

Matthew Levitt. *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-18-49-04-333-5. Pages: xiv, 407. Paperback. £19.99.

Hezbollah, literally translated as 'Party of God', is a militia, social welfare organisation, and political party based out of Lebanon. While its exact origins are difficult to determine, the organisation is believed to have arisen in the 1980s as a result of a number of factors including the export of the Iranian Revolution, the marginalisation of Lebanon's Shiite community, and Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

Hezbollah established itself as a formal entity with its 1985 manifesto, which rejected foreign presence in Lebanon, denounced Western influence on the Islamic world, declared its resistance to Israel, maintained its devotion to the Iranian regime, and promoted the achievement of its objectives through military action. Hezbollah has been held responsible for high-profile kidnappings and attacks against Western targets, such as the 1983 Marine barracks attacks and the 1985 hijacking of TWA Flight 847. It has been designated a terrorist organisation by a number of countries including Canada, the United States, Australia, Israel and the Netherlands.

However, over the years, Hezbollah has evolved from solely a militant organisation to one that is heavily involved in formal Lebanese state institutions. Hezbollah's popularity in Lebanon has been buoyed by its representation as a resistance movement and its sophisticated welfare programs. Hezbollah won 10 seats in Lebanon's 2009¹ elections and continues to take an active role in Lebanese politics. Its transition into mainstream Lebanese politics has led to its emergence as a powerful and multifaceted organisation with global networks.

Matthew Levitt, Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, explores

¹ Casey L. Addis and Christopher M. Blanchard, *Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington D.C.: US Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, R41446., 3 January, 2012).

some of the agendas and activities of these global networks in his book *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon's Party of God*. *Hezbollah* is the ambitious product of over ten years of research, interviews, and collation of information regarding Hezbollah's global networks in general and covert activities in particular.

Levitt is a former intelligence officer and has served as an analyst for the FBI, the U.S. Department of Treasury, and as a counterterrorism advisor to the U.S. State Department. In his comprehensive volume on Hezbollah, Levitt utilises his credentials and contacts, together with extensive research and documentation to present a dialogue on Hezbollah's international activities through the prism of a U.S. intelligence analyst. This is supported by an exploration of declassified intelligence records as well as interviews with policy makers and senior officials. The book is clad with details such as names, dates, and events, which are weaved together masterfully in a fast-paced and captivating tone. The narrative is accessible to readers with no prior knowledge about Hezbollah and is, therefore, compelling. Levitt guides the reader through the origins, ideology, structure, and activities of Hezbollah in the local and international arenas. He overlays each chapter with insight into Hezbollah's methods, tactics, and procedures.

Hezbollah provides a thorough overview of Hezbollah and its global networks as well as an intriguing discussion of its criminal activities, its relationship with Iran, and the potential threat it poses to the West. Levitt begins the book with a useful background about Hezbollah's genesis and traces its beginnings as a pro-Iranian faction to an international party. He then discusses Hezbollah's expansion into Europe, Latin America, North America, Southeast Asia, and Africa and outlines its various successful and unsuccessful plots. He also describes its involvement in training

insurgents who fought against the U.S. in Iraq as well as its creation of a unit to support Palestinian militant groups. Levitt denotes some of the steps taken by Western intelligence agencies to track Hezbollah and deter plots worldwide, and he presents some of the challenges to countering the organisation.

One of the challenges he persistently refers to in countering Hezbollah is the organisation's immense logistical capability, which he suggests is made possible through Iranian diplomatic, logistical, and intelligence support. (p. 357) Indeed, he systematically describes Hezbollah's capability and its intersection with Iranian intelligence architecture. Examples of this intersection are the 1990s bombings in Buenos Aires, believed to have been orchestrated by Iranian intelligence officials and carried out by Hezbollah operatives. Acts such as this imply that Iran uses Hezbollah as a proxy, enabling Iran to project its power and achieve its strategic objectives without having to contend with the consequences of militant activities on the ground. The relationship between Hezbollah and Iran is a constant theme throughout Levitt's work. Levitt identifies Hezbollah's position toward the West *vis-à-vis* its relationship with Iran. In analysing Hezbollah's global operations, Levitt places these in context of Iranian strategy toward the West and its use of a 'shadow war.' Yet, he also asserts Hezbollah's varying degrees of independence from Iran. Thus, Levitt suggests that Hezbollah's relationship with Iran renders it neither completely a proxy nor completely independent.

Another constant theme of *Hezbollah* is the convergence of terrorism and crime. Terror groups must be able to finance their activities in ways that are undetectable to law enforcement; and as finance is a vital resource for both criminal and terrorist groups, these groups may work together to further their financial goals despite dissimilar ideologies. For example, the alliance between a group with a Marxist-Leninist ideology (the FARC) and one with an extremist Shiite ideology (Hezbollah) would appear ill-matched, yet these groups are willing to collaborate due to their shared interest in making a profit. Levitt, therefore, identifies financial motive, abetted by cooperation with

local criminal elements, as one of the drivers for the operations and expansion of Hezbollah's global networks.

Levitt asserts that Hezbollah's willingness to use sophisticated military tactics at home as well as abroad, its global reach, and its strategic relationship with Iran should be of serious concern to Western actors, particularly the United States. He claims: 'It is high time the international community conducted a thorough and considered discussion of the full range of Hezbollah's "resistance" activities, and what to do about them'. (p. 373) Levitt clearly seeks to make the case that Hezbollah poses a danger to U.S. security, made ever more prevalent by its global expansion. However, the vast amounts of documents, anecdotes, and interviews utilised to support this claim are weakened by a lack of Hezbollah and Iranian sources. Levitt refers to this limitation by asserting that given that the book covers the organisation's illicit activities, 'it should be assumed that persons or entities accused of illicit conduct of any kind ... dispute those charges'. (p. xiv) While this point is certainly valid, additional sources, even if they deny claims of criminal activities, would provide a more balanced picture of the organisation in light of any potential bias by Levitt's bias as a former U.S. intelligence official.

Furthermore, Levitt claims that Hezbollah's involvement into a formal Lebanese party should not excuse its global illicit activities, as the organisation still constitutes a terrorist threat. However, it is exactly the multifaceted nature of the organisation that would, alternatively, seem to mitigate a terrorism threat by Hezbollah. Its involvement in formal state institutions means Hezbollah has had to evolve into a highly rational actor. Therefore, its considerations on whether or not to pursue militant actions are likely subjected to a strategic calculus that must take into consideration all of its formal structures, its political position locally, and its image in the world.

Additionally, given Hezbollah's support of the Assad regime, it would seem pertinent to place more attention on events in Syria. It would be interesting to understand what connections

have been made between Hezbollah and Syrian militias and in what way Hezbollah's troops engage in attacks against the rebels. Greater information regarding Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war and possible explanations for the significant amount of casualties it has suffered despite its years of military training would be valuable in understanding the continued evolution of Hezbollah's military wing.

Finally, Levitt's assertion that Hezbollah still poses a threat, particularly to the United States, would benefit from a more in-depth discussion of the lack of consensus over whether or not to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. While certain countries have designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation in its entirety, most countries, such as EU member states, recognise only its military wing as a terrorist entity. The lack of a global designation serves as a stumbling block to effectively counter any illicit activities carried out by Hezbollah and is, therefore, paramount to a discussion about the organisation's global activities.

While some consider Hezbollah an integral part of Lebanon's political scene and an instrument of Lebanese resistance, others have labelled it one of the most sophisticated terrorist groups in the world. Levitt has contributed to this debate by mapping Hezbollah's covert activities all over the world, including its logistical, criminal, and financial operations.

His work provides a comprehensive chronicle of Hezbollah's position *vis-à-vis* Iran's strategic calculus in what he dubs a 'shadow war'. While Levitt's experience as a U.S. intelligence official may arguably constitute a potential bias in his presentation of this material, it also provides a unique approach to this subject. Besides discussing Hezbollah's operations in Europe, Africa, and Asia, he also provides a fascinating review of Hezbollah's presence in the Western Hemisphere and the potential dangers this holds for U.S. security.

At a time when much of Hezbollah's activities, including its involvement in the Syrian civil war, take place outside of Syria, a greater understanding of its *modus operandi* and

objectives is essential. Levitt claims that its global reach and partnership with Iran render it a serious security concern, particularly for the U.S. and Israel, a claim that may be debatable given Hezbollah's involvement as a rational actor. Through a plethora of case studies and extensive coverage of Hezbollah's international activities, *Hezbollah* presents an intriguing and comprehensive insight into this powerful organisation and triggers the debate on whether or not Hezbollah should be considered a terrorist organisation.

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