

ISRAELI-HEZBOLLAH CONFLICT AND ITS EFFECT ON MIDDLE EAST SECURITY

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Abstract

This research investigates the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict and its implications for regional security in the Middle East. The study focuses on two main objectives: first, to assess the emergence of the conflict and its effect on regional security; and second, to enumerate the effect of the conflict on state stability and diplomatic alignments. It was anchored by the Realist theory, which accentuates power, security, and state survival in an

anarchic international system. This research adopted ex-post Facto research design, primarily relying on secondary sources including scholarly literature, policy reports, United Nations documents, and media analyses. Furthermore, this study features the limited effectiveness of international frameworks such as UNIFIL and United Nations Security Council resolutions, which endures enforcement and credibility challenges in restraining asymmetric confrontations. The study recommends among others that enhancing Lebanese state agencies, particularly the armed forces and internal security agencies, through modernization, capacity-building, and better coordination, to reduce reliance on non-state armed actors and fostering long-term stability.

Keywords: Israeli–Hezbollah Conflict; Middle East Security; Regional Stability; Realist Theory; Non-State Actors

Introduction

Israeli-Hezbollah's conflict is one of the longest-standing and most combustible rivalries in the Middle East, ingrained in the region's political, religious, and strategic landscape. It originated from Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, known as Operation Peace for Galilee, which was designed to remove the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from southern Lebanon. The invasion prompted Lebanon's disenfranchised Shia society to take action due to the severe oppression of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). It was originally formed in 1985 inside Lebanon to oppose Israel's occupation of the country, and through the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) it was funded by Iran, as a result of that state's aid Hezbollah following the 1979 Iranian

Revolution, Hezbollah is an extension of radical Shi'a Islam ("Party of God") (Norton, 2007).

The groups common interest highlights the Liberation of Southern Lebanon from Israeli occupation deeply confined into the opinion about resisting Western domination in the region. Eventually, Israel maintained its view of the group as a significant security risk rival due to its geographic proximity, missile arsenal and close ties to Iran, as Hezbollah evolved into a prominent political and military force.

The 2006 Lebanon War revealed the severity of the conflict resulting to widespread destruction and numerous civilian deaths and exposed the weakness in regional security. The back-and-forth clashes and persistent confrontations have maintained a state of instability in Lebanon and Israel also involving key regional and global powers. Hezbollah have received constant support from Iran and Syria both militarily and politically while Israel's military and diplomatic initiatives have reliably received aid from the United States. According to Bazzi and Makdisi (2024), Hezbollah's cross-border attacks indicate support for Gaza and align with Iran's plans. As a result, the conflict is shaped into wider rivalries involving the U.S. and Russia and China. These conflicts complicate humanitarian suffering and threaten local economies. They reveal how UN groups, like United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) are deficient. The negligence of these UN groups to reduce the tension means weak global peacekeeping (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia 2024)

Due to occurring developments, the nature of the conflict faced a major transformation particularly in 2023. Hezbollah made use of precision-guided missiles and drones which marks a significant change toward hybrid warfare, while Israel relied on deep-strike and cyber operations indicating a growing regional arms race (Kober, 2024). These tactics blurred traditional battle lines, eroded conventional deterrence, thereby restraining all possible efforts to achieve lasting peace. The conflict is accompanied by Economic instability, growing confrontations along the Lebanese-Israeli border and potential risks to Mediterranean energy routes unsettling global markets (Salem, 2024). Diplomatically, normalization between Israel and Arab states has been altered, while Iran's strengthened ties with Russia and China suggest an emerging multipolar order in the Middle East (Barnett & Telhami, 2023; Lynch, 2024).

Despite the existence of UNIFIL and the endorsement of UN Security Council Resolution 1701, prolonged conflict and Hezbollah's growing arsenal shows the inability of international actors to enforce peace, therefore the conflict exhibits notable institutional weaknesses. The asymmetric nature of the conflict exposes the limits of traditional peacekeeping frameworks made for interstate wars (Makdisi, 2024). Civilians from both regions continue to suffer the impact of violence as international humanitarian standards weakened and fail to take accountability (UNHCR, 2024). Moreover, the presence of global powers led to a split in the institutional stances, where the Western support for Israel in conflict with Iran and Russia's support for Hezbollah shows the growing division of the international order.

The persistent activities of external powers have deepened complications of the conflict, one of which is, Iran played a crucial role in opposing U.S. and Israeli influence by funding Hezbollah with advanced weaponry and using the group as part of its broader “Axis of Resistance” (Slim, 2024; Bazzi, 2024). While Gulf States such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE continue to be cautious despite previous attempts at cooperation, the United States continues to aid Israel with weapons and intelligence support while avoiding direct intervention (Barnett & Telhami, 2023). Meanwhile, Russia has used the conflict to strengthen its ties with Iran and deepen its influence in Lebanon, portraying itself as an opposing regional power broker (Makdisi, 2024).

Fundamental principles of international law are at risk due to the dynamics of the conflict. Hezbollah’s semi-autonomous military operations distort the divisions between state and non-state actors further complicating Lebanon’s sovereignty and accountability under the international laws (Fakhoury, 2024). Conversely, Israel adopted Article 51 of the UN Charter to defend self-defense strikes in Lebanese territory which prompted challenges in proportionality and legality of preemptive action towards non-state actors (Kober, 2024; Lynch, 2024). These dynamics reveal asymmetric warfare challenges eroding the state-centered model of international relations and imposing pressure on traditional legal frameworks.

Statement of the Problem

Israel and Hezbollah's conflict transformed from intermittent cross border hostilities to a broader regional conflict zone, which involves regional actors such as, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and other international actors in complex security concerns. Hezbollah supported by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps and strategic alliances, evolved into an organization with powerful political and military force, positions itself as a pillar of the "axis of resistance" (Levitt, 2024; IPRC, 2025). Hezbollah projects itself as a multidimensional threat aside its missile and drone capability and subterranean tunnel networks (positioned near the Blue Line) but through its collaborative operations with Iran and allied forces across Syria Iraq and beyond as stated by Israel.

Meanwhile, Israel's military actions varying from premeditated homicides of Hezbollah's leadership to precise strikes on its communication networks shaped the regional power balance (MEI, 2024; SETA, 2025). The operations caused extreme collateral damages particularly within Lebanon's civilian infrastructure and including the healthcare sector creating severe humanitarian and legal concerns.

The conflict persists, strengthening armament proliferation, regional polarization, and a possibility of multi-front escalation with multiple diplomatic initiatives and peacekeeping strategies, including UNIFIL's prolonged but terminal operation in southern Lebanon (UN Security Council, 2025). This declining security threat prompts an essential question: is the Israeli-Hezbollah

conflict simply a regional military clash, or is it a sign of a broader regional security issue with widespread implications for state stability, diplomatic alignments, and conflict resolution?

Regional frameworks and global mechanisms limitations to mitigate this conflict in a sustainable manner asserts the need for rigorous analysis. Notably, accessing the dynamics of the conflict reduces prior security frameworks, strengthens state fragility, and weakens the chances for long-term peace in the broader Middle East is essential.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this research aims to assess how the emergence of Israeli–Hezbollah conflict affected the Middle East security

Specifically, the research aims to;

1. To assess the emergence of the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict and its effect on Middle East security.
2. To enumerate the conflict’s effects on regional diplomatic relations.

Research Questions

These research questions guided the research;

1. How has the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict emergence affected the Middle East security?
2. How does the conflict affect regional diplomatic relations?

Conceptual Review

Conflict

The concept of conflict is both multifaceted and multidimensional, making it one of the most controversial terms in the social sciences. The term conflict is generally understood as a state of disagreement between two or more parties who identify their interests, values, or goals as being at odds with one another (Egobi, 2019). However, there is no commonly accepted definition, as scholars across disciplines view conflict differently based on their theoretical orientation, context of analysis, and methodological approach.

Conceptualizing the term conflict is vague, as scholars have divided opinion based on its meaning. Thus, it has been defined as “the existence of non-compatibility or disagreements between two actors (individuals, groups, organizations or nations) in their opposition over the issues of interests, values, beliefs, emotions, goals, space, positions, scarce resources, etc (Egobueze, 2016, p. 18).” Conflict is a defined clash between two interdependent parties who perceive opposing goals, advantages and interferences from the opposing party in achieving their goals; it could also be inter personal. It is a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a severe disagreement or dispute; this could be a violent or fighting, or a situation where there are conflicting views, perspectives, beliefs or wishes, a situation where it is difficult to choose.

The term Conflict is defined by one of the prevailing viewpoints as the state of incompatibility or disagreement between actors over scarce resources, power, positions, values, or beliefs. Scholars such as Coser (1956), who stated that conflict occurs

whenever individuals or groups attempt to maximize their advantages in the pursuit of incompatible goals reflects this perspective. Similarly, Jeong (2008) defines conflict as a “social situation in which a minimum of two actors (individuals, groups, or states) struggle over values, status, power, or scarce resources.” The structural and material root causes of conflict are highlighted by this incompatibility standpoint..

The general definition of conflict in the field of international relations is the quest for contradicting goals by numerous states or non-state actors within the international system. Scholars such as Galtung (1996) have distinguish between three types of conflicts; direct conflict (obvious violence), structural conflict (rising from an imbalanced social structures), and cultural conflict (caused by inequalities in identity and values). This broader perspective views conflict not only at the interpersonal or domestic level but also in global politics.

Regional Security

Regional security is a concept that has grown in significance in contemporary international relations, especially in the post–Cold War era where many security threats are less confined within national borders and often spill across regions. The traditional security focused primarily on protecting states from external aggression, while regional security highlights the interconnectedness of states within a geographical region and the collective management of common threats. (Buzan & Wæver, 2003).

The notion that states are interconnected through security is often viewed as regional security or the security interdependence of states in a defined geographical area. Buzan (1991) proposed the idea that security dynamics are clustered regionally because threats and vulnerabilities are most experienced by geographically proximate states. The development of this idea into the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) was done by Buzan and Wæver (2003), who argues that there are distinct patterns of security interdependence between regions so that conflict or insecurity in one state affects neighboring states.

Regional security can also be viewed from a different point of view, as a collective security arrangement; states are working together through regional institutions and processes in order to prevent, manage, resolve any potential conflict or feelings of danger or insecurity between them. Collective Security's basic principle is that when a state is threatened, all member states have been threatened and their responses should be joint (Deutsch et al, 1957). In African continent, Organizations such as ECOWAS and AU carry out this function using peacekeeping missions, mediation and conflict resolution efforts (Adebajo, 2002) The conceptualization of security has broadened to incorporate political, economic, societal, and environmental dimensions beyond military concerns in the post-Cold War era (Buzan, 1991). Therefore, non-traditional threats such as terrorism, climate change, human trafficking, piracy, pandemics, and cybercrime all compromises of modern regional security. For instance, regional security in Asia is shaped not only by interstate rivalries but also by transnational issues like terrorism and natural disasters

according to Okonkwo (2024). Non-traditional threats in Africa dominate regional security agendas through issues such as Boko Haram insurgency, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and climate-induced conflicts in the Sahel.

The concept of human security is linked to regional security in a subsequent approach, which underscores the protection of individuals rather than just states (UNDP, 1994). Regional security also about protecting civilians from poverty, disease, repression, and displacement and not only preventing interstate wars. Persistent regional security is unachievable without tackling essential structural inequalities and governance negligence where Galtung's (1996) framework of direct, structural, and cultural violence is applicable.

Israeli-Hezbollah Conflict

The persistent conflict between Israel and Hezbollah resulted to a major scholarly debate considering its crucial effects for Middle Eastern regional security. Major literature works traces the evolution of the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict to the broader Arab-Israeli confrontations and the Lebanese Civil War. Scholars such as Norton (2007) highlight the role of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon in catalyzing Hezbollah's formation as a Shiite resistance movement. Thus, from this perspective, Hezbollah is an integral part of Lebanese politics and the regional power game as a hybrid political-military organization with the strong backing of Iran. (Levitt, 2013) This perspective, undertaken by most historians, sees the conflict as deep-rooted, thus possessing the

persistence of the same as a reflection of supposed unresolved struggles within the ideologies of identity.

The Second Lebanon War (2006) is cited as one of the conflicts' crucial development stages that have shaped the following Israeli and Hezbollah strategies and the overall history of the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict. The historical roots of the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict are mutual enmity and suspicion, which create a basis for almost intractable reconciliation attempts. Hezbollah was formed as a reaction to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the subsequent occupation of southern Lebanon until 2000. Symbolically, it is also evident in the case of Shebaa Farms, which are claimed by Lebanon but have been occupied by Israel, as they keep the conflict going. These territorial issues have continuously resurfaced as justification for Hezbollah's militarization in its resistance discourse and have perceived Hezbollah's military presence along the border as an existential threat. It would be regarded by Israel as opposing all forms of state legitimacy as a substantial threat to Israel's security: armed resistance to it by Hezbollah. With that, ideologically, it has to be said to further feed the ill will, which means that concessions are politically very costly for both sides. (Norton, 2007)

Scholars often analyze the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict through the lens of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) which posits that the Middle East is an elaborate security complex in which localized conflict has an impact on system-level stability (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). As a result of the Iran-Israel conflict and the

Sunni-Shia divide, the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict symbolizes a small community of wider middle east rivalry. The conflict is sequentially linked to a threatening Levant and broader Arab world regional order and claims that Hezbollah's role as Iran's proxy worsens tensions between regional rival powers, while Israel's use of military force to react to Hezbollah generates reaction from other state and non-state actors, as stated by Hinnebusch (2013) and Mabon (2020). Hezbollah maintains its image as resistance against Israeli "aggression," pleasing to its Shiite base and regional supporters. This account causes complexity of peace-building by undermining diplomatic solutions and bordering compromise as capitulation. (Wendt, 1999) stated that Israel's security procedures, including the "campaign between wars" strategy, concentrates on reducing the effect Hezbollah's military capabilities. While this approach addresses direct threats, it worsens lasting hostility by prioritizing military solutions over political engagement. (Norton, 2021).

On the other hand, Iran has enhanced Hezbollah as a dominant regional power and made peacekeeping missions face complexities through endorsing Hezbollah financially and its military capabilities. The Israeli-Hezbollah conflict deepened the broader regional instability and has weakened the chances of securing peace. The involvement of Hezbollah in Syria's civil war enhanced its militarization and links it to regional wars because of facilitated the Assad regime. Iran provided advanced arsenals and financial aid to Hezbollah's military capabilities and continue their alliance. Hezbollah's growing alignment with Iran becomes more complicated for Israel to marginalize the group militarily or diplomatically as it's an important factor in the regional strategy

of Iran. According to Israeli officials Hezbollah's missile arsenal exceeds 150,000 missiles as a primary security threat. The United States stated its full support for Israel, including supplying advanced missile defense systems such as Iron Dome. In opposition, Hezbollah has indirectly supported the Assad regime by securing, an important ally amidst Russia's engagement in Syria (Levitt, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The Realist theory highlights the international system as anarchical in nature, where states focus on survival through the accumulation of power and security. Realism, Classical Realism, Neorealism (Structural Realism), and Neoclassical Realism are deeply entrenched in classical political thought has adapted into several strands. Thucydides as a Classical Realist in Ancient Greece established the foundation of realist thought through works like *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which underscores the persistent struggle for power among states. Niccolò Machiavelli, in *The Prince*, highlighted the prominence of power, pragmatism, and effective statecraft in politics, while Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, depicted human nature as self-interested and defined the international system as an anarchic "state of nature." Hans J. Morgenthau emerged as a leading Classical Realist in the current global order. He claimed that international politics is ruled by objective laws entrenched in human nature In *Politics Among Nations* (1948).

Neorealism, or Structural Realism, emerged subsequently with Kenneth Waltz as a key proponent. The structure of the

international system, categorized by anarchy and the distribution of capabilities among states, shapes state behavior surpasses human nature was contended by Waltz, In *Theory of International Politics* (1979). Reinhold Niebuhr, who supported Christian realism by emphasizing the persistence of power politics, John J. Mearsheimer, a leading Offensive Realist who views states as power-maximizers (*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2001), and Stephen Walt, who refined neorealism with his balance-of-threat theory are momentous contributors to realist thought.

Israeli-Hezbollah conflict is constructed as a struggle for dominance within a competitive and hostile regional order. The preemptive strikes against Hezbollah by Israel's military, signifies its strategic pursuit for security and deterrence. Israel's strategy of sustaining a qualitative military edge to nullify perceived threats, mainly Hezbollah's growing missile arsenal and ties to Iran is grounded Realism. Hezbollah's alliance with Iran and Syria illustrates an offsetting strategy against Israel. (Waltz, 1979) This relationship strengthens Hezbollah's ability to counter Israel militarily, thereby increasing the regional security dilemma. Realism reveals how this balance of power fuels an enduring cycle of hostility. Constructivism alters the focus to how identity, norms and socially constructed meanings influence international relations. The Israeli-Hezbollah conflict is a clash of ideologies and identities alongside material struggle. Hezbollah's legitimacy among its followers is reinforced by its resistance movement, which is anchored in Shiite ideology and anti-Zionism. Constructivism examines the persistence of the conflict through identities and ideational elements.

Hezbollah portrays itself as a protector of the Lebanese state's sovereignty against Israeli occupation. (Wendt, 1999) A persistent breakdown of trust is maintained by Israel's framing of Hezbollah as a major security threat and Hezbollah's viewing Israel as an existential threat. Constructivism emphasizes the ideational and identity-driven dimensions of the conflict, where realism underlines the material aspects of conflict, such as military prowess and alliances. These structures clarify the material and immaterial origins of conflict when unified. While contextualizing the conflict within the wider Middle Eastern security architecture RSCT further highlights interdependence and the influence of outside actors. By confronting the regional and systemic elements of power politics, it facilitates realism. Constructivism by understanding how regional identities and norms interrelate. The basic multidimensional approaches to conflict resolution, including power-balancing strategies, norm-building initiatives, and frameworks for regional cooperation, are emphasized by observing the conflict through these lenses.

Emergence of Israeli–Hezbollah Conflict and the Middle East Security

The Israeli–Hezbollah conflict is a key player of instability in Middle East security, particularly as it escalated between 2020 and 2024. The escalation of hostilities during this period exposed the fundamental weaknesses in the international system, with particular regard for how its former is able to regulate asymmetric warfare and manage conflicts involving powerful non-state actors. The origins of the conflict can be traced to decades of geopolitical

rivalry, sectarian divisions, and unresolved territorial disputes in the region. The effectiveness of international institutions in preserving peace and implementing international law remains contentious by a prominent non-state armed group known as Hezbollah, with significant military and political capacity that has substantially influenced the conflicts dynamics (Al Habtoor Research Center, 2024; Foreign Policy, 2024; Salihu, 2023).

Hezbollah's re-emergence as an active combatant during the October 2023 war between Israel and Hamas marked a significant milestone in the contemporary phase of the conflict. Hezbollah launching cross-border attacks from southern Lebanon intensified regional tensions and sparked concerns about a broader two-front war involving Israel. This development underscored how easily localized conflicts can escalate into larger regional confrontations and highlighted the fragility of existing deterrence mechanisms (AP News, 2024; Riedel, 2024). The situation further demonstrated how inadequate international peacekeeping structures are at containing such escalations.

During this period the role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) became particularly divisive. UNIFIL which was established in 2006 to monitor ceasefire agreements and preserve peace in southern Lebanon was incapable of effectively curbing Hezbollah's military operations. The structural limitations of international interventions in situations where non-state actors possess significant autonomy and local legitimacy were revealed by the persistence of hostilities despite the presence of peacekeeping forces (Cheeseman, 2024). This reinforces the

claim that contemporary security issues characterized by hybrid warfare are often beyond the capabilities of traditional peacekeeping models (Salihu, 2023).

UNIFIL's failure to prevent escalation reveals a broader concern regarding the effectiveness of international peacekeeping in compound conflict environments. As a result of Hezbollah's integration into Lebanon's political and social structure disarmament efforts are hampered by institutional and diplomatic barriers. Consequently, the United Nations credibility as a neutral mediator in regional conflicts has been damaged by its alleged inability to act decisively.

Critical gaps in the application of international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly in regard to non-state actors are also revealed by the conflict. Hezbollah operates within a more ambiguous legal space than Israel which is governed by established legal frameworks as a recognized state. Allegations of attacks on civilians, the use of human shields, and the enlistment of child soldiers raise serious legal and ethical concerns. However, the lack of efficient mechanisms for holding non-state actors accountable means that the enforcement of international law remains limited. Hezbollah's connection to Iran further complicates this dynamic, as it blurs the distinction between state and non-state warfare, thereby challenging existing legal frameworks (Brookings Institution, 2024; Salihu, 2023).

The geopolitical dimension of the conflict has further threatened the stability of the international system. Due to the indirect involvement of major powers such as the United States, Iran, and

Russia the conflict has become a proxy battleground for broader strategic interests. As part of its regional influence strategy Iran continues to support Hezbollah which contrasts sharply with the United States' strong political and military backing of Israel. Russia's involvement, particularly through its strategic cooperation with Iran and its alignment with the Syrian government and adds another layer of complexity. The effectiveness of organized diplomatic responses has reduced due to this polarization which has also weakened international consensus.

The rise of proxy warfare is a defining characteristic of the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict. Hezbollah's role as an extension of Iranian regional strategy replicates a broader trend in contemporary conflicts where states use non-state actors to pursue their strategic objectives. Its function as a key instrument of regional influence is further demonstrated by its involvement in the Syrian Civil War alongside Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This pattern of indirect makes conflict resolution efforts engagement complex, as it enables state actors to pursue strategic goals while avoiding direct accountability (Salihu, 2023).

The conflicts humanitarian consequences have been dire, particularly in Lebanon. Repeated airstrikes, destruction of infrastructure, and widespread displacement have all been subjected by civilian populations. Existing socio-economic crises, including the aftermath of the 2020 Beirut port explosion and enduring economic instability exacerbate these challenges. The

resulting humanitarian situation has strained aid organizations capacity, which is often hindered by insecurity and limited access. This highlights international responses inadequacy in addressing the immediate aspects as well as the structural dimensions of the crisis.

Hezbollah's role in Iran's regional strategy illustrates the rise of proxy warfare, reflects a broader shift in contemporary crisis. The use of armed militias state actors achieve their goals without direct clash. Hezbollah interfering in the Syrian Civil War alongside Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps guaranteed its role of Iranian influence. As a result of this, conflict resolution becomes extremely difficult and sustains political costs for state actors. The deepening internalization of proxy warfare and peacebuilding undermines traditional modalities of diplomacy as because actors strive for strategic ends in the legal and political gray zones in the international system free from accountability.

The conflicts humanitarian costs, mainly in Lebanon, continue undermine insubstantial prospect for international governance. Apart from the political stagnation, the economic crisis and aftermath of the 2020 Beirut port explosion, Lebanese civilians had to endure nightly Israeli airstrikes against Hezbollah. Strategic infrastructures are the target of these operations, making thousands refugees, exacerbating the severity of poverty and displaced people. Humanitarian organization face major unbeatable barriers despite their maximum efforts, humanitarian aid has been inconsistently supplied and many international responses have failed to curb fundamental causes of the conflict.

The failure to safeguard civilians or enable long-term recovery reveals the thresholds of high diplomacy and international development assistance.

The conflict exposed the structural shortcomings of the international system. The effectiveness of global powers rivalries is limited when non-state are firmly established Peacekeeping missions encounter complexities and international law is rarely applied during asymmetric warfare. This is the dominant strategy in regional clashes where proxy warfare occurs, thereby peace tasks and security complex. The credibility of the international system continues to decline if failed to implement. Overall, the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict serves as a critical test of how hybrid warfare and geopolitical fragmentation affects the future of international governance, far beyond the region.

Israeli-Hezbollah Conflict and regional diplomatic relations

The Israeli–Hezbollah conflict has had far-reaching impact on Middle Eastern diplomatic relations, fundamentally reshaping of alliance formation patterns, intensifying geopolitical rivalries, and complicating efforts toward sustainable conflict resolution. The conflict which is a protracted and multidimensional confrontation involving a highly organized non-state actor (Hezbollah) and a sovereign state (Israel) transcends conventional interstate warfare and exerts major influence on the broader regional and international diplomatic environment. Its persistence has strengthened the growing trend of proxy competition among regional and global powers undermined multilateral engagement mechanisms and deepened diplomatic polarization (Salihu and

Ogunnoiki, 2021). In this regard, the conflict serves as a critical example of how contemporary security challenges intersect with and reshape diplomatic practices within the international system.

A major diplomatic ramification of the conflict is the escalation of regional polarization within the Middle East. With states aligning either with Iran and its network of allied non-state actors including Hezbollah or Israel and its Western allies, the region has increasingly evolved into a divided geopolitical space marked by competing blocs. The United States continues to play a pivotal role in this alignment By providing Israel extensive diplomatic, financial, and military support the United States continues to play a central role in this alignment, reinforcing its strategic dominance and diplomatic leverage.

Conversely, Iran's sustained support for Hezbollah reflects part of a broader foreign policy objective to project influence and counterbalancing Western and Israeli interests in the region. The prospects for collective regional diplomacy have been significantly constrained by ideological and strategic divide, as divergent interests and mutual suspicions hinder the development of unified responses to security threats (Riedel, 2024).

Beyond regional polarization, the conflict has also had a significant impact for Lebanon's international standing and diplomatic relations. Hezbollah's dual identity as both a legitimate political actor within Lebanon's internal political system and a militant group engaged in armed confrontation with Israel has created a complicated diplomatic dilemma. While the Lebanese state is formally recognized as the sovereign authority,

regional and international actors have raised concerns about its effectiveness and autonomy due to its limited capacity to control or limit Hezbollah's activities. This has, in turn, strained Lebanon's position within regional and international diplomatic engagements has been weakened as a result of the strained diplomatic relations with countries that perceive Hezbollah as a destabilizing force (Cheeseman, 2024). The situation highlights the broader challenge states face when non-state actors wield significant political and military influence.

The Israeli–Hezbollah conflict has also intersected with the developing process of diplomatic normalization between Israel and some Arab states. A strategic shift in regional diplomacy is reflected in initiatives such as the Abraham Accords which take into pragmatic considerations such as economic cooperation, security concerns like shared opposition to Iranian influence. However, by reigniting longstanding political and emotional sensitivities within the Arab world recurrent escalations involving Hezbollah tend to disrupt these normalization efforts. Governments are placed under pressure to reconsider or adjust their diplomatic engagements with Israel as a result of public opinion which is often influenced by sentiments of injustice and solidarity with affected populations. Consequently, the persistence of conflict continues to impede the development of emerging diplomatic partnerships.

The limitations of international organizations in managing the conflict have further contributed to the erosion of confidence in multilateral diplomacy has been exacerbated by the limitations of

international organizations in curbing the conflict. It has been a struggle for institutions such as the United Nations, particularly through the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), to effectively enforce ceasefire agreements or prevent renewed hostilities. UNIFIL has faced significant operational constraints, despite its longstanding presence in southern Lebanon including limited mandates, restricted access, and the challenging realities of operating in an environment dominated by a powerful non-state actor. These challenges highlight the broader shortcomings of traditional peacekeeping frameworks in addressing contemporary conflicts marked by asymmetry and hybrid warfare. As a result, bilateral negotiations and strategic alliances have greater emphasis than reliance on multilateral mechanisms (Al Habtoor Research Center, 2024; Salihu and Ogunnoiki 2021).

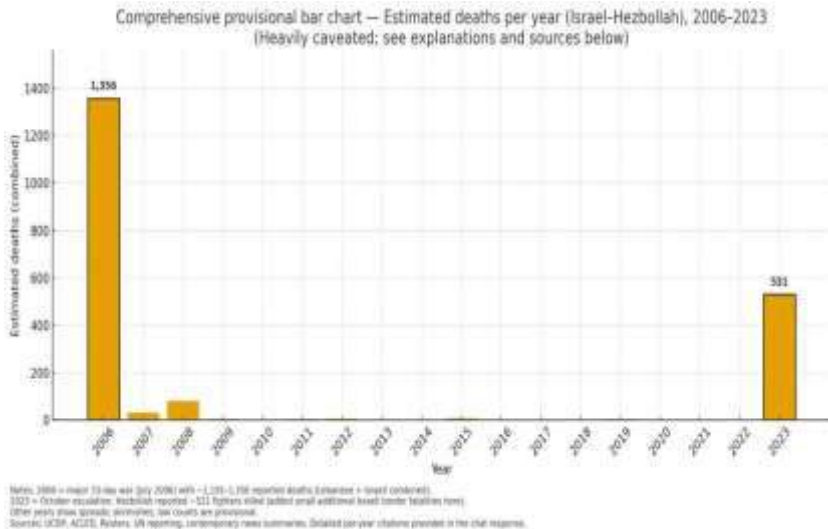
The reinforcement of proxy diplomacy as a dominant feature of Middle Eastern international relations is another dimension of the conflict. Regional and global powers increasingly use non-state actors to pursue their strategic objectives rather than engaging in direct military confrontation. Hezbollah's role as a key proxy for Iran exemplifies This trend is best demonstrated by Hezbollah's role as a key proxy for Iran exemplifying how non-state actors have become integral to the conduct of foreign policy and the projection of regional power. This indirect mode of engagement makes diplomatic processes more difficult, as it introduces additional layers of actors whose interests and actions must be taken into consideration in any negotiation framework. Additionally it challenges established norms of international relations and diplomacy by blurring the traditional boundaries

between state and non-state actors (Brookings Institution, 2024; Salihu, 2023).

The Israeli–Hezbollah conflict has humanitarian consequences that further shape regional diplomatic dynamics. Significant civilian casualties, the destruction of critical infrastructure and widespread displacement, have all been caused by recurrent cycles of violence particularly in Lebanon. These humanitarian issues have garnered international attention and prompted calls for ceasefires, humanitarian assistance, and conflict de-escalation. However, the effectiveness of diplomatic responses to these crises is limited because they are frequently fragmented and influenced by political alignments. The tension between humanitarian imperatives and strategic interests remains a major challenge for policymakers, as states strike a balance between their moral responsibilities with geopolitical considerations.

The Israeli–Hezbollah conflict remains a central factor in determining regional diplomatic relations in the Middle East. It has elevated the role of proxy actors in regional diplomacy, weakened the effectiveness of multilateral institutions and contributed to the entrenchment of geopolitical divisions. The persistent nature of the conflict underscores the difficulty of establishing sustainable peace in a region marked by overlapping strategic interests, ideological differences, and shifting security dynamics. Ultimately, the conflict serves as an illustration of the increasing interconnectedness of modern warfare and diplomatic relations, with profound implications for both regional stability and the broader international system.

A Bar Chart visualizing the death toll and casualties of the Israeli-Hezbollah Conflict from 2006-2023



The bar chart above illustrates a conflict with the intensity appearing periodically. Based on the first observation, 2006 appears incredibly tall; this is as a result of the 33-day Lebanon war which claimed the lives of over a thousand people, the majority of whom were Lebanese civilians and fighters, as well as Israeli soldiers and civilians. The war is documented as a turning point with long-lasting repercussions.

After the chaos, there was conflict but it subsided. There are still remnants of the violence in the subsequent years, particularly 2008 when the Beirut street battles contributed to Hezbollah's wider power struggle. The chart then shows a prolonged period of minimal change during the following decade of border flare-ups, killings and small-scale skirmishes. The Casualties barely surpass single digits during those years. However, their presence shows that the conflict never ended but with reduced intensity.

From 2020 to 2022 the conflict appeared to be at its lowest point as if the war had subsided but it was a fallacy. The conflict reignited in 2023 and the death toll escalated rapidly in a new spike. Over five hundred Hezbollah fighters were lost in the conflict along with Israeli and civilian casualties making it a total above five hundred thirty. The 2023 bar is the second largest bar since 2006 illustrates a change in the regional stability and a resurgence of confrontational clashes.

The bar chart shows sudden waves of destruction interspersed with years of instability a rather than a steady pattern. It shows how this conflict persists overtime and a reminder of how low numbers can conceal the effect of the conflict which eventually escalates.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question One

How has the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict emergence affected Middle East security?

The findings reveal that the Israeli–Hezbollah conflicts emergence and escalation have significantly undermined security in the Middle East by intensifying instability, broadening the scope of conflict, and weakening preexisting security frameworks. Asymmetric and hybrid forms of conflict in which non-state actors such as, Hezbollah are key players have replaced conventional interstate warfare as a result of the conflict. This transformation has made security management in the region more complex, as traditional military deterrence strategies are less effective against decentralized and ideologically driven groups

The escalation of regional insecurity due to the possibility of multi-front warfare is one of the conflict's major impacts. Hezbollah's cross-border attacks from southern Lebanon have intensified tensions and raised the possibilities of a broader regional confrontation involving Iran and its allies. This has created a precarious security environment where localized conflicts can swiftly escalate into wider regional crises.

The findings also show that the conflict has exposed the shortcoming of international security and peacekeeping mechanisms. Institutions such as the United Nations have proven insufficient in preventing hostilities or enforcing ceasefire agreements particularly through UNIFIL. This has exposed the inability of international frameworks to effectively handle

conflicts involving powerful non-state actors and weakened confidence in global security governance.

In addition, the conflict has strengthened the pattern of proxy warfare in the Middle East. Iran's support for Hezbollah is an example of how regional powers increasingly pursue strategic interests through covert means avoiding direct confrontation while maintaining instability. Due to the involvement of multiple actors with competing interests, this trend has prolonged conflicts and made resolution more difficult.

The humanitarian effects of the conflict further intensify insecurity. Infrastructure destruction civilian casualties and displacement all exacerbate social instability and deepen grievances which could lead to further violence and radicalization. Overall, the findings indicate that the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict has also contributed to long-term structural insecurity in the Middle East in addition to disrupting immediate security conditions.

Research Question Two

How does the conflict affect regional diplomatic relations?

The findings show that the Israeli–Hezbollah conflict has a profound impact on regional diplomatic relations by deepening gaps, complicating alliances, and undermining multilateral cooperation in the Middle East. There are limited prospects for coordinated regional actions, as a result of the conflicts

contribution to a polarized diplomatic environment, where states align along opposing geopolitical and ideological lines.

The escalation of regional bloc politics is a key finding. States supporting Israel, particularly Western allies such as the United States, and those in alliance with Iran and its proxy networks, including Hezbollah have become more divided as a result of the conflict. This polarization has diminished the efficacy of regional cooperation mechanisms and made it difficult to achieve diplomatic consensus on security-related issues.

The findings also demonstrate how that the conflict has complicated the diplomatic position of Lebanon. Lebanon's credibility in international relations has been weakened by Hezbollah's dual role as both a militant and political actor. The Lebanese government limited its diplomatic influence and strained its relations with other states are results of its inability to fully control Hezbollah's activities.

Furthermore, ongoing efforts to normalize relations between Israel and some Arab states have been disrupted the conflict. While initiatives such as the Abraham Accords reflect a shift toward pragmatic diplomacy Hezbollah-related hostilities frequently reignite tensions and generate public opposition which slows the pace of normalization and diplomatic engagement.

According the study, the conflict has reduced confidence in international organizations as effective mediators. Diplomatic efforts have shifted to bilateral and informal channels due to the

limited success of institutions such as the United Nations in managing the conflict. However, because non-state actors role outside traditional diplomatic frameworks their increasing influence in regional politics has complicated diplomatic negotiations.

Conclusion

The Israel and Hezbollah conflict is one of the most combustible tensions in the Middle East and hence has its significant ramifications for political stability, international peace mechanism and regional security. According to this study, the conflict is not only a confrontation between two rivalries but also a complex interplay of asymmetric warfare, state and non-state actors, regional rivalries, and global strategic interests. Over time the conflict escalated intermittently, resulting to cross-border violence, civilian casualties, humanitarian crises, and population displacement, all of which intensified regional instability. According to the research findings, Israel relied on advanced military capabilities and strategic deterrence while Hezbollah made use of asymmetric tactics, local support, and regional alliances to sustain its impact and operational capacity. The interplay of these rivalries interacted to create an unpredictable security environment with cyclical rivalries and recurrent flare-ups that test regional states and international actors in stability maintenance.

The study also states that the regional and international mechanisms such as ceasefire agreements, United Nations

resolutions, and diplomatic mediation have only partially succeeded in resolving the conflicted permanently. The inability to enforce compliance from both state and non-state actors as well as geopolitical rivalries and conflicting national interests typically undermine their efficacy. Consequently, the conflict continues to have an impact on the political development of Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and other neighboring countries as the broader strategic balance of the entire Middle East.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that; Enhance the capacity of national armed forces and intelligence systems, particularly in fragile states, to reduce the impact of groups like Hezbollah and promote stability in regional security.

Encourage inclusive, multilateral engagement among regional and global actors to reduce rivalry, enhance collaboration, and promote more effective conflict resolution.

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