

Iran's Militia Mayhem

by [David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](#)

Aug 14, 2006

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[David Makovsky \(/experts/david-makovsky\)](#)

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations.



Articles & Testimony

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah is a man who likes flags. At the start of the war, he appeared on his organization's al-Manar television station with a Hezbollah flag behind him. Then that was replaced by a Lebanese flag. Lately, he has placed both flags at his side.

There's been one flag missing from these pictures, however, and it's the most important one: Iran's. As the world's responsible leaders like Israel's Ehud Olmert try to implement a ceasefire resolution, they ignore that fact at their peril.

Why? Because, by funneling its oil money to Hezbollah, arming a fierce band of fanatical fighters, Iran has honed a strategy that, if seen to succeed, could replicate itself all across the Arab world.

Today in the Mideast, there are three places where militias operate freely within states: Iraq, Gaza and Lebanon. In all three cases, the militias receive political, economic and military backing from Iran. Iran gives at least \$100 million annually, plus an estimated 11,000 missiles, to Hezbollah. It provides Iraq's Mahdi militia and others with Iranian explosives. It even aids Hamas, which is Sunni and does not share Iran's Shiism.

If Hezbollah emerges from this conflict emboldened, it is a safe bet that Iran will set out to make still more militia mayhem—strengthening homegrown radical Arab groups with the potential to destabilize governments from Egypt to Saudi Arabia.

For these future militias, Hezbollah would be the prototype—because of three key ways in which it has created what, for Iran, is an ideal 21st century militia:

First, it has no return address—freeing it of the burdens of traditional warfare. Its fighters are embedded in the civilian population. That's what enabled Hezbollah to fire more than 3,400 rockets indiscriminately into Israel. And when Israel retaliates and there is collateral damage among Lebanese civilians, Israel is blamed. Second, by importing military hardware from Iran and Syria, Hezbollah has the advantages of an army without any of its responsibilities.

Third and critically, Hezbollah has enmeshed itself within the Lebanese political system. When the political wing of Hezbollah ran for Lebanese elections in 1995, it avoided a fateful choice between having to declare itself either a party or a militia.

Not having to choose between bullets and ballots, Hezbollah leveraged its power in both directions. It gained political popularity by claiming to be the resistance force that triggered Israel's exit from Lebanon in 2000. After Israel left, Hezbollah used its political clout—including two cabinet seats in Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora's political coalition—to thwart any adherence to UN Security Council resolutions that called for the group's disarmament. And when the Lebanese Armed Forces actually intercepted missiles coming from Syria several months ago, the Beirut government let the missiles pass through to Hezbollah.

A perceived victory for Hezbollah today will spawn clones tomorrow. That's why it is time for the international community to make it crystal-clear that democratization cannot be built on the false legitimacy of a militia. Radical militias are criminal organizations that aid and abet terrorism—no more and no less.

David Makovsky is a senior fellow and director of The Washington Institute's Project on the Middle East Peace Process. ❖

New York Daily News

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

[How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria](#)

Feb 15, 2022

◆
Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

TOPICS

Arab-Israeli Relations (/policy-analysis/arab-israeli-relations)

Military & Security (/policy-analysis/military-security)

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iran (/policy-analysis/iran)

Israel (/policy-analysis/israel)