988-1990) was directly influenced by Iran and Syria's efforts to calm the tensions between the fighting factions. Also, the promulgation of the Second Damascus Agreement between Hezbollah and Amal came about following regional convergence regarding the crisis in Lebanon, indicated by reaching the Taef Agreement in 1989, through the combined diplomatic efforts of Lebanon, Syria, USA, the Arab League and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the ascent of

[44] Clashes between Hezbollah and Syrian troops took place in May 1984 in the Beqaa region, and again in 1987 in Beirut, where it's alleged that 18 Hezbollah members were massacred by the Syrian forces in the Fathallah Barracks, Hezbollah's early headquarters in Beirut. (Szekely, 2012, 116; Saouli, 2018, 99-100).

pragmatist leaders in Iran such as Rafsanjani and Syria's tightening grip around the Lebanese domestic scene contributed to moderating Iran's demands in Lebanon (Ranstorp, 1997, 80, 109), especially when taking into consideration the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and the rise of the United States as a global hegemon. In addition, the large human costs of the War of Brothers fueled popular resentment against Hezbollah and Amal (Azani, 2009, 77). This basket of domestic, regional and global variables constituted a dominant political structure that generated a suitable moment not only for ending the Hezbollah-Amal stalemate, but also bringing about the larger-scale resolution of the Lebanese Civil War. In this light, the end of the Lebanese Civil war can be viewed in terms of William Zartman's ripeness theory, where the parties concerned with the conflict come to perceive the continuation of the conflict as a mutually hurting stalemate (Zartman, 2000, 228).

C) Brief Summary and Closing Remarks:

Hezbollah's quest for power during the Lebanese Civil War entailed three subcomponents: 1) the group sought to garner popular support through capitalizing on Iranian sponsorship in order to compete with domestic adversaries and enhance its territorial control in Shiite majority areas. Particularly notable was Hezbollah's attempt to monopolize the military operations against Israel. 2) the group institutionalized its values of social welfare and service in the form of efficient organizations capable of providing material services not only to the local populations inhabiting its territory of control but also to its military fighters and their families. This was especially effective in light of the Lebanese government's continuous marginalization of Shiite-majority areas lying at geographical peripheries, and it enhanced the group's accumulation of mobilizational capacity and social control. Alongside providing material needs, Hezbollah offered a holistic bundle of symbolic capital for the Shiites of Lebanon, prioritizing

militant resistance against Israel and other forms of foreign occupation, supporting its employment of violence with the incorporation of Khomeini's revolutionary ideology. The combination of material rewards and symbolic capital, coupled with sanctions and violence ensured compliance, participation, and legitimation. 3) Hezbollah took advantage of the chaotic political opportunity structure prevalent during the Lebanese Civil War by maximizing the utility of violence to achieve its goals, while serving as a foreign policy tool for Iran.

The group faced major obstacles that pushed it to gradually restrain its behavior. First and foremost was Syria's opposition to Hezbollah's hegemonic ambitions. Secondly, it was Hezbollah's realization that exporting Iran's model of governance was practically unachievable given the deep sectarian divisions of Lebanon's society, in addition to the opposition and resentment it faced from within the Shiite sect itself.

In summary, this section aimed to situate Hezbollah's quest for survival and power through using a theoretical tripod that combines Migdal's state in society approach, Huntington's idea of institutionalization and the extant political opportunity structure. The strategy of restrained institutionalization, which forms the core explanatory argument of this thesis, gradually came about from Hezbollah's experience and interactions during the Lebanese Civil War. The group underwent a learning process characterized by a decisively important calculus that balances between the group's aim to accomplish its own goals, on one hand, the need to account for domestic responses to its actions, and the viability of achieving Hezbollah's goals given the present political opportunity structure. Having said that, it becomes unsurprising when Hezbollah expert Adham Saouli notes that there is no decisive evidence proving that Hezbollah's primary

goal during the Lebanese Civil War was the establishment of an Islamic Republic (2018, 94)[45] indicating that its experience in Lebanon since its grassroots activity in 1982 has forced it to reconsider ordering its preferences. The idea of preference ordering, or in other words, knowing what and when to prioritize a certain goal will be central in the next empirical chapter which observes Hezbollah's strategy between 1990 and 2005.

II. Experimental stage (1991-2000): Hezbollah's Evolution and Exploration of Domestic Politics:

"When the organization confronts a changing environment, it must, if it is to survive, weaken its commitment to its original functions"

Samuel Huntington (1968)

A) From Lebanese Civil War to Post-war Syrian Hegemony:

The Taef Agreement[46], a product of domestic, regional and global attempts to put end to what William Zartman described as a 'hurting stalemate', further reinforced the power-sharing arrangements that used to govern the Lebanese consociational system. Among Taef's most

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[45] Saouli makes a great point when he notes that Hezbollah did not clash with the Lebanese Forces during the civil war, although the latter represented the dominant Christian Maronite pro-status quo coalition (Ibid). Todd et al further corroborate this point, when they claim that Hezbollah benefitted from a business partnership with the Lebanese Force, by facilitating the flow of hashish and poppies from the Hezbollah-dominated Beqaa and Hermel regions to the city of Jounieh, where the port resided under the control of the pro-government Lebanese Forces (Todd et al, 2012, 32).

[46] The agreement was reached on October 22, 1989 in Saudi Arabia, and got approved by the Lebanese parliament on November 4, 1989. Retrieved from United Nations Website: https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_taif_agreement_english_version_.pdf

important reforms is the institutionalization of equality between Muslims and Christians in political representation, as well as proportionality within the various sectarian confessions (Taef Agreement, United Nations Website). Also, the Taef Agreement undermined the political status of Lebanon's longstanding powerful sect, the Christian Maronites, via limiting the powers of the president on one hand, and expanding those of the Sunni prime minister and Shiite speaker of parliament (Bordenkircher, 2013, 205). As for the relationship with Syria, given the latter's significant efforts toward bringing the Taef Agreement to life, not to mention the presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon at that time, Syria was able to negotiate itself a de jure supervisory, yet de facto hegemonic, tutelage over the Lebanese domestic landscape[47]. In the words of Lebanese scholar Bassel Salloukh, Taef "consecrated the role of Syria as the external balancer of power among the different Lebanese communities" (2005, 17). The Syrian grip over Lebanon was further tightened when Lebanon and Syria signed the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination (TBCC) on May 22, 1991. The treaty emphasized the Lebanese-Syrian relationship as a special one based on the common historical background and security "interdependence" both countries share (1992, Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination, United Nations Treaty Series). However, while the Taef Agreement stipulated that Syrian troops would assist the Lebanese government in spreading and maintaining its authority over Lebanese territory for no longer than two years following the ratification of the agreement and the implementation of political reforms, the TBCC refrained from setting a definite deadline for Syria's withdrawal, nevertheless pointing out that any agreement regarding the size of the Syrian

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[47] A detailed examination of the *Pax Syriana* is not central to this thesis's purpose. It is conceptualized and analyzed here in light of theoretical tripod guiding this study. Syrian hegemony is viewed as part of the overall political opportunity structure that constrained political freedom on the Lebanese domestic scene.

force and its duration of stay is to be negotiated via the Lebanese-Syrian Military Commission (1992, United Nations Treaty Series, 155).

Although a detailed analysis of the impact of Syrian tutelage goes beyond the scope of this study, this very brief overview of the Taef Agreement is indispensable for understanding the dynamics of domestic Lebanese politics in post-war Lebanon. Accordingly, it also elucidates the political opportunity structure that affected Hezbollah's domestic strategy since the end of the Lebanese Civil War and up until the withdrawal of Syrian forces in 2005.

As a matter of fact, the Taef Agreement did not ultimately satisfy Hezbollah's political and ideological principles, given that it opposed the sectarian-based nature of power-sharing arrangements institutionalized by the agreement. DeVore's statement that Hezbollah found the content of Taef to be minimal and insufficient (2013, 99) does not give a fair description of Hezbollah's dilemma at that time. Yet, and as the paper argued earlier, the dominant political opportunity structure, characterized by an interest convergence between the United States, Saudi Arabia and Syria posed a clear obstacle toward defying Taef[48]. Though it is impossible to observe what would have happened had Hezbollah actively persisted in its opposition to the Taef Agreement. However, evidence from a similar incident can demonstrate the historical developments that could have emanated from such a counterfactual scenario.

Michael Aoun, the General and Commander-in-chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces since 1984 and appointed Prime Minister by President Amine Gemayel in September 1988[49], is

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[48] The Unites States implicitly approved of Syria's control over Lebanon after the end of the Lebanese Civil War in return for Syria's cooperation against Iraq in 1990 (Nizameddin, 2006, 95).

[49] The appointment of the Army's Commander in Chief, Michael Aoun, as prime minister by President Amine Gemayel provoked opposition from Lebanon's Muslims, as the prime minister seat belonged to Sunni Muslims. Gemayel took this step since his presidential term came to an end without the election of a new president (Traboulsi,

perhaps the only figure to openly and aggressively dismiss Syria's hegemonic ambitions and automatically the prospect of the Taef Agreement. Aoun's military battles during the late 1980s took place on two different fronts: an internal conflict known as the 'War of Elimination' with the militias of the Lebanese Forces, his domestic rivals, and an external conflict dubbed the 'War of Liberation' against Syrian troops deployed in Lebanon (Lefort, 2015). Norton notes that Aoun's employment of excessive violence against his domestic rivals, his failure to build channels of communication with other Lebanese sects and the challenge he posed against Syria's military presence in 1989 rendered the War of Liberation a losing battle and led to Aoun's exile to France under Syrian pressure (2014, 129). Hence, Aoun has undertaken a bold stand against an overwhelming political opportunity structure which not only favored the termination of the Lebanese Civil War but also issued a green light to Syrian control in the post-war era. Alienated by both domestic and external actors, Aoun failed to attain his political agenda. His negligence of sensitive domestic, regional and international dynamics that governed the fate of post-war Lebanon undermined the legitimacy of his actions and ended with his exile to France. Applying the same logic to Hezbollah, it becomes safe to claim that had the group decided to fiercely and directly oppose Syria[50], the repercussions would have been extremely costly given the domestic and regional consensus bent on putting an end to the conflict.

2007, 240). The former prime minister then, Salim al Hoss, reacted by reverting his decision to resign, challenging Aoun. Consequently, Lebanon had two competing prime ministers, one who challenged Syria's presence and another who acquiesced to it.

[50] Note that the previous section already highlighted Hezbollah's conflict with Amal (Syria's ally in Lebanon) between 1988 and 1990 (the Brothers-Enemies War), which in term translated into a competition for social control on a domestic level, with strategic significance on a regional level (Iran-Syria relationship).

Therefore, Hezbollah’s decision to accept Taef must have been grounded in the political opportunity structure and circumstances governing the late 1980s. Syria, in particular, has proved its ability to constrain Hezbollah’s behavior during the Lebanese Civil War as if reminding the group that their relationship is governed by strategic premises and careful calculations, which if violated, may endanger its sustainability and consequently pose an existential threat to Hezbollah’s survival. Henceforth, the argument made by the proponents of Hezbollah’s comprehensive integration in Lebanon’s political system (Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2001; Harik, 2004; Norton, 2014; Dionigi, 2014; Daher, 2016) is misleading if it views Hezbollah’s acceptance of Taef as a mere product of the group’s tendency towards moderation. Hezbollah’s approval of Taef despite its shortcomings was simultaneously an outcome of necessity and a display of strategic flexibility.

B) Into the Game of Politics: Hezbollah’s Strategic Adjustments in Post-War Lebanon:

Two broad currents governed the trajectory of Hezbollah’s domestic strategy in post-war. Lebanon: *Infitah*, or political openness and *muqawama*, or resistance. It’s noteworthy to mention that Hezbollah was the only domestic actor allowed to sustain its arms, with Syria’s blessing, as a necessary tool for the group in its struggle to liberate the remaining territories in southern Lebanon from Israeli occupation (Azani, 2009, 82). Thus, Hezbollah now was carrying on its military resistance activities, through irregular warfare, against the IDF, with the approval of the effective political power in Lebanon, that is Syria. Salloukh notes Syria’s instrumentalization of Hezbollah in order to gain diplomatic leverage and push forward a satisfactory settlement with

Israel, especially with the disturbing prospect of a unilateral agreement between the PLO and Israel (2005, 19) that excludes Syrian strategic interests. Hence, the relationship between Syria and Hezbollah was mutually beneficial: Hezbollah sought to force the withdrawal of the IDF alongside its allies in the South Lebanon Army (SLA) from the Security Zone, augmenting its legitimacy in the Shiite community and improving its image as a force of national liberation vis-à-vis the broader Lebanese audience. Syria utilized Hezbollah's growing effectiveness against the IDF as a stick that threatens Israeli security interests in hopes of gaining concessions.

In addition, Hezbollah's aversion to bargaining with Israel led the group's leadership to look with suspicion at any form of Arab-Israeli rapprochement. After all, the likelihood of a Syrian-Israeli agreement might have certainly threatened the continuity of Hezbollah's resistance operations and its acquisition of arms. Whereas Todd et al (2012, 44) contend that Syria's tight grip over Lebanese politics did not constitute an obstacle toward Hezbollah's survival, Early (2006, 122) remarks that Hezbollah's room for maneuvering in domestic politics was rather constrained. The simple fact that only Hezbollah did not undergo disarmament demonstrates the leverage it enjoyed under Syrian tutelage. However, Hezbollah nevertheless exercised restraint and avoided, for instance, retaliating to the killing of nine of its supporters by government forces during a protest in 1993 against Palestinian-Israeli negotiations (Saouli, 2011, 937). Later in the next section, the paper will provide further evidence to highlight the strings attached to Hezbollah's role in domestic politics.

Hezbollah's confrontation with Israel was characterized by a series of continuous operations, which escalated into large-scale conflicts in 1993, in what became known as Operation Justice Rendered or the Seven Days War (Todd et al, 2012, 51), then again in 1996's Operation Grapes

of Wrath[51]. Hezbollah's assiduous stance against the Israeli war-machine gained the group momentum and legitimacy both among its Shiite supporters and more broadly among the Lebanese public. The group capitalized upon this wave of fame, de-emphasizing its revolutionary element and reconstructing itself as a resistance movement[52]. Instead of turning the population against Hezbollah, the Israeli aggression further united the Lebanese domestic scene behind the group's back[53]. Ergo, Hezbollah benefitted from the cumulative legitimization of Syria and its local backbone, strengthening its foothold in the Lebanese domestic scene.

Alongside the military activities, and in parallel with its early tradition of multi-dimensional resistance, Hezbollah continued to take advantage of the Lebanese government's persisting weakness, not to mention its marginalization of peripheral regions in south Lebanon and the Beqaa. Eighty percent of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri[54]'s budget for Plan Horizon 2000[55] was

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[51] Both operations intended to eliminate Hezbollah's threat to Israeli settlements and the Security Zone, but instead resulted in huge civilian casualties and dire economic losses (Harik, 2004, 112).

[52] This shift in narrative was evident in Hezbollah's manipulation of its symbolic capital. The group went on to change the famous motto on its flag from Islamic Revolution to Islamic Resistance (Abdul-Hussain, 2009, 71).

[53] Solidarity with the resistance reached its zenith on April 18, 1996, in the aftermath of the Qana Massacre, where the IDF artillery bombed what it claimed to be Hezbollah fighters, hitting instead a UN Base full of refugees. The bombing resulted in around a hundred victims, most of whom where Lebanese villagers (Harik, 2004, 121-122), which sparked an international outcry against Israel's inhumane aggression and elevated Hezbollah's struggle on moral grounds.

[54]Rafik Al Hariri, the Lebanese-Saudi billionaire and business-man, became Prime Minister in November 1992. A proponent of the state, Hariri exercise control over and shaped the economic agenda of Lebanon's post-war reconstruction era, but nevertheless was heavily constrained by Syria when it came to political issues (Najem, 1998, 30).

[55] Plan Horizon 2000 represented an example of a reconstruction model based on neoliberal economic policies. Though the project was able to rehabilitate Lebanon's infrastructure, in central Beirut to say the least, it prioritized reviving the Lebanese banking and services' sectors over responding to socio-economic problems. To exacerbate the situation, the Lebanese government's inability to harness the sufficient resources for Plan Horizon 2000 created a serious debt bubble (Ibid, 31), which has become today a classic feature of Lebanon's economy.

allocated to Beirut and Mount Lebanon (Daher, 2016, 39), which mirrored the prior socio-economic gap. In addition to the inequitable distribution of resources, the unstable security situation in south Lebanon prevented the inflow of investment into that region and hindered the proper implementation of developmental projects.

On the other hand, Hezbollah's basket of institutions, described in the previous chapter, developed its capacities to fulfill the survival strategies of the Shiite community. For instance, it helped rebuild 3000 homes following the 1996 War with Israel and provided compensation for up to 2300 farmers (Flanigan & Abdel Samad, 2009, 127). One cannot but overemphasize the importance of the compensation strategy Hezbollah has committed itself to fulfill following conflicts with Israel. Not only does the group provide credible guarantees for the future of fighters' families, but also to the wider Shiite community and sometimes even non-Shiites. Though the group's hospitals may and do offer privileged levels of care to Hezbollah-affiliated families, they do sometimes expand their scope of activity.

So, Hezbollah's social service model does partially act as a club model, since it provides subsidized club goods and prioritizes those "members" whose membership involves disciplined acts such obeying prohibitions (Berman & Laitin, 2008, 2-3), or in other words, paid the bill of membership through conceding social control to the group. Yet, the Lebanese government's inability to attend to the efficient provision of health services is clear in instances where Hezbollah's medical arm, the Islamic Health Unit, has managed and supervised several public hospitals, with the state's approval (Hamzeh, 2004, 52). This has been a constant element eroding de facto state sovereignty and injecting more loyalty in Hezbollah's popular image as an alternative strong non-state actor. Hezbollah's willingness to welcome members of other sects to benefit from its services signals the group's attempt to get rid of the radical edge it gained during

the Lebanese Civil War, and represent itself as an actor that can serve different people on a range of different levels. While such an occurrence in Lebanon's deeply divided society and its consociational power-sharing political arrangement is severely limited (for reasons to be discussed later in this section), it still resembles or approximates a promotion of public interest, although this usage of the term can be considered a form of conceptual stretching. But given the superiority of sectarian communities over the state as sources of socio-political power, the term public interest itself becomes distorted because there is no agreement over what constitutes the Lebanese public interest. Here, the state-in-society approach helps to understand how defining the public interest as "the interest of public institutions" (Huntington, 1968, 25) can be a hollow statement when sectarian entrepreneurs nest in those institutions. Lebanon's weak political system remains intact as result of the collusion between patrons, as Migdal describes it (2001, 149) and the consensus between actors both inside and outside Lebanon over the distribution of power and benefits. Therefore, playing by the rules of the consociational game has become a recipe for political stability, which normally aligns with the public interest, but here alternatively advocates the interests of sectarian leaders and enhances their social control.

On an organizational level, the group possesses a decentralized chain of task implementation that helped facilitate the provision of social services in a highly responsive manner. Whereas the scramble for resources within the corruption-stricken clientelist networks of the Lebanese government suffered from inefficiencies and bureaucratic obstacles, Hezbollah's independent and disciplined institutional framework, with the backing of Iranian resources, was able to surpass the government's performance (Flanigan & Abdel Samad, 2009, 131). Hezbollah was developing into a strong non-state actor inside a weak state, substituting the state's

responsibility, particularly in southern Lebanon, through monopolizing the means of military struggle against Israel and providing socio-economic benefits to the growing Shiite community. Hezbollah's maintenance of an institutional backbone that is autonomous from the state and a resource base that is independent of the government's budget rendered the weakness of the Lebanese state an asset rather than a liability. Through Migdal's state-society based lens, Hezbollah could be seen as a sociopolitical organization that is competing with the state for social control, and is actually stealing the show! The embryonic institutional system it established during the mid-1980s and up until the end of the Lebanese Civil War expanded during the post-war era in both scope and complexity, in what Azani rightly calls a process of institutionalization (Azani, 2009, 48).

Hezbollah's quest for social control through fulfilling the Shiite community's strategies of survival represents a continuity in one dimension of the group's domestic strategy that has to do with the group's relationship with society. As for Hezbollah's relationship with the state, the major polemical transformation has been the group's decision to participate in the 1992 parliamentary elections. Indeed, the within case-study analysis and comparison conducted in this paper allows controlling for numerous domestic dynamics. The main difference though is the shift in the nature of the political opportunity structure, that is the shift from a state of protracted and internationalized civil war, or a Hobbesian anarchical order (as Saouli would call it) toward the post-war era of political stability under Syrian hegemony, or the Lockean anarchical order (Saouli, 2018, 17-18). Unsurprisingly, the decision taken by Hezbollah's leadership to participate in the first post-civil war parliamentary elections in 1992 sparked controversy. After all, the group has denounced the sectarian nature of Lebanon's consociational system, advocating a more majoritarian type of political representation. Hezbollah's deputy chair Naim Qassem has

even confirmed the intense internal debates the took place regarding this vital step, saying that parliamentary participation was “not a clear choice” for Hezbollah (El Husseini, 2010, 807). Opinions were exchanged on the matter among the group’s hawks and doves[56]. Moreover, Todd et al (2012, 41) emphasize the approval of Iran’s moderate figures, led by Sayyid Ali Khamenei and Hashemi Rafsanjani, and mention a *fatwa* (religious edict) issued by Khamenei in May 1992 that approved Hezbollah’s formal access to the Lebanese political system.

A glimpse at Hezbollah’s 1992 electoral program is insightful on how the group shaped its political agenda vis-à-vis the state and the populace. The 1992 electoral platform highlights two main objectives: liberating the remaining Lebanese territories from Zionist occupation and abolishing political sectarianism (Alagha, 2010, 65). Thus, Hezbollah could be seen as an opposition party seeking parliamentary representation and holding a political program that criticizes the very nature of the political system prescribed by the Taef agreement The group also portrays the participation it anticipates in support of its parliamentary venture as the fruit of the struggle it has championed against Israel and an affirmation of the loyalty of the *resistance society*: “Hizbullah’s decision to participate, with its brothers and friends, in these elections is based on perpetual principled political convictions, enforced by the blood of its martyrs, and the suffering and pain of its prisoners of war, detainees, wounded, families of the martyrs, and the oppressed” (Ibid, 64). Hezbollah sought then to invest the social mobilization capacity it accumulated through its diverse activities (anti-Israeli resistance, social welfare and the

[56] Subhi Tufayli, Hezbollah’s first Secretary-General and one of the group’s founding fathers, disagreed with the policy of *infitah*, or political openness, adopted by the party’s leadership (Daher 2016, 46). His staunch objections to Hezbollah’s post-war trajectory escalated to a short-term crisis in 1997, when he mobilized a form of disobedience movement under the banner, *Thawrat Al Jiya*’, the Revolution of the Hungry. The paper will elaborate more on the significance of this event in the next few pages.

production of religious symbolic capital) and transform it into electoral support in parliament[57]. The group was not disappointed[58]; it was able to win eight seats out of 128 in 1992, and sustained a similar share again in the 1996 and 2000 elections (seven and nine seats respectively) (Hamzeh, 2004, 113). The competition between Hezbollah and Amal persisted, though on a timid level, and Syria sought to keep it in check. For instance, Hezbollah and Amal teamed up in a common electoral list during the 1996 parliamentary elections, pressured by Syria in order to control and put limits on Hezbollah's political autonomy (Charif, 2015, 37). This tightening and loosening of strings is a demonstration of the strategic calculations governing Syria's relationship with Hezbollah. The group was allowed to maintain its arms and wage operations against the IDF but did not enjoy total freedom in maneuvering in domestic politics.

Whether Hezbollah's participation in the parliamentary elections of 1992 aimed mainly to provide a political cover for its military resistance activities (Hage, 2018), or whether it indicates that Hezbollah prioritizes the political over the ideological (Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2002; Harik, 2004), Hezbollah's entrance on the Lebanese domestic arena paved the road for the institutionalization of a new value in its agenda, that is political participation in a "flawed"

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[57] Hezbollah's participation in domestic politics also involved municipal administration, which provided the type of local control and direct interaction with the Shiite community. Hence, holding municipal power strengthened Hezbollah's ties with the society (Azani, 2009, 125). In the 1998 municipal elections, the group was able to get a considerable number of municipalities under its control, including 40 municipalities in south Lebanon and the Beqaa region, even though Amal retained a relatively higher number of municipalities (Hamzeh, 2004, 128-129).

[58] Worth noting here is the controversy surrounding parliamentary elections held throughout the 1990s, or more broadly under the era of Syrian tutelage (known as *Pax Syriana*). Syria's effective hegemony over Lebanon has shaped the general picture of political representation in the country, whether it be in the parliament, cabinet, or even the presidency. The elections took place under very tense political circumstances, where Christian Maronite political and religious figures called for election boycotts. Al Khazen describes Syria's meddling in Lebanese domestic politics as "authoritarian by diffusion", indicating Damascus's intention to create a Lebanese post-war pro-Syrian political elite (quoted in Salloukh, 2006, 638).

system of government. The group was able to generate political power from its military resistance activities and provision of social services. According to Huntington's criteria of institutionalization, one could say Hezbollah's political participation enhanced the group's complexity and demonstrated its organizational adaptability. The logic for this argument can be illustrated in two sentences: the more functional differentiation a socio-political organization undergoes, the easier it is to adjust to a sudden loss of a certain function. Huntington explains that " the greater the number and variety of subunits, the greater the ability of the organization to secure and maintain the loyalties of its members" (1968, 18). The state-in-society approach also goes along with this claim, as functional differentiation renders sociopolitical organizations able to satisfy a wider scope of the material and symbolic needs that constitute its target audience's survival strategy (Migdal, 2001, 52).

Furthermore, the scope of activities open to Hezbollah increased, as participation in domestic life inevitably leads to communication with other political parties and with actors outside Hezbollah's Shiite political community. In 1997, the group gathered alongside more than 15 political parties to revitalize party politics and mobilize a pro-resistance stance (Saouli, 2011, 934). That year also witnessed Hezbollah's establishment of the Lebanese Resistance Brigades (LRB), a paramilitary group whose core mission is resistance against Israel, but whose membership is not exclusive to Shiites (Blanford, 2011, 197), as is the case with Hezbollah. The creation of the LRB in 1997 is a perfect example of experimentation, but its success was highly undermined by the dominance of sectarian-based political mobilization in Lebanese politics[59]. The LRB's lack of success demonstrates the limits of Hezbollah's scope of mobilization. The

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[59] In fact, the Lebanese Resistance Brigades were at some point accused of being "Hezbollah's thugs", as one pro-Hezbollah journalist described them (quoted in Daher, 2016, 190).

power-sharing arrangements, institutionalized by the 1943 National Pact and later in the 1989 Taef Agreement, further entrenched and politicized sectarian divisions.

Hezbollah's resistance activities did receive wide appeal on the national level, but nevertheless this certainly did not alter the historically rigid sectarian basis for political mobilization in Lebanese politics. Viewing other parties within the Shiite community and outside it as socio-political organizations in their own right helps understand this point; the game of politics in Lebanon has had specific rules in accordance with Lijphart's fourth pillar of consociationalism, segmental autonomy. The idea and practice of segmental autonomy, articulated by Lijphart as the "delegation of rule-making and rule-application to segments" (1977, 41), echoes Migdal's interest in the question of who gets the to make the rules. The term segmental autonomy, which denotes a feature of a consociational system as articulated by Lijphart, is similar to the term community autonomy used by Kaplan (2017) in his study of communities in civil war[60]. Although Lebanon's political system is not a strict application of Lijphart's consociational system, the rule-making autonomy sectarian-based institutions enjoy among their communities in Lebanon has been reinforced in the ninth and tenth articles of the constitution, which includes autonomy regarding the matters personal status law (Clark & Salloukh, 2013, 738). Another display of segmental autonomy relate to education through to phenomenon of politically and religiously affiliated private schools. A report by Jihad Al Binaa (Holy Construction Foundation) in 2000 presents the distribution of ten Hezbollah-affiliated schools, the Mahdi Schools, in Shiite majority areas of Beqaa, south Lebanon and Beirut's suburbs (Hamzeh, 2004, 57). The education curriculum in these schools includes elements that

[60] Kaplan views community autonomy, as the community's ability to retain decision-making power over its members (2017, 34).

reflect the group's ideological beliefs, such as dress codes for female students and courses in Shiite religious education. This is also common with Hezbollah's Shiite counterpart, Amal (e.g. Martyr Bilal Fahs High Schools), as well with other sectarian groups. Yet, the efficient use of Iranian financial backing enabled Hezbollah to achieve both a quantitative and qualitative advantage over other socio-political organizations in this regard. And more importantly, Hezbollah's social welfare program became recognized in the post-war era, as its organizations were registered by the Lebanese government (Flanigan & Abdel Samad, 2009, 124) and were therefore permitted to work alongside other Lebanese, regional and international non-governmental organizations. Briefly reiterated, the institutional framework upon which Hezbollah's social welfare activities rested was recognized and legitimized by the state, rendering those NGOs eligible for government funding.

Therefore, it could be argued that the power-sharing arrangements grounded by Lebanon's sectarian-based social fragmentation and institutionalized by the Taef Agreement complemented Hezbollah's process of generating social control, by legitimizing its relationship with the Shiite community in particular. The social control Hezbollah sought to engender through a combination of carrots and sticks during its infancy was consolidated by the constitution's respect for segmental autonomy. Each sectarian group enjoys its spheres of influence and power center, not necessarily in a clearly demarcated territory, but one that is well-defined enough to establish boundaries and put limits on sectarian groups' room for maneuver. So, both the activities of Hezbollah's Islamic Health and its Educational Unit somehow walk hand in hand with the concept of segmental autonomy, although they sometimes can be a more ambitious extension of it, even if the main priority of Hezbollah's health service provision is the circle of most loyal supporters, fighters and their families. The persistent weakness of public

institutions, emphasized earlier, allowed Hezbollah to automatically fill this vacuum and respond to the needs of a wider public.

It remains problematic to equate Hezbollah's engagement in the game of Lebanese politics alongside other sectarian-based sociopolitical organizations with the statement that Hezbollah has actually become a full-fledged supporter of the political status quo. Daher adopts this equation by arguing that even though Hezbollah publicly criticized some aspects of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's neoliberal post-war reconstruction policies, the group did not translate its rhetoric into active opposition. He thus concludes that it did not see a conflict between Hariri's advocacy of privatization and liberalization on one hand, and its objectives of fighting poverty and reducing inequality (2016, 56). However, it is important to reinstate that the control Hariri exercised over Lebanon's post-war economic agenda was blessed with Syria's approval, as long as high politics and security remained in the latter's grip. Syrian hegemony during the post-war era, with the effective cover it provided for Hezbollah's resistance activities, remarkably constrained the latter's mobility. Yet, Hezbollah's active engagement in domestic politics goes beyond its quasi-passive stance toward post-war reconstruction economic policies to encompass the scramble for power over forces of civil society. In a remarkably revealing study carried out by Clark and Salloukh, Hezbollah, alongside other parties and sectarian elites, engaged in undermining the Grand Confederation of Labor (GCL) and other civil society NGOs through a divide-and-rule strategy that depended on infiltrating those organizations from within[61] (2013).

[61] Clark and Salloukh note Hezbollah's early support to Ilyas Abu Rizk, the independent president of the GCL, during the 1997 executive elections, against the ruling Troika of pro-Syrian president Elias Hrawi, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, and Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (Ibid, 734). Later in 2001, though, Hezbollah joined an alliance with Amal and the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) to defeat the opposing leftist groups and elect Ghassan Ghosn, a pro-government puppet, as president of the GCL (Ibid, 735).

An interesting feature in Hezbollah's domestic strategy is that despite its decision to participate in parliament, the group abstained from granting votes of confidence to three consecutive Lebanese governments (1992, 1996, 2000). This says a lot about its perception of the Lebanese government at that time. Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary-General, Shaykh Naim Qassem stated the group's position when he said that "our loyalty is to a government that represents and serves the people, not to cabinet spoils" (Hamzeh, 2004, 120). Hamzeh also explains the ideological barrier standing in the way of a confidence vote, by indicating that with respect to its Islamic nature, the group is bound in principle only by God's laws, and not by man-made laws (Ibid). Still, Hezbollah criticized Lebanon's political system as corrupt and inefficient, not only because it's un-Islamic, but also because it is based on political sectarianism (Hezbollah's Open Letter 1985; 1992, 1996, and 2000 electoral platforms, in Alagha, 2011). If Hezbollah's issue with the political system was rigidly ideological, then one would not expect it to participate in the political system in the first place. It's actually difficult to provide a specific and decisive answer for why Hezbollah did not participate in the government. It might have been one of Syria's tactics to constrain the group, or possibly a self-proclaimed decision by Hezbollah since it was focusing its efforts on the military front during that period. Nonetheless, Hezbollah's abstention from participation in government indirectly helped sustain its puritan image as a resistance movement and social welfare provider that is independent of the government. Comparing Hezbollah's actions with Iran's, Hage remarked that Hezbollah, being a non-state actor, "is subjected to less public scrutiny and expectations" (2018, 44). The same could be posited to explain why Hezbollah abstained from granting confidence to the above-mentioned governments. The group might have wanted to re-emphasize its autonomy from the government and avoid the burden of accountability.

Having sufficiently discussed the first two criteria for institutionalization (complexity and adaptability), evaluating the second two, autonomy and coherence, demands more caution. In Huntington's perception, Hezbollah has not yet become autonomous in any sense, because autonomy entails a state where "political organizations and procedures exist independently of other social groupings and methods of behavior" (1968, 20). Hezbollah's capacity for social mobilization heavily relies on the Shiite community, or more precisely on the *resistance society*, as argued by Lebanese sociologist Waddah Sharara (1997). This relationship, of course, is one of mutual interdependence and reflects the sectarian-based power-sharing arrangements reviewed earlier above. Therefore, Hezbollah's reliance on the Shiites for human capital and legitimacy is matched by the growing role of Hezbollah in fulfilling its audience's strategies for survival. This interdependence is not equivalent to subordination though, because the decisive influence Syria had on Lebanese politics between 1991 and 2005 constituted an external source of legitimization for Hezbollah, evident in allowing the organization to avoid disarmament, as a token of Syria's appreciation for Hezbollah's strategic value in the conflict with Israel (Szekely, 2012, 118). In this sense, Hezbollah's relationship with Syria is also one of strategic interdependence, and that helps explain Syria's occasional moves to constrain the group's scope of action, as state sponsors do in their relationship with clients (Bapat, 2012).

Shortly put, Hezbollah may have enjoyed a certain form of autonomy from the state and other sectarian groupings, facilitated by the consociational rules of Lebanese politics and Syria's hegemonic influence in post-Taef Lebanon. Yet, those very same conditions necessitated building a network of interdependence whose backbone is the Shiite community. Similarly, this interdependence does not resemble total subordination, as Hezbollah's maturation in Lebanese domestic politics led to the development of a corporate institutional structure (Salloukh, 2016,

123). As for the successful mobilization of resources in quest of social control, it does not possess a monocausal explanation, and there's shortage of empirical evidence in general to assert that external state sponsorship directly explains the success and efficiency of recipient clients, whether they be insurgent groups or non-state actors (Cunningham et al, 2011; Carter, 2012; DeVore and Stahli, 2015)[62]. A discussion of endogenous characteristics conducive for the efficiency of non-state actors is linked to group coherence, Huntington's last criterium of institutionalization. Comparing coherence in military organizations to that in political organizations, Huntington highlights values of internal discipline and the group members' commitment to elevate the institutional interest over their own individual narrow interests (1968, 23-24). Hezbollah's ideology, based on Khomeini's theory of *Wilayat Al Fakih*, is indeed a powerful engine of socio-political and religio-political mobilization, and the system of values it advocates (resistance and activism instead of the long-standing Shiite legacy of political quietism) has remained to be a unique asset that embodies the group's symbolic capital[63].

Nevertheless, Hezbollah's coherence was challenged in 1997, with the rising discontent voiced by its ex-Secretary-General Subhi Tufayli, a key figure of Hezbollah in the Beqaa region and one of its founding fathers. Tufayli's hawkish political attitudes diverged with the position adopted by moderate Hezbollah leaders, such as Abbas Al Mussawi, Ibrahim Amin Al-Sayyid

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[62] Cunningham et al (2011) find that states prefer to sponsor insurgent groups that tend to be stronger, which suggests an endogenous explanation for the effective performance of those groups, in line with DeVore and Stahli's claim that state sponsorship might be a necessary though insufficient cause for the effectiveness of non-state actors .

[63] In addition to the role of the system of values in instilling order and efficiency, Staniland proposed the social-institutional theory, linking the strength of pre-existing social networks that form insurgent groups to their cohesion/fragmentation (2012 and 2014). His theory conveniently applies to Hezbollah, where close and intimate transnational ties between Lebanese, Iraqi and Iranian religious clerics contributed heavily to the sustaining a serious and disciplined performance.

and Hasan Nasrallah, who chose to follow the pragmatic approach of Iran's new president, Hashemi Rafsanjani (Harik, 2004, 56)[64]. Tufayli thus disapproved of Hezbollah's decision to participate in Lebanese political life, which his next step was considered to be an aspiration toward restoring Hezbollah's Islamic project (Wege, 2010, 33). In 1997, Tufayli launched the Revolution of the Hungry[65], an anti-government disobedience movement, immediately dismissed by Hezbollah's leadership, in followed by Tufayli's expulsion from the group (Saouli, 2003, 74). Hezbollah's Secretary-General, Hasan Nasrallah, has managed to capitalize on Hezbollah's anti-Israel military resistance in order to enhance the group's popularity as well as his own image as *Sayyid Al Muqawama* (Saouli, 2018, 113), or leader of the resistance. Nasrallah is a mastermind of political mobilization[66] and possesses quite a charismatic figure, that enabled him to exercise effective control over Hezbollah, and modify the group's priorities in line with shifting sands of the political opportunity structure. As Tufayli's defection can be considered an outcome of the leadership's willingness to engage in Lebanon's consociational system, which he saw as a drawback, Hezbollah's policy of political openness was indeed an optimal decision that allowed it to sustain its legitimacy in post-civil War Lebanon, under Syria's watchful eyes[67]. In short,

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[64] Harik argues that internal tension in Hezbollah followed Khomeini's death and escalated in 1992 when controversy arose regarding the participation in the 1992 parliamentary elections (Ibid).

[65] Tufayli's movement garnered support among his supporters in the Beqaa region and specifically in his hometown, Brital.

[66] Before the foundation of Hezbollah, Nasrallah served in Amal's politburo, and he was responsible for political mobilization activities in Beirut, which enhanced his administrative skills. (DeVore and Stahli, 2015, 339).

[67] Tamm (2011, 607) argues that Syria enabled Tufayli to organize the Revolution of the Hungry in the first place in order to keep Nasrallah in check and balance against his increasing influence as a political figure. Although the evidence provided is not decisive, there's reason to give credit to his argument, because Syria has frequently resorted to divide-and-rule strategies in its relationship with Palestinian guerilla groups and Lebanese militias during the civil war to prevent the rise of a hegemonic group Lebanon.

Hezbollah's metamorphosis and maturation within the Lebanese political system did not take place without challenges, but the group's timely rationalization of preferences and interests, driven by the need to survive the pressures of the new political opportunity structure following the end of the Lebanese Civil War, rendered this transition relatively smooth.

C) Summary and Discussion:

This section intended to situate Hezbollah's domestic strategy during the first decade of the post-civil war era within the proposed theoretical tripod. In line with the main argument, Hezbollah's attempt to enhance its domestic leverage took place on three levels: The group's decision to accept the Taef agreement and consecrate this approval through participation in consecutive parliamentary and municipal elections marked further institutionalization into the Lebanese political system, in quest of supporting the cause of its military resistance and maintaining popular legitimacy on a communal level (among Shiites) and among the broader Lebanese public. Echoing Huntington's quote at the beginning of this section, Hezbollah underwent a process of re-ordering preferences, whereby its original opposition to Lebanon's corrupt and sectarian system was transformed into a long-term goal instead of short-term priority, enabling the group to sustain its ideological character and become a recognized political actor.

Consequently, these moves on the domestic chessboard increased Hezbollah's adaptability and complexity as a socio-political organization. The achievement of domestic gains nevertheless suffered from a challenge to Hezbollah's internal coherence, exemplified by Tufayli's defective actions and disapproval of the undertaken pragmatic trajectories. Last but not least, Hezbollah's embroilment in the Lebanese political system and its dependence on the

Shiites as a local popular base entangled both in a web of mutual interdependence, posing more constraints on Hezbollah's autonomy.

On another level, the institutionalization of sectarian-based power-sharing arrangements in the Taef Agreement fortified the social control Hezbollah harnessed since its inception in 1985, by allowing the group to legitimize and exercise its mobilizational capacity under the principle of segmental autonomy. Put differently, the consociational nature of Lebanese politics complemented Hezbollah's struggle for more social control. Particularly, the institutional and financial independence from the state system Hezbollah enjoyed enabled it to tap into the weakness of the state and fill two gaps essential for the well-being of its local constituents: security and development.

The third and perhaps most important component of Hezbollah's evolution during this period was the presence of an advantageous political opportunity structure, characterized by Syrian hegemony. The regionally and internationally approved presence of Syrian troops in post-civil war Lebanon ensured an atmosphere of relative political stability, during which Hezbollah's acquisition of arms was barely challenged, thus allowing the group to focus its attention on the military resistance activities against the IDF. At the same time, Syria's presence constrained Hezbollah's participation in Lebanese politics through a system of checks and balances, an example of which is its demand that Hezbollah team up with Amal, its staunch rival less than a decade ago, in the 1996 parliamentary elections.

It's important to acknowledge the truth in the claim that Hezbollah's participation in the parliamentary elections throughout this decade has taken place in order to legitimize and protect its armed presence. However, this goal was guaranteed with ease under Syria's tutelage, as Assad realized the strategic value of Hezbollah in the struggle against Israel. This means

Hezbollah did not face serious domestic political opposition, because there wasn't actually room for a serious debate over its military struggle against Israel. It also didn't have to meddle much in the bickering of Lebanese politics since Syria held effective power from 1990 to 2004-2005 (Abdul Hussain, 2009, 74). That's why this period of Hezbollah's history (precisely 1990-2000) is labeled as an *experimental stage* in this paper. Whether Hezbollah participated or not in politics in 1992, the resistance would have probably retained its weapons thanks to Syrian tutelage and Israeli occupation. Hezbollah's political participation from 1992 to 2000, in short, was not a necessary component of the group's short-term survival, but an essential pillar of its long-term domestic strategy.

That said, the next section will demonstrate how the changing political opportunity structure necessitated Hezbollah's resort to politics and violence in order to protect itself as a power center vis-à-vis rival sociopolitical organizations. Again, remember that the paper's concern is Hezbollah's domestic strategy. Therefore, any discussion of its external and regional struggles relates to their impact on its domestic status only, and details beyond that are not material to this paper.

III. Confrontational Stage (2000-2009): Hezbollah in An Environment of Conflict

"The organization triumphs over its function"

Samuel Huntington (1968)

The main argument in this section is that Hezbollah shifted its domestic strategy to accommodate the changing nature of the political opportunity structure it enjoyed under Syrian

tutelage. The group intensified its involvement in the domestic arena and further capitalized on popular mobilization in order to prevent the deterioration of Syrian control over Lebanese politics. An interesting feature of this era is that it represented the first time where Hezbollah as an armed socio-political organization faced serious domestic opposition, on grounds of its support to Syrian presence in Lebanon on one hand, and its continuous acquisition of arms on the other hand.

The roadmap for this section goes as follows: it proceeds to articulate how the proposed theoretical framework, with its three distinct pillars (state-in-society approach, institutionalization and political opportunity structure), explains Hezbollah's behavior on the domestic scene during this challenging period. Having illustrated Hezbollah's mobilization of social control in light of the state-in-society approach throughout the previous sections, this one will succinctly point out the extant continuities characterizing Hezbollah's relationship with society, and the resort to detailed elaboration takes place only if it provides new empirical value. This analysis is guided by four critical junctures: the withdrawal of Israeli occupiers in 2000, the demise of Syrian hegemony amidst a domestic political crisis in 2005, the July War in 2006 and the violent climax of the resumed domestic conflict in 2008.

A) Israel Withdraws, Hezbollah Celebrates:

Examining the withdrawal of Israeli occupiers from the Security Zone in south Lebanon on May 24, 2000, provides the chance to assess Hezbollah's domestic strategy on several levels. First, on an institutional level, Hezbollah achieved the primary function it had been working on for eighteen years, through its military activities against the IDF and its proxy, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). The fulfillment of this function, which reinforced an essential element of

the local constituency's strategies of survival (security) proved Hezbollah's ability to honor its credible commitment on a long-term basis. Accordingly, the withdrawal of the IDF resembled a further institutionalization of trust between Hezbollah and its local base.

Huntington argues that " the relationship between the culture of a society and political institutions is a dialectical one" (1968, 28). Indeed, the culture of discipline and trust Hezbollah sought to espouse as a socio-political organization vis-à-vis its domestic audience reaped its fruits; the group capitalized on the momentum its military victory generated to secure nine representatives during the 2000 parliamentary elections, winning three seats more than Amal[68] (Hamzeh, 2004, 113). Unsurprisingly, Hezbollah's pride with its achievement against the IDF was evident in its 2000 parliamentary electoral platform: "The Resistance was able to regain occupied Lebanese land and enforce its stance in the regional and international equation, forcing the Zionist enemy to capitulate and withdraw in humiliation, a precedent that the region [Middle East] has never experienced in the history of struggle against the 'Zionist Entity'" (Alagha, 2011, 76). Besides, Hezbollah attributed this victory to the Lebanese people and recognized the cooperative roles of the Lebanese Army and the government (Ibid.). The portrayal of the 2000 Liberation as a national accomplishment served to widen the appeal for Hezbollah's resistance and ground its legitimacy among a broader Lebanese public. Certainly, the parliamentary gains

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[68] Hamzeh describes the alliance between Hezbollah and Amal during the 2000 parliamentary elections as the "brainchild of Iran" (2004, 116). He adds that Iran's supreme leader Khamenei suggested that Hezbollah team up with Amal in order to prevent the possibility of backlashes between the two groups, especially when Hezbollah's popularity was rapidly soaring at Amal's cost. Iran, therefore, as Hezbollah's sponsor, sought to control the group's rise, through engaging the group in electoral alliances with rival groups. Consequently, this probably reduced the number of seats Hezbollah would have won in 2000, but it also secured a kind of domestic balance within the Shiite community that diminishes the resurgence of violence. After all, Amal and Hezbollah have fought a brutal two-year war, and although the animosity between the two did pacify, it did not completely disappear.

in 2000 derived not only from Hezbollah's resistance activities against Israel but also fed on its longstanding social welfare program and the pragmatism that characterized its behavior since the end of the Lebanese Civil War. The accumulation of social control and the institutionalization of trust over time allowed Hezbollah to properly channel its mobilizational capacity into the domestic arena[69].

Moreover, Hezbollah exercised remarkable self-restraint following the withdrawal of Israeli troops, in regard to the manner in which it tackled the issue of families and members affiliated with the now defeated South Lebanon Army[70]. Hezbollah always viewed the SLA collaborators as treacherous enemies, and the SLA had its fair share as a target of Hezbollah's military operations which rapidly escalated during the 1990s (Hamzeh, 2004, Shleifer, 2006, Dionigi, 2014). Yet, the group's constant promises to punish the collaborators were not met, and Hezbollah alternatively decided that this responsibility ought to take place through the Lebanese judicial system (Todd et al, 2012, 55-56). Furthermore, Hezbollah's Secretary-General Nasrallah indicated in an interview with the OTV Channel that upon a meeting with the French Ambassador in 2000, he described Hezbollah's actions of self-restraint to be noble, contrasting them with the violence perpetrated by the French revolutionaries centuries ago (February 6,

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[69] In a similar vein, the municipal elections held in 2004 demonstrated Hezbollah's ability to secure the support and participation of its popular base. The group was able to win 90% of the municipalities in the Beqaa region and 60% in south Lebanon (Flanigan & Abdel Samad, 2009, 123). The quest for municipal power reflected Hezbollah's prioritization of reviving local administration, given that municipal power allows a micro-level interaction between the governors and the populace. To add, Hezbollah's continuous participation in municipal elections goes along with its effort to benefit from the elements of segmental autonomy and administrative decentralization.

[70] The South Lebanon Army (SLA) was a militia composed in its majority of Lebanese Christians and a minority of Shiites in south Lebanon, near the border with Israel, in the wake of the 1978 Operation Litani, during which the IDF sought to eliminate the PLO threats. The SLA was funded by Israel and served as a kind of border police for the Israelis.

2008). So not only did Hezbollah refrain from exercising a punishment it deemed rightful against collaborators, but it also delegated this function to the state. This further supports the position that Hezbollah views violence as an instrument it can use or abstain from using, depending on how the outcome balances between its objectives and the image it wants to portray in the minds of its domestic audience. Another conclusion that could be drawn in light of Hezbollah's relationship with the state is that the group did not have any problem delegating an important function (punishment) to the government. As a result, the state itself could be seen as an instrument, capable of performing functions which Hezbollah may be reluctant to assume.

Electoral victories and self-restraint aside, the forced and celebrated withdrawal of the IDF paradoxically posed a challenge for Hezbollah. Echoing Huntington's functional approach towards institutions, a function once achieved is consequently dropped from an organization's agenda. Similarly, Hezbollah's military success raised questions about the utility of its military power (Simon & Stevenson, 2001, 34). However, the expectation that Hezbollah would disarm following Israel's withdrawal reflects a naïve analysis and neglects the fact that Hezbollah is an organization that has witnessed consecutive phases of successful institutionalization, particularly in terms of complexity and adaptability. At that stage, Hezbollah had become a hybrid non-state actor with political and military power, and it was more than an instrument that serves a particular purpose. In Huntington's words, it developed "a life of its own quite apart from the specific functions it may perform at any given time" (1968, 15).

In another perspective, and having highlighted in previous sections Hezbollah's relationship with Iran on ideological and strategic grounds, and its relationship with Syria as a marriage of

convenience both parties grew to appreciate over time[71], Hezbollah's disarmament would have caused the group to lose its essential strategic value: Hezbollah's status as an armed non-state actor whose open-ended struggle against Israel endowed it with local and regional legitimacy, but more importantly secured the continuity of resource flow from Iran[72]. Furthermore, to the author's knowledge, Hezbollah has not given a solid statement regarding the prospect of disarmament during the early 2000s. On the contrary, it reiterated in its 2000 parliamentary electoral platform the need to keep its military resistance on guard against any possible Israeli aggression (Alagha, 2011, 77), emphasizing the government's inability to ensure safety and security in south Lebanon. Syria also corroborated the Lebanese government's claim that the Shebaa Farms, a geostrategic region that lies at the intersection of Lebanese, Syrian and Israeli borders, belonged in fact to Lebanon[73], calling upon to Israel to withdraw in line with United Nations Security Council Resolution UNSCR 425 (Karam, 2006, 63). Worth noting here is that the Lebanese government's argument that the Shebaa Farms belonged under its sovereignty was probably crafted by Syria since the latter still maintained relative hegemony over Lebanese foreign policy issues during the early 2000s. Consequently, Hezbollah was able to retain its weapons through a combination of diplomatic efforts (Syria, Iran, Lebanese government) on one hand, and taking advantage of seemingly perpetual state incapacity on the other hand.

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[71] As noted earlier in this paper, Syrian support for Hezbollah stemmed partially from its rapprochement with Iran and also from the strategic value of Hezbollah as a tool for negotiating the return of the Golan Heights to Syrian sovereignty (Norton, 2014).

[72] Iran maintained its supportive stance towards Hezbollah, despite a request by the United States on April 2002 which called upon Iran to control Hezbollah's continuous military activities (Samii, 2008, 45).

[73] Israel considered the Shebaa Farms to be an occupied Syrian territory annexed from during the 1967 War, and therefore beyond the jurisdiction of UNSCR 425, which demanded full Israeli from Lebanese territory. See http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/425

The next subsection intends to situate this thesis's main argument through an examination of Hezbollah's shifts in domestic strategy following the simultaneous deterioration of its favorable opportunity structure and the emergence of a hostile one. The empirical evidence shows that the rapid developments leading to the demise of Syrian hegemony over Lebanon forced Hezbollah to become more engaged in the Lebanese political system; the group retained its fulfillment of the Shiites' strategies of survival, in line with the state-in-society approach, and sought building cross-sectarian coalitions, as the first pillar of consociationalism prescribes. This took place through the political mobilization of its popular base and the quest for more power inside the state system, therefore making Hezbollah a more complex and adaptable socio-political group (two criteria of institutionalization)[74]. Preceding the argument is a brief contextual overview of the domestic, regional and international developments that encapsulated Syria's decline and eventual withdrawal on April 2005.

B) Syria Withdraws, Hezbollah Reacts:

The political crisis which shook Lebanon starting 2004 and whose first product was Syria's withdrawal was the outcome of converging domestic, regional and international dynamics. The main domestic variable was the escalation of grievances, particularly among Christian Maronites, against Syrian hegemony[75]. Syria violated the constitution several times (Norton, 2007, 482 & Norton, 2014, 125), loosened the reins over its troops and intelligence officers in

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[74] I briefly summarize the findings in this paragraph, since there's a lot to mention about each pillar of the theoretical tripod in this section.

[75] Christian opposition to Syrian hegemony goes back to the first years of the post-civil war era, when the majority of Christian groups boycotted the 1992 parliamentary elections (Harik, 2004, 46; Todd et al, 2012, 44). Lebanon's Christians were suspicious because Syria refused to plot a timeline for its withdrawal (Salloukh, 2005, 18).

Lebanon intelligence[76], and crippled state institutions through manipulative electoral engineering intended to create a post-war pro-Syrian elite (Salloukh, 2010, 210). The tutelage era was economically disastrous, costing Lebanon an estimated 27 billion dollars between 1976 and 2005 (Salloukh, 2005, 19). Not to mention the fact that Lebanese presidents were literally puppets in Assad's hands. The first major mobilization of political opposition[77] took place in Qornet Chehwan, a town in Mount Lebanon, on April 2000 (Kurtulus, 2009, 210) and the conglomeration of political figures became known as the Qornet Chehwan Gathering (QSG)[78]. The main trigger for the opposition's climax though was Syria's decision to extend President Lahoud's tenure in 2004, in another violation of the constitution, and the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Al Hariri, who resigned in protest against the unconstitutional extension (Sami, 2008, 46).

A set of regional and global factors created a favorable political opportunity structure for the anti-Syrian opposition in Lebanon. The War on Terror, or the US's decision to project more power into the Middle East following the attacks in 9/11, threatened states like Syria[79] and Iran,

[76] See Salloukh et al (2015) for a detailed examination of the Syrian tutelage era and the role of security and intelligence apparatus.

[77] It's important to note that alongside Christian right opposition leaders, leftist and progressive leaders also expressed their opposition such as the leader of Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblatt, and the leader of the Lebanese Communist Party, George Hawi. Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and leader of the Future Movement also voiced a softer opposition.

[78] Khazen (2003, 622) lists the main points on the QSG's agenda: calling for implementing Taef and balancing the power between Syria and Lebanon. Second comes the encouragement of cross-sectarian dialogue with fellow Lebanese political parties.

[79] Syria's consciousness of those developments led to its recommendation that Hezbollah exercise restraint concerning the Shebaa Farms (Blanford, 2001)

and consequently Hezbollah[80]. This period also witnessed the death of President Hafez Assad in 2002 and the ascent of his son Bashar to the presidency. France, Saudi Arabia and Egypt also started voicing concern towards the Syrian presence they blessed a decade and a half ago. The UNSCR 1559 was the product of anti-Syrian efforts, calling upon Syria's full unconditional withdrawal and the disarmament of all militias in Lebanon, meaning Hezbollah (UNSCR Website). To borrow the title of an article on Syria and Lebanon (Korn, 1986), UNSCR 1559 was Syria's and Hezbollah's "fateful entanglement". Syria's withdrawal and the subsequent assassination of Rafiq Hariri polarized Lebanon's parties into two camps: the anti-Syrian March 14 Coalition and the pro-Syrian March 8 Coalition.

To summarize this historical overview in two sentences, Hezbollah witnessed the deterioration of the favorable opportunity structure which offered it external legitimacy. Its back was exposed to grievous domestic parties, who came to see Hezbollah as a rival by virtue of its ardent support to Syria, under the argument that "the friend of my enemy is my enemy".

In order to face the threat of a hostile political opportunity structure, Hezbollah increased its engagement in Lebanese domestic politics since the early 2000s. On an organizational level, it created a body called the Parliamentary Council in order to enhance its parliamentary performance (Hamzeh, 2004, 68). Moreover, the head of Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc

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[80] Although Hezbollah's external strategy does not lie within this paper's scope, several scholars noted Hezbollah's toning down of it anti-US rhetoric and stance in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (Harik, 2004; El Husseini, 2010; Stewart, 2010; DeVore, 2012). The group wanted to avoid stirring tension, especially since the War on Terror campaign triggered digging up Hezbollah's alleged past attacks against the US Marines in 1983, in addition to a couple of attacks that targeted the Israeli embassy in 1992 and the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA). While Syria, Iran and the Lebanese government argued that Hezbollah was a resistance movement and an expression of self-defense against Israeli aggression, Washington eventually aligned with Tel Aviv's position that Hezbollah was a terrorist organization (Harik, 2004, 165-166).

(Loyalty to the Resistance Bloc), MP Mohammad Raad, became an eighth member on Hezbollah's Shura Council[81] (Alagha, 2011, 28). Those two steps were taken within Hezbollah's internal organization signify the increased attention the group accorded to domestic politics. Also, Todd et al note a meeting between two Hezbollah spokesmen and representatives of the opposing Qornet Chehwan Gathering in the summer of 2001 (2012, 73), in a clear indication of Hezbollah's quest to contain the emerging tensions.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah expressed a staunch pro-Syria stance in the wake of UNSCR 1559 and Hariri's assassination[82]. In other words, the group was trying to prevent the deterioration of its favorable political opportunity structure. First, Hezbollah was able to employ the social control it harnessed and reproduced among the Shiite community, alongside the alliances it has built within the domestic landscape, to counter the emergence of what is saw as pro-Western anti-resistance force[83]. The outcome of this political mobilization manifested itself in the rallies organized by the pro-Syria coalition (known as the March 8 Coalition) which were countered by the protests organized by the anti-Syria coalition[84] (known as the March 14 Coalition) (Karam, 2006, 57). As Saouli notes, Hezbollah's call for a pro-Syria mass

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[81] The Shura Council is Hezbollah's main collective decision-making body and usually included seven members (Hamzeh, 2004).

[82] Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated on February 14, 2005, in a massive car bomb. The assassination sent shock waves throughout the country, and the anti-Syrian opposition considered Syria responsible.

[83] Hariri's assassination led to an extreme polarization of Lebanese domestic politics. Kurtulus described the aggressive nature of political rhetoric and presented evidence regarding the sectarianization of Lebanese politics (2009, 210-211). Even more, the wave of political assassinations which targeted anti-Syrian figures following the withdrawal of Syria's troops only exacerbated the tensions.

[84] The protests by the March 14 coalition against Syria held names such as the Independence Intifada and the Cedar Revolution. The latter name was presumably dubbed by Western media, echoing the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia (Kurtulus, 2009, 196).

demonstration on March 8, 2005, in the heart of Beirut, instead of organizing it in Beirut's southern suburbs (where Hezbollah's power center is located) implies its attempt to construct an image of national appeal (Saouli, 2018, 164).

Hand in hand with its resort to popular mobilization, Hezbollah's domestic strategy also entailed participation in the Lebanese cabinet with two ministers, an unprecedented decision in the group's history. Indeed, this goes in line with the group's attempt to protect itself through domestic channels, following the political power vacuum caused by Syria's withdrawal. Despite Hezbollah's objection to the electoral law which governed the 2005 parliamentary elections[85], the group and its allies in the Resistance and Development bloc won 35 seats (Hezbollah's individual share was 14 seats) (Karam, 2006, 54), proving its solid popularity amidst this challenging period. The interesting fact about this elections is that it witnessed Hezbollah's alliance (known as the Quadruple Alliance) in some electoral districts with parties belonging to the anti-Syria camp[86] such as Hariri's Future Movement and the Lebanese Forces (Aljazeera, June 15, 2005). Ergo, Hezbollah demonstrated ideological flexibility and willingness to cooperate with others in order to secure power in the government.

The Lebanese political system, whose rules followed the logic of no-winner-no-loser, ensured that the majority acquired by the anti- Syria March 14 Coalition won't be able to run the government effectively. Hezbollah capitalized on the consensual feature of Lebanese politics to obstruct the government's application of UNSCR 1559. Hezbollah and Amal's ministers retired from the government upon the latter's decision to run a majority vote on requesting an UN-

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[85] The electoral law of 2005 was the same as the one adopted in 2000, which was engineered by Syria, in a way that undermines and contains emerging opposition (Salloukh, 2006, 646).

[86] Hezbollah's representative Mahmoud Al Qumati justified this surprising move by saying that both electoral and political calculations govern Hezbollah's choice of alliance (Ibid).

supervised international committee to investigate the assassination of Rafiq Hariri (Azani, 2009, 231). This tactic was rewarding for Hezbollah, as the group and its allies returned to government, only after Prime Minister Siniora agreed to refer to Hezbollah's military wing as a resistance movement and not a militia (Norton, 2014, 132). Therefore, Hezbollah retrieved, through political pressure, a concession from a rival government that recognized the legitimacy of its resistance activities[87].

So far, this section has discussed two components of Hezbollah's domestic strategy: political mobilization and inducing government paralysis. The third component, alliance building, has been touched upon loosely in the previous two paragraphs. Here, a discussion of Hezbollah's alliance with the Free Patriotic Movement(FPM)[88] on February 6, 2006 demands a closer examination. The Hezbollah-FPM alliance, embodied through the Memorandum of Understanding[89] (MoU) signed by the groups' leaders in the Mar Mikhail (Saint Michael) Church in Beirut (Alagha, 2011, 168), represented the highlight of Hezbollah's political maneuverings in Lebanese politics. It also offered strong evidence of the group's appreciation of politics as a viable tool for achieving its interests.

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[87] The high level of polarization in domestic politics later pushed Siniora's government to revoke this recognition (Osoegawa, 2013, 170).

[88] The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) is a political party established by General Michael Aoun, the ex-Commander in Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces, and who's widely known for his rejection of the Taef Agreement in 1989, and his subsequent declaration of a War of Liberation against the Syrian troops present in Lebanon (Refer to p. 57-58 for recap). Having developed his image and connections from exile, Aoun to Lebanon from exile in France a few weeks following the full withdrawal of Syrian troops in 2005 (Lefort, 2015, 109).

[89] See Memorandum of Understanding between Hezbollah and FPM, https://now.mmedia.me/Library/Files/EnglishDocumentation/Political%20agreements%20and%20manifestos/hezbollah-FPM.pdf

The importance of the MoU can be illustrated on two levels. First, it outlined the agreement between Hezbollah and the FPM on matters of high importance to Hezbollah's domestic strategy: the need to honor the consensual nature of Lebanese politics and incorporate the discussion of Hezbollah's military power within a broader dialogue on Lebanon's national defense strategy. Thus, it helped break the isolation Hezbollah and the FPM suffered under the March 14-dominated Siniora government (Saouli, 2018, 170) and provided Hezbollah with a strong political partner that committed itself to solve the issue of Hezbollah's disarmament through consensus rather than a majority-minority contest. Second, the alliance widened Hezbollah's scope of appeal; the MoU resembled a cross-sectarian bridge not only between two highly respected leaders but also two widely popular groups in their constituencies, which consequently endowed valuable legitimacy on Hezbollah's resistance among a considerable part of the Christian community. The magnitude and impact of this alliance will remain to be noted as a remarkable feature of Hezbollah's domestic strategy. That said, it is utterly strange that one of the most cited books on Hezbollah's evolution (Azani, 2009) forgoes a discussion of the Hezbollah-FPM relationship.

Before moving on to the next subsection, it's useful to reflect on how Hezbollah dealt with two problems: the group's struggle against Israel during the 1990s depended on military resistance as the primary tool to force Israel's withdrawal. However, when Hezbollah witnessed the dilapidation of Syria's hegemony and the rise of hostile domestic voices, the group's strategy initially capitalized on domestic politics. This shift exemplifies the successful institutionalization of functional adaptability as a valuable asset in Hezbollah's trajectory. As Huntington clarifies, organizations that rely on a certain set of solutions for a problem may become "victims of their past successes" (1968, 15), as they fail to provide a new solution that suits a problem of a

different nature. Despite Hezbollah's gains from military resistance throughout the 1990s, the group's first response towards domestic opposition entailed a stronger engagement in politics, which means that it did demarcate and distinguish between the internal and external.

Another notable characteristic of Hezbollah's involvement in Lebanese politics in the wake of Syria's withdrawal is the efficient and outspoken role it played as a member of the opposition, in contrast with its quasi-passive political stance during the 1990s. Under the favorable (yet with some strings attached as demonstrated before) political opportunity structure of Syrian hegemony, Hezbollah did not dutifully bother with the intricacies of Lebanon's consensual politics. Syria's withdrawal forced Hezbollah's deeper and more influential domestic participation. The group came to recognize the threat Lebanon's government (or whoever is in government) can pose to the its identity and program and appreciate the value of political mobilization and coalition-building as effective means of opposition. Last but not least, Hezbollah's advocacy of consociationalism, outlined in the MoU it signed with the Free Patriotic Movement, neither serve as proof of Hezbollah's absolute and ultimate integration into the Lebanese political system, as some scholars have argued (Saad-Ghorayyeb, 2001; Harik, 2004; Flanigan & Abdel Samad, 2009; Norton, 2014; Dionigi, 2014) nor resemble a major ideological transformation. Rather simply, the group largely emphasized consensus-based politics when it was threatened by the prospect of a hostile majority government in 2005.

C) The July 2006 War[90]:

Amidst the political deadlock between the March 14 government and the March 8 opposition, Hezbollah engaged in 30-day war with the IDF, following an operation on July 12 when it killed three IDF soldiers and took two as hostages (Saouli, 2018, 171). The July War, obviously triggered through Hezbollah's instigation, stirred a lot of controversies, especially regarding Israel's unexpected retaliation[91]. Although it was a regional conflict, the July War nonetheless holds a rich empirical value of a major interest in this paper. This subsection zooms in on three features of this strategy: The mobilization of society and the intensive reproduction of social control in support of Hezbollah's external struggle; the efforts of reconstruction and compensation in the aftermath of the conflict; the active participation and bargaining with the government. Preceding the examination of those two features is a brief paragraph that connects the dots between Hezbollah's conflict with Israel on one hand, and its domestic strategy on the other hand.

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[90] As the reader might be wondering why the July War is discussed as a critical juncture, while the 1993 and 1996 wars are briefly touched upon, the importance of the July War lies in the fact that it took place without a favorable opportunity structure, as was the case during the 1990s under Syria's tutelage. Second, Hezbollah's performance against the IDF in 2006 was shocking and established a balance of mutual terror, after which both parties never engaged in a direct confrontation of the sort again. There is no question that Hezbollah's military power is negligible to Israel's in absolute terms, but the former's attained level of fire-power and reach rendered the ensuing threat to Israel' s citizens and infrastructure a far more undesirable scenario.

[91] Dubbed as the "Honest Promise", Hezbollah declared that the aim behind the operation is securing the release of remaining hostages in Israel's hands (Ibid, 172). Hezbollah's TV channel, Al Manar, broadcasted a speech by Secretary-General Nasrallah on July 14, where he highlighted Hezbollah's record of fearless resistance and claimed that Israel's response was not a retaliation for the hostage-taking operation but rather a planned aggression and a vengeful reckoning with Lebanon's 'resistance society'.

Given that Hezbollah's military strategy[92] is not an object of focus in this study, it suffices to state that the 2006 July War, whose scale was without paralleled when compared to previous confrontations[93], displayed Hezbollah's remarkable development of its military capacity but also unleashed an unprecedented magnitude of Israeli aggression (Arkin, 2007; Harel & Isacharoff, 2008; Badran, 2009; Norton, 2014; Dionigi; 2014). Hezbollah's survival, marked by the IDF's failure to eliminate the threat of rockets launched from south Lebanon throughout the conflict[94], led the group to celebrate what it called the "Divine Victory" (Hage, 2018). The IDF's strategy of mass destruction intended to undermine Hezbollah's operations through raising the domestic cost of the conflict, and stir pressure from the state and society against Hezbollah's continued military activities (Szekely, 2012, 118). The logic of Israel's strategy goes in line with Tilly's observation that internal stability and security strengthens an actor against external rivals (Tilly, 1985, 181). The failure of this strategy was grounded in Hezbollah's immense dedication to preserving its social control from the erosive forces of this costly war. After all, the majority of Hezbollah's popular base and some allies may share the group's enmity towards Israel in principle, but ideological conviction is rarely if ever sufficient to help maintain a group's popularity, especially when it decides to translate its words into costly actions.

The first feature of Hezbollah's domestic strategy involved the extensive reproduction and marketing of symbolic capital. The earliest manifestation of this strategy can be traced to SG

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[92] For an examination of the military dimension of the July War and Hezbollah's military strategy, see Schleifer, 2006; Arkin, 2007; Harel & Isacharoff, 2008; Gabrielsen, 2014)

[93] The war resulted in over a thousand casualties, the displacement of nearly a million residents, in addition to estimated 12 billion dollars in economic losses (El Husseini, 2010, 808). This represented a heavy blow to Lebanon's attempts at recovery following the end of the Lebanese Civil War.

[94] The IDF specified three goals for the July War: retrieving the hostages, eliminating Hezbollah's rocket-launching ability, and the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in south Lebanon (Saouli, 2018, 172).

Nasrallah's speech on July 14, 2006, where he utilized a mixture of national liberation narratives and Islamic revolutionary values to rally the Shiite community and the broader Lebanese society behind the resistance (Hage, 2018). Nasrallah described Hezbollah's fighters as the "sons of Mohamad and Ali"[95], promised the resistance society that victory was on the way[96], and in a well-crafted coordination between media and the fighters on the field, asked his audience to observe the Israeli war vessel INS Hanit while it sank near Lebanon's shores (Todd et al, 2012, 84). The massive circulation of symbolic capital enabled Hezbollah to enhance the morale of both its fighters and popular base, through the legitimizing power it endowed to the resistance's cause and consecrating the sacrifices made by the Lebanese in general, and the Shiites in specific. In the same vein, Hezbollah waged psychological warfare against the IDF and the Israeli audience (Schleifer, 2006), in an effort to generate domestic pressure against the latter's government. Of course, the successful implementation of this strategy reflects the remarkable progress Hezbollah achieved in the domains of media and marketing (DeVore, 2012). For instance, Al Manar TV, its media outlet, was able to broadcast the ongoing developments throughout the conflict (Norton, 2014, 138), despite the IDF's targeting of Hezbollah's infrastructure in the southern suburbs of Beirut.

Hezbollah's advantageous investment and reproduction of symbolic capital were coupled with popular mobilization in the aftermath of the July War. Indeed, the July War can be observed as a trial that tested the potential of the group's social control. Hezbollah successfully passed the test, as it was able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of supporters and allies in Beirut to attend

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[95] alluding to the most respectable and heroic figures in Shiite Islam (Ibid, 124).

[96] Nasrallah's saying, "and as I promised you victory before, I promise you victory again", became a trademark proverb among Hezbollah's audience and embodied the credibility and trust that characterized the Hezbollah's relationship with its popular base.

the Victory Festival (August 15, 2006), which later became another annual celebration on the group's calendar. Nasrallah gave a historic speech, emphasizing that the victory was not censored to a certain group or sect, but was rather a national-level Lebanese accomplishment[97] (Nasrallah, 2006).The echoes of Hezbollah's 'divine victory' transcended the domestic boundaries to encompass the rallying voices of people from Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia and Egypt[98]. Some of the demonstrators in Egypt shouted: "Tell Nasrallah we are all Hezbollah" (Aljazeera, August 1, 2006). Hezbollah thus disseminated and shaped its message through an amalgam of religious and national values. The group published heavily on the topic of the 'Divine Victory', relating it to Islamic prophecies about the arrival of the Mahdi and miraculous events (Hage, 2018, 163). Its band, *Al Wilaya*, produced several resistance anthems honoring the victory and its martyrs. In a further attempt to construct a form of resistance heritage, Hezbollah built the Mleeta Landmark, a museum located[99] in the Iqlim Al Tuffah region of south Lebanon, "to preserve the places where the Mujahideen lived, giving people the chance to be acquainted with the style of the unique experience of the Islamic resistance against the Israeli enemy, since its occupation of Beirut in 1982". (Mleeta Official Website).

The list of examples used to illustrate Hezbollah's production of symbolic capital also testifies to the diverse scope of activities its institutions and affiliated network of organizations have attained, which implies the significant amount of resources the group has dedicated to this

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[97] He also discussed the issue of the Israeli hostages, insisting that their release is conditional upon the release of remaining Lebanese and Arab prisoners in Israeli hands (Ibid.).

[98] It's important to emphasize the popular nature of this support. The positions of the Arab governments regarding the July 12 War will be briefly discussed later in this section, as they thematically relate to the domestic condemnation Hezbollah faced from the March 14 Coalition.

[99] Also, the website indicates that the hill upon which Mleeta rests used to be a strategic position for Hezbollah's fighters during its early operations against the IDF (Ibid).

dimension of its strategy. In short, Hezbollah displayed "adroitness in exploiting or generating symbols to which people develop strong attachments" (Migdal et al, 2007), an important component of a successful survival strategy.

The second feature of Hezbollah's domestic strategy, and one that is equally if not more important, was its compensation-for-sacrifice policy. In fact, this has been a continuous pattern of the group's quest to sustain its mobilizational capacity and therefore its social control. In other words, Hezbollah has made it a customary practice to clean its own mess. Norton indicates that around 15000 families who lost their homes received grants between 10000 and 12000 dollars from Hezbollah (Norton, 140). In addition, various Hezbollah-affiliated institutions such as the Association for the Wounded, the Martyr's Foundation, and the Islamic Health Unit offered aid to fighters, their families and other victims of the war (Flanigan & Abdel Samad, 2009, 125). Moreover, following the sheer destruction caused by the IDF's aerial bombardment of Beirut's southern suburbs[100], the group launched a large-scale reconstruction project[101] whose management and implementation can be examined through Joel's Migdal's state-in-society approach[102]. Fawaz argues that Hezbollah challenged the government's regulations by stipulating its own rules on the post-war reconstruction project in Haret Hreik (known as *Al Wa'd,* or The Promise) (2009). Fawaz proceeds to provide evidence that Hezbollah's project did not aim at a maximum utility in terms of economic efficiency and urban-planning perspectives, but rather sought to control and shape urban space for political ends (Ibid, 330). Given that Haret Hreik is

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[100] In Haret Hreik, one of the municipalities in the southern suburbs, an estimated 265 commercial and office buildings were destroyed (Fawaz, 2009, 323).

[101] The Wa'd Project sought to rebuild 230 buildings, to be rehoused be 20000 residents (Ibid, 325).

[102] The same approach applies and helps explain why the implementation of the Elyssar Project of reconstruction was never successful. See Clerc, 2008.

one of Hezbollah's power centers in Beirut southern suburbs, and accordingly an area where it exercises high levels of social control, the group sought to maintain social control by making sure it holds the answer to two questions: who makes the rules? what are the rules? As Migdal puts it, "The policy [government policy] is not targeted at a free-floating clientele, but at people susceptible to sanctions of the local threatened leaders" (2001, 88).

In short, Hezbollah relied on two systems to fortify its position in society in times of costly conflict: a symbolic system of values that rest upon Islam and narratives of national liberation and self-determination, and a concrete system of benefits and compensation disseminated through its social welfare institutions. Both features of this domestic strategy seem to reinforce one another, as Hezbollah's commitment to the material needs of its local base legitimized the symbolic capital it produced and the self-image it constructed. The continuous commitment for compensation and social welfare in times of war and peace has institutionalized trust between Hezbollah and its popular base, which explains the solid level of support it has been able to maintain despite its regional adventures.

The July War also created a thin shade of national solidarity with Hezbollah's struggle against the IDF that paused the existing political stalemate and Hezbollah's refusal to cooperate with a government in which it does not possess veto power. Hezbollah bargained with the rival Siniora government over the conditions of cease-fire with Israel and was able to obtain a favorable UNSCR resolution[103] that did not threaten its military power (Dionigi, 2014, 148-149),

[103] UNSCR 1701 called for cessation of hostilities, IDF's withdrawal from south Lebanon and deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in south Lebanon with the assistance of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Having emphasized the importance of implementing UNSCR 1559, so that "there will be no weapons without the consent of the Government of Lebanon", the resolution neither referred directly to Hezbollah's weapons nor provided a mechanism for disarmament. (UNSCR 1701)

despite the challenging regional political opportunity structure. In fact, the rivalry between the March 8 and March 14 Coalition was fed by broader political polarization in the Middle East, where the United States was projecting its influence against what it called terrorism and its sponsors. This created a pro-Western camp led by the US and housing the Sunni Gulf States and Egypt, and an anti-Western camp led by Iran, Syria and an emerging Shiite-dominant Iraq (Norton, 2014, 137). Consequently, many Arab states joined the   In Lebanon, the outcome of this polarization expressed itself in the visit of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in July 2005, where she demanded the full implementation of UNSCR 1559 (implying Hezbollah's disarmament), then again the US's attempt to shape the outcome of the July War through influencing UNSCR 1701 (Dionigi, 2014, 145-146). The alignment between the March 14 Coalition and the pro-Western camp constituted a threatening sign for Hezbollah' survival, which strengthened its conviction that a consensus-based government would guarantee its domestic security.

To sum this subsection up, the July War, regardless of whether it was a miscalculation by Hezbollah or a planned aggression by Israel, revived Hezbollah's legitimacy temporarily and served as a test for its domestic strategy. Indeed, Hezbollah's military struggle against Israel has been a constant source of social control and legitimacy (1993, 1996, 2000, 2006), and the group did not spare the opportunity to sail with the winds of military success. On one hand, Hezbollah's relationship with the Shiite community has remained solid in general, as the group carried on its commitment to the community's strategies of survival. On the other hand, Hezbollah's increased political engagement in the domestic scene helped its land a resolution that ended the war without posing an existential threat to its interests. Nevertheless, the turbulence caused by the July War fortified Hezbollah's belief that its influence over domestic

politics is of vital importance to its own survival under unfavorable regional and international circumstances.

D) Consolidation through Violence: May 2008 Crisis and Doha Accords

As the momentum of the July victory faded away, Hezbollah resumed its political activity amidst a tense domestic atmosphere, characterized by the pre-war March 8 -March 14 competition[104], the continuous wave of political assassinations[105] and the sectarian polarization between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon. This subsection finds that Hezbollah sought to consolidate its domestic power through a combination of politics and violence. On one hand, it pressured the government to adopt consociational features[106], in order to protect itself from a rival majority; on the other hand, it employed violence for the first time in post-civil war Lebanon against its internal rivals, in order to signal the indivisible and undebatable nature of its military power. This basket of carrots and sticks is examined here in relation to the main argument, followed by a discussion of the chapter's ultimatum, the Doha Accords.

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[104] The differences between the March 8 Coalition (which includes Hezbollah) and the March 14 Coalition represent a continuity of the divisions extant in 2005, which mainly revolved around Syria's presence. After the 2006 War, Hezbollah's opposition became more pronounced as it accused Siniora's government of inefficiency, corruption and of working to promote US and Israel's interests (Todd et al, 2012, 87).

[105] Political assassinations targeted figures who criticized Syria, most of whom belonged or were affiliated to the March 14 Coalition. Aside from the major assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005, the list included thinker and activist Samir Kassir (2005), MP Gebran Tueni (2005), Lebanese Communist Party leader George Hawi (2005), MP Pierre Gemayel (2006),), MP Walid Eido (2007), MP Antoine Ghanem (2007), Captain Wissam Eid (2008), and Major General Wissam Al Hassan (2012) in addition to failed attempts on MPs Marwan Hamadeh (2004) and Elias El Murr (2005) (Todd et al, 2012; Norton, 2014). It's important to mention that Hezbollah also lost one key figure, Hajj Imad Mughniyeh, who was assassinated in Damascus in 2008. Mughniyeh is believed to have supervised and planned major martyrdom/suicide bombing operations during the Lebanese Civil War (Saouli, 2018, 133).

[106] See page 27-28 for a recap on the pillars of Lijphart's consociational democracy.

The calls made by the March 8 Coalition, spearheaded by Hezbollah, for the establishment of a national unity government did not receive approval from its rivals in power. The former consequently responded by obstructing government performance. For instance, the ministers of Amal and Hezbollah resigned from cabinet because it "lacked power-sharing" (Daher, 2016, 221). Also, Hezbollah and its allies organized a popular sit-down camp in Beirut downtown in 2006 which would last for 537 days (Alagha, 2011b, 58), to exert more pressure on Siniora's government to resign. Furthermore, Hezbollah and its allies, repeating their 2005 stand, denounced the government's request for the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL)[107] to investigate Hariri's assassination (Daher, 2016, 232). To add, Speaker of Parliament and leader of Amal Nabih Berri vetoed the election of a new president 19 times through withholding the convention of the parliament (Azani, 2009, 253). Hezbollah did not want presidential elections, because the parliamentary majority of the March 14 Coalition would replace the pro-Syrian president Lahoud (whose tenure ended in 2007) with a rival president. Hezbollah thus relied on its ability to mobilize the populace (especially following the July 2006 War) and the political alliances it built earlier (particularly the MoU with the Free Patriotic Movement) in order to seek a state of domestic security conducive to its survival as an armed non-state actor.

[107] The STL was established in 2007 through UNSCR 1757, upon request from the Lebanese government (UNSCR 1757 and STL Official Website). Hezbollah and Syria opposed the establishment of an international committee for investigating Hariri's assassination, claiming that its decisions would be shaped and controlled by the United States and Israel. Indeed, a considerable portion of Lebanon believed that Syria was behind the assassinations although there wasn't and still isn't decisive evidence to point in that direction (Bloom, 2008, 65), which they interpreted as acts of vengeance against the anti-Syrian coalition. Hezbollah's SG, Nasrallah, described Syria's accusation as a political analysis, offering a counter-analysis that the assassination was an Israeli plot that aimed to foster anti-Syrian sentiments in Lebanon (Nasrallah, 2008).

As for developments on the ground, the spiking tensions between the March 14 and March 8 coalitions spilled over to university campuses, when clashes between Hezbollah supporters and others from the Future Movement (Hariri Son's party) on January 25, 2007, in Beirut Arab University led to at least two casualties and hundreds of injuries (The Guardian, January 2007). While both parties blamed one another, both leaders pleaded their supporters to refrain from violence (Alakhbar, 2007). The pivotal episode of violence was sparked by the majority government's decision on May 5, 2008, that Hezbollah's fiber-optic telecommunication network was illegal and must be dismantled; also, it decided to reassign the Hezbollah-affiliated Head of Airport Security Haj Wafiq Shuqair (Norton, 2014, 169; Hage, 227). Two days later, and in a blitzkrieg pace, Hezbollah's armed members (and allies from Amal and SSNP) controlled West Beirut, after clashes with the Future Movement's militia (Saouli, 2018, 38). The group also damaged the Future Movement's TV station and newspaper offices (Abdul Hussain, 2009, 75). In addition to Beirut, clashes between the March 8 and March 14 fighters took place in Mount Lebanon and Tripoli (Norton, 2014, 169). Daher stated that areas gained and controlled by Hezbollah during the clashes were handed to the Lebanese army (2016, 164). Also, it's interesting to note that Hezbollah did not target government buildings (Norton, 2014, 169).

Before moving on, it's important to comment on the significance of this event, as it was the first time when Hezbollah resorts to open violence against domestic rivals. This happened despite its continuous assurance not to so (Norton, 2014; Hage, 2018; Saouli, 2018). Indeed, Hage is right to argue that the May 2008 violence provides solid evidence against the argument of Hezbollah's Lebanonization (2018, 14). It also raises questions about Abdul Hussain's claim that the 2005-2008 crisis domesticated Hezbollah (2009, 76). However, this paper takes the position that Hezbollah's resort to violence in quest of political ends in 2008 should be viewed

the tip of an iceberg of continuous attempts to achieve veto power and secure its stand in domestic politics. Yet, one could argue that Hezbollah viewed the decision made by the government on May 5 as a potential trigger. In fact, Nasrallah considered the government's decision to be a declaration of war (Saouli, 2018, 38) and emphasized that the 'weapons will be used to protect the weapons' (Todd et al, 2012, 100). The armed resistance is a foundational component of Hezbollah's identity and represents the fruit of the convergence between Syrian and Iranian interests. Migdal's conceptualization of society as a mélange of socio-political organizations including the state is useful here because it first breaks the duality of the state-society (where it's assumed that the former has agency over the latter) and also shows that a strong socio-political organization may use violence to avoid being dominated by the rule-making power of the state (Migdal, 1988; Migdal, 2004).

This paper has argued that Hezbollah's domestic strategy relied on a process of restrained institutionalization that balances between its own agenda on one hand, and the need to sustain social control and a degree of legitimacy with other political elites on the other hand. This argument holds partially in explaining Hezbollah's resort to violence: Hezbollah's defiance against the government's decision and its subsequent control of West Beirut is a consequence of the group's decision to maintain its autonomy versus the state. Huntington defined autonomy as "the extent to which political organizations and procedures exist independently of other social groupings and methods of behavior" (1968, 20). Through this lens, the May 8 crisis represented Hezbollah's attempt to sustain its existence as an armed non-state actor independently from the state[108]. In fact, this reasoning walks hand in hand with statements by Hezbollah's leaders which

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[108] Interestingly, Hezbollah's SG Nasrallah discussed in a speech on May 8, 2008 the strategic sensitivity surrounding Hezbollah's fiber-optic landline network and why it constitutes an essential element of the group's

depict the group standing “at the side of the state, …. both inside and above the state” (Badran, 2009, 10). As for the shortcoming of this explanation, Hezbollah’s resort to violence clearly does not reflect a strategy where the group takes the interests of other political elites and the broader Lebanese public into consideration. Truly said, the May 2008 crisis left a deep sectarian scar amidst the Sunnis of Lebanon (Salloukh and Mikaelian, 2016, 137) and undermined Hezbollah’s long-standing image as a resistance movement. Nonetheless, this critical event proves the limitations posed on Hezbollah’s domestic maneuverability, and that costly violence is still rationalized by the group if it serves its priorities,

The Doha Accords, sponsored by Qatar, thus put an end to the political crisis but did not mitigate sectarian tensions (Salloukh, 2016, 137). Hezbollah’s standing has been cemented in the Lebanese political system, since the Doha Accords granted veto power to the opposition while demanding that it won’t be used to obstruct government performance (Doha Accords, May 21, 2008). The veto power in the cabinet, or what became known as the blocking third (ten opposition ministers in a cabinet of thirty), would therefore secure the need for consensus on vital matters within the government, among which of course lie Hezbollah’s acquisition of arms and the dialogue on Lebanon’s national defense strategy. In addition, the leaders convening in Doha agreed on electing Commander in Chief of the Lebanese Armed Forces General Michel Suleiman as a consensual President (Ibid). This is another political victory for Hezbollah, because it avoided the scenario where the March 14 Coalition would have used their parliamentary majority to bring their own presidential candidate to power.

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security and struggle against Israel. He proceeded to state that Hezbollah is not asking for support from allies to face the government’s decision, but is rather wants others to understand its decision to respond with violence (Nasrallah, 2008). This indicates that the group was well-aware of the high cost (in terms of domestic legitimacy) their violent response would amount to, even if it succeeds in meeting Hezbollah’s political goals.

Therefore, the government's decision to undermine Hezbollah's security edge posed a vital threat to the group, especially at a time where sectarian tensions were heightening in Lebanon, fueled by regional developments. The challenge posed by the government, in an escalation against Hezbollah's security interests, which Fearon would call an 'effectively indivisible' issue in the group's calculations as an armed non-state actor (1997, 382), was thus met with violence, despite the costly repercussions it had on Hezbollah's domestic legitimacy.

As if in an ironic move to recite the lessons enforced after May 2008, the Political Document released by Hezbollah in 2009 sought to portray not only the possibility, but also the necessity of having harmony between the group and the state (2009 Political Manifesto in Alagha, 2011, 124-125)[109]. Moreover, it reaffirmed support to consociationalism given the sectarian-based raison d'etre of Lebanese politics, while advocating for its long-term abolition. Compared with the 1985 Open Letter, the content of this document drew less on rigid ideological ideals and more on analysis of dynamic political developments, a reasonable move given the scar left by May 2008 crisis and the high levels of sectarian polarization[110]. However, Hezbollah simultaneously made sure to emphasize the weight of the resistance and its achievements particularly at a time when the "project of Western-American hegemony" (Ibid, 118), as the group put it, was looming over the Middle East. Indeed, and as will be shown in the last section, the geopolitical competition and sectarian animosity between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Syria's descent into a long-term crisis would constitute yet another challenging political opportunity structure for Hezbollah.

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[109] The joint ministerial declaration made by the national unity government expressed the awkward agreement over "the army, the people and the resistance" trio (Norton, 2014, 175).

[110] The group also signed in August 2008 an understanding with the Salafi Movement, in an attempt to build Sunni-Shiite bridges and mitigate sectarian polarization (Ibid, Hezbollah's Understanding with the Salafi Movement

E) Summary and Discussion:

This section aimed to process-trace Hezbollah's domestic strategy through the examination of several key critical junctures that resemble the challenges the group faced during this confrontational period. The demise of the favorable political opportunity structure, embodied in Syria's withdrawal in 2005, drove Hezbollah to further involvement in domestic politics to secure its survival as an armed non-state actor. To do so, the group sought to enhance and consolidate its legitimacy by the continuous fulfillment of the Shiite community's strategies of survival. Hezbollah employed the social control it generated from both its military activities and social welfare programs in order to mobilize against domestic rivals. In parallel, Hezbollah cultivated political alliances and institutionalized political opposition as a valuable asset of its strategy in order to cement its domestic standing.

The fragmentation of social control in Lebanon's deeply divided society and the state's penetration by sectarian elites undermined the latter's ability to counter-balance against Hezbollah's rising domestic power. The epitome of this failure manifested itself in the May 2008 Crisis, when Hezbollah resorted to violence in order to impose its rules of the game upon the Lebanese political landscape. Interestingly, the consociational nature of Lebanese politics facilitated Hezbollah's ascent domestically, as the group was able to capitalize on segmental autonomy to affirm its social control over the Shiite community. Also, it was able to institutionalize another component of consociationalism, that is veto power, in the 2008 Doha Accords, corroborating its stance as an armed non-state actor existing alongside the Lebanese government.

IV. Continuity and Change in Hezbollah's Domestic Strategy (2011 – today):

"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power".

Abraham Lincoln

In this penultimate section of the study, the patterns of continuity and change in Hezbollah's domestic strategy will be outlined and discussed, amidst the critical regional developments that have been taking place in the Middle East during the last decade. The most remarkable among those developments were the internationalized conflict in Syria under the umbrella of the Arab Spring and the economic war waged by the pro-US camp against Iran and its allies (states and non-state actors)[111]. It's useful to reiterate the study's interest in Hezbollah's actions within the domestic sphere, and thus the examination of regional developments takes place here as long as it is relevant to the dependent variable (domestic strategy). Hezbollah's domestic strategy is traced and explained in terms of the theoretical tripod utilized throughout this paper, that is, through Hezbollah's relationship with its local base and the state, the group's process of institutionalization, and the extant political opportunity structure.

The findings reflect continuity in terms of Hezbollah's mobilization of the Shiite community and its participation in the Lebanese political system. Despite the forced consolidation of its power in 2008, its acquisition of arms remains to be an indivisible issue and a source of controversy within Lebanon, especially with the spillover of the Syrian crisis and the high level of sectarian polarization prevalent in the Middle East. On an institutional level,

[111] The conflict in Syria and the sanctions are not quite separate and independent from one another, as the latter represents one of the costs of Hezbollah's regional involvements (and Iran obviously). However, they are separated here to yield a more cohesive and parsimonious discussion.

Hezbollah has made a remarkable achievement, switching from its long-standing function as the champion of political opposition towards becoming a more active component of the governing coalition. The paper explains this major step as an adjustment to two significant changes: First, Hezbollah's growing domestic power has placed more responsibilities on the group to act against the deleterious socio-economic situation in Lebanon. Second, the wave of regional and international pressure Hezbollah has been subject to have pushed it towards a deeper penetration of the government in order to protect itself from sanctions and possibly obtain government resources.

That said, the next subsection deals with the impact of the Syrian crisis on Hezbollah's domestic strategy, in terms of its relationship with other Lebanese actors (including the state) and that with its local base (the Shiite community). Then, the paper drags on one last time to discuss the interesting domestic consequences of Hezbollah's expanding regional role.

A) Into the Syrian Crisis:

While Hezbollah initially greeted the wave of popular protests in Tunisia and Egypt against authoritarian regimes as acts that resembled the people's expression of self-determination and yearning for freedom (Daher, 2018, 186), the group shifted this perception when this momentum reached Syria challenging the power of its ally President Bashar Assad. In 2013, and after two years of political support for Assad, Secretary-General Nasrallah declared Hezbollah's military intervention in the Syrian conflict (Lob, 2014, 3). At this stage, the relationship between Hezbollah and Syria has remarkably developed, especially with the former's ardent support for Syria during the period 2004-2005 and Hezbollah's increased strategic value following the July 2006 War (Salloukh, 2013). Consequently, the threat of ousting Assad meant that Hezbollah and Iran would lose one of the few precious allies in the 'axis of resistance'.

Regarding the Lebanese domestic landscape, Hezbollah had consolidated its stance after the Doha Accords, attaining a veto power in the July 2008 government (IFES, 2009). Its failure to secure a parliamentary majority in the 2009 elections though[112] removed the possibility of a blocking third in the 2009 cabinet[113]. The period between 2009 and 2013 witnessed continuous political deadlocks characteristic of the accommodation-stricken decision-making processes of the Lebanese government (Norton, 2014). The investigation of Hariri's assassination remained a contentious issue with Hezbollah's stiff opposition towards allocating government funds to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL)[114]. The deadlock climaxed with the collapse of Saad Hariri's government when the ten ministers of Hezbollah's March 8 Coalition resigned (Bassam, 2011, January 12). What followed was a display of force when unarmed Hezbollah members dressed in black shirts[115] gathered in Beirut, signaling a warning against the reappointment of PM Saad

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[112] The 2009 parliamentary elections resulted with a majority of 68 seats for the March 14 Coalition, while the pro-Hezbollah March 8 Coalition took 57 seats (Norton, 2014, 173).

[113] Following the 2009 parliamentary elections, where Hezbollah and its allies failed to attain the majority, the government formed (after five months of deadlock) granted Hezbollah and its allies ten ministers (15 for majority, 10 for opposition and 5 minister for the president, removing the possibility of the blocking third established in the post-Doha 2008 government (IFES, 2009). Nevertheless, Hezbollah's share of the cabinet included the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Administrative Reform, and it secured the Ministry of Telecommunications to its ally, the Free Patriotic Movement (Ibid).

[114] This issue preserved the tension between the Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon, and the rift widened with the assassination of Brigadier General of the Internal Security Forces on October 2012. Al Hassan headed the intelligence unit of the ISF, and it was alleged the he found preliminary evidence for Hezbollah's role in Hariri's assassination (Fisher, 2012; Norton, 2014, 177). The March 14 Coalition claimed Syria had a hand in his assassination, as it had been obstructing the investigations since 2005. The STL's indictment of four Hezbollah members linked with Hariri's assassination boiled the tensions and triggered a response from SG Nasrallah accusing the tribunal of fraud and confirming that the suspects will not be handed over for extradition (Follath, 2011).

[115] Rabah (2016) claimed that those members belonged to the Lebanese Resistance Brigades (LRB) and other paramilitary groups associated with Hezbollah's allies. As noted earlier, the LRB was a paramilitary force

Hariri, and pressuring the pro-March 14 Progressive Socialist Party to defect from Hariri's coalition (Daher, 2016, 166). Consequently, the government formed by Prime Minister Najib Miqati in 2011 was a pro-Hezbollah majority government, with Hezbollah's ally the Free Patriotic Movement holding significant ministerial weight (Norton, 2014; 179). This mixture of signaling and government pressure is quite similar to Hezbollah's tactic during the period 2005-2008, but it did not escalate to the use of violence as in 2008. Again, Hezbollah engaged in what can be called a domestic version of coercive diplomacy, backed with the recent memory of the May 2008 crisis, to mitigate opposition and attain a friendly government.

Following Hezbollah's decision to intervene in Syria, a wave of criticism and questioning of the group's integrity and legitimacy ensued (Salloukh, 2013; Norton, 2014; Daher, 2016; Saouli, 2018). After all, it had placed double standards over the Arab uprisings, supporting the protest movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, and Bahrain, then condemning attempts to oust Assad out of existential fear. Nasrallah's response was decisive in a speech on November 14, 2013, where he called upon the March 14 Coalition to put a sense of realism on their demands (Nasrallah, 2013); he stated that Hezbollah did not, does not and will not need a domestic cover from the March 14 Coalition for its military intervention in Syria (Ibid). In addition to the March 8-March 14 rivalry, radical Sunni Islamist currents such as the group of Sheikh Ahmad Al Assir called for rebellion against Hezbollah, citing narratives that depicted Hezbollah's hegemonic ambitions as an extension of Iran's expansion (Saouli, 2018, 196). The escalation of Assir's campaign was eventually pulverized through joint coordination between Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (Daher, 2016, 221) which secured the Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque in the city of Sidon and

established by Hezbollah in 1998 and has been denounced to be a group of Hezbollah's thugs. For recap, see pp. 73-74.

led to the arrest of Al Assir's supporters. It's unquestionable that Hezbollah's expanding regional role exacerbated the Sunni-Shiite polarization, particularly amidst the saturation of sectarian narratives around the crises in Syria, and more broadly around Iraq and Yemen. Once a venerated resistance fighting Israel, the image of Hezbollah as a sectarian non-state actor, to borrow the term from Salloukh (2019 Yet, the group was able to deter any serious meddling with its military power and secure a larger share of power in Lebanon's political system as will be shown in the next subsection.

With respect to the Shiite community, Hezbollah sought to mobilize support for its cause through relating its regional agenda to the Shiite's strategies of survival. For instance, the group first claimed that its intervention in Syria aimed to secure the Lebanese villages lying on the permeable borders between the two countries (Saouli, 2018, 186), then presented another argument through citing the radical Sunni militancy (e.g. Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) & Jabhat Al Nusra) as an existential threat the spirit of sectarian diversity and coexistence in Lebanon (Ibid, 186-187). The group bolstered its claims in the aftermath of a campaign of suicide bombings that targeted its power centers and justified its earlier concerns in the first place[116]. Thus, Hezbollah stressed on the essential value of security and safety Shiite community and the broader Lebanese society to justify its pre-emptive step in Syria. Also, the group utilized its now-classic manipulation of symbolic capital in order to endow legitimacy on its military activities. Citing the dangers roaming around Shiite shrines in Syria, religious narratives such as

[116] Beirut's southern suburbs were targeted by a series of car bombings and suicide attacks, some of which were claimed by ISIS (Norton, 2014). While Hezbollah argued that this wave of terrorism justified the necessity of its intervention, the argument that the causal arrow runs in the opposite direction can be easily made. Hezbollah's intervention in Syria might have triggered this violent response.

Imam Hussain[117]'s battle in Karbala against the forces of oppression and tyranny were instrumentalized in an exorbitant manner (Daher, 2016, 184). Moreover, its news outlet Al Ahed drew parallels between the divine victory of the July 2006 War and the battle of jihad in Syria (Hage, 2018, 135). Even to a father extent, Al Manar TV utilized dreams and superstitions to construct robust links between martyrs, their families and fellow fighters (Bianchi, 2018, 70). As Hage contends that "the supernatural, being more primordial, is a more effective tool for legitimacy and mobilization", the basket of symbolic capital Hezbollah marketed was helpful in two ways: first, it boosted the morale of Hezbollah fighters, through assurance of reward in the hereafter. Second, it maintained support within the Shiite community through elevating the fighters who died to the level of martyrdom and heroism, thus transforming the incurred human cost into a venerated form of self-sacrifice.

Assuring citizens and fighters with the righteousness and feasibility of a cause is indispensable for success (Schleifer, 2006, 2). Hezbollah thus sought to superimpose its regional interests over the Shiite community's strategies of survival, in an attempt to maintain social control and ensuring the Shiites would respond through compliance, participation, and legitimization of Hezbollah's cause. The utilization of symbolic capital is only one component of its strategy, alongside Hezbollah's continuous dedication to the provision of social services and compensation for the families of its members. Also, it's important to note that the deeply divided

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[117] Imam Hussain is Prophet Mohammad's grandchild, and thus belongs to the *Ahl Al Bayt*, or "the people of the Prophet's house", which represents the highly venerated family of Prophet Mohammad, especially for adherents of Twelver Shiism. Imam Hussain expressed a position of defiance and determination against Yazid in the Battle of Karbala that demonstrated exemplary self-sacrifice against oppression. The martyrdom of Hussain and his companions by is annually commemorated by Shiites in the ceremony of Ashura. Todd et al (2012, 187) note how the symbolic narratives of martyrdom turn the worldly calculations upside down and elevate sacrifice to a significant element in Hezbollah's basket of symbols.

Lebanese society itself is conducive for sectarian mobilization. To add, and as already noted in previous sections, this pattern of continuity in social service provision is in itself a value that legitimizes Hezbollah's position, as it embodies the institutionalization of trust between the group and its audience.

That said, Hezbollah's mobilizational capacity, which reflects its social control among the Shiite community, is quite solid and reliable. To the author's extent of knowledge, Migdal has not given a perspective on popular support or social control as an asset whose efficiency can be tested when a certain sociopolitical organization passes through hard times. Given so, it's worth noting that in an environment of conflict where sociopolitical organizations are competing for social control, it is logical to say that the popular support (here, support from the Shiite community mainly) and the people's strategies of survival are tested. For Hezbollah, an expanding regional role might translate to more pressure on the Shiite community's wellbeing and therefore constitute a test of loyalty and support[118]. This point will be of central relevance in the next and last empirical subsection in this study.

B) Hezbollah and the Dilemma of Domestic Power:

This last empirical subsection is perhaps the most interesting because it provides a fresh discussion about the transformations that led Hezbollah to reshape its domestic strategy which might soon be observed in our contemporary time. The author starts with a brief analysis of Hezbollah's evolving domestic strategy, relating it to the group's overall agenda, or in Huntington's terms, its institutional interest. After that, the consequences of Hezbollah's

[118] Hezbollah's participation in Syria incurred a glaring human cost, estimated between 1400 and 1600 members (Phillips, 2018 and Taheri, 2018).

domestic power are discussed in reference to institutionalization, the state-in-society approach, and the extant political opportunity structure.

To sustain itself as a non-state actor autonomous from the state, Hezbollah participated in the Lebanese political system in 1992. Its participation, thus, was not an end in itself, but a means towards generating legitimacy. And because Syria exercised hegemony over Lebanon since the end of the Lebanese Civil War until 2005, Hezbollah's participation was not a necessary component of its domestic strategy. It was Syria's withdrawal and the subsequent birth of a power vacuum, however, that recalibrated the group's strategy and necessitated more political engagement. Hezbollah then fully realized the importance of coalitions and political mobilization (March 8 Coalition, MoU with Aoun, and popular rallies). At the same time, it carried on its habit of mobilizing popular support through amplifying the effects of military accomplishments (2000 Liberation, July 2006 War, and battles in Syria).

Moreover, Hezbollah employed violence and coercion to pose limits on the state (May 2008). The group still prioritized its own institutional infrastructure as a source of social services and a self-legitimizing engine. It viewed the state as an instrument or as a weaker body that nevertheless should not misbehave. From here, Hezbollah induced deadlocks and signaled warnings to its rivals, reminding them that it shall 'cut the hand' which approaches to harm the Resistance. However, it did not show interest in translating its increasing political weight into more ministerial cabinets, and thus did not significantly utilize state agencies to satisfy the strategies of survival of Lebanese citizens. The participation has remained instrumental to a large extent.

That said, and bringing Huntington's understanding of institutionalization, the functional adaptability of a sociopolitical organization is an essential characteristic for survival. Huntington

wrote that a political party “gains in functional age when it shifts from opposition to government” (1968, 17). Hezbollah has performed the function of opposition since 2004. After its major contribution in the election of General Michael Aoun as President in 2016 (Al Kassifi, 2018), it has gained a firmer domestic ground bringing the long-term benefits of its 12-year alliance with the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). Furthermore, the landing of a mixed proportional representation electoral law in 2017 yielded a majority for the March 8 Coalition in the 2018 parliamentary elections. Thus, in consociational terms, Hezbollah has attained the upper hand in the grand coalition which participates in the Lebanese government. It has maximized its influence in Lebanon’s consociational game, through capitalizing on coalitions, veto power, proportional representation, and segmental autonomy.

Now, as the group diminishes its role in Syria with the conflict folding up, and undergoes the “journey from Syria’s battlefield to Lebanon’s political minefield” as one writer put it (Hashim, 2018), two interconnected challenges await. First, though Hezbollah secured victory in the 2018 parliamentary elections, the results also exposed a level of discontent, especially in the Beqaa region, with the group’s failure to deal with the worsening socio-economic situation (Rasmussen & Osseiran, 2018; Hashim, 2018; Nassif, 2019). Second, the group’s expanding regional role has pushed several countries to take diplomatic and economic measures against Hezbollah. The European Union designated Hezbollah’s military wing as a terrorist organization (Norton, 2014, 201); the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the United Kingdom followed suit in 2016 and 2019 respectively (Aljazeera, 2016 & Holden, 2019); the United States Department of Treasury issued the Hizbullah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act (HIFPAA) (Salloukh, 2019). This intense anti-Hezbollah campaign, coupled by the

economic sanctions on Iran, erected another unfavorable opportunity structure under which Hezbollah ought to calculate its steps carefully to sustain itself.

There are several indicators of Hezbollah's decision to refocus on domestic issues. Secretary-General Nasrallah announced on March 2018 that the group is planning to fight the rampant corruption in the Lebanese political system and set an organizational framework in pursuit of this goal (Al Qazzi, 2018). Furthermore, Hezbollah's current cabinet share includes the Ministry of Health, which holds the fourth largest share of government allocated resources (Yee and Saad, 2018). As the state-in-society approach explains, state agencies are channels through which sociopolitical organizations can mobilize resources to strengthen their bonds and social control over the local population (Migdal, 2001). Tying this with the earlier discussion on functional adaptability, Hezbollah's ability to exercise the function of government will be tested. Known for its credibility among the Shiite community, it has to reinforce its commitments with concrete results on the ground. Daher notes that Hezbollah's timid participation in the cabinet since 2005 did not yield any significant achievements on the socio-economic scale (2016, 65-67). Following the 2000 liberation, Simon and Stevenson warned that in case Hezbollah fails to mitigate socio-economic issues, "it will not matter how many Israeli soldiers its guerillas kill" (2001, 39). The same warning applies today, as the Syrian conflict drags to a close.

Simultaneously, Hezbollah struggles to deal with the repercussions of its regional venture, mainly the campaign of sanctions the group has been subject to by regional and international actors. In one of his most recent speeches[119], Hezbollah's SG acknowledged that the group is passing through a financially challenging phase expressed his gratitude for the

[119]Nasrallah gave the speech on March 8, 2019, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Resistance Support Organization (IRSO), one of its main fund-raising bodies.

endless support Hezbollah has received from the populace, encouraged the Shiite community towards volunteering in the IRSO's activities and underscored the importance of donation (Nasrallah, 2019). Interestingly, Nasrallah said that "Prophet's Mohammad's Message (Islam) needed the resources of Khadija and others (Khadija belonged to successful merchant family), and cited verses from the Quran that highlight the virtue of resource mobilization as a form of jihad (Ibid). Hezbollah is thus trying to further engage its local base in an attempt to ameliorate the effects of the challenges it is facing. Given Hezbollah's diverse influence across socio-economic classes, this call is likely to be answered by the Shiite middle and upper-middle class families, some of whom have generously supported the group in Lebanon and from the diaspora (Daher, 2016, 3).

In short, recent years have witnessed Hezbollah's expanding regional role (Saouli, 2018) and expanding domestic power. As domestic turbulence dampened over the question of Hezbollah's military power (Nassif, 2019), the group is standing against a test of institutionalization, in which it is expected to transform the domestic influence it has attained with its allies in government into solutions that can deal with Lebanon's socio-economic problems. In the eyes of the Shiite community, Hezbollah has shown commitment in consecutive battlefields against diverse adversaries (Israel, ISIS, etc.) and is known for its efficient social service provision. The question remains whether the group will be able to successfully replicate its regional achievements in the domestic landscape.

Conclusions

This thesis attempted to explain Hezbollah's durability as a strong non-state actor alongside the sovereign yet weak Lebanese government by examining its domestic strategy. To do so, it first relied on Migdal's state-in-society approach, which enabled conceptualizing Hezbollah as a socio-political organization that competes for social control with the state and other actors within the Lebanese domestic landscape. Hezbollah has relied on a basket of material and symbolic rewards, embodied in its network of social welfare institutions and the mobilization of the Shiite community across narratives of national liberation and Khomeini's interpretation of Shiite Islam. More importantly, Hezbollah's durability is a product of the its transformation, described in this paper as a process of restrained institutionalization, where the group's domestic strategy was shaped by the need to reproduce social control over the Shiite community on one hand, and the need to sustain domestic power in the Lebanese political system. This rationale has enabled Hezbollah to secure a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis the state, while allowing it to work according with its agenda.

Hezbollah's domestic power was amassed through a mixture of carrots and sticks. Regarding politics, it took advantage of the consociational nature of Lebanon's political system: *segmental autonomy* complemented the group's exercise of social control over the Shiite community; it also sought *veto power* in the cabinet; it was able to attain an electoral law based on *proportional representation* (as imperfect that PR law is though), and eventually gained with its allies an upper hand in the *grand coalition or elite cartel* governing Lebanon. Yes, this paper concludes that Hezbollah has institutionalized political participation in Lebanese politics as value essential in its domestic strategy. Still though, the violent aspect of Hezbollah's character, deemed to be a relic of the past by the proponents of the argument that Hezbollah underwent a

process of Lebanonization, remained to be an option when unfavorable political opportunity structure imposed itself on the group. Hezbollah's increasing influence in the Lebanese political system ought not to be misread as a manifestation of integration in the absolute sense. The group is an armed non-state actor whose institutional interest transcends Lebanon's domestic calculations towards a more regional and geopolitical outlook. Violence is likely to remain a rational option in the group's calculus, especially regarding the issue indivisibility characteristic of Hezbollah's military power.

However, it is the same strategy which reaped considerable domestic power for Hezbollah that poses today a dilemma: when a non-state actor enhances its power within the state system, then what are the lines demarcating the state dimension form the non-state dimension? It is not easy to answer this question, but Hezbollah today provides an example of a hybrid actor whose power draws on both its own institutions and the influence it has in state institutions. Salloukh impeccably expressed this dilemma, saying that "the borders between Hizbullah-in-society and the Hizbullah-in-the-state are increasingly becoming blurred" (2019). This phenomenon has important conceptual implications that future research on violent non-state actors should address.

In the broader sense, Hezbollah's ascendancy is one case among the larger phenomenon of the rise non-state actors (Abdul Hussain, 2009; Saouli, 2018; Salloukh, 2019). Abdul Hussain has previously argued that the Shiite revival during the 60s and 70s generally came as a reaction against the secular and progressive tides of Arab Nationalism (2009). The revolution in Iran succeeded in erecting an Islamic republic, while Hezbollah has resembled the strongest expression of Shiite political mobilization in Lebanon. Yet it was restrained by the intricacies of the power-sharing arrangements governing Lebanon's deeply divided society and is thus stuck in

the hybrid state-non-state dimension. In a similar vein, Salloukh observes that the rise of non-state actors such as the Houthis in Yemen and the Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq as a reversal of the state-building project (2019). Indeed, this broad and worrisome phenomenon in the Middle East is raising more questions regarding the taken-for-granted concept of the state. Instead of state-building, the region is witnessing the political development of non-state actors.

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