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Hezbollah’s Evolution in the Last Decade: Implications for Israel’s Security

by

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Hezbollah’s Evolution in the Last Decade: Implications for Israel’s Security

(7,489 words)

Abstract

The traditional role of the Hezbollah organization as an opposition to Israel is now uncertain due to developments in the last decade. Hezbollah has found itself participating unwillingly in two wars: in 2006 in the Second Lebanon War against Israel, and since 2012, the Syrian Civil War. Those two events have modified the organization’s objectives and priorities. Furthermore, they have influenced the organization’s political role in the strategic environment: in the Middle East, externally and in Lebanon, internally. The paper will research the level of Hezbollah organization’s readiness and intent for any future conflict with Israel. Consider the impacts of Hezbollah’s fighting in the last decade in Syria and Israel, and how they influences on the organization’s policy and military readiness In addition. This topic was selected to assist Israel’s leadership, civilian and military, to improve the strategy facing Hezbollah organization.

Hezbollah’s Evolution in the Last Decade: Implications for Israel’s Security

In 2006, after the kidnapping of two Israelis soldiers, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, Hassan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hezbollah, delivered an important speech to his people.[[1]](#endnote-1) The speech was presented at a strategic and traditional location at Bent G’able. This location provided a view of the entirety of Israel and was the site of the previous speech in 2000.In the speech, Nasrallah presented Israel as a spider weaving its web, to show the entire world, and especially Israel, that the Hezbollah organization can act and operate when and how it chooses. Above all, its main aim is to oppose Israel. Hezbollah has the capability and the intent to harm Israel according to his goals and it was and is a real threat to Israel. Currently, the organization’s priorities have shifted due to its actions of the last decade, including the Second Lebanon War and the Syrian Civil War.

Since this speech, more than a decade has passed. During this time, Hezbollah participated unwillingly in two large-scale wars. The first war started shortly after the speech was given in 2006, a war that was unforeseen to Hezbollah since it was not ready for such a response from Israel to the kidnapping. Additionally, Hezbollah has taken an active part in the civilian war in Syria, which started in 2011. In this war, Hezbollah is an ally of Syria and Iran and it is a significant war for all sides. For Hezbollah, it is the first time it has participated in a war that is not against Israel and one that has taken so much time and casualties. The traditional role of Hezbollah as opposition to Israel is now uncertain due to its new campaign in a new arena, as well as its ability and intent to fight against Israel in the future.

This paper will research Hezbollah’s readiness for any potential future war against Israel and will demonstrate any changes in the organization’s vision and policy, while outlining their consequences for Israel. First, Hezbollah’s background and roots will be discussed in different contexts. **Then**, the paper will review the Hezbollah organization and explore its roots, role, vision, strategy, policy, structure and its development over the years, in order to fully understand the foundation and the character of the organization. **Additionally**, an examination of the Second Lebanon War in 2006 will be presented as a case study of Hezbollah’s overall readiness, intent, and ability to draw conclusions for the present and near future. The analysis of Hezbollah’s readiness for the war will be based on specific criteria, which will be outlined below. **Next**, an analysis of Hezbollah’s role and function during the civil war in Syria in the last decade will be conducted considering the impacts of Hezbollah’s fighting, the influences on the organization’s structure, and military readiness and intent. Then, Hezbollah’s readiness for any future fight against Israel will be assessed.

The **final section** of this paper will present the challenges facing Israel in light of any changes that might have taken place in Hezbollah’s intent, ability, and role in Lebanon’s strategic environment. It will conclude with recommendations for Israel and the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) leaders. This section will aim to provide information and useful data that will aid in better preparation for any future war against Hezbollah and in particular, how to defeat Hezbollah in that war.

# Methodology

The research and analysis in this paper will rely on open sources from around the world. However, due to the high visibility of the organization and the conflicts it has been involved in, there are many resources, and this will not hinder the study’s validity and usefulness. The advantage of this paper will be the broad view of the present and past in examining the relevant challenges in the future.

The IDF’s five building stones of a military unit will be applied to Hezbollah’s current capabilities. The IDF[[2]](#endnote-2) concentrates on five building stones: (1) Training, (2) War Fight Doctrine, (3) Fighting Equipment, (4) Manpower, and (5) Force Structure. Education is developed for all-sized military units based on long-term strategic assessments. War Fight Doctrine determines the approaches and methods the military will pursue in local combats through to a full-scale war. Fighting Equipment include the equipment the military needs to achieve its strategic goals. These are determined based on the combat doctrine, whether it emphasizes offensive or defensive approaches and specific predicted combat needs. Manpower area focuses on recruitment, division of soldiers, and the process to train and assign soldiers and commanders throughout the army. In the Israeli Army, a large part of this area works with and focuses on reserve units. Force Structure determines the framework and division of units from the largest military units down to the smallest in a way that indicates the organization’s priorities and best practices for goal achievement.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Hezbollah today, the final part of the third section will compare and contrast Hezbollah’s growth over the past 10-15 years. It will compare the organization before the 2006 conflict with Israel to the present Hezbollah after its participation in the Syrian civil war. The analysis applies the Ends Ways and Means[[3]](#endnote-3) framework to analyze the impact of these two events on the changes in Hezbollah today.

# The Hezbollah Organization – Past and Present

## Roots and Development

“*Lebanon is part of Iran according to the definition of Khomeini, therefore we should save it from the hands of ambitious, immoral, and unethical leaders…”*[[4]](#endnote-4)

In light of these words, the Shi’a party in Lebanon reflects the views of the leaders and the religious revolutionaries of Iran.[[5]](#endnote-5) The Lebanese civil war started in 1975 between religious parties and emerging opposition groups from all over the country and was an important factor in the instability of the region. One of the key factors in the breakout of the war, was the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) forced movement from Jordan into Lebanon. The outcome was that Lebanon became an unsafe place, open for religious and political corruption.

Due to aggressive terror attacks on Israel’s northern border and villages nearby, Israel invaded Lebanon in the summer of 1982, adding a level of complexity to the civil war there. The invasion made the situation worse in Lebanon as it changed the power balance in the region. Syria’s prestige decreased and the government in Beirut diminished in power.[[6]](#endnote-6) Israel defined this situation as the Lebanon War and insisted on achieving peace and security on its northern border.

Iran’s foreign policy after the revolution was to spread its nationalistic and religious ideals around the region as a result of the new regime under Khomeini, who revitalized religious connections to government. Iran influenced its government’s foreign policy including the approach to the Shia community in Lebanon, which was struggling with its identity and dissatisfaction with the Amal party in Lebanon, Hezbollah’s predecessor, which ceased to express Iranian views and policy in Lebanon.[[7]](#endnote-7)

These conditions, Iran as a background actor, the development and constantly shifting situation in Lebanon and in the Shia community and party internally, and above all Israel’s invasion of Lebanon, all led to the emergence of the resistance movement Hezbollah in the mid-1980s.[[8]](#endnote-8) Hezbollah, literally meaning Party of God, suggests the party represents God’s way and expresses the extreme religious notion there is only one way to step in God’s path and follow his orders. Since its creation, Hezbollah has had significant impact on society and policy in Lebanon.

## Identity, Policy, and Goals

Since Hezbollah’s foundation, there has always been tension around its identity. Originally, Hezbollah was established as an Islamic Shia movement to oppose western influence, especially Israel, without limits of regional or governmental policy, under the title of Iran proxy. However, Hezbollah has a clear interest in presenting itself as a defender of Lebanon and relevant actor in its government above serving as a proxy of Iran, in order to gain the support of Lebanese citizens. Over the years, challenges and changes in the region forced Hezbollah to maneuver between these two roles.[[9]](#endnote-9) Hezbollah knew its past successes and failures in its operations and movements against Israel. The IDF exit from South Lebanon in 2000 is still considered Hezbollah’s greatest hour and the Second Lebanon War is its’ biggest failure because of Israel’s combat success.

The development of Hezbollah’s identity indicates progress in phases. First, it was founded as an Islamic struggle movement of social and political protest led by Shi’ite clergy backed by Iranian ideology.[[10]](#endnote-10) The first years characterized the organization as a non-state entity with ideology and religious concepts from outside the Levant region, with no clear hierarchical structure.[[11]](#endnote-11) Second, during the 1980s, Hezbollah focused on its structure and strength and was less involved in the Lebanese government. In the 1990s, the organization shaped itself as a terror movement with order, leadership, structure, and goals, and expanded out from Lebanon to create a global network.[[12]](#endnote-12) Simultaneously, Hezbollah shifted from its domestic position in the 1980s and began pursuing a domestic role as well.

The main ideas and principles of the Hezbollah organization were to establish a Shia republic in Lebanon according to the Iranian model of adhering to the fakia, a Muslim religious ascetic, and observing sharia law, derived from the religious precepts of Islam. According to Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, “Hezbollah is first and foremost a jihadist movement that uses political means, not a political party that pursues jihad.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

The initial official document of Hezbollah defined four main goals.[[14]](#endnote-14)

1. "Finally remove Israel from Lebanon as a first step to destroy Israel and free Jerusalem."
2. "Remove USA, France, and their allies from Lebanon and end their influence in Lebanon."
3. "Forcing the local militias to obey the rightful government and bringing them to justice for their crimes against Muslims and Christians that were done with encouragement by Israel and the United States".
4. "Give freedom of election to the Lebanese people with the purpose of committing to an Islamic government." [[15]](#endnote-15)

Over the years, the goals and emphases have shifted to serving as Iran’s proxy, destruction of Israel, and maintaining Hezbollah as a political and social movement in Lebanon with the intent to reinforce the connection with Syria, and additionally to eliminate Western influence and interference in Lebanon.[[16]](#endnote-16)

## Organizational Structure

Although founded as a resistance movement, over time Hezbollah designed a clear structure with responsibilities and reporting. At the top of the organization there is the Shura Council responsible for the decision-making. Since 1992, Sheikh Hassan Sayyid Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s senior political leader, has presided over the Shura Council in his capacity as Secretary-General of the organization.[[17]](#endnote-17) The council is in charge of several different sub-councils, as seen in figure 1 below. The civilian sub-councils include the executive, judicial and political. The military council, on which this paper is focusd, is comprised of a variety of units, mostly trained by the Iranians, including special units and missile units, comprised of ground-ground, intelligence units, security enforcement, and regional units.[[18]](#endnote-18)



Figure 1. Hezbollah Organizational Structure[[19]](#endnote-19)

## Second Lebanon War: Triggers and Impacts

In order to examine the changes that have occurred in the Hezbollah organization, it is important to understand the impact and significant meaning of the Second Lebanon War for the organization. The war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 was significant for Hezbollah’s identity, policy, and role as a key player in Lebanon. For Hezbollah, this was an unpredictable and undesirable war.[[20]](#endnote-20) This is clear from Nasrallah’s statement in August 2006 where he said if he had have inclination that Israel would have reacted to the kidnapping with war, he would not have carried out the attack.[[21]](#endnote-21) Although Hezbollah succeeded in fighting Israel for 34 days and was able to shoot rockets until the last day of the war, it lost hundreds of soldiers and Lebanon suffered enormous destruction in human life and property. As a result of the war, Hezbollah absorbed a new level of criticism internally in Lebanon, almost causing a new civil war.[[22]](#endnote-22)

At the beginning of this war, Hezbollah appeared to be a militia within Lebanon, that had no intention of developing a large-scale war with Israel, and relied instead on using guerilla warfare tactics to achieve its goals. At the end of the war, Hezbollah understood the need to create an army (without a country) with increased human capability, weapons, and installations.

## Developments in Readiness Due to the War

Hezbollah’s intent and capabilities have transformed because of the influences from the Second Lebanon War. When the war ended in 2006, Hezbollah realized their previous capability to face Israel would not be sufficient for the next campaign. The organization must shift toward new capabilities to enable it to be a relevant threat to Israel.

To achieve broad and deep analysis of the organization’s readiness, one can divide the organization according to the IDF model[[23]](#endnote-23) of five areas, which was mentioned on page 3: (1) Training, (2) War Fighting Doctrine, (3) Fighting Equipment, (4) Manpower, and (5) Force Structure. In the Training area, Hezbollah accelerated its shift from a militia to an army without a state, based on a combination of conventional and non-conventional tactics, while investing its time and energy to train and develop special operations units and unit experts in crossfire.[[24]](#endnote-24) Additionally, the education and training began to be conducted by Iranian forces in order to further professionalize the organization.

In the War Fighting Doctrine area, the Second Lebanon War was a turning point, which led Hezbollah to shift its doctrine from defensive to offensive. The organization no longer focused on home defense and rocket campaigns, Hezbollah now relied on local, time-restricted assaults, raids, and its’ defense capabilities to demonstrate power and assert its position in the region. In Nasrallah’s speech after the war, he described the Second Lebanon War as the victory of God and determined that any future campaign would result in a crushing victory,[[25]](#endnote-25) which indicates his desired objectives for the next confrontation. Therefore, its implication for Israel is to observe Hezbollah’s offensive movements to attack and occupy bases and settlements in Israel.

In the Fighting Equipment area, there has been significant progress due to the 2006 war. The progress can be divided into several domains. In the weapons domain, before the war, Hezbollah had weapons systems without navigation or control, and with low precision. After the war, Hezbollah upgraded its rocket arsenal to emphasize more precision, quality, and longer range.[[26]](#endnote-26) In addition, Hezbollah upgraded its ground to air missile layout and the anti-tank missile systems. It further reinforced its communications and intelligence systems and concepts and invested more efforts in developing a small air domain focused on drones and other light aircrafts.[[27]](#endnote-27)

In the Manpower area, in part from the understanding of the necessity to transform from a militia into an army, Hezbollah accelerated its growth in the number of soldiers. This would provide it with the ability to protect and attack simultaneously in different places and have the ability to fight for a long period to maintain the balance between offensive and defensive capabilities. This would further outline its policy of deterrence against Israel.[[28]](#endnote-28)

In the Force Structure area, Hezbollah found itself reflecting on its structure and economic sources, due to the Second Lebanon War and the change in combat concepts and military equipment. As Hezbollah found in the war, the Iranian budget may not be sufficient for all the needs of the organization, so it developed independent resources and systems to increase its budget. For example, it raised donations from around the world, obtained funding from criminal activities and developed trade companies.[[29]](#endnote-29)

## Changes in Intent and Political Role Due to the War

Before the war, Hezbollah tried to define itself as a protector of Lebanon, as mentioned above. It struggled continuously with the tension between defending Lebanon and serving as a proxy of Iran and the Shia. This war tested Hezbollah’s role as a terror organization that tries to enjoy both worlds, getting support from the population and operating without political or regional limits. For the Lebanese people, the damage and the price of the war were too expensive, which led to them having doubts about the necessity and purpose of war.[[30]](#endnote-30) They were concerned about who the war was serving in contrast to Hezbollah’s official message of protector of Lebanon. The war also cast doubt on the goals of the organization and did not provide evidence of achievement.

All these questions cast doubt about Hezbollah’s political role in Lebanon. Moreover, they leverage the question of contribution and effectiveness of Hezbollah for Lebanon. The analysis shows that the benefits of this war were less than advantageous as the outcome was decreased support for Hezbollah among the Lebanese people and this affected its ability to succeed in the political arena.

From the perspective of deterrence balance, one can look at the security situation along Israel’s northern border with Lebanon to understand the developments that have occurred in this area. The ten years after the war can be defined as the least active years in the fight between Israel and Hezbollah. This is due to the disproportional response by Israel at the beginning of the war, which led Hezbollah to understand that Israel’s policy towards its attacks had changed. The aftermath of the 2006 war was strong deterrence from battling Israel and damage to Hezbollah’s intent to operate aggressively against IDF soldiers.[[31]](#endnote-31)

The impacts of the Second Lebanon War were seen in two different areas. In the readiness and capability area, Hezbollah demonstrated significant progress in weapons systems capabilities and operational concepts, which enabled it to reach and operate at different levels. Likewise, the combat doctrine has changed to be both defensive and offensive, simultaneously. On the other hand, in the intent and willingness area and in the political and domestic area, there is diminished prestige in Lebanon and the organization will carefully consider before sparking another war with Israel.

The war in 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah took the ongoing fight between the two to a new level. After this war, nothing has been the same as most of the characters that designed that campaign have changed, as well the role they play and the adversaries are no longer the same.

## Hezbollah and the Civil War in Syria

After exploring the first milestone in the Hezbollah evolution during the last decade, this section will present the influence and impacts of Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian Civil War to analyze the changes in its abilities, priorities, and policies. In order to gain a deeper understanding of Hezbollah’s characteristics in the present, the organization must be analyzed through its participation in the Syrian Civil War. This war had significant impact on the entire Middle East and in the international arena, on the large global powers such as the United States and Russia.

According to Jonathan Spyer, the reasons for Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian Civil War are loyalty, commitment, and requirement, not choice.[[32]](#endnote-32) Spyer describes Hezbollah’s three levels of identity as an Iran-aligned force, Shi’a’s representative political player in Lebanon, and a self-appointed champion of regional resistance to Israel and the West. The Arab Spring and the revolution in Syria challenged Hezbollah’s policy and identity. The organization shifted from focusing on resistance to Israel as a main platform, to fighting in a war that had no perceived benefits from the Lebanese people’s perspective. Lebanon, as a result of Hezbollah’s external focus, raised concerns about the organization’s claim that war would improve the nation and achieve central interests. The thousands of Hezbollah troops and equipment that were sent to the campaign in Syria further highlighted questions as to Lebanon’s role in this conflict.

It is hard to justify Hezbollah’s participation in the war in Syria as protection of Lebanon. Although there is an indirect connection between the Syrian Civil War and Lebanon, Hezbollah supports Assad regime’s activity in the field. The decision is a result of organizational priority and commitment and loyalty to its allies, though in this case Hezbollah is more like a proxy of Syria than an ally. Furthermore, since the establishment of Hezbollah, the organization has received more than $100 million per year from Iran, which creates additional dependence and forges a forced relationship between the two entities. Hezbollah chose to stand with Iran and Assad, as members of the Shi’a group, against the Sunni insurgencies and therefore, lowered its priorities of the Lebanese political and the resistance roles. Jonathan Spyer, an expert on Hezbollah, further outlined this tension:

“Hezbollah demonstrated its status as above all a client of the Iran-led regional bloc, and on a secondary level a Lebanese Shi’i sectarian force, with pretensions toward leading a general regional “resistance” relegated to a distant, rhetorical third place.” [[33]](#endnote-33)

At first, Hezbollah joined the Syrian Civil War as an adviser and government supporter. Over time it took on a more active role in the campaign, first providing training and army support including logistics and artillery fire, and later by supplying active troops. The organization took part in the big victories in El-Qesir in spring 2013 and in Yabrod in March 2014, though it suffered losses as well. Hezbollah has become involved with Russian forces by committing approximately 4,000 fighting soldiers; a large number for an organization with 5,000 soldiers on active duty and an additional 10,000-15,000 in reserve. [[34]](#endnote-34) [[35]](#endnote-35) The number of injures and casualties Hezbollah suffered are estimated at no less than 1,000 soldiers, not including commanders.[[36]](#endnote-36)

## Changes in Readiness Due to the Syrian Civil War

The main reason for Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian Civil War is its cooperation with and relationship to the axis of Russia, Iran, and Syria. Driven by its interests in the region, Russia is acting as a key player and operates actively in the region by supporting Assad’s regime and maintaining its troops. Russia is an international power that brings tremendous advantages to the field and influences the roles and character of this war. The war is no longer between terrorist groups and a failed government. It has evolved to include the capabilities, skills, and technology of one of the largest powers around the globe, and now Hezbollah is close to being Russia's ally.[[37]](#endnote-37)

The analysis will be according to the same IDF model above. In the Training area, the organization has grown from a terror organization with tactics appropriate for small and local battles to a form of an army (without a state) that fights large battles with infantry, artillery, armor and tactical intelligence. All these require changing and adjusting the training and education. Moreover, Hezbollah has been exposed to Russian Special Forces and operations, which allowed for more advanced training and tactics to be learned. In addition, it developed and learned a concept to face long-range attacks by IDF special units.[[38]](#endnote-38) At least a small number of Hezbollah soldiers have been exposed to Russia’s methods and practices to later spread these lessons throughout the organization.

In the War Fighting Doctrine area, due to Hezbollah’s new experiences in the battles in Syria, the main change is the transition to offensive attacks and initiatives rather than defense. This supports the development of the “victory theory” in recent years in Hezbollah and led to naming the next campaign against Israel “the crushing war,”[[39]](#endnote-39) based on the notion of combining long-range fire and ground attacks.

In the Fighting Equipment area, the main change has been seen in a couple of domains. In the intelligence world, emphasis has been on the combat intelligence gathering. In addition, Hezbollah has been exposed to part of Russia’s cyber ability, which accelerated its learning and progress in this domain. A new development in the artillery fire domain is Hezbollah’s ability to hit targets in minimal precision with maximum precision through coordination between its intelligence and artillery units.. On the battlefield, Hezbollah has dramatically updated its control and command systems’ and its control and inspection systems’ capability as well.[[40]](#endnote-40) In the manpower component, Hezbollah lost a significant number of soldiers, as mentioned above, in addition to many important commanders. Yet, the experience provided more quality, as research has suggested it has saved its professional soldiers for the fight against Israel.[[41]](#endnote-41) Thus, there is no certainty or clear progress in this domain.

In the Force Structure component, the exposure to the Russian and Syrian militaries taught and required Hezbollah to modify its structure. This led to better coordination across units and improved organization as a result of the changes in the combat doctrine that transitioned to more offensive attacks and initiatives in the intelligence units.

## Developments in Organizational Intent and Political Role Due to the Syrian Civil War

Hezbollah’s current war in Syria provides information about its intent to start a new war against Israel specifically at the present time. This indicates what the impacts and influences are on the organization’s intent from its participation in this war. In addition, with its participation, Hezbollah clearly indicated its priority to all. The main impact on Hezbollah’s intent to fight Israel is that the organization is associated indirectly with the Russians, who have a good relationship with Israel. This connection will be an obstacle for Hezbollah to spark war against Israel, as the organization will now need to consider political and economic interests as well.[[42]](#endnote-42) In the domestic area, Hezbollah is under pressure from the Lebanese political groups, who claim that Hezbollah prefers the eastern theater rather than staying in the country and maintaining its stability.[[43]](#endnote-43)Therefore, from the domestic aspect, Hezbollah would prefer to focus militarily in one theater in Syria, and invest its political and economic efforts in Lebanon to strength it position.[[44]](#endnote-44)

# Hezbollah’s Readiness and Intent Profile Analysis

## Analyzing Hezbollah Readiness and Intent Profile in the Light of the Developments of the Last Decade

In order to demonstrate a broad view of Hezbollah’s current situation, this section will analyze the organization’s strategy construct through the lens of Ends (aims, objectives), Ways (concepts), and Means (resources) model,[[45]](#endnote-45) in addition to an assessment of Hezbollah’s risk of initiating a new campaign against Israel. In order to reach comprehensive and deep understanding of the development and changes in the Hezbollah organization during the last decade, the analysis will focus on two time periods. The first period analyzed will be Hezbollah before summer 2006, prior to the Second Lebanon War, and the second period is Hezbollah in the present, winter 2016. These periods express two significant milestones, which represent turning points in the region and in the strategic environment.

## Hezbollah in the Summer of 2006 - Ends, Ways, Means, and Risk

**Ends** - the upfront and clear objectives and aims of Hezbollah before the Second Lebanon War were: resistance to Israel and the West, become a Shi’a political player in Lebanon, and continues as a proxy of Iran, which had low profile in the battlefield. Those three aims in this order indicate Hezbollah's efforts, energy, and direction at that time. Hezbollah presented its prestige in the local field as a defender of Lebanon using the concept of resistance to Israel as essential for the Lebanese people. When the IDF exited Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah claimed it was because of weakness.[[46]](#endnote-46) In the political domain, Hezbollah attempted to increase its political and social impact on the Lebanese nation, while handling the United Nations’ decision to investigate the murder of Lebanon Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Serving as the proxy of Iran meant increasing and expanding the power of the party in Lebanon, which increased Iranian impact in the country.

**Ways** - This section will explore Hezbollah’s impact of the diplomatic, information, military, and economic, (DIME) instruments, to achieve strategic goals. Hezbollah focused on the military and political instruments, however utilized all four elements of strategy for its international and domestic operations.

The military strategy was applied by using purposeful guerilla tactics and specific attacks to confirm the resistance against Israel and keep Hezbollah as an advanced and relevant terror and guerilla organization. Moreover, it found ways to create balance of deterrence against Israel while using and developing terror ability to harm the population, including long-range rockets, sniper shooting across the border, and kidnapping soldiers.[[47]](#endnote-47)

**Means -** Hezbollah’s primary resources between 2000- 2006 were to increase the arsenal of long-range rockets after the departure of the IDF from south Lebanon, in addition to developing specific units for special operations focusing on kidnapping skills and the presence of anti-tank weapons.[[48]](#endnote-48) All these were used to apply the resistance concept. In the political domain in the Lebanon theater, Hezbollah attempted to gain the Lebanese people’s support which was thought to achieve key roles in Lebanese politics.[[49]](#endnote-49) Additionally, as mentioned above, Hezbollah was financially supported heavily by Iran. Prior to 2006 and the result of the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah was almost fully funded by Iran, however after the War, the organization has begun constructing its own form of financial stability through illegal activities.

**Risk** - One can analyze in three primary aspects the Hezbollah’s risk of going to war before the conflict in 2006. First, there was a low chance that Israel would want to spark a war, as Hezbollah had predicted. Hezbollah would risk its success in 2000 and may be defeated. Second, on the domestic side, Hezbollah can currently be seen as a defender of Lebanon by fighting on the borders or just as an organization which serves only its interests for the resistance and not those of the Lebanese people. Thirdly, Hezbollah maintains its prestige within the entire Arabic world and conflict could present a situation in which the organization loses this status.

## Hezbollah in the Present - Ends, Ways, Means, and Risk

**Ends** - if judged by the actions of Hezbollah in the present, the main objectives and aims of the organization are:

1. Serve as a proxy of Iran – participate in the Syrian civil war with indirect connection to Lebanon.
2. Continue to be a Shi’a political party player in Lebanon.
3. Offer resistance to Israel and the West.

This order indicates the organization’s priorities and the huge change in the last decade in Hezbollah’s role, which means Hezbollah clearly prefers the eastern theater, fighting in Syria to support Assad regime in order of Iran.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Moreover, Hezbollah has become a player in the international theater as it has allied with the axis of Russia, Iran, and Syria, which means that it has responsibilities and limits not previously required or expected. The organization still struggles with its legitimacy due to the fact that it was defined as a terror organization by major countries in the Arab world. Therefore, the organization must secure a space in the international theater and increase its support base within the Lebanese nation.[[51]](#endnote-51) The organization’s new objectives are to win or perhaps survive the local fights in Syria and expand its political and domestic role in Lebanon.

**Ways** - Changes that occurred in the last decade in the Hezbollah organization can be analyzed through the expanded implication of the DIME elements. On the diplomatic level, one can argue Hezbollah is sitting with Russia at the same table and sharing all kinds of information as an outcome of its membership in this axis.[[52]](#endnote-52) On the domestic level, Hezbollah attempted to demonstrate itself as a defender of Lebanon in Syria, by struggling with the refugee issues and protecting the western border of Lebanon. In the military domain, there has been a huge transition in Hezbollah’s concept during the last decade. Hezbollah today is constructed and operates more like an army than a terror organization. The organization shifted itself from a militia to a semi-army although without a country, which influenced the offensive ways in which it achieves its aims, while using military and guerilla methods.[[53]](#endnote-53) In the economic domain, the organization developed independent systems and expanded its sources to reach broad funding to support its activities,[[54]](#endnote-54) including from Iran.

**Means** – Due to its exposure to the Russians’ abilities, as part of the coalition, Hezbollah’s means now include a semi-army with offensive ability and ground units with some special operations skills.[[55]](#endnote-55) The layout of the semi-army includes armor, artillery, and the beginning of an air capability with new intelligence and cyber capabilities. Simultaneously, Hezbollah expanded its economic resources and developed independent abilities to maintain itself.

**Risk** - As a result of Hezbollah’s new role in the international theater and due to it participation in the Syrian Civil War, the organization has additional limitations and increased commitments and connections to maintain, therefore, it has more to lose. The strategic calculus, before each step, is now much more complicated with new players involved. From the domestic point of view, Hezbollah must prove to the Lebanese people how much they are important to the Hezbollah party and make a couple of trust building actions to increase the support of the Lebanese nation. From the domestic organization’s perspective, the organization took one risk, although it could be a calculated one, by participating in the Syrian Civil War. This further destabilizes the possibility to open a new campaign in the Israeli theater when the organization is already in the midst of conducting one.[[56]](#endnote-56)

Table 1. Hezbollah’s Evolution, 2006-2016

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Spring 2006** | **Winter 2016** |
| **Ends**in priority | 1. Resistance to Israel and the west.
2. Player as a defender of Lebanon and political role.
3. Iran proxy
 | 1. Proxy of Iran as support Assad regime.
2. Political actor in Lebanon politics and player as defender of Lebanon.
3. Resistance to Israel and the West.
 |
| **Ways** | 1. Guerilla concept tactics based on defensive doctrine and specific attacks against Israel.
2. Develop the political role and influence in Lebanon.
 | 1. Guerilla and conventional tactics participate the Iran, Syria, Russia axis war.
2. Increasing and sustaining the politic and social efforts in Lebanon.
3. New role on international level creates more obstacles due to new rules of engagement
 |
| **Means** | 1. Terror organization, with limited abilities.
2. Domestic diplomatic efforts in Lebanon.
3. Rely primarily on Iranian support.
 | 1. Semi army organization with new advanced abilities influenced by the exposure to Russians, spread of cyber, artillery and air domain, along with new equipment and an offensive doctrine.
2. External and internal diplomacy to support Hezbollah’s prestige in the Middle East.
3. Variety of economic sources including independent economic resources.
 |

# View to the Future

## Israel’s Future Challenges and Implications Facing Hezbollah

Hezbollah’s present organization looks more like an army than a terror or guerilla unit, even though it does not have a home country.[[57]](#endnote-57) To Israel, this means a significant change in its approach to Hezbollah’s power, force, troops, concept, and doctrine. Moreover, the strategy to defeat an army’s power will be different than the strategy to defeat a terror or guerilla organization.

As a result of the changing strategic environment outside of the Middle East and Hezbollah's presence in the Syria theater, the organization is increasing its combat abilities and arsenal. Therefore, Israel is now facing a threat from Hezbollah that has plans to attack and occupy areas and settlements along the northern border.[[58]](#endnote-58) Hezbollah’s new strategy will combine local tactical attacks with coordinated defensive plans.

The new concept of surprise attacks in certain places, while protecting Lebanon against Israel’s invasion, will be supported by Hezbollah’s new abilities, skills and equipment. These it adjusted and purchased over the last decade, leading Israel to face the threat of new capabilities in Hezbollah’s artillery, which can cover targets from the north border to Dimona in southern Israel, over 300 miles away. Moreover, these long-range rockets’ advanced technology makes them accurate, controlled, and have a long range and the organization has vast quantities of them.[[59]](#endnote-59)

Israel could be met with counter-offensive attacks, which would be led by Hezbollah’s Special Forces and small units with expert soldiers. Furthermore, these units would have been exposed to and have learned from the Russian new ways of deploying special operations, using new control and command systems and coordinated land, air, naval, and cyber domains to support special operations. The implication for Israel is that, in the event of conflict, it will meet Hezbollah’s new, advanced abilities in offensive attacks, which are coordinated with all the domains to achieve the specific aims of an operation.

For Hezbollah’s new defensive abilities, Israel will encounter new defensive systems in the air and on the ground, which the majority of the IDF will need to face with smart and advanced air protection systems, limited numbers of drones, as well as limited number of tanks. Above all, Hezbollah potentially has chemical weapons, which will further present challenges to Israel.[[60]](#endnote-60)

As a result of Hezbollah’s participation in the Syrian Civil War over the last few years, the soldiers’ and commanders’ war experience has increased dramatically. The organization has earned a great amount of experience during the battles and has had the opportunity to carry out offensive and defensive operations combining infantry and armored units involved with close intelligence support and coordinated with artillery. It is quite clear that, should Israel fight Hezbollah again soon, it will meet a quasi-army with recent battle experience throughout all units of the organization.[[61]](#endnote-61)

The present axis, which supports the Assad regime, has a great impact on Hezbollah’s position and its threat to Israel due to its political role in the arena. The Russians, leading this axis, have a common interest with Israel, which is to maintain stability in Syria. From Hezbollah’s point of view, it is deeply involved in the fights in Syria and has invested much effort to maintain its political role in Lebanon. For Israel, Hezbollah has become an ally of the Russians, involved in decision-making that influences the area. Hezbollah improved its prestige with the Russians, although with some of the central Arab countries it has actually decreased its prestige, due to the fact that it is fighting against the Sunnis.[[62]](#endnote-62) Israel may encounter a change in Hezbollah’s international prestige, which may influence its calculations, due to its new engagements, to spark a war against Israel.

## Recommendation: A Way Ahead

Overall, Israel should work to keep Hezbollah’s focus away from Israel, thereby redirecting its’ intent, and also preparing for any future conflict by meeting the organization’s new capabilities. These recommendations discuss a three part strategy that encompasses political, diplomatic and military aspects: 1. Push Hezbollah to increase its role in Lebanon’s politics. 2. Work with Russia to decrease Hezbollah exposure to new capabilities; 3. Increase IDF readiness to meet the new Hezbollah in the future.

**Hezbollah’s new priorities** - As it was demonstrated in this paper, Hezbollah is currently engaged in two campaigns: the ongoing campaign for its role and prestige in Lebanon and its participation in Syria’s Civil War. Therefore, Hezbollah’s intent and willingness to open an additional campaign against Israel is assessed as low at this time. In light of this, Israel’s security policy must calculate every action, either offensive or defensive, in light of Hezbollah’s engagement. Israel’s security policy must react responsibly and in a balanced way to reduce Hezbollah’s intent to spark a new war. At the same time, Israel should make great efforts to prevent Hezbollah’s military progress.

### Political Strategy

Israel should assess and explore the sensitive points of Hezbollah’s prestige and political role in Lebanon to find ways to strengthen Hezbollah's reliability amongst Lebanon’s people. This strengthened reliability could lead to Hezbollah’s envelopment into the political sphere of Lebanon as a Shi’a party and therefore, reduce its status and subsequent threat as a terror organization.

### Diplomatic Strategy:

At the **diplomatic level**, in addition to Hezbollah’s new role in the strategic environment in the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has more engagements and limitations as a result of being a member of the Russia, Iran and Syria Coalition, and follow Russia and Iran approach. Therefore, Israel must engage with Russia to influence a reduction in the military connection and cease exposure to Hezbollah’s army of systems and tactics.

### Military Strategy

**Operational concept** - In order to defeat Hezbollah in the next campaign, Israel should develop a new strategy to address the current challenges of Hezbollah’s threat. Under the assumption that Hezbollah has dramatically changed, the IDF will be required to adjust to the changes and translate concepts to operations in all domains, including land, sea, air, and cyber. These concepts should address how to defeat Hezbollah, should outline what will be considered a victory for Israel, and determine what kind of aftermath will strengthen the balance of deterrence. Regardless, Israel should adapt new strategies that suit Hezbollah’s advanced characteristics and focus on translating the terms of center of gravity, determining the decisive point, and identifying what victory entails in the next campaign.

**Conduct the next campaign** - Hezbollah’s intent to win the campaign is indicated by its communications in the Arab world and to the Lebanese people that it did not lose, which will be confirmed by resilience in longstanding battles combined with small successful local attacks. Therefore, the operational concept of the IDF should be centered on strategies that would rapidly end the campaign,[[63]](#endnote-63) which include sneak attacks, harming accurate high quality targets, and executing quick maneuvers. These tactics serve to prevent Hezbollah’s shooting ability. Additionally, Israel must keep a strong defense along the northern border to prevent local attacks, combined with a strong air defense system.

**The ongoing efforts** – During peacetime between conflicts, the IDF should be focused on two main goals. First, the IDF should prioritize ongoing intelligence efforts to explore and closely track what developments and changes take place within the Hezbollah organization.[[64]](#endnote-64) This effort should be in cooperation with uncovered and covered elements, combined with other agencies. Secondly, Israel must execute operational efforts to prevent Hezbollah from enhancing its ability and purchasing new advanced weapon systems. In this field, Israel should be aware of and concentrate on chemical weapons, new air defense systems, and different types of aircraft and intelligence abilities.

**The** **defense aspect**, Israel and the IDF should increase their readiness and be able to transition rapidly from routine to emergency situations in two different domains: civilian and military. In the military domain, defense preparation should address the threats in the land domain including underground attacks, rocket threats, drone attacks, terrorist activities and offensive attacks. In the civilian domain, villages near the northern border should be ready to absorb ground and underground attacks, and consider appropriate solutions to all civilians, including women and children.

# Conclusion

Looking closely at the Hezbollah flag, one can see a hand-held weapon coming out from the first letter in Allah’s name. When the organization was first established the target was quite clear: Israel and the West. Currently, the target is unclear – is it Syrian, Sunni Islamist rebels or something else? Additionally, at the bottom of the flag is written “the Islamic resistancein Lebanon,”[[65]](#endnote-65) and according to the analysis in this paper and Hezbollah's current fights, if the sentence was rewritten today, perhaps it would say ‘the Islamic resistance party **for** Lebanon.’

Coming back to Nasrallah’s spider web speech, it seems that he might think carefully before launching the next attack against Israel, because Israel is no longer considered feeble and weak. However, the relationship between Hezbollah and Israel is wrought with tension and there will most likely never be assurance of stability in the future. On Israel’s side, the strategy should consider how to prevent the next fight and prepare forces at a high readiness level if there should be future conflict. Furthermore, if a new war sparks, Israel should look for a decisive, rapid, and disproportional response, that would provide the strongest deterrent as possible.

Hezbollah’s evolution in the last decade indicates that although the organization still has the same name, nothing is the same about it. The majority of the characters in the organization have changed and priorities have shifted dramatically, from fighting Israel and Israel as its first priority to fighting to Assad’s regime as a proxy of Iran as its first priority. In the capability area, Hezbollah is no longer an Islamic militia, but a small army with a military structure and advanced skills. This may explain the last statement by the IDF’s Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot in January 2016: “Hezbollah is Israel's most serious threat.”[[66]](#endnote-66)

Hezbollah was born in the beginning of the 1980s as a terror organization, Islamic Shi’s militia, party of God and proxy of Iran, to resist Israel and establish a new Islamic country in Lebanon. Currently, it has become a terror army which now serves Iran’s ideology with the future of becoming a Lebanese quasi- army, if another civil war was to occur. Therefore, Israel should remember that the name is the same, but the threat is completely different. It needs to be ready to defeat Hezbollah in the next campaign, with the aim, however, to delay any confrontation. Regardless, Israel should adapt new strategies that suit Hezbollah’s advanced characteristics and focus on translating the terms of center of gravity, determining the decisive point, and identifying what victory entails in the next campaign. With these approaches, Israel will increase its chances in preventing the next campaign additionally be prepared to defeat Hezbollah and can reasonably expect victory against the organization.

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