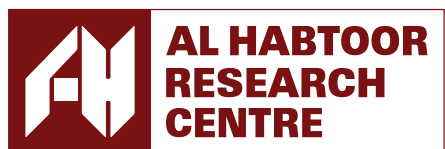


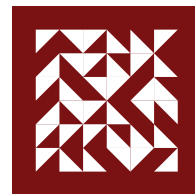
From Lebanon to Syria:

How Did the Syrian Civil War Reshape
Hezbollah's Military?



Strategic Estimates

December 2024



The Syrian Civil War has significantly reshaped Hezbollah's military capabilities and strategic posture, particularly in its conflict with Israel that began on October 8, 2023, and up until the recent agreement on a temporary sixty-day ceasefire in December 2024. This shift stems from several interconnected factors, including operational experience gained during the Syrian civil war, the strengthening of its alliance with Iran, and the changing geopolitical dynamics in the region.

First and foremost, the Syrian Civil War has served as a critical training ground for Hezbollah, allowing the group to engage in combat operations alongside various factions, including the SAA (Syrian Arab Army) and Iranian forces. This collaboration has facilitated the exchange of tactical knowledge and operational strategies, which Hezbollah has subsequently adapted for its use against Israel. The Civil War has also allowed Hezbollah to test and improve its military capabilities in real combat scenarios, thus enhancing its proficiency in asymmetric warfare, which is crucial in its confrontations with the Israeli Military.¹

Moreover, the Syrian Civil War has reinforced Hezbollah's strategic alliance with Iran, which has been pivotal in providing military support and resources to the group. Iran's involvement in Syria has not only bolstered Hezbollah's military capabilities but has also allowed the group to establish a more significant presence in the region. This strategic depth is vital for Hezbollah, as it enables the party to operate more effectively against Israel while simultaneously countering Israeli influence in Lebanon and the broader Levant region. The Iranian support has included advanced weaponry, training, and logistics, which have all contributed to Hezbollah's enhanced operational readiness.

The operational experiences gained in Syria have also led to significant changes in Hezbollah's military doctrine. The party has adopted more sophisticated tactics, including the use of urban warfare strategies and the integration of advanced technologies such as drones and precision-guided munitions. The lessons learned from the Syrian battlefield have informed Hezbollah's preparations for potential future conflicts in the region, particularly in terms of adapting to the Israeli military's operational patterns and countermeasures.²

Furthermore, the Syrian Civil War has allowed Hezbollah to engage in extensive logistical and operational planning, which is essential for sustaining prolonged military engagements. The party has developed a more robust supply chain and logistical framework, enabling it to maintain its operational capabilities even in the face of Israeli airstrikes and other forms of military pressure. This logistical sophistication has been critical in ensuring that Hezbollah can continue to operate effectively in both Lebanon and Syria, thereby enhancing its deterrent posture against Israel.^{3 4}

The ideological framing of the Syrian Civil War has also played a role in shaping Hezbollah's narrative and mobilization efforts. The party has positioned itself as a defender of the Shiite community and a bulwark against Sunni extremism, which has gained traction during the Syrian Civil War. This narrative not only strengthens Hezbollah's domestic support but also aligns it with Iran's broader regional ambitions, thereby solidifying its role as a key player in the axis of resistance against Israel and its allies.^{5 6}



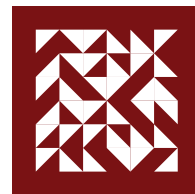
Recently, Hezbollah has waged several attacks on Israel, increasing the potential of going to a state of all-out war. Many questions have been raised about the party's readiness for such kind of military operations. In this paper, we argue that Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian Civil War has acquired the party's new military tactics, supplied it with new heavy weapons, and diversified its sources of funding, which indicates that the party can perform effectively in any future war against Israel. Also, this paper investigates Hezbollah's motivations for joining the Syrian Civil War alongside the regime, attempting to analyse how the party benefitted from militarily participating in the Syrian war, and how that prepared it for any future war against Israel.

First: Hezbollah's Syrian Gambit: Unmasking the True Motives

When the Syrian Civil War began in 2011, Lebanon adopted a **"Policy of Neutrality,"** attempting to avoid the expansion of sectarian violence into its lands. Since Lebanon experienced high levels of sectarian violence during the Civil War between 1975 and 1990, the country has adopted a cautious foreign policy, attempting to take a neutral stance on the sectarian competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the MENA region. Since Hezbollah which is being supported and weaponized by Iran intervened in Syria to secure its supply lines, the government of Lebanon decided to take a neutral position to ensure that the sectarian violence in Syria does not expand into Lebanon. Moreover, Lebanon has been experiencing an economic crisis for over a decade, and being involved in the Syrian Civil War would have intensified the crisis. Moreover, Lebanese leaders recognized that taking any position publicly would have upset different internal factions, and could have created waves of confrontation between Hezbollah and its allies against other Sunni factions. Any such wave could have led to the creation of new militias, which would have weakened the role of the Lebanese government. For instance, If Lebanon supported the Syrian regime, this would anger the Sunni and their external allies such as Saudi Arabia. By contrast, backing the Syrian armed opposition could lead to conflicts with Hezbollah.

Despite Lebanon's neutral stance, Hezbollah chose to intervene based on political and religious factors. Its military involvement in Syria was primarily aimed at securing arms supply routes from Iran throughout Syria to Lebanon. The potential fall of the Syrian regime would be a significant blow to Hezbollah, threatening its main source of support. This justifies Hezbollah's keenness to control areas close to the Syrian borders, which are gates to smuggle weapons to Hezbollah.

Additionally, Hezbollah believed in a conspiracy to undermine the **"Axis of Resistance,"** which includes Iran, Syria, Hamas, Hezbollah, and other armed groups. The regime's collapse could lead to Hezbollah being militarily besieged, especially if a west-aligned government came to power in Syria. This reasoning played a key role in Hezbollah's decision to engage in combat outside of Lebanon for the first time, seeking a victory that could enhance its standing within Lebanon, despite the inherent risks.



Initially, Hezbollah focused its fighting efforts near the Lebanese border to protect its arms supplies. For instance, it was involved in prolonged battles in Zabadani, located just 11 kilometres from Lebanon.⁷ This area is known for containing secret tunnels that Hezbollah used to smuggle weapons into the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. Additionally, Hezbollah aimed to alter the demographics of border towns by pushing out Sunnis and replacing them with Shiite, creating a new sphere of influence that could serve as a buffer zone. Attempting to change the demographics of the border town reflects Hezbollah's awareness that the balance of power in Syria might change at any moment against its interests. As a result, it sought to create a buffer zone between its areas in the South of Lebanon and areas inhabited by the Sunnis in Lebanon. Attempting to do so indicates that Hezbollah's intervention in Syria held long-term objectives for securing its presence and supplies.

It was challenging for Hezbollah to mobilize its fighters who were prepared ideologically to fight Israel. Changing to compass from Israel to Syria required Hezbollah to adopt a sectarian narrative such as such as the need to protect the shrine of Sayyida Zaynab in Damascus.

Second: From Guerrilla to Hybrid Force: Reforging Hezbollah's Sword

Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian Civil War, driven by its interests and a calculated acceptance of the risks involved, has profoundly impacted the party. While aware that deploying forces under sectarian pretences outside its traditional Lebanese sphere could fuel jihadist Salafism back home, Hezbollah deemed the potential gains in Syria worth the gamble. This calculated risk has yielded significant military dividends, transforming Hezbollah into a more sophisticated and battle-hardened fighting force. The Syrian Civil War has provided invaluable combat experience, tactical evolution, and strategic realignment, better equipping Hezbollah for potential future confrontations with Israel. In this part, the study explores how Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria impacted its military equipment, funding capabilities, recruitment capabilities, and military tactics.

From RPGs to Drones: The Modernization of Hezbollah's Arsenal

This involves evaluating the changes in Hezbollah's military and missile capabilities following its intervention in Syria. It's known that military conflicts result in losses of equipment alongside human casualties, suggesting that Hezbollah's involvement in Syria may have negatively affected its military power. However, the practical situation might differ since Hezbollah is primarily a militia that relies on missile capabilities to threaten its military opponents. This indicates that the party's losses in terms of military equipment were minimal, as it did not possess tanks, armoured vehicles, or armoured personnel carriers (APCs) that could be easily targeted during wars. Reports indicate that Hezbollah has acquired many of these weapons after its involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Some sources indicate that Hezbollah acquired this equipment from the SAA, while others suggest they were supplied by the Lebanese army.⁸ In both cases, Hezbollah managed to turn the Syrian Civil War to its advantage by acquiring new weapons that enhanced its military power.



Additionally, Hezbollah utilized the chaos in Syria to enhance its missile arsenal, which is the core of its military power. It recognized the Syrian Civil War as a temporary engagement and, hence worked to acquire heavy weapons to secure its military influence in Lebanon while operating in Syria, knowing that war with Israel might occur shortly. These heavy weapons have also enabled Hezbollah to militarily siege the towns of Al-Qusayr and Al-Zabadani for longer periods until seizing them by force.⁹

Example of Hezbollah Weapons and Systems in Syria	
System	Description
Fateh-110	A short-range, road-mobile, surface-to-surface ballistic missile. Hezbollah apparently has the M-600 variant of the Fateh-110, which has a range of approximately 180 miles and can deliver a payload of up to 1,100 pounds.
Shahab-1 and Shahab-2	A single-stage, liquid-propelled, short-range ballistic missiles. The Shahab-1 has a maximum range of nearly 200 miles, while the Shahab-2 has a maximum range of over 300 miles. The Shahab-1 and Shahab-2 missiles are the Iranian variants of the Russian SS-1C 'Scud B' and SS-1D 'Scud C,' respectively.
Toophan Anti-Tank Guided Missile	An Iranian man-portable, semiautomatic command to line of sight (SACLOS) anti-tank guided missile. It is reverse-engineered from the American BGM-71 tube-launched, optically tracked, wire guided (TOW) missile. The Toophan can be deployed by small teams against tanks, armored vehicles, buildings, and other targets. It has a maximum firing range of over 2 miles, a warhead of roughly 8 pounds, and can pierce armor 22 inches thick.
9M133 Kornet	A modern Russian man-portable, anti-tank guided missile intended for use against main battle tanks. The Kornet has a range of over 3 miles, a warhead of 15 pounds, and can pierce armor nearly 40 inches thick.
M113 Armored Personnel Carrier	A lightly armored personnel carrier first fielded by the U.S. army in 1962. It is versatile and capable of acting as a front-line vehicle and can also be used in support roles. The M113 is most commonly armed with a machine gun.
T-72 Main Battle Tank	A Soviet second-generation main battle tank that entered production in 1971. The T-72 is lightweight, has a comprehensive nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) system, can reach speeds up to 50 miles per hour, and is usually equipped with the 125-millimeter 2A46 series main gun.
Karrar Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle	The Karrar is an unmanned combat aerial vehicle and the first long-endurance, combat-capable Iranian drone. It has an operational range of over 600 miles, with a maximum speed of 560 miles per hour. The Karrar can be outfitted with conventional bombs or guided missiles, including precision ordinance.
Katyusha Multiple Rocket Launcher	The Katyusha was originally a truck-mounted multiple rocket launcher first fielded by the Soviet Union in 1939. Today, there are numerous variants of the Katyusha, with maximum ranges between 2 and 7 miles. While the Soviet variant used 82 mm and 132 mm rockets, the Hezbollah variants are typically 107 mm and 122 mm.



While the acquired weapons have made Hezbollah more ready to deter any ground invasion of Israel against Lebanon, the effectiveness of tanks and carriers may be limited in the absence of ground-to-air defence systems to neutralize Israeli airstrikes. This explained Hezbollah's efforts to smuggle air defence systems known as "SA-17," which are Russian-made,¹⁰ self-propelled anti-aircraft missile systems. During the Civil War, Hezbollah managed to smuggle an Iranian Air-defence system, known as "Sayyed 2C Missiles" with an operational range of between 75-100 kilometres and a maximum interception height of 27-30 Kilometres¹¹. In June 2024, Hezbollah declared that it used its air defence systems to force an Israeli fighter to retreat from Lebanese airspace.¹²

Hezbollah has also obtained Russian missile systems, specifically the P-800-Yakhont, which can reach up to 300 kilometres and posed a threat to Israeli naval vessels in the Mediterranean. This enhanced the party's ability to neutralize potential threats from the Mediterranean.¹³ Usually, these missiles would be only used in case of Hezbollah going into a full-scale war against Israel.

To further strengthen its missile capabilities, Hezbollah has worked on smuggling long-range missiles to increase its threat to Israel in future conflicts. Reports from The New York Times, citing Israeli intelligence sources, indicate that Hezbollah successfully smuggled several long-range Scud D missiles and short-range C missiles, along with Iranian Fateh medium-range missiles and Fajr anti-aircraft missiles.¹⁴

As Hezbollah recognized that the Syrian Civil War was just a temporary period, it established underground facilities for manufacturing weapons in Lebanon while smuggling necessary materials from Syria. The French publication "Intelligence Online" reported in July 2017 that Hezbollah built two underground factories for missile production—one in Hermel, northwest Lebanon, for



producing Fateh-110 missiles capable of carrying half a ton of explosives, with a range of 190 miles, and another factory in southern Lebanon for ammunition production.¹⁵

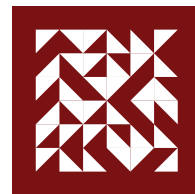
Additionally, some reports suggest that Hezbollah has possessed chemical weapons since 2013, as the Al Assad regime transferred its chemical arsenal to areas controlled by Hezbollah in southern Lebanon to avoid international scrutiny.¹⁶ This transfer occurred following the Al Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Eastern Ghouta in August 2013. If these reports are accurate, this is one aspect that Hezbollah would strive to keep concealed, and it would only consider using such weapons in the event of a direct chemical attack against them.

Moreover, the Syrian Civil War has allowed Hezbollah to experiment with new technologies and tactics, particularly in the realm of asymmetric warfare. The group has increasingly utilized drones for reconnaissance and combat purposes, a tactic that has proven effective in both Syria and in its confrontations with Israel.¹⁷ The operational environment in Syria has also facilitated the development of urban warfare tactics, as Hezbollah has engaged in house-to-house fighting and the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) against more conventional forces. This experience has equipped Hezbollah with the skills necessary to operate effectively in densely populated urban areas, this is what the Israeli forces faced when they tried to invade Southern Lebanon.¹⁸

Adapting to the Battlefield: Hezbollah's New Combat Doctrine

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has required a significant adaptation of its tactical approach. Traditionally, Hezbollah's military strategies have been heavily influenced by its experiences during the Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 War with Israel.¹⁹ Hezbollah has adopted a "**defensive strategy**" focused on holding territory and prolonging the war to prevent Israel from making any territorial gains. This strategy also aims to undermine Israeli morale by instilling a sense of despair among its fighters over their failure to achieve any significant victories against Hezbollah, contrary to what was planned before the Civil War. Hezbollah has always considered the mere fact that it has deterred an Israeli attack as a victory, regardless of the number of casualties. This stems from the groups' understanding that any Israeli war aims to dismantle Hezbollah's military power.

The Syrian battlefield presented new dynamics that required the party to change its combat strategy to better refine its tactics to address the complexities of urban warfare, counterinsurgency, and the diverse array of adversaries it faced, including various rebel factions and extremist groups such as ISIS, adopting an "**offensive approach**" to seize new territory and maintain influence over it for long periods.²⁰ The party's fighters gained experience in attacking densely populated residential areas and engaging in street fighting against opposition groups. This was exemplified by the battles of Qusayr in Homs Governorate in 2013 and Zabadani in the Damascus countryside in 2015, where Hezbollah, in cooperation with Syrian forces, succeeded in besieging and controlling both cities.²¹ One of the most notable tactical adjustments was Hezbollah's increasing reliance on joint



operations. In Syria, Hezbollah coordinated closely with the SAA and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, learning how to integrate infantry, armour, artillery, and air support coherently. Not only has this cooperation enhanced Hezbollah's operational effectiveness, but it has also provided it with invaluable experience in joint operations, which is crucial for any future engagements against Israel.²²

Moreover, the Syrian Civil War has provided Hezbollah with a unique opportunity to expand its operational reach and logistical capabilities. The group has established supply lines and logistics networks that extend into Syria, allowing it to sustain its operations over extended periods. This logistical development is critical for Hezbollah, as it enables the group to maintain its combat readiness, even in the face of Israeli airstrikes and other forms of military pressure. The experience gained in managing these logistical challenges in Syria will undoubtedly form the basis for Hezbollah's future operations against Israel, particularly in terms of sustaining prolonged engagements.²³

The party has also deepened its experience in street fighting through its involvement in Syria, giving it an additional advantage over any regular army. Fighting alongside Russian forces also kept Hezbollah abreast of the latest developments in military technology and the effective application of intelligence to serve offensive plans. Moreover, the party benefited from the **"Rotation Policy"** imposed on its fighters by the nature of the protracted war, which aims to renew the spirit of its fighters and counter the despair that may creep into their ranks. In addition, Hezbollah fighters also gained experience engaging in unfamiliar terrain. For example, the party fought in urban areas such as the mountainous areas in Qalamoun. The party also fought battles in the Palmyra desert, reinforcing the concept of seizing the initiative and transferring the battle to enemy territory instead of remaining in barracks to deter any external aggression.²⁴

In addition, the ability to fight multiple battles simultaneously in different geographical locations gave each group different justifications for its participation. The group fighting in Damascus was mobilized to defend the Sayyida Zeinab shrine, which Hezbollah claimed was targeted for destruction by the Syrian opposition. At the same time, the fighters in Qusayr and Zabadani were motivated by the need to defeat "terrorists" in Syria to prevent the Civil War from spilling over into Lebanon.²⁵

Expanding the Ranks: Hezbollah's Evolving Recruitment Strategy

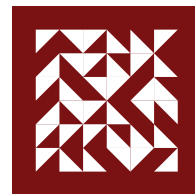
Hezbollah's engagement in the Syrian Civil War has led to a significant transformation in its recruiting strategy, one of the most notable changes in Hezbollah's recruitment strategy has been the increased emphasis on a broader sectarian mobilization.²⁶ Initially, Hezbollah primarily recruited from the Shiite community in Lebanon, leveraging its identity as a defender of Shiite interests against Sunni extremism. However, as the Syrian Civil War intensified and the threat from



groups like ISIS and Al-Nusra Front became more pronounced, Hezbollah expanded its recruitment efforts to include not only Lebanese Shiites but also individuals from other sectarian backgrounds, particularly those sympathetic to the Al Assad regime.²⁷ This shift was partly driven by the need to bolster its ranks in response to the high casualty rates experienced during the conflict, necessitating a more inclusive approach to recruitment.

The party's initial recruitment methods, which were largely based on local sectarian affiliations and ideological commitments, evolved to incorporate a broader range of motivations and demographics by the use of religious rhetoric, socio-economic incentives, digital outreach, and the integration of foreign fighters. These adaptations reflect the group's recognition of the changing dynamics of the conflict and its need to sustain its operational capacity in an increasingly complex environment. By evolving its recruitment strategies, Hezbollah has not only managed to maintain its influence in Lebanon but has also positioned itself as a key player in the regional struggle for power and identity. This evolution reflects Hezbollah's need to maintain its operational capacity and influence in the face of a protracted and multifaceted conflict.

Moreover, Hezbollah's recruitment strategy has increasingly focused on portraying its military engagement in Syria as a form of jihad, appealing to a sense of religious duty among potential recruits. This ideological framing has been crucial in attracting young men who may not have previously considered joining the group. By emphasizing the narrative of defending the Shiite community and the broader Muslim ummah against existential threats, Hezbollah has been able



to tap into a reservoir of religious sentiment that resonates with many individuals in the region. This shift toward a more religiously charged recruitment narrative reflects a broader trend among militant groups in the region, which often utilize religious rhetoric to justify their actions and attract recruits.

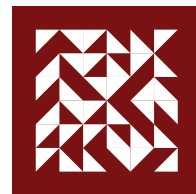
Hezbollah began to recruit not only from Lebanon but also from other countries with significant Shiite populations, such as Iraq and Iran. This proxy network, bolstered by an additional 8,000 to 12,000 Shiite foreign fighters from countries like Afghanistan, Yemen, and Iraq, expansion of recruitment sources has allowed Hezbollah to enhance its operational capabilities and diversify its fighting force, making it a more formidable player in the Syrian Civil War. The inclusion of foreign fighters has also served to strengthen Hezbollah's ties with Iran, further solidifying the alliance between the two entities and enhancing their collective military effectiveness.²⁸

In addition to ideological appeals, Hezbollah has also adapted its recruitment strategies to leverage the socio-economic conditions exacerbated by the Syrian Civil War. The War has led to significant economic hardship in Lebanon and the surrounding regions, creating a pool of disaffected youth who may be more susceptible to recruitment offers. Hezbollah has capitalized on this by offering financial incentives and employment opportunities to potential recruits, thereby framing military service as a viable means of economic support. This pragmatic approach to recruitment not only helps to replenish Hezbollah's ranks but also strengthens its ties to the local community by positioning the group as a provider of social services in times of crisis.

Furthermore, the group's recruitment strategy has increasingly utilized social media and digital platforms to reach potential recruits. Hezbollah has recognized the importance of modern communication tools in disseminating its message and attracting new members. By employing sophisticated propaganda techniques, including videos and social media campaigns that highlight the heroism and sacrifices of its fighters in Syria, Hezbollah has been able to engage a younger audience that is more connected to digital platforms. This shift toward digital recruitment strategies reflects a broader trend among non-state actors in adapting to the information age, where traditional methods of recruitment may no longer suffice.

This propaganda serves a dual purpose: recruitment and morale-building. Hezbollah's online platforms meticulously document past military operations, glorifying the sacrifices of its "martyrs" to inspire recruits and reinforce the commitment of existing supporters. Speeches by leaders like Hassan Nasrallah are also widely disseminated.

Moreover, Hezbollah's recruitment strategy has been influenced by the need to maintain morale among its fighters and supporters. The high casualty rates and the protracted nature of the conflict have posed challenges to the Hezbollah's internal cohesion and public support. To counteract this, Hezbollah has implemented measures to ensure that recruits are ideologically aligned and committed to the group's objectives. This has included rigorous training programs



and indoctrination sessions designed to instil a strong sense of loyalty and purpose among new members. By fostering a culture of commitment and sacrifice, Hezbollah aims to mitigate the potential for dissent and maintain a unified front in the face of adversity.

These groups, trained and advised by Hezbollah commanders, mirror the Asaib Ahl al-Haq units previously established in Iraq. Some notable examples include: Quwat al Ridha: Operating in governorates like Homs, Al-Ghaliboun: Active in Daraa and Quneitra, and Liwa al-Imam al-Baqir: Deployed to Aleppo.

Sanctions and Shadow Economies: Hezbollah's Funding Resilience

Hezbollah's funding strategy has been significantly altered by the Syrian Civil War, driven by increased financial demands for military operations, logistical support, and a shifting geopolitical landscape. Hezbollah's deepening involvement in the Syrian Civil War presented new challenges, requiring a reevaluation of funding sources and financial management strategies. This transformation can be analysed through several key dimensions: the diversification of funding sources, the impact of regional alliances, and the adaptation to economic pressures.²⁹

Notably, Hezbollah has diversified its funding sources in response to the Syrian War. Traditionally, Hezbollah relied on a combination of state support from Iran, which has been a steadfast financial patron of Hezbollah for decades. Starting with \$100 million annually in the 1980s, Iranian support steadily increased to \$200 million by 2005 and \$300 million between 2006 and 2009. Despite fluctuations caused by sanctions and oil price volatility, Iran's funding has stabilized in recent years at approximately \$700 million annually.³⁰ This sustained level of support was particularly evident during periods of sanctions relief under the Obama and Biden administrations.³¹

Regional geopolitical dynamics have also shaped Hezbollah's funding strategy. The Syrian Civil War, involving international actors like Russia and the United States, has forced Hezbollah to navigate a complex web of alliances and rivalries. This complex environment presents both opportunities and challenges for Hezbollah's funding efforts. For example, Hezbollah's role in the Syrian Civil War has solidified its position within the Iranian-led axis of resistance against Israel, attracting support from aligned groups and states. Conversely, increased scrutiny and sanctions from Western nations have forced Hezbollah to adopt a more cautious approach to financial management.

Additionally, the War has also prompted Hezbollah to enhance its logistical capabilities, which in turn has required additional financial resources. The group has had to invest in transportation, supply chains, and infrastructure to support its operations in Syria. This logistical expansion has led to a greater emphasis on securing funds that can be allocated specifically for these purposes. Hezbollah has reportedly engaged in illicit activities, such as smuggling and drug trafficking, to generate additional revenue to support its military endeavours in Syria. Hezbollah's involvement in the drug trade, particularly in Latin America and Europe, has allowed it to tap into lucrative markets, thereby supplementing its traditional funding sources.



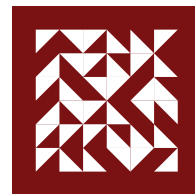
Moreover, the Syrian Civil War has strengthened Hezbollah's ties with Iran, which has been a critical source of financial and military support throughout the Civil War. Iran's commitment to backing Hezbollah has not only provided the group with the necessary funding to sustain its operations but has also facilitated the transfer of military technology and expertise. This relationship has allowed Hezbollah to maintain its operational capabilities despite the economic challenges posed by the War. The financial support from Iran has been crucial in enabling Hezbollah to continue its military engagement in Syria while simultaneously preparing for potential future conflicts with Israel.³²

In addition to these changes, the economic pressures resulting from the Syrian Civil War have forced Hezbollah to adapt its funding strategy to address the challenges posed by the Lebanese economy. The ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon has created a difficult environment for fundraising and revenue generation, compelling Hezbollah to reassess its financial priorities. The group has had to balance its military expenditures with the need to provide social services and support to its constituents in Lebanon, which has historically been a key aspect of its legitimacy. This dual focus on military and social spending has required Hezbollah to adopt a more strategic approach to its funding, ensuring that it can meet both its operational needs and the expectations of its supporters.

Hezbollah has indeed sought to create and utilize new sources of funding beyond its traditional reliance on Iranian sponsorship, foreign expatriate remittances, charities, front organizations, and criminal enterprises, particularly in the context of the Syrian Civil War. The evolving nature of the conflict and the financial demands associated with it have prompted Hezbollah to explore innovative funding mechanisms. This transformation can be analysed through several emerging avenues: the privatization of funding, the use of technology for fundraising, and the establishment of new partnerships.

Moreover, Hezbollah has mobilized resources from its local and diaspora communities to bolster its funding. The group has historically relied on donations from its supporters, particularly within the Lebanese Shiite community and the broader diaspora. In the context of the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has intensified its fundraising efforts, appealing to its supporters for contributions to support its military operations and humanitarian efforts in Syria.³³ This grassroots mobilization has allowed Hezbollah to maintain a steady flow of financial resources, despite the economic challenges faced by Lebanon.

Additionally, Hezbollah has leveraged technology to enhance its fundraising capabilities. The rise of crowdfunding platforms and social media has provided Hezbollah with new tools to reach potential donors and solicit contributions. This approach allows the group to bypass traditional financial channels that may be subject to greater oversight and regulation. By utilizing online platforms, Hezbollah can appeal to a global audience, tapping into the sentiments of supporters who may wish to contribute to its cause. This method of fundraising aligns with broader trends in the digital economy, where crowdfunding has become a popular means of financing various initiatives.



Moreover, Hezbollah has sought to establish new partnerships with regional actors and organizations that share similar interests in Syria. These partnerships can provide additional financial resources and logistical support, further enhancing Hezbollah's operational capabilities. The group's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has positioned it as a key player within the Iranian-led axis of resistance, which includes various militias and organizations that oppose Sunni extremism and Israeli influence. By collaborating with these groups, Hezbollah can access shared resources and funding opportunities that may not have been available through traditional channels.

Third: The Implications of Hezbollah Intervention in Syria

The Syrian Civil War has significantly impacted Hezbollah, transforming the group into a more formidable military force. By participating in the conflict, Hezbollah gained invaluable combat experience, modernized its arsenal, and strengthened its strategic alliances. This involvement has solidified the group's position as a key regional player, capable of influencing the dynamics of the Middle East. The war has also allowed Hezbollah to expand its operational capabilities, diversify its funding sources, and enhance its public image, further solidifying its influence within Lebanon and beyond. In this part, we explain how the implications of Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian Civil War on four different factors: military equipment, warfare tactics, increased number of fatalities, and restrictions on fund.

Military Equipment

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian War has had several negative repercussions concerning its military equipment and capabilities. As the group engaged in extensive combat operations in Syria, it faced challenges that impacted its military resources, procurement strategies, and overall operational effectiveness. The following points outline the key negative repercussions of Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War regarding military equipment:

One of the most significant repercussions of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has been the increased vulnerability of its military assets to Israeli airstrikes. Israel has actively targeted Hezbollah's military infrastructure and weapon transfers in Syria, aiming to prevent the group from acquiring advanced weaponry and establishing a stronger foothold in the region. This ongoing threat has forced Hezbollah to adopt more cautious operational strategies, often leading to the concealment of its military equipment and a reduction in its operational tempo. The constant need to protect its assets has strained Hezbollah's ability to effectively deploy and utilize its military capabilities.

The prolonged engagement in Syria has resulted in the depletion of Hezbollah's military resources. The party has had to allocate significant portions of its arsenal and logistical capabilities to support its operations in Syria, which has affected its readiness for potential confrontations with Israel. This depletion of resources can lead to a diminished capacity to respond to threats in Lebanon, potentially compromising Hezbollah's deterrent posture against Israeli military actions. The



diversion of military equipment to Syria may also result in a lack of sufficient reserves for future conflicts, thereby impacting Hezbollah's long-term operational sustainability.

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has complicated its procurement and maintenance of military equipment. The increased scrutiny from international actors and the imposition of sanctions on Iran and Hezbollah have made it more difficult for the group to acquire advanced weaponry and military supplies. The sanctions have restricted access to critical components and technologies necessary for maintaining and upgrading its military capabilities. As a result, Hezbollah may face challenges in ensuring that its existing equipment remains operational and effective in combat situations.

While Hezbollah has historically relied on Iranian support for military equipment, the Syrian Civil War has intensified this dependency. The group has become increasingly reliant on Iran for the provision of advanced weaponry and military technology to sustain its operations in. This dependency can be a double-edged sword, as it may limit Hezbollah's autonomy in decision-making and operational planning. Additionally, any fluctuations in Iranian support due to geopolitical changes or economic pressures could significantly impact Hezbollah's military capabilities.

The Syrian Civil War has resulted in significant casualties among Hezbollah's fighters, including experienced personnel who are crucial for operating and maintaining military equipment. The loss of skilled fighters can lead to a decline in the overall effectiveness of Hezbollah's military operations, as the group may struggle to replace experienced operatives with the same level of expertise. This attrition can hinder Hezbollah's ability to train new recruits effectively, impacting the operational readiness of its forces.

The experiences gained in the Syrian Civil War have led Hezbollah to adapt its military doctrine, which may have unintended consequences for its operational effectiveness. The party has had to focus on counterinsurgency tactics and urban warfare strategies, which differ from its traditional asymmetric warfare approach against Israel. While this adaptation may enhance Hezbollah's capabilities in certain contexts, it could also lead to a dilution of its core competencies in conventional military engagements. The shift in focus may result in a less effective response to potential future conflicts with Israel, where traditional military strategies may be more applicable.

Warfare Tactics

The Syrian Civil War has heightened Hezbollah's exposure to Israeli airstrikes, particularly as the group has established a more significant presence in Syria. Israel has actively targeted Hezbollah's military infrastructure and weapon transfers, aiming to prevent the group from acquiring advanced weapons. This increased vulnerability has forced Hezbollah to alter its operational tactics, often leading to a more cautious approach that may limit its ability to engage effectively in combat. The constant threat of airstrikes can hinder the group's operational flexibility and responsiveness on the battlefield.



While Hezbollah has historically been known for its tactical innovation and adaptability, the Syrian Civil War has led to a more rigid operational structure as the group has aligned itself closely with the SAA and Iranian forces. This alignment can stifle Hezbollah's ability to experiment with new tactics and techniques, as it may become more reliant on the operational frameworks established by its allies. The loss of tactical innovation can diminish Hezbollah's effectiveness in combat, as the group may struggle to adapt to rapidly changing battlefield conditions.

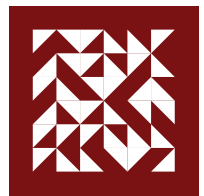
The demands of the Syrian Civil War have necessitated significant resource allocation for Hezbollah, diverting attention and assets away from its traditional areas of operation in Lebanon. The need to sustain military operations in Syria has led to a depletion of resources, which can impact Hezbollah's ability to maintain its combat readiness and effectiveness in Lebanon. This resource allocation challenge can hinder the group's ability to respond to threats from Israel or other adversaries, potentially compromising its deterrent posture.

Increased Number of Fatalities



Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has had several negative repercussions on its recruiting strategy, impacting its ability to attract new fighters and maintain its existing base of support. The following points outline the key negative repercussions of Hezbollah's engagement in the conflict regarding its recruitment efforts

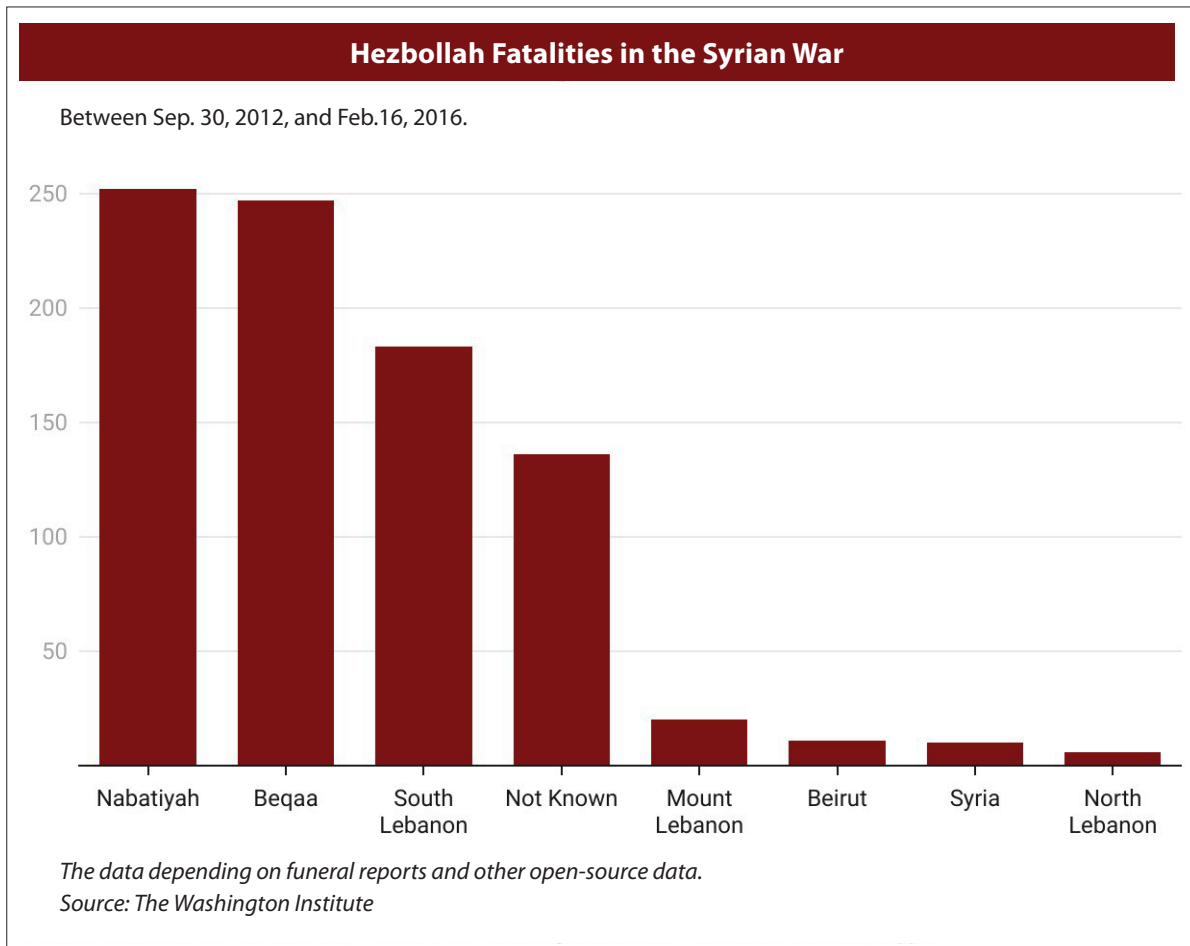
Hezbollah's military intervention in Syria has led to a decline in local support within Lebanon. Many Lebanese citizens, including some of Hezbollah's traditional supporters, have expressed discontent with the group's involvement in a foreign conflict that has resulted in significant casualties among its fighters. This erosion of local support can hinder Hezbollah's recruitment efforts, as potential



recruits may be less inclined to join a group perceived as prioritizing external conflicts over domestic issues. The perception that Hezbollah is acting in the interests of Iran rather than the Lebanese people can further alienate potential recruits.

The party has lost hundreds of its elite fighters throughout the Civil War, and the number of wounded is likely to be much higher. Among the Hezbollah casualties in Syria are veteran military commanders. Many of these individuals fought against Israeli forces in the 1980s and 1990s and brought years of combat experience to the Civil War in Syria.³⁴

Hezbollah’s involvement in the Syrian Civil War has come at a steep cost, with estimates of fighter deaths ranging from several hundred to several thousand, likely falling between 1,000 and 2,000. Thousands more have been wounded.^{35 36} The conflict has also claimed the lives of prominent figures within Hezbollah, including senior commanders like Mustafa Badreddine, Abdel Hamid Mahmoud Shri (Abu Mahdi), and Ali Al-Hadi Al-Ashiq. This heavy toll has fuelled internal dissent within Hezbollah, with some members and supporters questioning the strategic wisdom of the Syrian intervention. Critics argue that the financial burden and loss of life are too high and that the focus on Syria has diverted resources and attention from Hezbollah’s core mission in Lebanon. As exemplified by one former fighter’s sentiment, many believe their duty lies in resisting Israel, not fighting in Syria. Growing discontent over mounting casualties could ultimately force Hezbollah to reconsider its continued involvement in the Syrian Civil war.





Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has necessitated a shift in its ideological framing. Initially, the group framed its actions as part of a broader resistance against Israeli aggression and Sunni extremism. However, as the conflict progressed, Hezbollah's rhetoric has increasingly focused on political and military objectives rather than sectarian narratives. This shift may alienate potential recruits who are motivated by sectarian identity or who view Hezbollah primarily as a defender of Shiite interests. The need to appeal to a broader audience may dilute the group's traditional messaging, making it less compelling for potential recruits who identify strongly with sectarian narratives.

The Syrian Civil War has created a complex environment where various armed groups compete for recruits and resources. Hezbollah's involvement in the conflict has placed it in direct competition with other factions, including those backed by regional powers such as Turkey. This competition can dilute Hezbollah's recruitment efforts, as potential recruits may choose to align themselves with groups that offer more appealing ideologies, better resources, or more immediate benefits. The fragmentation of the recruitment landscape in Syria complicates Hezbollah's ability to attract new fighters.

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has drawn increased scrutiny from both domestic and international actors. The group's actions in Syria have been criticized by various factions within Lebanon and have led to a negative perception of Hezbollah among certain segments of the population. This stigmatization can deter potential recruits who may fear social ostracism or backlash from their communities for associating with a group involved in a controversial foreign conflict. The negative publicity surrounding Hezbollah's actions in Syria can create barriers to recruitment, as individuals may be hesitant to join a group that is viewed unfavourably.

While initially claiming ideological or religious motivations for fighting in Syria, some young Hezbollah recruits have confessed that financial incentives were their primary reason for joining. As casualties mounted, these Lebanese-Shiite youth began to acknowledge that Hezbollah offered them a path out of poverty and a chance at a better life. This highlights how economic factors can play a significant role in recruitment, even when masked by ideological rhetoric.³⁷

The financial demands of the Syrian War have forced Hezbollah to allocate significant resources to its military operations, potentially impacting its recruitment efforts. The need to divert funds toward combat operations may limit the group's ability to invest in recruitment campaigns, training programs, and outreach initiatives. This resource allocation challenge can hinder Hezbollah's ability to attract and retain new fighters, as the party may struggle to provide adequate support and incentives for recruits.³⁸



Funding Dilemma

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War has had several negative repercussions on the party, particularly concerning its funding strategies. As the group engaged more deeply in the conflict, it faced increased financial pressures and challenges that affected its traditional funding sources. The following points outline the key negative repercussions of Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War on its funding:

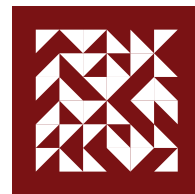
The Syrian Civil War has significantly escalated the financial demands on Hezbollah, as the group has had to allocate substantial resources to support military operations and logistics in Syria. This increased expenditure has strained Hezbollah's existing funding mechanisms, necessitating a search for new sources of revenue to sustain its operations. The financial burden of prolonged engagement in Syria has made it more challenging for Hezbollah to maintain its operational capabilities without compromising its other activities in Lebanon.

As Hezbollah's traditional funding sources faced pressures, the party has increasingly turned to illicit activities, such as drug trafficking and smuggling, to generate revenue. While these activities may provide short-term financial relief, they also expose Hezbollah to significant risks, including legal repercussions and increased scrutiny from international law enforcement agencies. The reliance on criminal enterprises can undermine Hezbollah's legitimacy and support among its base, as it may be perceived as compromising its ideological principles for financial gain.

The Syrian Civil War has led to heightened scrutiny of Hezbollah's funding sources, particularly from Western nations. Increased sanctions targeting Iran and Hezbollah have made it more difficult for the group to secure financial support from traditional allies. The economic pressures resulting from these sanctions have forced Hezbollah to adapt its funding strategies, but they have also limited its ability to access the financial resources necessary for sustained military engagement in Syria.

Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has caused some erosion of local support within Lebanon. As the group has committed resources to the conflict, there has been growing discontent among segments of the Lebanese population who feel that Hezbollah's priorities have shifted away from addressing domestic issues. This shift in focus can lead to a decline in local fundraising efforts, as supporters may become disillusioned with the group's involvement in a foreign conflict rather than addressing pressing social and economic challenges at home.

To sum up, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian war marks a transformative phase in its military, political, and strategic trajectory, preparing it for future confrontations, especially with Israel. The conflict served as a critical testing ground, providing the group with invaluable combat experience and enabling it to develop and refine its military tactics. Hezbollah transitioned from a guerrilla force into a hybrid entity capable of conducting both conventional and asymmetric warfare. The lessons



learned in Syria have enhanced its ability to engage in urban combat, coordinate joint operations, and utilize advanced military technologies, such as drones and precision-guided missiles. These skills have positioned Hezbollah as a more formidable adversary in the region.

The Syrian Civil War also allowed Hezbollah to bolster its arsenal significantly. It acquired advanced weaponry, including air-defence systems, long-range missiles, and even underground missile production facilities in Lebanon. These acquisitions have increased its deterrence capabilities, particularly against Israeli airstrikes and naval threats. Additionally, Hezbollah leveraged the chaos of the war to establish robust logistical networks and supply chains, ensuring a steady flow of resources and weapons. This logistical sophistication enables the group to sustain prolonged engagements, whether in Syria, Lebanon, or against Israel.

Furthermore, Hezbollah's deepened alliance with Iran has been a cornerstone of its resilience and growth during the Syrian Civil War. Iran's financial and military support has not only provided Hezbollah with the resources needed to sustain its operations but also facilitated the transfer of critical technologies and expertise. This strengthened partnership has further solidified Hezbollah's role as a key player in the Iranian-led "Axis of Resistance" against Israel and its regional allies.

The fighting in Syria over the past years has accelerated the creation of a large, well-trained force of Hezbollah, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Syrian, and Iraqi fighters. This force is now interoperable in ways not seen before. Hezbollah, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Qods Forces (IRGC-QF), and the SAA have become more adept not only at joint training and planning, but have also learned how to better operate together as a unified fighting force. At the same time, Hezbollah has also helped develop and integrate a range of Iraqi and Syrian militia fighters into their larger-scale operations. Iran has also gained valuable lessons in guerrilla warfare that it can incorporate into its doctrine and training. The Civil War in Syria, which began as a major test for the axis of resistance, has made it a more integrated and capable fighting force. The ability of Iranian, Hezbollah, and Iraqi fighters to deploy across borders to conduct sustained operations in a variety of terrains has given Iran and its allies an important tool for advancing their interests. That is why Hezbollah's role in Syria is a significant and undoubtedly troubling development for Hezbollah and Iran's regional rivals.

Despite these advancements, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has not been without significant challenges. The group has suffered heavy casualties, including the loss of veteran commanders and elite fighters, which has impacted its operational efficiency. The high human cost has also created internal dissent and reduced morale among its ranks. Financially, the prolonged conflict has placed immense pressure on Hezbollah's funding sources. While Iran remains its primary benefactor, Hezbollah has increasingly turned to illicit activities, such as drug trafficking, to offset the rising costs of its military operations. This reliance on criminal enterprises risks undermining its legitimacy and eroding support among its base.



Domestically, Hezbollah's focus on Syria has drawn criticism from segments of the Lebanese population who view its priorities as misaligned with Lebanon's pressing socio-economic challenges. The perception that Hezbollah serves Iranian interests over Lebanese ones has led to a decline in local support. Additionally, the group's sectarian framing of its role in Syria has alienated potential recruits and heightened tensions within Lebanon's diverse communities.

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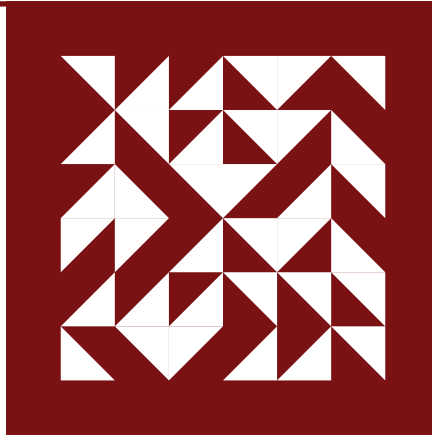
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