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Non-State Actors in Middle East Politics:
Hezbollah and Hamas as a Comparative Study

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To my father...

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Non-State Actors in Middle East Politics: Hezbollah and Hamas as a Comparative Study

Hasan Moh'd Ibhais

ABSTRACT

The role of non-state actors (NSAs) in international relations has gained increased attention over the course of the past decade. This is especially so in the Middle East where armed non-state actors proliferated. This thesis pursues a better understanding of the factors that contributed to the rise and resilience of such non-state actors through a comparative analysis of two of the longest standing armed non-state actors in the region: Hezbollah and Hamas. The thesis examines how internal and contextual factors, as well as alliance choices, have impacted the ability of these armed NSAs to mobilize resources to grow and maintain an active role in Middle East geopolitics. It argues that the failure of existing state structures to respond to a perceived external threat (the independent variable), or lack thereof, was the most essential element giving way to the emergence and growth of both armed NSAs. Moreover, the two NSAs' degree of success in mobilizing necessary popular and material resources while evading the constraints of the state-centric system (the intervening variable) determined their ability to continue to perform an external defense/deterrence function (the dependent variable).

Keywords: Non-state actors, Middle East, Islamists, liberation movements, Hezbollah, Hamas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
List of Figures.....	ix
List of Abbreviations.....	x
I- Introduction.....	1
1.1 Research Question.....	3
1.2 Methodology.....	5
1.3 Map of Thesis.....	6
II- NSAs in International Relations Literature.....	8
2.1 Non-State Actors in IR Theories.....	8
2.2 The Literature on Hezbollah And Hamas.....	17
2.3 Conclusion.....	20
III- Hezbollah: from Trenches to Politics.....	22
3.1 Internal Factors.....	23
3.2 Domestic and Regional Contexts.....	29
3.3 Alliance Formation: Key Observations.....	39
3.4 Impact on Mobilization of Resources.....	41
IV- Hamas: from a Social Movement to a Quasi-State.....	44
4.1 Internal Factors.....	44
4.2 Domestic and Regional Contexts.....	50
4.3 Alliance Formation: Key Observations.....	58
4.4 Impact on Mobilization of Resources.....	60
V- Hezbollah and Hamas Compared.....	62
5.1 Identity Formation.....	62
5.2 Internal Structures.....	65
5.3 Domestic and Regional Contexts.....	66
5.4 Alliance Formation.....	67
5.5 Mobilization of Resources.....	70
5.6 Conclusion.....	71
Bibliography.....	74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Proposed modeling for examining NSAs geopolitical influence.....	3
Figure 2. Variables affecting NSAs' pursuit of geopolitical influence.....	4

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FPM	Free Patriotic movement
IO	International Organization
IR	International Relations
MNC	Multi-National Corporation
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
NSA	Non-State Actor
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
SLA	South Lebanon Army
STL	Special Tribunal for Lebanon
UN	United Nations
US	United States

Chapter One

Introduction

The Middle East has been an active arena for non-state actors' engagement in international politics since the 1960s. This has often involved contesting the power and authority of state actors. More recently, the mushrooming of non-state actors after the Arab uprisings shook the central authority of many states, but especially in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, reanimated the debate about the role of non-state actors in international politics to the forefront (Salloukh, 2017).

Albeit the term “non-state actors” (NSA) has become widely used in the study of International Relations, its connotations are not very specific. The most basic understanding refers to it as an actor in international politics other than a state. Such actors are understood to include, among others, International Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and Multi-National Corporations (MNCs), in addition to armed non-state actors. This thesis attempts to provide a better understanding of the role of the latter type of non-state actors in international politics, with a primary focus on the Middle East, as a region where such actors have had a substantial effect on geopolitics for a good part of the last century.

The thesis examines the two cases of Islamic resistance movements in Lebanon (Hezbollah) and Palestine (Hamas) as two of the region's major non-state actors that are still active today. The rise of armed Islamist movements in the Middle East and North Africa region has led to an increased interest in understanding such movements in both popular and academic circles. Thus, the scope of this research is limited to understanding a specific type of non-state actors based on certain commonalities

shared by both organizations: 1) they are both politically motivated and pursue geopolitical objectives; 2) have independent and highly organized institutional structures; and 3) compete with available state institutions in domains usually exclusive to states, such as in the provision of services, the use of coercive force and territorial control. As for the term ‘geopolitics’, it is used here to distinguish domestic politics from another form of ‘higher’ politics, one that is connected to competition for territory and other “practices and representations of territorial strategies,” and considered as “a way of seeing the world,” or as a “practice of identifying the power relationships” between different units (Flint, 2006).

Finding the appropriate theoretical approach for studying any political subject remains a basic requirement in such an undertaking. In this case, the key determinant factor for employing IR theories lies in the objective of this study; that is, capturing the role of armed non-state actors in transnational rather than domestic politics. Indeed, the engagement of Hezbollah and Hamas in domestic politics might suggest studying them as political parties competing within the state. However, in doing so, one would fail to understand the broader character of these political actors, namely their involvement in contentious politics in a transnational rather than in a purely domestic setting. Similarly, while foreign policy analysis tools could be employed in studying individual international actors, that would not help in producing generalizable conclusions about multiple actors, which is one objective of this comparative study (see figure 1).

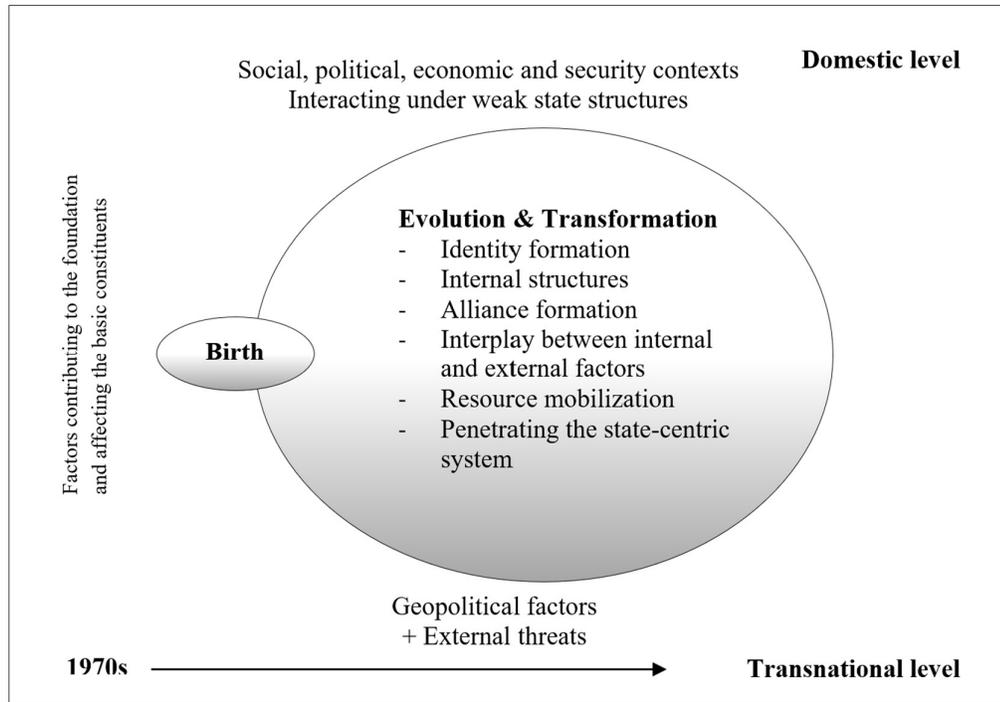


Figure 1. Modeling the analytical approach to how Hezbollah and Hamas developed their ability to maintain geopolitical influence

1.1 Research Question

This thesis attempts to explain how different contextual factors produced variations in the actors' ability to thrive and maintain/expand their geopolitical influence. Given the similarities shared by Hezbollah and Hamas with regards to their motivation, internal structure, and tactics, this thesis tests the assumption that contextual factors (i.e. weak state structures and external alliances) facilitated the foundation and growth of both organizations, and were causative in allowing them to emerge and mobilize the human, financial, military and other resources necessary for their survival and for gaining geopolitical influence. However, the variations within the latter contexts led to various levels of geopolitical influence.

The key hypothesis for this thesis is that internal and contextual factors, as well as alliance choices, have impacted the ability of Hezbollah and Hamas to mobilize

resources to grow and maintain an active role in Middle East geopolitics. It argues that the failure of existing state structures to respond to a perceived external threat (the independent variable), or lack thereof, was the most essential element giving way to the emergence and growth of both armed NSAs. Moreover, the two NSAs' degree of success in mobilizing necessary popular and material resources while evading the constraints of the state-centric system (the intervening variable) determined their ability to continue to perform an external defense/deterrence function (the dependent variable – see figure 2).

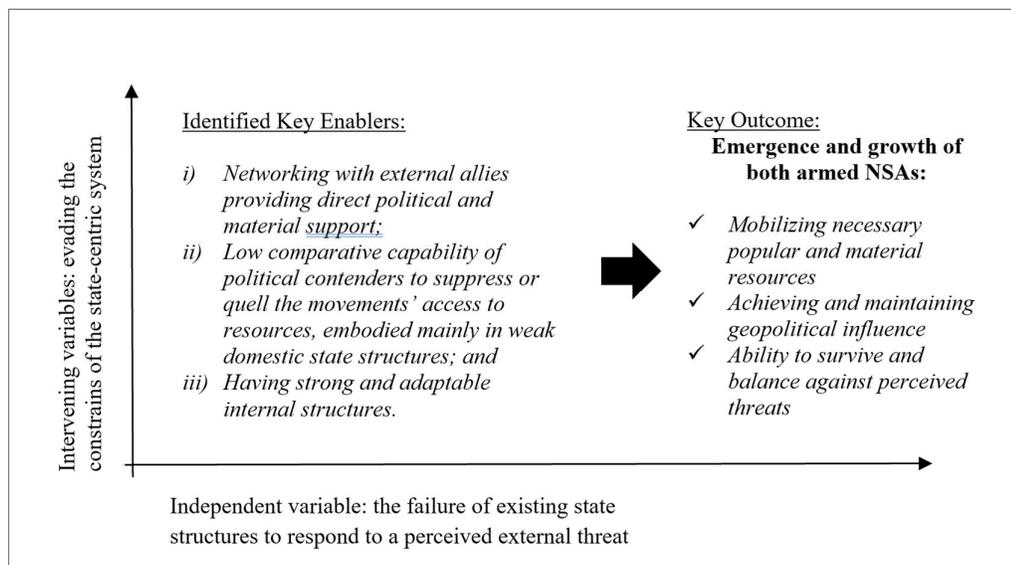


Figure 2. Identified variables and key enablers for Hezbollah and Hamas in pursuit of geopolitical influence

In other words, it is assumed that while the two NSAs adopted similar strategies and invested in similar tactics, the difference at the level of the specified local contexts has led to varying degrees of success in mobilizing resources required to overcome the obstacles imposed on them through the international state-centric system. Thus, this argument contributes to the growing body of literature using cases from the Arab world to challenge the orthodoxy of dominant IR schools that pay little attention to non-state

actors¹. This, in turn, provides better and more systematic insights to the underestimated role played by such actors in international politics.

The universe of cases of armed non-state actors in the Middle East includes many more examples other than the two selected for this comparative study. These include Ansar Allah (also known as the Houthis) in Yemen, the Popular Mobilization Forces (al-hashd al-sha‘bi) in Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS, commonly called Da‘esh in Arabic) in Iraq and Syria, and Ansar al-Shari‘a in Libya, among others. However, Hezbollah and Hamas stand out as two of the region’s longest standing, most resilient and most formidable armed non-state actors, with a record of continuous involvement in transnational politics since the 1980s, alongside being major actors in domestic politics in their countries. Moreover, the shared similarities between the two make them better subjects for a comparative study of this kind, as there is a better chance to control for these similarities and isolate the examined variables.

1.2 Methodology

To answer the research questions, the thesis adopts qualitative research methodologies and data collection techniques. In terms of its purpose, it is both descriptive and explanatory. First, the thesis looks at how the main schools of IR theory (realism and liberalism) addressed the issue of non-state actors. The main critique of such theories is that they are state-centric and are designed to provide a macro level explanation of

¹ See for example: Bassel F. Salloukh, “Overlapping Contests and Middle East International Relations: The Return of the Weak Arab State,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50, 3, (July 2017), pp. 660-663; F. Gregory Gause III, “Ideologies, Alignments, and Underbalancing in the New Middle East Cold War,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50, 3, (July 2017), pp. 672-675; and Curtis R. Ryan, “Shifting Alliances and Shifting Theories in the Middle East,” *POMEPS Studies 34: Shifting Global Politics and the Middle East*, March 2019, at: https://pomeps.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/POMEPS_Studies_34_Web.pdf.

international politics. They consequently tend to downplay the role of non-state actors, and thus different realist and liberal explanations fail to capture the full potential of such actors. A problem-driven approach encompassing non-state actors is necessary. Therefore, this thesis assumes an analytically eclectic approach, drawing on the works of Stephen Walt (on alliance formation), Raymond Hinnebusch (on identity formation and the need to utilize state and sub-state levels of analysis), and Gregory Gause (on the need for a customized view of conceptualizing Middle East international relations). The thesis uses primary and secondary sources, including previous literature of individual case studies examining Hezbollah and Hamas, to study the contextual factors surrounding the foundation and evolution of each organization. This is followed with a comparative study approach to detect how contextual variations affected the ability of each organization to maintain its geo-political influence and draw some generalizable conclusions regarding the understanding of this type of non-state actors.

1.3 Map of Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The next chapter surveys how non-state actors were approached by different IR theories. It then moves to the more specific cases of Hezbollah and Hamas, while tacking stock of relevant work on similar non-state actors in Middle East politics. Thus the third and fourth chapters, respectively, are dedicated to examining the contexts within which Hezbollah and Hamas operate, how they came into being and what allowed them to develop, survive and gain their geopolitical influence. Special attention is given to the role of weak state structures and external alliances in allowing both actors to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve what

they have achieved. With the aim of locating the decisive variables and establishing causality between them, the final chapter contrasts the two non-state actors against each other, looking into similarities and differences on various levels: in their motivations, tactics, internal structures, domestic contexts, alliances and external support, and the effects of all these on resource mobilization. It then uses counter-factual reasoning to further test the arguments made in it.

Chapter Two

NSAs in International Relations Literature

This chapter explores the available literature on NSAs in International Relations (IR), starting with an overview of how dominant IR theories have looked at NSAs, including the various realist, liberal and constructivist approaches. It also discusses the early attempts to go beyond state-centrism and include NSAs in the study of IR and the evolution of alternative approaches dealing with this topic. Then, the chapter examines previous literature on Hezbollah and Hamas, the case studies used in this thesis, and the various explanations introduced of their behavior and role in the geopolitics of the Middle East.

2.1 Non-State Actors in IR Theories

Despite the wide disagreement within the IR literature over many core assumptions about international politics, state-centrism has been perhaps the central common denominator over which there has been little to no dispute – at least until recently. Across paradigms, IR scholarship deals with states as the central unit of analysis, and this is so for a good reason. States remain the main actors in today’s international system. Consequently, all the major IR theories tend to downplay the role of non-state actors in international politics, although they do not dismiss it entirely. Alexander Wendt’s summary of the debate over the role of non-state actors in international relations seems particularly relevant to this thesis: “The point is merely that states are still the primary medium through which the effects of other actors on the regulation of violence are channeled into the world system. It may be that non-state actors are

becoming more important than states as initiators of change, but system change ultimately happens through states” (Wendt, 1999, p. 9). This thesis does not attempt to question the logic behind state-centrism. It rather seeks to bridge the gap resulting from the neglect of studying how non-state actors operate through states within the described world system.

For Realism, which is centered around material power relations, not only is the international system made of national actors, but the states that matter are the great powers. State-centrism can be found across the various classical, structural, and neo-classical realist theories, starting with Hans Morgenthau, who emphasized that “a nation pursues international policies as a legal organization called a state whose agents act as the representatives of the nation on the international scene” (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 74). The assumption that states are the main actors in international politics is shared by structural or neo-realists as well, such as Kenneth Waltz (1979; 2008), Robert Gilpin (1981), Stephen Walt (1987), and John Mearsheimer (2001), who treat the state as a unitary and rational actor whose behavior is attributed mainly to structural pressures. Neo-classical realists, including Gideon Rose (1998) and Randall Schweller (2006), disagree with neo-realists by stressing the need to incorporate unit-level variables in their study of actors’ behavior, but again, those actors are principally rational states.

However, realists’ state-centrism does not necessarily exclude the possibility of having other actors. Morgenthau, whose use of the term ‘nation’ stresses the centrality of the nation-state in his theory, sees the nation as “an abstraction from a number of individuals who have certain characteristics in common.” The identification of these individuals with the power of their nation is linked to “national symbols, especially in

so far they have a reference to the armed forces and the relations with other nations” (Morgenthau, 1949, pp. 73, 75).

When this is combined with Morgenthau’s earlier remarks on the agency of a nation’s representatives in the international scene, and his argument that “armed strength as a threat or a potentiality is the most important factor making for the political power of a nation,” (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 14) it becomes possible to consider a role for actors other than the state in international politics, especially when such actors seek political power² on the international scene on behalf of a state or a group of individuals who share certain characteristics, and utilize armed strength as a threat or potentiality in the relations with other actors.

Likewise, Waltz’s neo-realist structural theory makes general assumptions about free competition among “political entities of whatever sort,” where “substantive and stylistic characteristics are similar” (Waltz, 2008, p. 43). He further explains that the definition of a self-help system in terms of its principal actors (i.e. states), “does not exclude other components, but merely sets the context of their existence” (Waltz, 2008, p. 48). Waltz’s discussion of the international political impact of September 11 attacks provides an example of the ability of neo-realists to accommodate such components. According to Waltz, “terrorists contribute to the continuity of international politics” rather than interrupting it. “They further trends already in motion” (Waltz, 2008, p. 250).

Gilpin (1981) makes a similar point when he suggests that “[t]he argument that the state is the principal actor in international relations does not deny the existence of other individual or collective actors. As Ernst Haas cogently put it, the actors in international

² Political power is defined by Morgenthau as “a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised” (Morgenthau, 1949, p. 14).

relations are those entities capable of putting forth demands effectively; who or what these entities may be cannot be answered a priori” (Gilpin, 1981, p. 18).

Neo-classical realists as well recognize a need for inclusion of sub-state variables in the analysis of international relations. For instance, Rose suggests that “power analysis must examine the strength and structure of states relative to their societies, because these affect the proportion of national resources that can be allocated to foreign policy” (Rose, 1998). He later recognizes the significance of ‘civil society activities’ for non-state actors operating within institutionally weak states, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon (Berman & Rose, 2006). Similarly, Schweller proposes a model that measures internal state coherence as a predictor of its behavior, by looking at the elite’s consensus and cohesion, the government/regime vulnerability, and social cohesion, where the latter two would affect a state’s ability to extract resources necessary to support its elite’s willingness to balance against a perceived threat (Schweller, 2006, pp. 46-47).

Liberal theories, on the other hand, tend to show more tolerance towards the involvement of non-state actors in international politics, even though states remain the major actors. Liberal scholars, namely Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1971), were among the first to challenge the classic state-centric paradigm in the study of world politics, calling for a broader world politics paradigm that would be more capable of understanding the reality of international politics (Keohane & Nye, 1971, p. 344).

However, the basic liberal assumptions – namely the emphasis on individual rights, democracy, and free trade as tools for promoting international cooperation between international political actors – have been able to explain the role of some non-state actors, but not all. This comes as no surprise since liberalism has been generally more capable of explaining peace rather than war or conflict. Non-state actors whose role can be explained using liberal assumptions, are either of an economic nature (such as

transnational corporations or TNCs), or manifest the collective will of cooperating international actors through international institutions. With mainly non-liberal agendas, and little to no access to international trade or international institutions, armed non-state actors seem to subscribe to the ‘unpleasant’ realm of power politics, which many liberals aspire to abolish.

This shortcoming was apparent in Keohane and Nye’s attempt mentioned earlier at incorporating non-state actors into the study of world politics. Although their long list of possible NSAs engaged in transnational relations included a variety of actors, including revolutionary movements, their analysis has been largely focused on economic transnational transactions and intergovernmental organizations, and how these affect intergovernmental relations. Meanwhile, the examination of armed non-state actors of that time by J. Bowyer Bell (1971), depended almost entirely on realist assumptions and explanations. Moreover, some liberal attempts have focused on using state-level variables (such as regime type of host state, socio-economic conditions, and repressive state policies) to explain the emergence and rise of armed non-state actors (Ezrow, 2017, pp. 55-69). Others have looked at how globalization might have empowered non-state actors by giving them better access to military and communications technologies (Ezrow, 2017, pp. 42-53; Mulaj, 2010, p. 14). Although such explanations add to the overall understanding of armed non-state actors, they fall short of establishing a causality relationship leading to outcomes: namely, explaining the behavior of such actors or the motives behind policy choices they make.

Even for constructivist scholars, who are at odds with the materialist explanations of rationalist approaches, namely neorealism and neoliberalism, the state remains the primary unit of analysis. But as opposed to the causal relationship materialists attempt to explain between state material capabilities and behavioral outcomes, constructivists

look into the constitutive relationship between social structures and state identities, interests, and behavior (Martha Finnemore, 1996; and Wendt, 1999). For example, Wendt's argument for choosing the state as the main unit of analysis in his social theory of international politics reveals what seems to be a common reasoning shared by state-centric paradigms: "Since the state is a structure of political authority with a monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence, when it comes to the regulation of violence internationally it is states one ultimately has to control" (Wendt, 1999, p. 8).

This does not necessarily preclude a possible role for non-state actors. Despite the choice made by many constructivist scholars, the constructivist core assumptions and/or explanatory work are not necessarily exclusive to states and may be applied to other international actors as well. Looking into 'how actors are socially constructed' is not constrained to certain actors (Wendt, 1999, p. 7). The ability to explain actors' motives, interests, and identity formation (instead of making assumptions about them) has been one distinctive feature of constructivism, one that accounts for the *raison d'être* of armed non-state actors, which does not necessarily match the realist or liberal assumptions about the ultimate goal of states (i.e. relative vs. absolute gains). At the same time, constructivism's ideational reasoning is able to explain how the same action of one actor can be interpreted differently by other actors (i.e. different perceptions of threat by allies/ foes).

But armed non-state actors (the type this thesis aims to study) were not a high priority for constructivist scholars who have shown interests in this topic. The main attention has been given to the role played by international organizations in socializing states to adopt new interests and social norms (Finnemore, 1996). Not all IR literature falls

under this paradigmatic categorization, however, as many scholars have criticized the limits set by theoretical ‘boundaries’ on research.

One early argument against the ‘irrelevance’ of the ‘conservative’ state-centric model, one that even predates the emergence of structural realism and the whole debate that ensued thereafter, was that it “has imposed research blinders and has inhibited an accurate mapping of the increasingly complex global system” (Mansbach, Ferguson, & Lampert, 1976, p. 28). Entitled *The Web of World Politics: Non-State Actors in the Global System*, the study used quantitative data from three different regions to point out to the increasing role of non-state actors in world politics. Interestingly, the authors used a mix of ideational and material factors to explain actors’ behavior, as well as the formation of their interests and identities (or loyalties).

The inability of a single theory to explain some complex issues in international politics has been a frequent argument for the use of a ‘cross-paradigmatic’ approach. One critique of the ‘academic sects’ or ‘isms’ approach was voiced by David Lake (2011), and Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein (2011). Sil and Katzenstein (2010) introduce ‘analytic eclecticism’ as an alternative to paradigm-bound research in the study of international politics, arguing that it can address real-world problems instead of being confined by theoretical restraints. They suggest that no single theoretical approach could solely explain complicated international phenomena such as war and peace, hence the need for analytical eclecticism. By allowing for a problem-driven research with open ended questions, not focused around issues emphasized in paradigm-bound theories, eclecticism makes it possible to address newly arising and more complex issues (Sil & Katzenstein, 2011, pp. 205-206).

Another example, more relevant to this thesis, is Raymond Hinnebusch’s (2003) work on Middle East international relations. While recognizing the dominance of realist

rules in the international politics of the conflict-torn Middle East, Hinnebusch underlines the explanatory power of constructivism in addressing “the unique misfit between identity and sovereignty, nation and state, inflicted on the region.” At the same time, he argues that “the state and sub-state levels are at least as important as the system level in shaping state behavior” (Hinnebusch, 2003, pp. 1-2).

Similarly, Gregory Gause (1999; 2017) and Bassel Salloukh (2017) criticize the use of a systems-level perspective in explaining the international relations of the Middle East, and suggest an alternative, more customized view of conceptualizing Middle East international system, one that underscores the interplay between material and immaterial factors in the making of Middle East international relations across different levels of analysis.

Not far from such arguments, the mushrooming of armed non-state actors in the Middle East – which at the same time is home to many institutionally ‘weak’ states that cannot claim monopoly over the use of legitimate violence – has given rise to a whole new thematic approach in the study of the region’s international politics. The duality of having strong armed non-state actors and weak states in the same region caught the attention of many scholars who decided to explore the possible linkages between the two. The concept of ‘failed states’ has become a hot topic in the study of Middle East politics, but not without controversy. This controversy is brilliantly captured by Merhan Kamrava (2016), who rests much of it on the fact that, rather than being merely an academic endeavor, the study of weak states has been at the heart of development policies, frequently associated with terrorism or terrorist groups and allegedly concerned with the protection of US and Western national and international security interests. However, and despite Charles Call’s view of this discourse as “value driven”, and Branwen Gruffyd Jones’ criticism of it as “irredeemably rooted in an

imperial imagination,” Edward Newman approves the concept of failed states as academically useful, no matter how problematic it is (Kamrava, 2016, pp. 2-4).

Remarkably, the Middle East is the arena where much of the criticism of “the clear-cut dichotomy of traditional International Relations theory between state and non-state actors,” as Kristina Kausch (2017) puts it, has evolved. Kausch joins other scholars in exploring the linkages between weak statehood and the rise of non-state actors, with focus on the role of changing identities in shaping alliances between state and non-state actors and their impact on regional stability (Kausch, 2017).

Looking at the correlation between sovereignty and state failure has been another way to approach this topic, where the Middle East – again – is the field for testing non-conventional IR theories. Actor-Network Theory, originally used in science and technology, is one such example. Joseph MacKay (2006) argues that failed states “are emblematic of a selection of international issues that conventional IR is poorly equipped to deal with – namely, those that involve non-state and nonsocial actors in prominent roles” (MacKay, 2006, p. 63). Alternatively, MacKay calls for evaluating networks, “broadly defined as virtually any sort of collectivity, in terms of both their social and material components.” By arguing that sovereignty is “a series of actions or processes, through which a collection of actors and networks present themselves as a coherent unit,” MacKay questions the very base of conventional IR theories that view states as unitary actors in the first place. Hence, a state fails when it loses its capacity to coordinate itself as a coherent unit, breaking down into a set of non-state actors formerly represented collectively (MacKay, 2006). Next, the focus turns to exploring how the two NSAs subject of this comparative study have been studied in IR literature.

2.2 The Literature on Hezbollah and Hamas

The growing roles played by Hezbollah and Hamas in domestic and regional politics since their establishment in the 1980s until now, was reflected in the increased interest in understanding their roots and operationality. Consequently, this has resulted in the creation of a substantial literature on these two Islamist movements. Three notes are worth mentioning regarding trends within this literature, however.

First, the use of a single case study has been the preferred approach in much of the literature on Hezbollah and Hamas (Abu-Amr, 1993; Alagha, 2006; Gunning, 2008; Hamzeh, 2004; Harik, 2004; Hroub, 2000; Jaber, 1997; Levitt, 2006; Milton-Edwards B. , 2013; Norton, 2007; Qassem, 2005; Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002; Salloukh & Mikaelian, 2013; Tamimi, 2011). Although this approach is able to generate valuable in-depth understanding of what was then a newly researched topic, it does not explore the potential of a wider understanding of non-state actors within regional or international political systems. With only few comparative studies examining the role of the two movements as part of a broader trend of non-state actors acquiring increasing importance either regionally or world-wide (Mishal & Rosenthal, 2005; Strindberg & Wärn, 2005; Dalacoura, 2011; Gleis & Berti, 2012; Tocci, 2007; Koss, 2018), the topic is still substantially under-researched.

Second, a sizable amount of literature is largely descriptive. Despite the few theoretical or analytical arguments made in this literature, its value lies in the insights it provides about Hezbollah and Hamas, namely when coming or relying heavily on sources from within these two movements (Hroub, 2000; Jaber, 1997; Qassem, 2005; Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002; Tamimi, 2011).

Third, the debate within the literature on Hezbollah and Hamas is highly affected by the fact that much of the interest in studying the two movements is not purely academic

but originates from perceiving them as a security and/or political threat, namely by state actors. One way to frame the debate, according to Anders Strindberg and Mats Wärn (2005), is to look at “the scholarly and political effort to lump together diverse resistance groups into a homogenous ‘terrorist enemy,’” as part of “neocolonial power politics whereby all ‘native’ struggles against established power structures are placed beyond reason and dialogue” (Strindberg & Wärn, 2005, p. 23).

Devising appropriate state responses to the threat posed by Hezbollah and Hamas remains a major research agenda affecting the literature about them. One view follows what Menachem Klein describes as the ‘static approach’ (Klein, 2007), which dominated ‘Western’ political and academic circles, and relied heavily on sources from security and intelligence apparatuses (Tamimi, 2011, p. 1), primarily depicting them as ‘evil’ or ‘terrorist’³ groups. Within this literature, the internal idiosyncratic attributes of Hezbollah and Hamas are considered the primary predictor of their behavior, viewing them through a ‘reductionist’ lens, as ideologically-driven, radical, and violent organizations insusceptible to change or moderation (Levitt, 2006; Levitt, 2013; Karmon, 2000).

However, this constricted view of Hezbollah and Hamas is highly problematic for its inability to grasp the complex social and political dimensions of the two movements. Interestingly, this criticism comes from authors and scholars from various backgrounds; whether introducing alternative narratives that account for contextual

³ Terrorism remains a controversial term, and according to Jackson (2007), there have been more than 200 different definitions of the term terrorism. While studies of terrorism count for a large bulk of literature about Hamas and Hezbollah, many academics tend to criticize the surge in literature about terrorism following the 9/11 events, whether in generic media and research institutions publications, or in academic-refereed journals. In a study that examined over 300 political and academic texts, Jackson concluded that “for the most part, political and academic discourses of ‘Islamic terrorism’ are unhelpful, not least because they are highly politicized, intellectually contestable, damaging to community relations and practically counter-productive”. Jackson adds that terrorism is often mistakenly associated with movements and more specifically non-state actors, while it is one of several other strategy options that could be adopted by any actor and that there is rarely a movement that is “terrorist” *per se*.

factors in the study of the two movements (Ayoob, 2005; Gunning, 2008; Alagha, 2006; Hamzeh, 2004; Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010; Harik, 2004; Knudsen, 2005; Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002; Norton, 2007; Salloukh & Mikaelian, 2013; Salah, 2017; Daher, 2019; Al-Aloosy, 2020), or following an essentialist view of them as basically ‘terrorist’ organizations (Gleis & Berti, 2012; Mishal & Rosenthal, 2005).

Those challenging the ‘reductionist’ view argue that contextual/environmental factors within which these movements operate should not be overlooked, because they provide better explanations for their rise and better predict their behavior. Contextual factors discussed within this literature include domestic ones, such as governance/state institutions, political participation, inter-group relations, socio-economic conditions, as well as regional and international factors (e.g. foreign occupation, external allies, foreign aid, effects of regional and international developments. Above all, the issue of the transformation both movements underwent as a result of their participation in domestic politics has gained most attention.

Within this discourse, there have also been several attempts to present a counter-narrative that assimilates the point of view of the two movements and their constituencies (Saleh, 2014; Baconi, 2018; Dolatabadi, Beigi, & Choul, 2020), or to analyze changes within the movements by examining their own political documents and statements (Adwan, 2019; Nilsson, 2020).

Refusing to remain “caught in pre-established categories or focusing on single- case studies only, whose results are difficult to transfer to further cases,” stands the work of Maren Koss (2018). She calls for some hybrid theoretical framework that combines Islamism research and IR theory as basis for comparing political conceptions of Hezbollah and Hamas (Koss, 2018, p. 18). Whether exploring the internal attributes of Hezbollah and Hamas or their external environments to explain their behavior, what

both sides of the debate have in common is that they ultimately focus on the ability of these two non-state actors to mobilize resources in one way or another. Therefore, this thesis proposes introducing mobilization of resources as an intervening variable.

2.3 Conclusion

Despite the growing literature on armed NSAs in international relations, namely in the Middle East as a region where they have flourished recently, the literature is largely descriptive and tends to be politically driven by the analysis of state actors looking for foreign policy alternatives to deal with such NSAs – often perceived as a security threat or a challenge to states. The literature on Hezbollah and Hamas more specifically is increasingly voicing the need to dispose of reductionist approaches and encompass domestic and regional contexts, as well as internal factors, in the study of these two movements. This is for the simple reason that such analysis would be better able to explain and predict their behavior, noting that the motive behind this alternative narrative is not purely academic either. However, the introduction of this approach enhances the understanding of the phenomena of armed NSAs in Middle East politics, regardless of its motivations. Nonetheless, the discussion around this topic seems to be far from being saturated, with several aspects still under-researched and only few attempts made to draw some generalizable conclusions through a comparative lens. A condition specifically needed if we are to analyze NSAs using IR theoretical tools rather than using foreign policy analysis fit for individual international actors.

In the following chapter, we take a closer look at Hezbollah, examining how the interplay of internal factors (namely identity formation and internal structures) with domestic and regional contexts affected the party's geopolitical alliance choices and

ultimately its ability to mobilize resources while evading external sanctions, identified as an intervening factor shaping the outcomes.

Chapter Three

Hezbollah: from Trenches to Politics

For the purposes of this study, both internal and external factors are examined to assess their influence on the birth and evolution of non-state actors, and how it affected their transformation from small-grassroots resistance groups into full-fledged political actors, active on both the domestic and transnational levels.

On the internal factors, the identity formation and internal structures of these two actors are observed, with the aim of identifying why Hezbollah and Hamas qualify as subjects of a study of international politics, i.e. how they qualify as unitary actors on their own, and not as mere proxies of regional state actors as they are often portrayed. Unlike the study of domestic factors within a state, it might be challenging to look at sub-unit level factors within non-state actors in the times preceding their actual birth. However, domestic factors directly affecting the basic constituents of these two non-state actors are looked at as internal factors, due to their close association with the foundation of the two.

On the external level, contextual factors that fall outside the above-mentioned sub-unit perimeter are observed, in both domestic and trans-national levels. On the domestic level, the analysis focuses on social, political, economic, and security contexts – and how they culminated in having weak state structures. On the trans-national level, the analysis looks at geopolitical factors with emphasis on external threats and alliance formation.

Eventually, the chapter looks at how the interplay between internal and external factors resulted in enhancing the capacity of the two studied non-state actors to mobilize

resources, while avoiding pressures of the state-centric international system; thus enabling them to achieve and maintain geopolitical influence.

3.1 Internal Factors

3.1.1. Early roots

The literature on Hezbollah has covered extensively the circumstances of the party's birth. Therefore, we focus on the analysis of the establishment rather than recall descriptive and chronological narratives of this establishment.

An overarching topic across the literature on Hezbollah's establishment is the socioeconomic conditions of the Shi'a community under the pre-1975 political system in Lebanon, and how these conditions of disadvantage and marginalization instilled a wide sentiment of deprivation, laying the ground for a renaissance-like movement led by religious Shi'i clerics, most notably among whom is Imam Musa Al-Sadr. The reformist nature of this new political force challenged the authority of the powerful political *Zu'ama* [leaders] who previously dominated Shi'i politics, garnering the support of the Shi'i community through a promise of radical change (Norton, 2007, pp. 14-15). These factors gave birth to *Harakat Al-Mahrumin* (the movement of the deprived or the dispossessed) in 1974, around the same time when the fighters of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) had relocated from Jordan to South Lebanon as grounds for their military resistance operations against Israel.

Shortly after, the establishment of the Battalions of the Lebanese Resistance (AMAL) was announced, as the armed wing of *Harakat Al-Mahrumin*. This development seems to have resulted from three interwinding factors: i) the growing sense of political identity among the Shi'a, whose youth were increasingly taking part in armed resistance operations under one or another of the PLO groups (Norton, 2007, p. 16);

ii) al-Sadr's stance towards Israel as 'an utter evil' whose occupation of land must be resisted (Qassem, 2005, p. 15); and iii) the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in April 1975 (Harik, 2004, p. 22). Although Amal fighters were first trained by Fateh – PLO's largest Palestinian faction, the decision for al-Sadr's movement to have its own military wing turned out to have a stronger sense as disagreement (and discontent) with the PLO grew over the next few years (Norton, 2007, pp. 17-19).

What marked al-Sadr from the other two most prominent Shi'i clerics of the time, Muhammad Mahdi Shamseddine and al-Sayyed Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, was his focus on socio-political reform. This distinguished his movement as "the only political movement of the time," and helped it attract both religious and non-religious adherents (Qassem, 2005, p. 17). However, the sudden disappearance of Imam al-Sadr in August 1978, a few months after the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon, impacted the nature of the movement's leadership and identity towards a more secular discourse. The wiping out of the Islamic content alienated the religious constituency within the movement, at a time when the Islamic revolution in Iran succeeded in overthrowing the Shah regime. The rift grew bigger between the secular and religious components of Amal. (Harik, 2004, p. 22). The latter were one group among several other politicized Shi'i groups adopting a version of political Islam, whose theoretical cultural foundation "was subject to the influence of all or some of the three leading clerics [al-Sadr, Shamseddine and Fadlallah], as well as to clerical activity in general." (Qassem, 2005, p. 17).

3.1.2. Identity formation

The Islamic Revolution in Iran triggered a reconsideration of political thought and approaches across Islamist movements in the Middle East, but it especially gave

momentum to a debate within Shi‘i Islamist circles in Lebanon on the best way to pursue their own resurgence (Harik, 2004, p. 16). Lebanese clerics, traditionally receiving their teachings at Najaf in Iraq with a predominantly intellectual and cultural focus, had a new model to consider – one that succeeded in establishing an Islamic state led by the Guardian Jurist (*al-wali al-faqih*). Thus, a link was established between Lebanon and the new Iranian state. With that, the foundations for the first pillar (i.e. Islamic identity) of a new unified organizational framework that would later become Hezbollah were laid. Such identity revolved around two key concepts: i) Islam as a comprehensive program for all aspects life, and ii) the jurisdiction of the Guardian Jurist whose commands and proscriptions should be enforceable (Qassem, 2005, pp. 18-19).

Jihad, in the form resistance against Israeli occupation, constituted the second pillar upon which Hezbollah’s identity was established. Markedly, the decision of Amal’s now secular leadership to join the National Salvation Committee upon Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was a tipping moment for the young Islamist component within Amal, who viewed this Committee as an “American-Israeli bridge” into controlling Lebanon (Norton, 2007, p. 23). As a result, Islamist members of Amal, such as Abbas al-Mussawi, Subhi al-Tufayli, Hassan Nasrallah, Na’im Qasim, and Ibrahim al-Amin al-Sayyid, among others, broke away from the movement, as did Hussein al-Mussawi, who went on to found Islamic Amal (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p. 15).

Around the same time, several Shi‘i clerics met in Tehran with Ayatollah Khomeini, the supreme leader of the Islamic revolution, who urged them to mobilize people to fight the Israeli occupation. These clerics included several from the above-mentioned influential figures who split from Amal and later played key roles in the establishment

of Hezbollah, including al-Tufayli, al-Sayyed, and Ragheb Harb (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 24). Practically, Iran did more than just that, as it dispatched 1,500 of its Revolutionary Guards to the Bekaa region to provide military training for Islamist resistance fighters in the wake of Israel's invasion. This bold action is usually cited to have a direct role in the genesis of Hezbollah (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p. 14).

While Hezbollah traces its founding date back to 1982, its first public announcement came only in February 1985, through an open letter addressed to the "Downtrodden in Lebanon and the World". That document gave the first glimpse of the party's ideals and goals, which emphasized its global Islamic identity beyond "an organized and closed party in Lebanon," and highlighted its linkages to *al-wali al-faqih* Ayatollah Khomeini. Nonetheless, the Lebanese focus of the letter was also hard to miss, as much of the letter was addressed to Lebanese Muslims and Christians, and resistance objectives were specifically identified in putting an end to Israeli occupation and "expelling the Americans, the French and their allies definitely from Lebanon" (The Hizballah Program: an Open Letter, 1985).

The above narrative suggests that while developments in Iran had an impact on Shi'i politics in Lebanon, the pretext allowing the Islamic revolution to have such an impact was indeed emanating from within Lebanon; for it is the activity of the several Shi'i clerics and the call of socio-political reform that started a few years before the revolution in Iran that gave rise to a unique political identity for the Amal and Hezbollah constituency. At the same time, Israel's invasion and occupation of Lebanese land provided the pretext for armed resistance. Thus, the formation of the Islamic identity of Hezbollah cannot be seen as a mere result of Iran's policy of exporting its Islamic revolution. This is not by any means to say that Hezbollah should

be exclusively analyzed as a Lebanese political party/liberation movement; it is rather to emphasize the need to look at it through the broader lens of international politics. Hezbollah's expansion of functions, namely in the domestic political sphere and its participation in parliamentary and municipal elections after the Taif accord, were read by many scholars as evidence of an identity transformation process, by which Hezbollah was increasingly becoming 'Lebanonized'. However, such an analysis would not adequately explain why Hezbollah would still be involved in regional politics and military activities outside the Lebanese borders.

To contemplate further, any attempt to apply binary, mutually exclusive categorization of Hezbollah's identity - as either Lebanese *or* a regional proxy of Iran- would be incomplete and unrewarding. An alternative explanation would be possible if we are to recognize the hybrid identity of Hezbollah as a regional non-state actor with allegiance to al-wali al-faqih *and* a Lebanese political party.

3.1.3. Structure

On a structural level, Hezbollah went all the way from being a group of loosely organized guerilla fighters working in secrecy, to a complex and highly organized entity, one that engages in contentious politics as one of Lebanon's largest political parties, delivers social, educational, healthcare and at times infrastructure services, and boasts a formidable semi-professional highly equipped armed force.

The reason we are looking at the structure of Hezbollah is mainly to understand three things: i) what this structure tells us about the party's level of autonomy; ii) about its identity; and iii) how these structures co-relate with its capacity to mobilize resources. On the first element, Hezbollah follows a hierarchical pyramid structure, headed by a collective leadership of a Shura (Consultative) Council that is elected by the party's

primary figures of authority who form the Central Council. From among the seven members, a Secretary General and a Deputy are internally selected, and each of the remaining five would head one of the five assemblies forming the party's political and administrative apparatus (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 44-47; Qassem, 2005, pp. 60-63). Apart from the overall guardianship of al-wali al-faqih, Hezbollah's hierarchy and election process of its leadership are practically independent from any exogenous actors. However, it is important to understand the exact role of al-wali al-faqih to better comprehend the level of autonomy Hezbollah enjoys in decision-making.

Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary General, explains that the necessary authority and accreditation received from al-wali al-faqih are "reflected as substantial independence at the practical level, not necessitating direct supervision," while requesting clerical permission from al-wali al-faqih is reserved for "essential issues or overtures that might affect any of the working principles or requiring knowledge of legislative jurisprudence" (Qassem, 2005, p. 56).

As such, Hezbollah's high level of autonomy in decisions relating to its domestic environment would be understood as not in conflict with this concept of guardianship. At the same time, and based on Qassem's account, Hezbollah frames keeping in harmony with al-wali al-faqih directives as a self-made decision by the party's leadership early on upon its establishment. In any case, such a decision to follow a certain ideology or join a certain alliance is not a function of an actor's statehood/non-statehood.

On a practical level, the party's structure expanded over different stages of time to accommodate its need to mobilize more and a wider range of resources.

In the early beginnings, Hezbollah functioned mainly through secret circles of fighters trained by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in Bekaa. At the time, resource

mobilization had been focused on recruitment and training of fighters, and military training was a pre-requisite for party membership (Qassem, 2005, pp. 67-68).

Social work was one of the first areas of expansion, as Hezbollah founded Jihad al-Binaa Association in 1985 to reconstruct homes and repair damages caused by Israel's bombings (Qassem, 2005, p. 83). Soon, Hezbollah would be delivering welfare services through its Social Unit and the various semi-autonomous social organizations it established to address the needs of its constituency, with attention paid – but not limited – to the wounded resistance fighters and families of those who lost their lives in battle. Similarly, delivery of healthcare and educational services was extended to the growing constituency of the party. Dedicated units were also established to lead the party's media institutions, handle its external relations, its finances, and guide its representatives in professional syndicates and associations (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 49-64). These expansions were most necessary as Hezbollah entered the arena of political contention and had to mobilize popular support in a country known for its clientelistic politics, and as internal politics required engaging with other domestic political actors. In other words, it is fair to say that such adjustments in Hezbollah's internal structures were mostly necessitated by the domestic political context, to which the thesis turns next as part of the analysis of exogenous factors surrounding the party's evolution.

3.2 Domestic and Regional Contexts

3.2.1. Birth amidst the civil war

During the period since its foundation until the signing of the Taif Accord which brought an end to the Lebanese civil war (1982-1991), Hezbollah was able to thrive despite, or perhaps due to, a complex mixture of domestic and regional contexts.

Domestically, the civil war had further undermined the ‘perpetually’ weak Lebanese state, whose geography had by then turned into an arena for regional contenders. Years before the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war of 1975, PLO guerilla fighters were contesting the Lebanese state’s monopoly over use of lethal force by making south Lebanon a base for their military operations against Israel. A de facto situation that was formalized in what became known as the Cairo agreement of 1969, giving the PLO the right to have an armed presence on Lebanese soil for the purpose of fighting the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Soon after, this presence would provide the pretext for the outbreak of the civil war, during which Lebanese militias thrived at the expense of the state’s authority. Syria’s military intervention authorized by the League of Arab States in 1976 was a sign that such authority had become practically non-existent.

However, of all foreign players in Lebanon, it was Israel’s presence that turned pivotal for the emergence of the Islamic resistance. The former’s limited invasion of 1978, the broader one of 1982 and subsequent occupation of south Lebanon ended up setting off the Shi’a community against Israel, and promoting the fortunes of Hezbollah by providing a politico-military environment that legitimated its presence and actions (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 17).

When adding to the equation years of the state’s neglect of underdeveloped Shi’a areas – many of which are situated in south Lebanon, the very same scene for PLO operations and Israel’s military occupation later on; the outcome is a set stage for the newly emerging political forces within the Shi’i community to capitalize on. An opportunity that Hezbollah was namely successful in seizing (Salloukh & Mikaelian, Hizbullah in Lebanon, 2013, p. 120). On regional level, Hezbollah benefitted from a Syrian-Iranian convergence of interests over its role as a resistance movement.

At the time, the Iraqi-Iranian war that erupted in 1981 had pushed the new Islamic regime in Tehran to seek expanding its regional alliances, namely within the Arab world (Harik, 2004, p. 39). Damascus, already at odds with the ruling Ba'athist comrades in Baghdad, and apprehensive of a threat from a victorious Iraq, opted to balance against it and thus sided with Iran (Salloukh, 2004, p. 93). It, also, was in need of a strategic ally that could help improve its negotiating stance over the Golan – the strategically situated plateau occupied by Israel in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and balance against the threats posed by Israel and the United States. With the departure of the PLO fighters from Lebanon, a deal with Tehran to support the Islamic Resistance fighters seemed to secure both Syria's and Iran's aims. Consequently, the Iranian revolutionary guards' access to Bekaa was granted, signaling the start of the flow of Iranian support to the Islamic Resistance with Syria's blessing (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002, p. 14; Harik, 2004, pp. 30-31; Blanford, 2011, pp. 21-23).

The relations between Tehran and Damascus were just as necessary throughout the whole period, and proved most essential to contain the in-fighting which ensued between Amal and Hezbollah fighters towards the end of the 1980's. At that point, the 'camps war' – in which Amal, backed by Syria, sought to ensure PLO's influence in the Palestinian refugee camps is put to an end – had just ended. The movement, backed by Syria yet again, seemed to be determined to solidify its power in south Lebanon and the southern suburb of Beirut and to draw a limit for Hezbollah, who refused to participate in the camps war. However, as Hezbollah stood ground, Iran intervened with Damascus to put a conclusion to the clashes (Qassem, 2005, pp. 100-102).

3.2.2. The post-Taif era

As a political settlement of the Lebanese civil war through the Taif Accord approached, it was becoming clear that the rules of the game were about to change. Hezbollah was quick to understand what such a change could bring to its existence and ability to mobilize resources, especially that the progress towards political settlement came around the same time internal fighting intensified with Amal. Those political and military developments were perceived to pose a serious threat to Hezbollah, namely as its leadership labelled the clashes with Amal as “a fight for existence,” and as developments accompanying the Taif agreement seemed to assume its secure implementation would require the party to be dissolved (Qassem, 2005, pp. 101-102). While the same Syrian-Iranian understandings that put an end to the fighting between Amal and Hezbollah succeeded in providing political cover for the Islamic Resistance and excluding it from Taif’s militia disarmament measures, the turbulence in the party’s relationship with Syria and Amal, the two key allies dominating the politico-military scene in Lebanon, was alarming for Hezbollah. It became apparent that the party had to bolster its own strengths if it is to survive the country’s shift back to the political track. This particularly provided the rationale for Hezbollah to start considering politics as an arena for contention, for the first time.

Capitalizing on an organizational structure already growing to expand the popular base of the Islamic resistance, a track record of effective guerilla warfare tactics against the Israeli occupation and the South Lebanon Army (SLA), and the fact that it largely steered clear of being involved in the internal fighting during the civil war, Hezbollah started its evolution into a political party while keeping its military activities. Within a few years, the party would be participating in the first post-war parliamentary

elections of 1992, winning a total of 12 seats in the parliament as the first ever Islamist bloc in the history of Lebanon (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 113).

Hezbollah followed the same pragmatic approach of political participation in the following two parliamentary elections of 1996 and 2000, maintaining its presence in the parliament. By doing so, the Hezbollah secured a foothold in the Lebanese political system, legitimized its presence as a political party and enhanced the protection offered to its constituency and resistance (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 121-122). However, Hezbollah retained an opposition role in the successive parliaments during the *Pax-Syriana*. By exerting pressure on government to address socio-political grievances, refusing to participate in the spoil-sharing arrangements practiced by the ruling coalition, and enhancing its good reputation through provision of social welfare services, Hezbollah managed to keep its stocks high amongst its constituency and the wider Lebanese populace.

At the same time, Hezbollah was adamant to ensure its military presence and activities in south Lebanon were not challenged. Thus, it continued to argue against the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south, while being determined to have the Lebanese government's continuous political cover for its armed resistance.

For Hezbollah, this carefully calculated formula of political participation was necessary to secure two main goals: i) avoid having resistance activities subjected to the willpower of government in fear this would place it in the sphere of political limitations, and ii) maintaining its freedom to act without restraint, without charging the government with responsibility for such actions (Qassem, 2005, p. 106).

Despite Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000, Hezbollah insisted the withdrawal was not complete as it excluded the Sheb'a farms – proclaimed by Hezbollah and the Lebanese government as a Lebanese territory. A position that

Hezbollah's domestic opponents labeled as a mere pretext for the party to maintain its weapons (Mikaelian & Salloukh, 2016, p. 134).

The Lebanese government officially adopted the same position inside the United Nations. However, the latter insisted that Israel had completed its withdrawal from Lebanon as per the UN Security Resolution 425 of 1978 (UN Secretary-General Report S/2000/590, 16 June 2000). Consequently, Lebanon and Syria came under increasing international pressure, leading to the UN Security Council adoption of the American-French engineered resolution 1559 (2004), which called upon "all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon" – in reference to Syria, and for "the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias" – referring to Hezbollah and the remaining Palestinian armed groups (United Nations Security Council S/RES/1559, 2004).

All this took place at a time when the world was awash with America's post-9/11 'war on terror,' for which Hezbollah and Hamas were on the target list as 'terrorist organizations.' The United State made it intentions towards the two movements public and was pressuring Syria and the Lebanese government to end their support for the two (Daher A. , 2019, pp. 180-182). The pressure was just about to intensify.

3.2.3. Syria out, Hezbollah in

For Hezbollah, 2005 marked the beginning of a new era characterized by two major changes associated with developments within domestic and regional contexts: i) an increased involvement in domestic politics after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, and ii) swapping roles with Syria, whereby Hezbollah now was the one offering protection to Bashar Al-Assad's regime against internal threats.

The assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri in February 2005, amidst rising tensions with Syria overextending the Lebanese president Emile Lahoud's term in office, brought about a new challenge for Hezbollah in the domestic arena. As Lebanese, Arab, and international pressures accumulated on Syria to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, Damascus was finally forced to end its 29 years of military presence in Lebanon (Daher A. , 2019, p. 183). For Hezbollah, that meant the earlier Syrian-brokered post-Taif arrangements were at risk and an adjustment was needed to maintain the domestic political cover for resistance (Koss, 2018, p. 56).

This all happened against a regional backdrop that included the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, and a growing tension between two regional alliances, consisting of Iran, Syria and resistance movements (namely Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine) on one side, and 'moderate' Arab countries allied with the US (including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and the UAE) on the other (Mikaelian & Salloukh, 2016, p. 136).

Hezbollah's response to the perceived domestic threats was multi-layered. On the popular level, Hezbollah and its pro-Syria allies spared no effort in mobilizing large-scale demonstrations to show they have enjoyed as much of public support as their anti-Syria adversaries, who also reverted to a popular showdown. The dates for demonstrations organized by both blocs, on March 8th and March 14th, 2005 respectively, became the labels for these two domestic alliances – originally divided over the position from Syria's involvement in Lebanese politics.

Politically, Hezbollah reversed its traditional position of non-participation in the government and joined the 69th Lebanese government headed by Fouad Al-Siniora with two ministers. But this came only after references to the protection of resistance and recognizing its function as a national tool for liberation and defense were included

the ministerial declaration. At the same time, Hezbollah sought to secure a cross-confessional national alliance to repair the damage that resulted from the dissolving of the Syrian-sponsored Sunni-Shi'i ruling coalition, after the Hariri assassination and Syria's withdrawal. This was secured through a memorandum of understanding signed with the Christian Free Patriotic movement (FPM) in February 2006 (Koss, 2018, pp. 57-59).

However, the party's participation in the government did not stop tensions between the 8 and 14 March blocs from growing over several issues, namely Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers leading to a new Israeli war on Lebanon in July 2006, and the government's support for the establishment of an international Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) to investigate Hariri's assassination in 2007, despite objections from Hezbollah and its allies. The first issue was a manifestation of the disapproval of many Lebanese, mostly represented within 14 March bloc, of Hezbollah's continued possession of weapons and how they are utilized domestically and regionally. This, alongside the position from the STL, continued to form two key issues of contention within Lebanese politics, up to the moment of writing this thesis in August 2020. At the same time, both issues overlapped with the overall regional strife between the pro-American and pro-Iranian blocs.

The early tensions in Hezbollah's first attempt at joining government re-invoked its domestic insecurities and prompted it to try to increase its weight in the executive authority, calling for a unity government. The FPM-Hezbollah alliance, which included Amal by default, served as a leverage to call for a veto share of one third of cabinet members to ensure that no decisions contrary to the interests of these parties were approved by cabinet.

As international pressure increased on the Lebanese government to take action against Hezbollah, further widening the rift between two blocs, the decision of the 14 March-led government to dismantle Hezbollah's telecommunications network in May 2008 was seen as the last straw for the party, to whom this network has been an essential and strategic component of its resistance infrastructure. With the help of its allies, namely Amal, Hezbollah responded with a military takeover of West Beirut targeting what was believed to be a skeletal military structure of Hariri's Sunni Future movement (Mikaelian & Salloukh, 2016, p. 137). It was an event that would leave a lasting sectarian scar and, for many Lebanese, shatter the party's hitherto image as a resistance movement that had kept a distance from the sectarian bloodshed during the Lebanese civil war. Within two weeks, the deal negotiated by Qatar to defuse the tension, known as Doha Accord, would ultimately recognize Hezbollah as the player with veto power over matters Lebanese.

The Doha Agreement resulted in the election of Michel Suleiman as a new President and the formation of national unity government that presided over the following parliamentary elections in 2009. Eleven years later, Lebanon witnessed several governments, one delayed parliamentary election, and a new presidential term. In all instances, Hezbollah's behavior revealed a certain pattern.

First, the party was pragmatic in terms of domestic alliances, with the central aim of benefiting of a political cover as extensive as possible. This was embodied by a tendency to pursue national unity governments as the preferred formula, whenever possible, while maintaining a substantial share for the party and its allies in preferred option remained.

Second, Hezbollah's pragmatism was conditioned by guarantees that Hezbollah's interests, in relation to its weapons and right of resistance (identified in loose terms

that include a regional role in several Arab countries), are not contested; and by the political interests of its allies – namely FPM. Whenever the above conflicted with these two parameters, or when the 14 March bloc simply refused to join such government, Hezbollah opted for an alliance government, sometimes disguised as formed of a technocrats or independents.

Third, Hezbollah continued to perceive the STL as an American-Israeli tool aimed at criminalizing the resistance and retained its position to deal with the Tribunal verdict as ‘non-existent’ (An-nahar, 2020), even as its final ruling indicted only one person, who is a member of the party, while indicating that there was “no evidence that the Hezbollah leadership had any involvement in Mr Hariri’s murder” and “no direct evidence of Syrian involvement in it” (Ayyash et al.: Summary of judgement, 2020, p. 15).

Regionally, as the Arab Spring reached the streets of Syria in 2011, Hezbollah - and Iran - decided to support Bashar Al-Assad’s regime against calls for regime change. After months of responding to demonstrators with armed force, the situation in Syria spiraled into a civil war. The party’s support soon went beyond political backing to include wide deployment of Hezbollah’s fighters on various fronts inside Syria. The reasoning used to support such a decision by Hezbollah was that a regime change in Syria was perceived as a threat that could eventually undermine the axis of resistance. By taking out Syria from that axis, Iran would have been denied access to the territory of an allied state bordering Israel, and supply routes between Hezbollah and Iran through that territory would have been cut, undermining the party’s deterrence capabilities vis-à-vis Israel (Mikaelian & Salloukh, 2016, p. 139).

3.2.4. Interacting with pressures and opportunities

Rather than being stages of a full identity transformation into a Lebanese political party, the above-mentioned changes were rather calculated adjustments by Hezbollah to ensure its continued function as an armed trans-national non-state actor, an Islamic resistance in Hezbollah's own terms. However, the argument on the party's identity transformation is still partially valid. As Hezbollah became more involved in Lebanese politics it gradually embraced its Lebanese identity – but only in parallel with the Islamic militant one. At the same time, the party's increased involvement in domestic politics, which continued to be characterized by corruption and failure to deliver, meant Hezbollah was no longer shielded from the criticism it used to aim at state institutions when it was not part of the ruling coalition during the Pax-Syriana (1990-2005) period. Moreover, and in terms of popular support, Hezbollah's focus on resistance at a time when the Lebanese militias were busy fighting each other during the civil war, helped portray the party as a genuine resistance movement and supported the rationale for it to keep its weapons arsenal when all other Lebanese militias were disarmed. However, the utilization of Hezbollah's arsenal and fighters internally and in the sectarian regional conflict ultimately distorted its image in the eyes and minds of many of its supporters in Lebanon and the region.

3.3 Alliance Formation: Key Observations

The above examination of internal and external contexts within which Hezbollah operated suggests that alliances played a key role in enabling Hezbollah to respond to contextual pressures and continue to mobilize resources. A deeper analysis of the party's network of alliances reveals four key observations.

First, Hezbollah's solid alliance with Iran, which emanated from internal ideological factors, has served as the most reliable and trusted source of external support. This alliance has been crucial not only in channeling Iranian state resources to Hezbollah on a massive scale and in a highly stable manner, but also in providing the latter with a comparative advantage over almost all other Lebanese political actors, who are largely reliant either on domestic state-generated revenues or unstable external sources of support to sustain their clientelistic networks.

Similarly, the intersection of interests between Iran and Syria, namely the shared perception of the common threat posed against both states by Israel and the United States, served to provide a political cover for Hezbollah since its birth and throughout the Pax-Syriana period.

Third, the very same perception of threat provided the rationale for Hezbollah to ally with Palestinian resistance groups, namely Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, despite the strong disagreement between Hezbollah and Hamas over position from the war in Syria.

Fourth, despite being an ideological organization frequently labeled as 'fundamentalist,' Hezbollah has demonstrated a high level of pragmatism in the formation of its domestic alliances, whether for short-term purposes (such as electoral coalitions) or long-term objectives (such as the coalition with the Free Patriotic movement). Such pragmatism allowed Hezbollah to benefit from the high diversity of Lebanon's population as well as political spectrum, which in turn increases the intersection of interests with multiple regional and global political actors that had been involved in Lebanon in one way or another. Thus, shielding Lebanon from being seen as an entity that is synonymous with Hezbollah, and allowing the latter to evade

potential sanctions that can be imposed on the country as a result of the party's actions through the state-centric international system.

3.4 Impact on Mobilization of Resources

On the level of independent variables, two factors have been key in deciding outcomes for mobilization of resources: i) a context of a weak state failing in its domestic and external functions, and ii) a network of domestic and regional alliances.

The domestic context of an institutionally weak and externally penetrated Lebanese state disregarding the socio-economic needs of the Shi'a community and unable to liberate occupied land or deter external Israeli threats, created the pretext for mobilizing resources by Hezbollah (Mikaelian & Salloukh, 2016, p. 120). While socio-economic inequalities provided the grounds for mobilizing popular political support, warding off Israel's occupation and constant military threat justified the efforts to mobilize human and military resources. Hezbollah, quite efficiently, countered the state's failure in delivering on both fronts with a successful investment in its own alternative structures, in nearly all sectors. Thus, undermining the 'traditional' differentiation of function demarcating the state's fields of dominion.

The party's diverse and multiple institutions were delivering key social, educational, health and municipal services to the party's constituency and the larger Shi'i community at large (Cammett & Issar, 2010, p. 396). The contribution of such services to alleviating socio-economic hardships, whereas the state fell short of assuming its responsibilities in this regard, helped Hezbollah boost the size of its constituency and increase its popularity at the expense of the Lebanese government and its main political rival – Amal movement (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 53-54; Daher J. , 2016, pp. 126-127).

More importantly, the Islamic Resistance's popularly and officially recognized role in driving Israel out of south Lebanon in May 2000, and its later confrontation with Israel in the 2006 war on Lebanon – during which the Lebanese Army was largely a bystander with only symbolic actions against Israeli forces – helped signify and legitimize Hezbollah as an effective national defensive asset against external threats. The party's involvement in the 2017 Dawn of the Hills campaign, launched by the Lebanese Armed Forces against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), helped to bolster its image as a legitimate force preserving Lebanese national security – although not without raising protests from some domestic and external actors given the 'Military Dualism' Hezbollah's actions created (Nerguizian, 2018).

At the same time, the alliance with the Islamic regime in Tehran was crucial to utilize the massive state revenues and other resources for building up military, political and social capacities and expanding Hezbollah's internal structures and domestic influence. However, it should be noted that such an alliance was only made possible by the virtue of the coinciding revolutionization of political Islamic discourse within the Shi'ite communities of Iran and Lebanon. Furthermore, the alliance with Syria as the dominant political actor in Lebanon for the good part of Hezbollah's life until 2005, and by virtue of geopolitics after that, helped provide necessary political cover in post-Taif political system in Lebanon, as well as an unobstructed flow of resources from Iran.

From 2005 onwards, Hezbollah had to get further involved in politics by joining government, to compensate for the potential loss of political cover. However, it was necessary to seek a cross-confessional alliance to maintain ability to evade international sanctions directed against the Lebanese state. A virtue long praised by Hezbollah as key to maintaining operational independence of resistance activities.

An analysis of Hezbollah's behavior at both domestic and trans-national levels, namely in alliance formation, shows that it has been ultimately conditioned by its focus on ensuring uninterrupted mobilization of the resources necessary for it to maintain its geopolitical role as an 'Islamic resistance'. Its success to maintain and expand geopolitical influence so far has been a result of its success in mobilizing such resources.

Whether further embracing a Lebanese identity, opening up to contentious politics, forming domestic or regional alliances, putting on a brave face at times or picking up arms at others – home or abroad, Hezbollah's behavior has been conditioned by its perception of threats affecting its ability to pursue its core proclaimed geopolitical objective⁴.

⁴ The term 'ability' used here to refer to the set of necessary financial, human, and military resources, as well as unobstructed access to territory.

Chapter Four

Hamas: from a Social Movement to a Quasi-State

This chapter follows the same logic as the previous one on Hezbollah, beginning with an assessment of the influence of internal (with focus on identity and structures) and external factors (including domestic political, social and other contexts, as well as regional political context and alliances) on the birth and evolution of Hamas, and how did it affect its transformation from a popular resistance movement into a transregional political actor. It then examines how internal and external factors have affected the movement's ability to mobilize resources, while evading pressures from the state-centric international system, which this thesis identifies as an intervening variable deciding NSAs ability to achieve and maintain geopolitical influence.

4.1 Internal Factors

4.1.1. Early roots

The Islamic Resistance movement (Hamas) was founded in December 1987, as “a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Palestine” (The Hamas Charter, 1988). The rise of Islamist sentiment across the region was in large measure a reaction to the failure of Arab nationalism to bring about the promised change after the defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war with Israel (Hroub, 2000, pp. 31-32), and the failure of the secular Palestinian nationalism to deliver despite their dominance for the decade that followed (Gunning, 2008, p. 33). Although this context did contribute to the resurgence of Islamist thought as an alternative to secular nationalism, the roots of first Islamist influences on resistance in Palestine can be traced as far back as the 1920's,

when the Syrian-born sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam arrived at the coastal city of Haifa and began to instigate people to revolt against the British occupation, which was preparing to hand over control of Palestine to the Zionist movement. In 1935, al-Qassam was killed in battle by British troops while putting his preaching to practice, with his death contributing to the outbreak of the Great Palestinian Revolt of 1936-1939 (Nafi, 1997). The name Hamas chose for its military wing, the Martyr Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, is symbolic of the movement's view of itself as "a link in the chain of Jihad against the Zionist occupation" (The Hamas Charter, 1988).

The more particular linkage for Hamas, however, is traced back to the early beginnings of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, which started establishing branches and offices in the country in late 1945, reaching up to 25 offices by the 1948 war. The Brotherhood's role in that war helped make them one of the most popular Palestinian political currents until 1954, the year Egyptian president Jamal Abdul Nasser dealt a blow to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Gaza Strip (which was put under Egyptian administration after 1948 war), forcing them to lay low and wait for the regional winds to change (Saleh, 2014, pp. 25-27).

The crackdown on the Brotherhood imposed a forced hiatus on the movement's resistance activities, as it prompted it to focus on social reform and re-consolidating its power in preparation of a right moment to re-engage in armed resistance. A decision that led many enthusiast members of the Brotherhood to breakaway and join forces with others to establish the Palestine National Liberation movement (Fateh) in 1957. Most notable among those was Khalil al-Wazir who later became the second highest ranking leader within Fateh after Yasser Arafat (Hroub, 2000, pp. 25-26; Gunning, 2008, pp. 27-28; Tamimi, 2011, p. 17).

The 1967 occupation of Gaza Strip – and the West Bank which had been annexed by Jordan in 1950 – allowed the Brotherhood in Gaza to break free from Nasser's grip, an opportunity that the movement seized to set out on a campaign to establish mosques, as well as social, educational and healthcare institutions, through which it spread its ideology and mobilized popular support, in preparation for the confrontation with the Israeli occupation (Hroub, 2000, p. 30). The several charities and organizations that were established in Gaza, the West Bank and the diaspora helped the Brotherhood to become a major contender to Fateh in student body and professional syndicates elections (Saleh, 2014, pp. 30-31). At the same time, the occupation united the entire fragmented geography of historical Palestine in some sense, thus allowing for enhanced movement and communications between members in Gaza, the West Bank and territories occupied in 1984 (Tamimi, 2011, p. 19).

As Egypt headed for peace with Nasser's successor, Anwar al-Sadat, visiting Israel in 1977, the Palestinians were further pushed towards a self-help mode of thinking. The momentum that was gradually being built by the Palestinian Brothers now gained a stronger rationale to go back to resistance. Discussions and efforts to re-group were starting to take place among the Brotherhood constituency in different locations, led by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 12, 21).

The green light for (re-)launching armed resistance by the Brotherhood in Palestine came in 1983, as an internal conference finally decided that liberation and the establishment of the Islamic state can go in parallel. However, the first attempts at establishing military structures in Gaza by Sheikh Yassin were discovered by Israeli authorities, which captured Yassin in 1984 and sentenced him to 13 years in jail, of which he spent only a few months as he was freed in a prisoner swap between Palestinian factions and Israel in 1985. The same year, the military structure was

restored and expanded, and the decision to seize any upcoming opportunity to confront occupation was taken. That moment came on 8 December 1987, when four Palestinian workers were run down by an Israeli truck, igniting what became known as the first intifada (uprising). Hamas urged its followers to take part in escalating popular confrontations with Israeli occupation forces and issued its first communique on 14 December (Saleh, 2014, pp. 31-32). The next section further discusses the impact of the above early roots on Hamas' identity formation upon its foundation.

4.1.2. Identity formation

Hamas's first charter (which was issued before its 1st anniversary) is clear about its Islamist views, including a view of Islam as a comprehensive way of life and the aspiration to establish an Islamic state, and about the movement's connection to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, the nationalist sentiment is also hard to miss, as Hamas identifies itself in the charter as "a distinct Palestinian movement," and limits its objective of "raising the banner of God" to the territory of Palestine. Furthermore, the charter includes an article dedicated to explaining Hamas's view of nationalism as "part and parcel of religious ideology" (The Hamas Charter, 1988). This notion has been further emphasized in the movement's practice over the years of confining its military activities to the historic land of Palestine (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010). Also, in terms of political practice, the Islamist ideology of Hamas has served as a way of mobilizing people for the purpose of national liberation rather than for enforcing Islamic Shari'a as a law or establishing an Islamic state. This, however, not to deny the social practice of spreading Islamic thought in the Palestinian society, namely by the Muslim Brotherhood during the period predating Hamas's establishment.

A look at the movement's political document, titled 'A Document of General Principles and Policies' and issued around its 30th anniversary, further emphasizes this analysis. The new document of 2017 identified Hamas as "a national Palestinian Islamic liberation and resistance movement," in that same order, used the term 'resistance' more frequently instead of 'jihad,' and dropped references to the connection with the Muslim Brotherhood and to the establishment of an Islamic state (A Document of General Principles and Policies of Hamas, 2017; Adwan, 2019, pp. 18-20). While understanding causality of such a change would need further analysis and goes beyond the scope of this thesis, the change itself is indicative of a strengthened nationalist identity.

4.1.3. Structure

Hamas's birth was by no means a sudden event announcing the spontaneous creation of a new political current in Palestine, it rather marked a transition in the practice of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood into a new phase, where it adopted a strategy of confrontation with Israeli occupation. Therefore, the very first structures on which Hamas stood upon its foundation in 1987 had been put in place years earlier. The Brotherhood set up its first social structures in Gaza in 1967 via the establishment of al-Jam'iyah al-Islamiyah (the Islamic Society), benefiting from Israel's occupation of the Strip and its adoption of a policy permissive of forming non-political social institutions hitherto banned under Egypt's rule. The Society's activities, which focused on educational, recreational, and sporting programs for the youth, were successful in attracting followers to the Brotherhood. A new institution was established in 1976 under the name of al-Mujamma' al-Islami (the Islamic Centre), with a wider range of activities that included the provision of social, medical, and educational services, in

addition to the establishment of mosques, schools and clinics across Gaza Strip. At the same time, zakat committees in Gaza were engaged in systemic fundraising to maintain the flow of funds for various activities, alongside fundraising networks established abroad by Brotherhood branches to support Palestinians under occupation (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 36-38).

Another major institution that helped expand the Brotherhood's popular mobilization efforts was the Islamic University, which was the first university to be established in Gaza, in 1978. This significantly increased the movement's ability to reach out to thousands of energetic youth, while providing much needed opportunities in employment and high quality education (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 39-40). Popular mobilization through student unions was also active abroad, with several Palestinian student bodies with Islamic orientation established in Germany, the United Kingdom, the US, and Kuwait, which was namely important in attracting young recruits who later became prominent leaders of Hamas abroad, including Khaled Mesh'al, who later headed Hamas's Political Bureau for many years (Saleh, 2014, pp. 30-31).

The first steps for laying the ground work for military structures began in 1980 as the Brotherhood sent some of its members to receive military training abroad. The movement's security apparatus, known as MAJD, was established in Gaza the next year, and later expanded and restructured in 1985. As mentioned earlier, Sheik Yassin's first attempt at establishing a military structure for the Brotherhood in Gaza was disrupted by Israel in 1984, but resumed in 1986 after he was released in a swap deal between Israel and Palestinian resistance groups (Saleh, 2014, pp. 31-32).

After Hamas was officially announced, its political and military structures took more shape. Under the political part, two main bodies manage the entire organization: the Shura Council making decisions at the very top, and the political bureau which is the

executive organ. The political leadership is geographically divided between the inside (Gaza and the West Bank), the Israeli Prisons, and the outside – those living in diaspora. The military wing, known as al-Qassam Brigades (since 1991), is subjected to the political leadership and its internal workings remain somehow secretive. Other main organizational units include finance, media, internal security, and foreign affairs (Gleis & Berti, 2012, pp. 144-145).

The expansion in the movement's activities over the years was coupled with expansion of its structures. While social welfare structures remained essential in mobilizing recruits and popular support, its military wing became more sophisticated and better equipped as it professionalized. The movement's fundraising network diversified its funding sources to include states, corporations, charities, nonprofit organizations, private donors, and later self-generation of revenues (Gleis & Berti, 2012, pp. 146, 152). In the following section, the thesis will shift to examining how domestic and regional contexts influenced Hamas' development, behavior, and its ability to play a role in the international relations of the Middle East.

4.2 Domestic and Regional Contexts

4.2.1. Birth at the onset of an uprising

The birth of Hamas followed a growing sense of despair among Palestinians due to several factors, but mainly due to the eviction of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 and the abandonment of military action for political action, an increasing Arab disinterest in the Palestinian issue – with the major Arab military sidelined by the Camp David peace agreement between Cairo and Tel Aviv, and increasing socio-economic and political pressures on Palestinians living under Israeli occupation (Hroub, 2000, p. 36).

Around the same time, and as Islamist ideologies were rising across the region at the expense of nationalist ideologies which received successive blows and defeats, the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran was giving a boost to anti-Israeli and anti-American rhetoric. Meanwhile, the launch of the jihad project to liberate Afghanistan from the Soviet Union was contributing to emphasizing militancy in Islamist thought and practice. All these events were putting the Brotherhood in Palestine under increased pressure to take action beyond social reform programs, and even contributed to the foundation of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organization, whose founders came partly from within the Brotherhood but were in disagreement with their leadership over their order of priorities (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 42-43).

In the meantime, rivalry between the Brotherhood (via the Islamic Center) and its nationalist rival, Fateh-led PLO, in Gaza was growing over domination of the public sphere, with recurrent episodes of violent and accusations directed at the Islamists of enforcing their ideology, beliefs and codes of conduct on Gazans by force and intimidation. At the time, the militant PLO was rather considered the source of threat by the Israeli authorities. So, the latter reportedly turned a blind eye to the rising power of the Islamists who were not engaging in anti-Israel activities back then, in an attempt to balance the power of the PLO in Gaza (Mishal & Sela, 2002, pp. 20-26; Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010, pp. 39-51).

Eventually, having resolved its internal order of priorities and laid the foundation for military infrastructures, the Brotherhood was ready to seize the opportunity when it came in 1987 to announce the birth of Hamas. Equipped with the infrastructure and the global logistical support needed, the movement provided momentum that helped sustain the uprising for a few years (Tamimi, 2011, p. 52), shifting the center of gravity of the Palestinian struggle back into the territory of Palestine.

The first test for the newly founded Hamas came in 1989, as Israel cracked down on the movement's leaders and members in response to its increasing military operations against Israeli targets, including the kidnapping and killing of two Israeli soldiers in two separate events by the same cell that year (Saleh, 2014, p. 37). The crackdown dealt 'a near-fatal blow' to Hamas as some 1,500 members of the movement were rounded up from Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and almost all of the organization's first- and second-ranking officials (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 58-59). It also resulted in exposing the organizational structure of Hamas for the first time ever (Saleh, 2014, p. 39).

Despite the sustained damage, however, Hamas proved resilient, thanks, in part, to its decentralized structure. Calling in the outside leadership to rearrange the internal structures, the movement recovered and continued its operations. Israel responded again with large scale campaigns in 1990, 1991 and 1992. However, the new arrangements put in place made restructuring of the movement after every setback "a matter of routine" (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 60-61). In December 1992, Hamas attempted to free Sheikh Yassin by kidnapping an Israeli soldier and asking the release of Yassin in return for the soldier's freedom. Upon Israel's refusal, Hamas killed the soldier, prompting an unprecedented Israeli reprisal by which 1,300 Hamas followers were arrested, and 415 Palestinians, mostly of Hamas leaders and supporters, were exiled to the borders of Israel's 'security zone' with Lebanon (Saleh, 2014, p. 39).

That incident provided Hamas with a historic opportunity to step onto the world stage, and break the media blackout imposed on it, as it found itself at the center of events and subject to sudden interest on the part of Arab and foreign actors. The UN Security Council issued its UNSCR 799 calling for the immediate return of the exiled Palestinians, while Hamas seized the moment to initiate contact with the five

permanent members of the Security Council via their embassies in Amman (Hroub, 2000, pp. 193-194). At the same time, Hamas found in this a once in a lifetime opportunity for a 'corporate retreat' during which many of its members met for the first time in years or sometimes ever. The inside and outside leaders could meet and discuss (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 68-69).

Another disturbing regional development had also brought unexpected benefits for Hamas. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait terminated its hitherto status as a hub for the outside leaders. However, as those leaders relocated to Jordan, the movement benefited from the large popular sympathy with resistance in the country and from the support of the Jordanian branch of the Brotherhood in expanding the outside activities and visibility (Saleh, 2014, p. 40). However, as the Madrid Conference for peace between the PLO and Israel drew closer, things were about to get tough again.

4.2.2. Negotiations vs. resistance: an early division

Throughout the intifada, both Hamas and the PLO leadership were contesting its direction, with the latter trying to capitalize on the largely unarmed uprising to negotiate a peace deal that would fulfill the promise of statehood (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010, p. 62). The PLO had reached this point bruised and suffering successive blows after having fought the Arab regimes of Jordan and Syria, the Lebanese militias and Israel, to no avail. Moreover, 1991 brought more bad news for the PLO as Iraq, with whom the PLO sided, was forced to leave Kuwait under the humiliation of a defeat at the hands of a US-led coalition. The Soviet Union, PLO's key international ally, collapsed the same year announcing the beginning of the era of US hegemony, just as Washington landed its forces in the region. For the PLO, the intifada was the only card left in its hand if it were to achieve anything at all through negotiations.

Hamas, on the other hand, was coming from a different vintage point. Starting fresh and having spent the last two decades mobilizing in preparation for confrontation, it was too early to quit. The intifada, they thought, was an opportunity for them to assert an active role in the fight against Israel from the West Bank and Gaza (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010, pp. 53-55; Tamimi, 2011, pp. 52-53), which brought the center of gravity into the occupied Palestinian territory.

It should be noted, however, that Hamas had no illusion about what was to come if the negotiations path is pursued. An internal document dated in July 1992 reveals that Hamas had accurately anticipated the potential threat and was weighing the pros and cons of different scenarios, including political participation in the electoral process that was to accompany the establishment of the interim authority. The calculation of potential gains and losses for Hamas was focused in large part on sustaining what has been achieved during the intifada in terms of mobilization and avoiding potential restraints of the changing domestic context. The restraints discussed in the document included isolation, containment, and the difficulty of being engaged in politics and armed resistance simultaneously. The paper did not indicate any decisions nor outcomes, as it was designed to solicit the opinions of Hamas members as part of what seemed to be an elaborate internal deliberation on the issue (Mishal & Sela, 2002, pp. 121-125).

As preparations for the Madrid Conference were underway, Yasser Arafat, the top figure of PLO and Fateh, tried to lure Hamas into the Palestine National Council, the legislative body of the PLO, to ensure the Islamists were onboard. However, Hamas put their quota request at no less than 40 per cent of the seats, coupled with a commitment to vote against any recognition of Israel (Milton-Edwards & Farrell,

2010, p. 63). Remarkably, the actual course of events did not differ from what Hamas had anticipated.

The Madrid track failed, while another shadow track resulted in signing an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal in Oslo on 13 September 1993, despite opposition from within and outside the PLO. The agreement gave way to the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) as an interim self-governance authority for the Palestinians in Gaza and parts of the West Bank. As soon as the Fateh-dominated PNA assumed control, it became apparent that opposition to the deal would not be tolerated. An early deadly confrontation took place in November 1994, when the PNA security forces killed 13 people to quell a protest (Saleh, 2014, p. 45). Future Palestinian-Israeli agreements tied progress towards enhancing the PNA's control on the ground to the PNA's success in preventing attacks against Israel (Ibhais, 2015, pp. 447-448). This practically meant that any military action against Israel by Palestinian groups opposed to the Oslo deal would be faced by PNA's coercive system, which kept growing in size and share of public budget up until 2006 (Ibhais, 2015, pp. 455-456).

More than one thousand Palestinians were detained by the PNA on political grounds in 1995 alone, but the divide between the PNA and the opposition – namely with Hamas – was yet to worsen as military actions against Israel continued. Another major crackdown hit the movement after al-Qassam claimed responsibility for a series of suicide bombings avenging the assassination of its commander Yahya Ayyash in January 1996, killing fifty Israelis and wounding others in the first three attacks (Tamimi, 2011, pp. 194-195). The PNA campaign resulted in about 1,200 arrests and the closure of several institutions of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad (Ibhais, 2015, p. 466). But the remarkable thing about this campaign was the international and regional alliance behind it, as it followed a US-backed anti-terrorism summit convened in

response to Hamas's deadly attacks in Sharm al-Sheikh in March 1996, with the participation of Israel, the PNA, the US, Egypt, Jordan and the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The conference called for identifying and shutting down financing sources of groups that stand behind such 'acts of terrorism,' without naming them, while providing support and training to all those who take action against such groups (Co-Chairmen's Statement of the Summit of Peacemakers, 1996).

The implications of that summit on Hamas continued until the eruption of the second Palestinian intifada in September 2000, with the involvement of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in coordinating security cooperation between the PNA and Israel. Restrictions against Hamas reached a point where Sheikh Yassin was put under house arrest in 1998, after an attack that killed an Israeli soldier outside an Israeli settlement compound in Gaza strip (Ibhais, 2015, p. 467).

4.2.3. The second uprising: a renewed opportunity

The second uprising brought on a halt to the path of negotiating a peaceful settlement between Israel and the leadership of the PNA. Thus, creating an opportunity for the opponents of the peace process, including Hamas and other factions insisting on their stance that resistance is the only way to end Israeli occupation. As events unfolded, almost all Palestinian groups, including even Fateh whose leaders were leading the PNA, were engaged in armed activities against Israel. The nature of this shift and renewed opportunity for Hamas was once summed up by the movement's leader Sheikh Yassin by saying: "They wanted to drag us to bargaining, but we ended up dragging them to resistance" (Saleh, 2014, p. 51).

4.2.4. Political participation and the divided geography

As Hamas decided to enter domestic politics within the PNA through the municipal elections of 2004-2005 and the parliamentary elections of 2006, evidence suggests it benefitted from several factors in mobilizing popular vote. First, the perceived corruption of Fateh-led PNA institutions. And second, a sense of futility of 13 years of negotiations with Israel, during which the latter proportioned more Palestinian land and refused to offer any compromise on the issues of final state (borders, Jerusalem and refugees); in contrast with Hamas's track record in armed resistance and the sacrifices it made namely during the second intifada. A factor that gained special attention in 2006 elections as Israel's withdrawal from Gaza Strip was portrayed as a direct result of – and a victory for –armed resistance.

4.2.5. Interacting with pressures and opportunities

Since its foundation, Hamas found itself against a non-favorable political environment, whether internally or externally. However, the movement was able to make use of several windows of opportunity to demonstrate its disruptive capabilities, benefiting from the strong social mobilization networks it had built prior to its official launch. Internally, even the early roots of Hamas embodied in the Muslim Brotherhood suffered from an early rivalry with the secular/leftist political organizations which dominated the political scene. During the early years of Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, the early founders of Hamas seized the political opportunity allowing them to mobilize and organize as a social, non-political movement. Whereas their rivals were already engaged in armed struggle against Israel. When Hamas decided to pick up arms its primary rival Fateh was moving towards a political settlement with Israel. As the political environment was increasingly becoming non-favorable for

Hamas after Oslo agreement, the latter worked simultaneously on disrupting the very political process causing this non-favorable condition, while seizing political opportunities caused by the impasse in the negotiations between Israel and Hamas' Palestinian rivals.

Yet and again, Hamas' attempts to claim representation of the Palestinians faced strong internal opposition by Fatah leadership which continues to control both the PLO and the PNA, and who conversely use their internationally recognized status as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinians to keep Hamas at bay. With the Islamist movement's attempts of taking a sizable share of this representation not yielding results in the official domestic or international structures, Hamas' main tool to remain geopolitically relevant continues to be focused on investing in disruptive capabilities that obstruct other players from overpassing the movement in implementing any major changes involving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The next section looks into Hamas' alliance formation, taking stock of key observations distilled from previous sections in this chapter, before assessing how the various internal and external factors impacted the movement's ability to mobilize resources.

4.3 Alliance Formation: Key Observations

Based on the above analysis, four key observations can be made about Hamas's alliance formation. First, it was noted that Hamas did not enjoy a steadily stable alliance with any regional state actor in the region, despite its best efforts to pursue positive relationships with Arab governments and being particularly careful not to interfere in the internal affairs of any state. As a result, the resources it was able to mobilize through networking with state actors fluctuated and was highly dependent on their own calculations of interests. Among those, Iran remained the most reliable ally

to provide continuous financial and military support, with a limited duration of interruption. Among NSAs, Hezbollah had a similar status – being almost the only non-Palestinian armed NSA allied to Hamas.

A second observation was that Hamas, initially, enjoyed a wide network of allies across the region, by virtue of the wide popular support for the Palestinian cause. Such alliances, however, were not led genuinely by the governments but rather as a result of the mainstreaming of the Palestinian cause in Arab and Islamic societies at grassroots levels. A lot of the financial support was led by organizations and individual charities rather than by official institutions and entities. A key driver of this has been the distribution of the Palestinian diaspora across the region, and Hamas being an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially that at the time of Hamas' establishment, political Islam was on the rise in the region, and the Brotherhood was the most notable Islamist movement, rallying support and adherence in almost every Arab country.

Third, the geographical distribution of Hamas' leadership between the inside and the outside (unevenly and unsystematically), made it reliant on external allies to host its external operational offices and leaders. While this arrangement provided the exiled leadership with some level of protection from direct Israeli threats, making the movement less vulnerable to pressures from Tel Aviv, it made it more amenable to pressures from its allies hosting members of this leadership. This did not necessarily dictate how Hamas would respond to such pressures, but it indicated a potential of negative impacts on its relationship with such allies when the movement's response did not meet their expectations, as was the case with the Syrian regime after the 2011 protests and the ensuing war.

Fourth, it was apparent that Hamas was never able to secure a wide alliance on the domestic level, partly due to a de facto bipolarity that to a large extent dominated the

Palestinian political arena. Hamas has been constantly contending with its main rival, Fatah, over popular support, funding from sympathizers with the Palestinian people, and representation. Fatah's longstanding leadership of the PLO, recognized as the representative of the Palestinian people by the United Nations, the League of the Arab States and majority of countries, has been a strong card continuously played by the movement. Meanwhile, Hamas and Islamic Jihad remain unrepresented within the PLO or any of its bodies.

4.4 Impact on Mobilization of Resources

In the period preceding the official birth of Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood benefited from three key domestic contextual factors on which it was able to capitalize: i) absence of restrictive state structures inhibiting social mobilization, which combined with the re-unification of hitherto segregated geographical regions of historic Palestine; ii) the failure of the Arab nation-states in performing the external defense function, which also caused the nationalist ideology to recede; and iii) poor socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians under occupation.

At the outbreak of the intifada, Hamas made use of the wide distribution of its exiled leadership, the growing Islamist sentiment, its reputation as an honest social organization which ensures delivery of social assistance to a host of beneficiaries, and the popular sympathy with the Palestinians living under occupation to raise funds and direct them to Gaza and the West Bank. This allowed Hamas to mobilize substantial financial resources to fund its military operations and network of social services. However, the domestic context that followed the creation of the PNA put Hamas under immense constraints. The movement was subjected to increased scrutiny namely as a result of Sharm al-Sheikh anti-terrorism summit in March 1996. Its ability to mobilize

financial and other resources narrowed further as a result of the American-led pressures to cut and eliminate all sources of funding and political support for Hamas within the context of its 'war on terror' in the wake of 9/11 attacks. In response, Hamas continued to diversify its funding sources, a job that did not get any easier over time, namely after the repercussions of the Arab Spring.

In terms of popular support, Hamas's bitter relations with Fateh, who continued to lead both the PNA and the PLO, were complicated by the fact that the two usually had to contend for the support of the same fan-base, made up mainly of average Palestinians. However, the PLO's abandonment of resistance seemed to play in favor of Hamas when negotiations with Israel deteriorated (Gleis & Berti, 2012, p. 149), a condition that has become the norm rather than the exception. Al-Qassam's resistance performance in Gaza during the second intifada also helped give Hamas credit for Israel's withdrawal from the Strip in 2005.

Eventually, Hamas's takeover of the Gaza strip shortly after its electoral victory played a crucial role in providing a protective environment for the movement's continued mobilization of resources and accumulation of power, and avoiding a replication of the constraining domestic context that followed the establishment of the PNA. The external constraining context, embodied in the Israeli-Egyptian blockade on Gaza, did put limitations on Hamas's ability to mobilize resources. However, it did not eliminate it altogether, as the movement's control over population, geography and institutions persists, with a de facto control over the use of armed force internally and externally. Hence the description of a quasi-state.

Chapter Five

Hezbollah And Hamas Compared

5.1 Identity Formation

On a very basic note, both movements identify Islam as the primary source of their guiding principles, view it as a comprehensive way of life whether at the individual level or in the public space, thus idealizing an Islamic state as the utopian form of social organization – at least in theory. They both set liberation of the land and defense of their people against Israeli threats as a key objective and adopt armed resistance as the primary means to that end. Both share a view of Islam as a comprehensive way of life. The rise of the political power of both movements came around the same time as the Islamic revolution was succeeding in overthrowing the Shah regime in Iran. The establishment of an Islamic state by Ayatullah Khomeini set a practical example of the achievability of such an aspiration. Moreover, and at the level of practice, notable are the calls led by scholars for reform of existing sociopolitical systems as a key factor in grass root mobilization in the respective contexts within which these movements have evolved.

Despite these similarities, the two movements subscribe to two very different schools of thought within political Islam. On one hand, Hezbollah subscribes to Twelver Shi'a Islam, which adopts a belief of the infallible Twelve Imams as successors of prophet Muhammad, and adheres to the concept of full guardianship of al-wali al-faqih (the Guardian Jurist) in the absence of the Imams. A concept that is embodied in practice in the shared view of al-wali al-faqih as the supreme religious and political leader, by

Hezbollah, the Iranian regime, and any other adherent to this concept. Forging alliances based on shared ideology is but one manifestation of such view.

On the other hand, Hamas subscribes to Sunni Islam and is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, which envisions the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by a version of Islamic Shari'a that is different from that adopted by the Shi'a. While Hamas and the Brotherhood in general follow the concept of bay'ah (pledge of allegiance) as a necessary condition for all its members, this pledge is given to the organization not to a single person. And it is limited to each country, as every country branch enjoys a high level of autonomy in its activities, within the broader parameters of the Brotherhood.

This divergence in the ideology of the two movements is significant because of the increasingly sectarian nature of the regional tensions between Saudi Arabia and its allies on one side, and Iran and its allies on the other. Since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the following sectarianizing of its politics, the divide between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the region has been on the rise and worsened further after the Arab spring. For Hamas, the sectarian nature of the Syrian civil war has been decisive for damaging its alliance with Syria and had a negative impact on its alliance with Iran and Hezbollah for some time as well. While this hints sectarian ideology might have precedence over geopolitical considerations, the latter repair in Hamas' relationship with Hezbollah and Iran – although not with Syria – indicates otherwise.

Another difference that is potentially relevant to this thesis lies in how change is perceived within the two different perspectives. Hezbollah adopted the revolutionary thought of the Islamic revolution in Iran and sought change in a more swift and conclusive manner, opting for confrontation as a first step before working on its public outreach efforts. By comparison, Hamas adopted a slower reformist path compatible

with the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine of preparing the grounds and changing society from within before moving to more confrontational tactics.

On the question of identity transformation, the literature is rich with analyses of transformations both NSAs went through, presumably as a result of their participation in domestic politics. However, a careful look at Hezbollah's and Hamas's own motives for political participation shows the two had no intention to 'moderate' themselves. If anything, this participation was justified by the two movements as a tactic to ensure their ability to maintain their original course as resistance movements, and necessarily their status as armed NSAs. However, this moderation effect, if any, resulted from rational calculations associated with contentious politics. Albeit these calculations, in turn, were conditioned by domestic and regional contexts, they do not seem to have resulted in transforming Hezbollah's or Hamas's identities as Islamic resistance movements, altering their objective of ending Israel's occupation of land, nor their adoption of armed/violent struggle as a means to that end.

That said, this thesis identifies identity formation as having three key influences on the behavior of Hezbollah and Hamas. First, ideology served as a strong base for the solid alliance between Hezbollah, Iran and other like-minded NSAs in the region – such as in Iraq and Yemen. The same applies for the short-lived alliance between Hamas and Arab states where Islamists – namely Muslim Brotherhood – succeeded in reaching power. Second, the way change of pre-existing power structures has been viewed by the two different ideologies might have had long term impacts on the strategies and tactics adopted by the two movements. Hezbollah followed an instant revolutionary path in its resistance function while adopting a slower reformist approach domestically, at least for some time. Hamas adopted the reformist approach all the way and preferred to equip itself in the shadows waiting for the right moment for

confrontation. Third, the transformation in the identities of Hezbollah and Hamas into more domestic versions of themselves, allegedly as a result of political participation, might have altered the movements' Islamist views, namely their vision of establishing some version of an Islamic state. However, they did not alter the movements' objectives and tactics related to external defense functions, that is their role in deterrence and liberation through armed resistance.

5.2 Internal Structures

The two movements followed two different courses in the way their internal structures evolved. Hezbollah started off as a group of resistance fighters receiving training in remote locations under the patronage of its regional allies Iran and Syria, and gradually turned into a grass-roots organization after expanding its operations to include social welfare networks, provision of healthcare and educational services, and building civic infrastructures. Ultimately, the organization developed into a full-fledged political party dominating domestic politics with the help of its allies, while boasting a highly equipped professional-grade military force engaged in battles inside and outside Lebanon.

To the south, Hamas's journey has been inverted, as it grew from a grass-roots social welfare network to a resistance movement with modest military apparatus, slowly but steadily increasing its power and arsenal to become a quasi-state controlling the narrow coastal Gaza Strip from the inside, while remaining under Israeli occupation. This was achieved, in part, due to a failed attempt at political participation under the conditions of an unrecognized provisional peace deal with Israel.

Beyond these disparities in the evolution of their structures, both of these structures ultimately perform similar overarching social, political, military and security roles

necessary to ensure steady mobilization of resources for geopolitical ends, just as any other international political actor.

Remarkably, then, the evolution of the internal structures of both NSAs was very responsive to contextual factors, namely domestic and transnational structural constraints, and was motivated by the need to either maximize gains (in terms of resource mobilization) or avert threats (often perceived serious and sometimes existential, such as mass arrests or assassination of leadership figures). The adaptability of the internal structures of both NSAs is thus identified as a key sub-variable that has an impact on both the ability to mobilize resources and evade the constraints of the state-centric international system.

5.3 Domestic and Regional Contexts

A cross examination of domestic and regional factors reveals one key commonality, which this thesis argues has been foundational in creating the pre-context for both NSAs to come into existence and mobilize popular support and material resources in the performance of their transnational function. That is, the failure of state structures in performing the function of defending a state's territory and/or population from external threats – or in the case of Hamas, the total absence thereof. In both cases of Hezbollah and Hamas, Israel has been the key embodiment of such threat.

The reasoning seems pretty much straight forward: had there been no perceived threat against the land and/or people of Palestine and Lebanon, or had state actors been successful in neutralizing such a threat, no resistance movements would have risen in the first place. The same reasoning implies that in the absence of such a threat both movements would lose their *raison d'être*, their ability to mobilize popular and material resources, and ultimately cease to exist as armed NSAs.

A secondary commonality that has been identified is the failure of existing state structures in their domestic functions, namely a perception of highly corrupt and inefficient state institutions that fell short in the delivery of basic services, infrastructure, and internal security. However, this factor is secondary in its significance compared to the first one. The simple reason for this ordering is that failure in the domestic function did contribute to the NSAs' ability to mobilize popular support within the sphere of domestic contentious politics, but not necessarily for the transnational roles played by Hezbollah and Hamas. In other words, this factor primarily influenced the two movement's domestic functions as political parties. Any potential impact on their external roles as armed resistance movements, via providing them with some level of political cover, was only secondary to the above.

5.4 Alliance Formation

Both movements were engaged in forming ideology-based and interest-based alliances. However, with few exceptions, ideology-based alliances tended to be more stable and reliable than interest-based ones, as those were more amenable to structural constraints and contextual factors. Most notably, the alliance between Hezbollah and Iran benefited from the complete ideological match between the two and the resulting shared perception of interests and threats. When adding the unique organizational connection between the two allies, it becomes hardly admissible to think of any potential disagreement that could break or weaken their alliance. This facilitated a steady flow of funds and other resources from Iran to Hezbollah, while ensuring the latter extended support whenever and wherever needed. On the other side, the interest-based alliance of Hezbollah with Syria has seen some bad moments, namely in the period that surrounded the signing of Taif Agreement. What saved the day at the time

was Hezbollah's proven ability to stand its grounds, combined with an effort from Iran, their common ally.

Domestically, Hezbollah was very pragmatic about its interest-based alliances, being fully aware not only of the constraints of the Lebanese confessional political system, but also of the benefits of a cross-confessional alliance in evading full sanctions on Lebanon through the international system. Assumingly, as other domestic allies had common interests with different state actors influential in the international system, those actors would be reluctant to sanction their own Lebanese allies. They would rather either impose sanctions singling out Hezbollah or not impose any sanctions at all. A formula which Hezbollah is fine with.

On Hamas's side, its ideology-based alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood has been largely stable. However, as Brotherhood branches in each country remain highly autonomous and decentralized from each other, instances of non-conforming behaviors have not been uncommon. For example, Hamas's interest-based alliance with Syria prior to 2011 was not affected by the fact that the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood was outlawed in the country since the 1980s with membership in it considered a punishable crime. Nonetheless, when pressured to take sides after the uprising in Syria, Hamas preferred not to take a stand that openly conflicts with its non-intervention policy and contradicts with its Sunni identity as the conflict was taking an obvious sectarian turn (Abu Amer, 2014, p. 316). Had it done otherwise, Hamas would have risked losing its very own popular base and potentially part of itself. A risk that was perceived to outweigh the gains from maintaining the alliance with Damascus.

Albeit the Brotherhood did not have much to offer for Hamas as Iran had to offer for Hezbollah, it is worth noting that the brief period of the Brotherhood's rule in Egypt

witnessed the most significant ease in restrictions on the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip in a decade. Under the Islamists' rule, Egypt's position on the Israeli attack on Gaza in November 2012 and its mediation to reach a cease-fire was the most favorable to Hamas compared to the Brotherhood's predecessors and successors in Egypt, who historically deal with Hamas and Gaza through a security lens rather than a political one (Ibhais, *The Palestinian issue and the Arab world*, 2016, pp. 148-151).

As the Muslim Brotherhood became the favorite target for counterattack by many Arab governments in the wake of the Arab Spring, Hamas largely found itself left with necessity or interest-based alliance choices. The common perceived threat posed by Israel to Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran helped the three repair the damage to their relationship caused by the conflict in Syria. The three decided to focus on the common threat while agreeing to disagree on the Syria war. Indeed, Iran and Hezbollah seemed the only ally willing to publicly risk supplying Hamas with military resources in support of its resistance, despite the brief setback in relations due to the sectarian framing of the conflict in Syria.

Ultimately, both NSAs formed and/or re-adjusted their alliances in a way that best guarantees a continued flow of resources, while balancing against perceived threats, whether internal or external.

Yet, it remains interesting to see how the seemingly shifting alliances in the region would affect both actors (or perhaps not), as several Arab states (including Bahrain, UAE, Sudan, and Morocco) started normalizing their relations with Israel. However, any potential impact might be dampened by the virtue that both Hezbollah and Hamas have not been heavily investing in relations with Arab regimes.

5.5 Mobilization of Resources

Across the board, the behaviors of Hezbollah and Hamas, whether making choices related to their identity (such as dropping Islamic state as a goal or accepting political participation), adapting their internal structures, seizing the weaknesses of their domestic contenders (whether state or non-state), or making domestic and transnational alliance choices, were calculated to ensure unrestricted access to resources necessary to pursue the pre-set objective of facing perceived external threats to the territory and/or population with which they associate themselves. Consequently, the relative success of the two NSAs in maintaining such a geopolitical role is attributed to the existence of the conditions set above. This assumes that whenever a NSA is subjected to a context where one or more of these elements is diminished or removed, their geopolitical function is expected to be diminished or blocked. Assuming the rationality of such actors, they would behave in a way that sustains favorable conditions.

This thesis argues that applying the above analysis would explain much of NSAs' behaviors, with a degree of generalizability to other armed NSAs. In light of this analysis, it would be possible to understand Hezbollah's position toward the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the south, its position from the 17th October uprising in Lebanon, and towards the opposition in Tehran and Damascus, beyond a short-sighted sectarian lens. At the same time, it would explain Hamas's re-alignment with Hezbollah and Iran, its longstanding disagreement with Fateh and its openness to get the best of a bad relationship with most of the Arab state. It would also help explain the consequences of the setback of the Arab Spring on Hamas, and the constraints under which it operates in Gaza until this moment.

5.6 Conclusion

This thesis argues for recognizing the role for armed non-state actors in international relations based on the track record of two of the Middle East's most durable NSAs, Hezbollah and Hamas. Both sustained several rounds of war against one of the major military powers in the region, managed to survive regional as well as domestic turbulences, and continue to exercise external deterrence functions alongside their domestic roles as major political parties. The above analysis emphasizes the need to look at Hezbollah and Hamas beyond the 'proxy' label usually used in dominant IR literature to downplay the influence of NSAs in international politics. Such labels not only fail to capture the reality of these actors, but also overlook the complexity of dynamics through which they interact with states and other international actors, and through which their identities and internal structures evolve. This thesis rather demonstrates how such actors are able to pursue and exert influence through, and sometimes around, the state-centric international system, proving their agility and adaptability within changing domestic and regional environments.

To sum up the findings, this thesis concludes that, at the level of the independent variable, the failure of existing state structures to respond to a perceived external threat, or lack thereof, was the most essential element giving way to the emergence and growth of both armed NSAs, Hezbollah and Hamas. At the level of intervening variables, the two movements degree of success in mobilizing necessary popular and material resources while evading the constraints of the state-centric system decided the geopolitical outcome (the dependent variable), identified in terms of ability to survive and balance against perceived threats (i.e. continuing to perform an external defense/deterrence function).

Thus, this case study found that the most significant determinants for the ability of Hezbollah and Hamas to mobilize resources while evading sanctions were: i) networking with external allies providing direct political and material support; ii) low comparative capability of political contenders to suppress or quell the movements' access to resources, embodied mainly in weak domestic state structures; and iii) having strong and adaptable internal structures. Applying a counterfactual reasoning to test all the explored variables suggests the following:

- i) The emergence of Hezbollah and Hamas as NSAs seeking to pursue the transnational role of external defense would not have been possible in the first place if: a) no perceived external threat existed, or b) that threat was successfully eliminated/balanced by some other political actor.
- ii) Assuming the independent variable existed, eliminating the intervening variable (mobilization of resources) would have negatively affected the ability of Hezbollah and Hamas to balance against external threats. This practically means that the geopolitical role of the two movements would be disrupted if: a) denied their networks of allies providing political and material support, b) a political contender succeeded in suppressing movement's access to resources, or c) the movements' internal structures were damaged beyond repair.
- iii) The partial satisfaction of any or all of the three conditions would reduce the NSA's ability to perform its function, but only a full satisfaction of at least one of these conditions would bring a NSA to a halt.

For example, taking out Iran as a key regional state ally for Hezbollah would simply deny the party from most of its financial and military resources. Similarly, the success of the PNA in suppressing Hamas's activities in the West Bank seriously undermined its ability to function in that territory. However, the failure or partial success in denying

the movements' access to weapons and other resources in Gaza allow it to maintain its function within and from the Strip. Meeting the last condition of harming the internal structures seems the hardest to achieved. For instance, Israel attempted to uproot Hamas and other armed resistance groups during the second Palestinian uprising by carrying out a massive assassinations campaign to eliminate military and political cadres and leaders. While this did harm the political and military structures of these NSAs, it fell short of damaging them beyond repair.

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