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## IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH HEZBOLLAH AND EMERGING SECURITY DYNAMICS OF THE REGION

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines how Iran has used transnational networks, ideology, and non-state groups to project influence across the Middle East from the 1979 revolution to the post-2025 regional environment. Rather than treating Iran's actions as sudden or purely revolutionary, the study traces the deep historical roots of Tehran's outreach to groups such as the Lebanese Shia and Iraqi Kurds during the Pahlavi era. Drawing on academic writings, historical records, and contemporary analyses, the paper discusses how Wilayat al-Faqih shaped Iran's modern foreign policy, how Hezbollah became a central pillar of Iran's regional architecture, and how recent conflicts, including the October 2023 Hamas attack and the 2025 Iran Israel war exposed new limitations in Iran's proxy strategy. The findings suggest that although Iran continues to rely on non-state partners, shifting geopolitical realities are pressuring Tehran to adapt, modernize, and partially decentralize its approach to regional power projection.*

**KEYWORDS**

*Ayatollah, Transnational Terrorism, Wahhabism, Wilayat e Faqih*

## INTRODUCTION

Transnational terrorism has often been described as violence activities carried out by non-state groups that operate outside the borders, sometimes with direct or indirect backing from states pursuing their own strategic goals. In the Middle East, Iran has played one of the most critical roles in shaping these networks. Since the 1979 revolution, the doctrine of **Wilayat al-Faqih** has laid the foundation for a new model of foreign policy, one that relied heavily on ideology, alliances with sympathetic movements, and the creation of non-state partners capable of advancing Iran's interests outside its borders. What began as a domestic revolution quickly expanded into a long-term regional strategy, pulling groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen into Iran's orbit.

This paper explores how Iran developed this approach, how historical experiences shaped its reliance on proxies, and how recent events, including the 2023–2025 cycle of conflict with Israel, have tested the limits of Tehran's model. By examining both the origins and evolution of Iran's strategy, the study aims to provide a clearer picture of why Iran operates this way and how its approach is likely to evolve. The current scenarios have been changed, and now Tehran tends to think that if they adopt a modernized strategy for the non-state participants of its foreign policy, especially Hezbollah.

## IRAN'S GOAL BEHIND TRANSNATIONALISM

In Iran's case, Ayatollah Khomeini has created his own state (government) in the modern world which is unprecedented because they have their own ideology (Wilayat e Faqih), the reflection of ideology in their foreign policy which they have pursued in the last four decades, it also impacted upon the region where Iran is situated and ultimately the broader Islamic World, the first repercussion was Iran-Iraq war and the Fatwah to assassinate Salman. Rushdie, from the 1990s on words there is a general division within Iran, first which Khomeini had that we are right and good, the hawkish policy still pursued by in Iran and secondly Iranian society has the opinion that we should try to find common grounds and reconcile with the rest of the world, former President Ali Akbar Hashmi.Rafsanjani is famous in this regard. Iran's support to Hezbollah is apparent and also promoted state-sponsored terrorism to accomplish Khomeini's desire to establish an Islamic government across the region ideologically controlled by Iran.

## THE ISRAEL LOBBY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON US FOREIGN POLICY

The United States and Iran had better relations after the coup in 1953 that restored Reza Shah Pahlavi, but the stances that Ayatollah Khomeini raised were anti-Semitic and anti-American, which made the US and Israel the main enemy in the Middle East. US foreign policy determines the influence of clerics sitting in Tehran against them their ally Israel. Stakeholders have an apparent influence on US

policymaking. The US foreign policy is a mixture of all approaches and elements highlighted by Graham Allison, who states that stakeholders influence a state's policies because of their lion's share in GDP (Allison 1978). Iran's desire for nuclear power determines that Israel to be vanished from world's map. The term "Israel Lobby" is used to identify the institutions or non-state organizations working in the United States to shape its policy in a pro-Israel manner. Organizations not properly lobbying to set national interest of the US, each of them exercising their own powers, such as Zionist Organization of America, Major American Jewish Organization and National Association of the Arab Americans along With the AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), CUFI (Christian United for Israel) and ADL (Anti-Defamation League). as the US foreign policy is shaped by these interest groups who influence elected official to make strict policies against Iran in favor of Israel. (Mearsheimer, M.Walt 2007).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *IRAN AND SHIAISM*

According to many researchers like Nasr, the third and most important anti-Sunni sentiment in Iran is the invasion of Caliph Umar, as he and after him, the Umayyad was violating the original teachings of Islam, Umar privileged Arabs where after a long time, The Eight Imam of Shias, Imam Ali Raza came to Iran, Al-Mamun appointed Imam Reza, his successor and he is known For his kindness and equal treatment with Arabs and non-Arabs in Iran, His Shrine is located in the city of Mashhad and Al-Mamun (a Sunni caliph) poisoned Imam-e-Raza, which opens another debate between Shia and Sunni. (Nasr.2006)

There is a place near Ayatollah Khomeini's tomb, where only women are allowed to visit, this is the Holy shrine of Bibi Shahrbanou, the daughter of Yazdgerd III (the last Sassanid King) and the wife of Imam Hussain. For Iranians, the marriage of Imam Hussain and Bibi Shahrbanou, who, of course, is the mother of the fourth Shia Imam Ali (Zain-ul-Abidin), Iranians expressed the marriage as the symbol of the connection between Imam Hussain and Iran, ultimately the Shiaism. Salman-e-Farsi, The Prophet's Companion, supported the idea that Ali was the right candidate to become Muslim's first caliph. The Idea is the first brick in the making of Shiaism, as far as the Sunni school of thought is concerned, after the Prophet, Abu-Bakr elected as the right man for the caliphate. (Nasr.2006)

The love of Iranians for Ahl al-Bayt (Descendant of Ali and Fatima, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad) is apparent, and the commemoration of every event belonging to Ahl al-Bayt is remarkable. Symbols like Tazia, Alam and Zuljinah, etc, are some distinguishing things that Shias do; use of colors also has been playing another role in this regard as Shia associate the Black for the sorrow of Ali's fate, green for the decedents of the Prophet, and red for the martyrdom of Imam Hussain.

Every starting month of the Islamic calendar, Shia worldwide wear Black to symbolize the protest against Yazid (Muawiyah's son).(Nasr.2006)

In Muslim civilization, its only from the 16th century onwards in Iran Shia pillar of Islam Managed to capture a state and ultimately established a full-fledged empire called Safavid Empire. After the control of Safavids, Iran started tilting toward Shiaism more. Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili is the ancestor of Safavids, who traced his ancestor from the seventh Shia Imam Musa al-Kazem, Sheikh's descendent took control of the northwest border area between Iran and Azerbaijan, the empire grew when Safavids wage war against Uzbek ruler. In 1501, Uzbeks were defeated by Ismail I and that was a milestone for the Safavid Empire. Safavids had an original zeal for the world to be ruled by Shias, Ismail himself was a poet and a warrior with extreme Shia believes, Safavids also were the competitors for the ground that how Muslim world would be ruled, they were also rivals of the Turkoman tribes, Ottoman Turks and Uzbeks. Especially Ottoman Turks and Safavids were competing for the heartland of the Muslim-dominated world, also these intra-imperial wars converted in a sectarian confrontation between the Shia Safavid empire and Sunni Ottoman Turks. Safavids fought many wars against Ottomans for the dominance of the eastern flank of the Old Arab world, Safavids ruled Iran for a brief time along with Safavids also used their dominance to legitimate Iran as a Shia state, alongside the Ottoman manslaughter Shias in Anatolia, only the Alawi flank of the Shia School of thought survive in Turkey. Another Shia empire is known as the Fatimid empire rose in the tenth century in Egypt. (Nasr.2006).

The Safavids built a formidable empire for Shiaism, the Shia laws were imposed very first time in history and Shia scholarship was patronized. Shia Ulma did not accept the Safavid monarchy completely but also blessed it as the most desirable form of legitimacy. The Safavid empire lasted from 1501 to 1722 then a short period of Qajar dynasty ruled the Iran since the Safavids were restored then after the Khomeini's revolution of 1979 settled a government based on Shia legitimacy. (Nasr.2006 )

#### ***STANCES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ISLAMIC GOVERNMENT BY AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI***

Ayatollah Khomeini explained his stances by giving the example of Umayyad's and Abbasid periods and how they distorted the Islamic laws, the un-Islamic amendments comprising Roman imperial, Iranian monarchial, and Egyptian Pharaonic systems.(Algar.2002) According to him Islamic law-making bodies and Islamic legislations should be bound to impose Islamic laws in every sector of the government through assemblies down to the municipal corporations. Justness and knowledge about Islamic laws are two obligatory skills which a ruler must acquire, a ruler must have the qualities of Prudence and intelligence. Khomeini's stances for government are given below

- Activities of Prophet (PBUH) to build a government.

- The divine law is everlasting; it remains the same today.
- Enactment of Islamic law is undesirable without establishing the Islamic government.

Prophet and Imams are enriched with the qualities, which God awarded them for the enactment of divine laws and maintaining a just governance system, in the time of occultation (Occultation: Shia believes that the twelfth Imam “Imam Mehdi” descendent of Prophet Mohammad went to occultation to preserve his life, who one day will emerge to reset the world order), people have several jurists (fuqaha) who acquire the same qualities, all of them can sit together and establish a just government and Only a well-trusted jurist (faqih) have all those qualities could be settled as a ruler. (Algar.2002)

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how Iran's foreign-policy behaviour, its use of non-state actors, and the evolution of its proxy network, particularly Hezbollah, shape regional security dynamics. Because the actors involved (Iranian security institutions, Hezbollah leadership, and regional military officials) are not directly accessible, the research draws primarily on secondary sources. These include academic books, peer-reviewed articles, field-based studies, think-tank publications, government reports, and interviews conducted by reputable international media outlets. Reports published after major regional escalations, such as the October 2023 attacks, the Syria conflict, and the 2025 Iran–Israel war, are also used to trace changes in Iran's strategic thinking.

To interpret these diverse materials, the study follows an interpretivist philosophy. This approach allows the researcher to make sense of how states and armed groups justify their actions, construct narratives, and frame their legitimacy, especially when dealing with subjects such as ideology, resistance, security threats, and regional influence. Much of Iran's relationship with Hezbollah is embedded in symbolic language, religious framing, and long historical memory; therefore, an interpretivist orientation provides a suitable lens for analyzing these meaning-making processes.

The study employs thematic analysis combined with critical reading of discourse, focusing on how Iran, Hezbollah, Israel, and regional actors describe their intentions, threats, and strategic priorities. This helps unpack how concepts such as “resistance,” “deterrence,” and “strategic depth” are used to justify military actions or political behaviour. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is applied selectively, not as a full linguistic framework, but as a tool to examine how official speeches, policy statements, and media narratives shape perceptions of security and threat.

The research adopts a deductive orientation, drawing on established theories of transnationalism, proxy warfare, and geopolitics within International Relations. Concepts from realism (especially neoclassical realism), security studies, and proxy

conflict literature provide the theoretical foundation. These frameworks help explain why Iran invests heavily in non-state partners, how regional power imbalances shape its decisions, and why Hezbollah remains central to Iranian strategy.

Given the evolving nature of Iran's regional engagements, especially after the 2023–2025 escalation, the study uses an exploratory strategy. This allows flexibility in tracing new patterns, such as Iran's increasing reliance on missile and drone capabilities, the decentralization of its proxy network, and shifts in Hezbollah's operational role.

Data were examined using logical reasoning, typology building, and cross-case comparison. These tools enabled the researcher to connect historical patterns with contemporary developments and identify continuities or ruptures in Iran's proxy strategy. Taken together, this methodology provides a structured yet flexible approach to understanding the complex and often opaque relationship between Iran, Hezbollah, and the broader Middle Eastern security environment.

Iran-Israel rivalry

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How Wilayat al-Faqih shaped Iran's foreign policy and how Hezbollah contributed to preach the ideology?
- How did Hezbollah become a central pillar of Iran's regional architecture?
- How recent conflicts, including the October 2023 Hamas attack and the 2025 Iran-Israel war, exposed new limitations in Iran's proxy strategy?

### **THE TENDENCY OF IRAN-ISRAEL CONFLICT**

Israel, as an apparent rival to Iran, had been addressed in a famous speech delivered by former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that the state of Israel, occupying Jerusalem (the third most important holy place of Muslims), must be abolished. The 1991's Persian Gulf war begins the Israel-Iran geopolitical conflict, Israel feared the undisputed emergence of the Islamic State of Iran in the Middle East would be a challenge to Israel's strategic importance in the region, So the Israeli think tanks accompanied politicians started pertaining the revolution as an irrational and fanatic idea of Mad Mullahs, if clerics have nuclear bombs in their control they would definitely destroy Israel, Iranian Nuclear Program was criticized in this regard, Israel has been gathering the Western States by arguing that the suicidal tendencies of Iranian clerics are totally against everything which the Western democracies talk about. Israel-Iran clashes are not even military, but a fight between democracy and totalitarian theocracy. The Oslo Agreement was largely criticized by Hawkish Iranian leadership that this could be considered unjust for the Palestinian population and the insult to Islam, Iranian clerics emphasize the

view that Muslims should raise voices and stand against the state of Israel and for the honor of Islam. (Parsi,2007)

Islam was introduced to Iran in the seventh century, after that Iran was governed by different Islamic regimes, in the Twenty-First century Iran is the only Islamic state in the Middle East that hosts the largest community of Jews, President Ahmadinejad received a protesting letter from Haroun Yahsayaei (Chairman of Iranian Jewish Council) for his words on Holocaust in 2006 and rephrased his words. Seyyed Mohammad Khatami's presidency remained lenient to the Jews living within Iran's boundary, Iranian Inhabitant Jews pretend to be different than the Jews living in Israel, David Menashri differentiated the Iranian Jews from Zionists living in Israel. Israel and Iran also seeking good relations with each other but the difference in their ideologies and Hawkish regimes don't let them do. (Parsi,2007)

### **HEZBOLLAH AND IRAN RELATIONS**

Mehdi Hashmi and Mohammad, two sons of Ayatollah Montazeri, established an organization Satja, to develop links, particularly with Shia organizations, to export the Khomeinian Revolution across the Arab world (Middle East). unorganised activities and relations with Shia Arab institutions had the attention of provincial governments and Imperial Army, which were still out of Khomeinists' hands, and Satja was demobilized. However, Montazeri built offices of the Liberation Movement, accompanied Hashmi and with the full support of the Revolutionary Guards. 1981's bombing assassinated Montazeri but made Hashemi the ideal of the Islamic Radical movement to export the Iranian revolution. Alongside the removal of Abol Hassan Bani Sadar from his office served as the whole ground for the Khomeinists. A parallel state was built, which was directly connected to the leader. The year 1982 allowed Revolutionaries to set the state's foreign policy to export the idea of Wilayat al-Faqih. (Hage.2018)

Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, Shaykh Muhammad, Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, Yazbak, Shaykh Na'im Qasim Sayyid Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyid, and Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah were hosted by Iran in 1982 where Khomeini emphasized these clerics to mobilize the Lebanese population against Israel. Khomeini himself suggested the organization's name called Hezbollah, the ambassador to Damascus and Ali Akbar Mohtashami-pur from Najaf played a vital role in this regard. Revolutionary Guards started training the youth. The organization was instituted on the principles. However, former President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani stood up against the activities led by the Revolutionaries, and he also influenced to stop the Iraq war. (Ali.2018) On April 5, 1988, a passenger plane from Kuwait was hijacked by a Lebanese organization, which flew to Algeria, and killed two Americans. The Algerian government agreed to release the Hijackers belonging to Hezbollah merely in exchange for the remaining passengers. (Hage., 2018)

Abbas al-Musawi and Nasrallah joined hands against al-Tufayli. 1991s rearranging the coup with al-Tufayli's leadership and internal relations of Ali-Khamenei and Nasrallah are two leaders of Iran's direct intervention; on the other hand, Rafsanjani's stances were more fit for the Syrian pragmatic political environment. The Ta'if agreement of 1989 set an international acceptance of al-Asad's dominance in Lebanese politics. (Ali.2018)

### **HEZBOLLAH'S ROLE IN TRAINING SHIA MILITIAS**

Hezbollah first acted as a regional or transnational organization in the Iraq War of 2003. The IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps) conducted many actions, also set up camps to train Shia militants in Syria against Sunni rebels. Amarnath Amarasingam and Alexander Corbeil from US Foreign Office interviewed one Hezbollah Commander where he addressed "When we will over with Syria, we definitely will begin our activities in Yemen, do you think that Tochka missiles were fired by Houthis in Saudi Arabia, NO! it was us the Hezbollah" the words draw an apparent hypothesis of Hezbollah's regional engagements, Tehran's vision to support Hezbollah, Badr and the Dawa was clear in Iraq and Syria. (Levitt.2021) Unit'1800 was created by Hezbollah to fight against Israel, then after they lounged Unit'3800 to support Shia militant groups in Iraq to combat international forces, that unit was established by Nasrallah on the special request of Iran. On July 29, 2003, an American Intelligence report cited an Israeli Intelligence report stating that Hezbollah was trying to ally with the Mahdi Army and Muqtada al-Sadr. One of the US military's analysts reported that, In Najaf, Hezbollah congregated a group comprising 30 to 40 persons actively engaged in maintaining a connection with the Muqtada al-Sadr group. There was another believe which was neglected later that Hezbollah was also engaged in training the Mehdi Army. (Levitt., 2021)

Hezbollah also set camps for the training of Shia military groups across the Gulf such as, in 2018 Bahrain government arrested hundreds of militants who were trained by Hezbollah in Lebanon and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (Khazali Network) group belonging to Iran and actively promoting pro- Iranian strategy in Iraq. 26 youngsters were charged in Kuwait for espionage for Iran, keeping high-explosives and undergoing terrorist-training in Lebanon apparently by Hezbollah. (Levitt., 2021)

Hezbollah fi Suriya was another group schooled by Hezbollah, the idea of Gen. Hossein Hamedani from IRGC was to establish another wing of the same movement in Syria, merely inspired by the success of Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran continued funding Hezbollah by sending military trainers, weapons, and financial assistance, also to underpin the Asad regime. Iran also provided Iranian oil to the Syrian government, and they support Hezbollah in return by providing them with free ground with access to mobility, weapons, training camps, and access to intelligence reports. An estimated ten thousand Hezbollah fighters were deployed

all over Syria, around sixteen hundred to two thousand militants were assassinated and six thousand were injured. (Levitt., 2021).

Iran's relations with Hezbollah and Lebanese Shia after the 7th October 2023 attacks. Iran depended on groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon, militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen to project influence on Israel and compensate for its own limited conventional military strength. These groups are called "Axis of Resistance" by Iran. However, the developments after the October 7, 2023, event. Especially Israel's aggressive and non-human actions in Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and later Yemen exposed real weaknesses in Iran's network in these regions. The turning point of the spectrum came in 2020. When Qasim Soleimani was killed, who was an influential commander of Quds, and later his successor Esmail Qaani lacked the authority that Qasim Soleimani had, which loosen Iran's power on its proxies. Over the time many of its proxy groups began acting more independently, along with weakening the centralized control of Iran. Even after the 2023 attacks by Hamas, Israel launched its military campaign against Hezbollah which suffered unprecedented losses, including more of its command. (Shahbazov. 2025)

In Syria, once the core of Iran's regional corridor slipped out of Iran's grasp when anti-Assad forces made major gains. Hamas was severely damaged in Gaza. In effect, the "Axis of Resistance" was no longer functioning the way Iran originally designed it. Realizing these setbacks, Iran shifted part of its focus toward the Houthis in Yemen, who have become one of the most proactive and autonomous actors aligned with Iran. The Houthis' missile and drone attacks on Israel and commercial ships in the Red Sea have placed them at the center of Iran's regional strategy, even though they operate with far more independence than Hezbollah ever did. Meanwhile, Israel intensified its attacks on Iranian military infrastructure, including missile and nuclear sites. (Shahbazov. 2025)

The comprehensive 12-day Iran-Israel war in 2025 provoke a question against the vulnerability of Iranian leadership structure, especially in air defense and intelligence. All of these events has engaged Iran to adjust its approach towards proxies. Instead of relying completely on its traditional proxy groups network, Tehran is interested more in ballistic missiles, drones, and naval capabilities. At the same time, Iran can rebuild a more decentralized and strong proxy system which may support groups that should operate independently but still consider Iran's adversaries. Iran's traditional proxy strategies are no longer sustainable in the same way these were. Meanwhile, proxies must remain part of Iran's playbook, Tehran is measuring how much they can depend on them, when the regional dynamics are changed and as old alliances have gotten weak. Iran is now facing the challenge of neutral ideology, survival, and the harsh new realities of the geopolitics in Middle East. (Shahbazov. 2025)

## **OUTCOMES OF IRAN-ISRAEL WAR**

The June 2025 “12-day war” between Iran and Israel highlighted how dramatically the short but intense conflict reshaped the regional strategic landscape. Israel’s decision to launch strikes inside Iran was something that previous US administrations had repeatedly avoided and only became possible because several conditions aligned at the same time. Iran’s constant backing of anti-Israel armed groups, Netanyahu’s far more aggressive military posture following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks, and Donald Trump’s unpredictable return to the White House all played a role. Israel with US refueling and intelligence support, hit a range of Iranian nuclear, military, and energy sites. Iran responded with a series of missiles that briefly put real pressure on Israel’s air-defense systems. For a moment, it seemed as though the balance could tip either way, but the exchange ultimately turned into a test of endurance rather than a decisive win for one side over the others. (Geranmayeh, 2025)

The conflict also showed that Iran still maintains a substantial missile force and a wide network of non-state allies across the region, its decision not to activate most of them during the 12-day conflict suggests that Tehran may be holding them back for the future’s conflicts. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar are particularly uneasy about this possibility, given how deeply Iran’s stability or instability affects the region because of its geography and political weight. (Geranmayeh, 2025)

The neutralization between both rivals, Iran and Israel, is very strange since there is no official ceasefire or hotline for communicating misinterpretations, also no external power has guaranteed it. Israel still relies on the US to sustain during any heavy external attack. Meanwhile, Iran is moving to Russia and China to rebuilt air-defense systems and missile arsenals. The uncertainty surrounding Iran’s highly enriched uranium has now more difficult to monitor because of the reduced IAEA access within Iranian sites opened another layer of tension and raised fears that covert nuclear activities may accelerate outside the radar. Military options have clear limits and highlight the need for renewed European diplomacy. (Geranmayeh, 2025)

## **IRAN’S MODERN NON-STATE APPROACH**

Iran’s approach to working with non-state groups has deep historical roots that long predate the Islamic Republic. The author shows that even under the Shah, Iran built relationships with communities beyond its borders, particularly the Iraqi Kurds and the Lebanese Shia, not for expansionist purposes, but to manage threats, shape the regional balance, and compensate for Iran’s deep sense of strategic loneliness. Much like today, geography and vulnerability pushed Iran to operate outside its borders, relying on groups that could help buffer it against regional rivals and Soviet-backed governments. The idea that Iran’s non-state foreign policy is not a revolutionary invention but a long-standing strategy shaped by Iran’s civilization,

geography, and perceptions of insecurity. The Shah's choices were influenced by a sense of being encircled, specially by Moscow's allies and by the belief that Iran could rely only on itself. (Reisinezhad,2019)

Although Shah lacked a strong ideological framework. Reisinezhad in "Iran's Non-State Foreign Policy" explains that Shah leaned on vague narratives of "Aryan identity" and Iran's civilizational heritage to justify cooperation with groups that shared linguistic, cultural, or religious ties with Iran. At the same time, he presented Iran's actions through Cold War language, framing Kurdish struggles as part of the broader East-West struggle to win American sympathy and support. Despite this, he later abandoned the Kurdish cause for regional political gains, a move the author links to the Shah's growing ambition to be recognized as the region's leading power. (Reisinezhad, 2019)

Shah's eventual retreat from non-state partnerships, particularly the Kurds and Lebanese Shia, marked a turning point. His quest for Arab approval and regional leadership led him to abandon the very strategy that had helped secure Iran for years. Ironically, the Islamic Republic revived and expanded those same networks, building the more extensive non-state alliances that define Iran's regional role that define Iran's regional role today. (Reisinezhad, 2019)

### ***HEZBOLLAH'S OUTREACH TO SAUDI ARABIA AND THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT'S DISARMAMENT AGENDA***

Hezbollah's deputy leader Naim Qassem recently used a televised address to call on Saudi Arabia to "open a new chapter" in relations, saying the region is at a dangerous turning point and that dialogue is needed to manage old disputes and protect future interests. Speaking on the anniversary of Israel's killing of senior Hezbollah commanders, Qassem stressed that the group's weapons are aimed solely at Israel, not at Saudi Arabia or any other state, and argued that weakening the resistance only strengthens Israel. He urged Lebanese political actors including rivals to avoid internal divisions that could benefit Israel and pushed for unity in government, economic reforms, anti-corruption measures, and a coherent national security strategy. Qassem reiterated that Hezbollah will not disarm, even as Lebanon's Cabinet has approved a plan to place all weapons under state control by the end of 2025. (Berjawi, 2025)

The long-running smuggling routes between Syria and Lebanon, which Hezbollah relies on for moving weapons, are still active despite periodic crackdowns. Earlier this month, Syrian security forces intercepted a shipment of more than a thousand mines near Yabroud in the Qalamoun Mountains, close to the Lebanese border. The mines had been hidden temporarily in the small town of Al-Jobea and were apparently on their way toward Asal al-Ward, a familiar staging point that connects to several known smuggling paths leading into Lebanon's Tfail region. People familiar with the area note that completely shutting down these routes is almost

impossible. The border stretches roughly 400 kilometers and is dotted with informal crossing points every few kilometers, making it easy for smugglers to adapt whenever authorities close one path. Hezbollah members involved in weapons procurement are deeply familiar with this geography and, by paying local facilitators and suppliers inside Syria, they continue to find ways to keep the flow of arms moving across the frontier. (Beeri, 2025)

The US Congress show growing pressure on Lebanon regarding Hezbollah's weapons. The House version of the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes a clause that would cut off American funding to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) if Washington concludes by June 2026 that the army is not genuinely willing to move toward disarming Hezbollah. Under this proposal, the Pentagon and the head of CENTCOM would have to submit a detailed report to Congress assessing the LAF's progress. This requirement is *not* included in the Senate's draft, so it may still change as the final NDAA is negotiated. Still, the timeline effectively gives Lebanon an extra six-plus months beyond the original December 2025 deadline previously pushed by the US. American officials have already warned Beirut that continued financial and military support depends on visible steps toward dealing with Hezbollah's weapons. Members of Congress even sent a formal letter in early December saying it would become harder to justify aid if Lebanon fails to uphold its commitments. Senator Lindsey Graham echoed the same frustration, saying the LAF has done almost nothing on this issue so far, making the U.S. investment in the Lebanese military "not a very good" one. (Reddy, 2025)

## CONCLUSION

The evolution of Iran's cross-border strategy reveals a foreign-policy model that has grown out of both historical experience and ideological grounds. Iran's reliance on non-state partners did not begin with the 1979 revolution, but the revolution gave this older practice a more explicit shape and purpose. The doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih transformed what had once been pragmatic security outreach into a broader project aimed at shaping the political landscape beyond Iran's borders. Over time, groups like Hezbollah, various Iraqi militias, Kurds and later the Houthis became extensions of Iran's influence, helping Tehran counter rival powers, deter external threats, and maintain a sense of strategic depth in the region. Recent developments show that this model is under a question mark. The killing of Qasim Soleimani removed the one figure who had the authority and personal influence to keep Iran's diverse proxy network aligned. By 2023 to 2025, many groups that Iran once controlled closely had begun acting more independently, sometimes in ways that complicated Tehran's own priorities. Israel's military operations in Lebanon, Syria, and later inside Iran during the 12-day war further exposed weaknesses in Iran's deterrence framework, particularly in intelligence and air defense.

Many of the networks with Iraqi Kurds and Lebanese Shia that the revolution later expanded had already been built under the monarchy. The author argues that Iran's post-1979 foreign policy did not emerge from a vacuum but evolved from foundations laid during the Pahlavi period. Kurds, Shia groups, Tajiks, and others as part of a wider cultural and historical realm. This creates what the experts called Iran's "heartland," a zone stretching from the Middle Eastern to Central Asia where shared symbols like Nowruz and Ashura still resonate. According to this perspective, Iran's outreach to these communities is not simply political maneuvering but part of a deeper civilizational logic. A Saudi source told Cradle that Iran and Saudi now on the page where they have drawn some significant promises that Saudi will not party with US and Israel led military campaign against Iran. Whereas the report shows the authorization from the US President Donal Trump to Muhammad Bin Salman has been given and led Mbs brokering for the greater understanding of Yemen, Ali Larijani, communicated Iran's openness to the peace dialogues.

Despite Tehran's attempts to project confidence at the ceasefire, the conflict exposed several vulnerabilities in Iran's deterrence posture. Israel succeeded in hitting targets deep inside Iranian territory, revealing significant gaps in Iran's intelligence capabilities and air-defense infrastructure. Key nuclear facilities suffered damage, enrichment activities were forced to halt temporarily, and reports indicated that several leader of Iranian security and nuclear officials had been assassinated during the confrontation. The strikes on Qatar rattled Gulf Arab states as well. The episode signaled that neither Israel nor the US felt obliged to protect friendly governments from escalation, prompting many GCC states to reassess their heavy dependence on Washington and explore broader defense partnerships.

These shifts do not mean Iran is abandoning its proxy architecture, but they suggest an important transition that Iran has to take. Tehran is investing more heavily in drones, ballistic missiles, and naval capabilities. Tools which reduce dependence on proxies while still allowing Iran to respond to threats beyond its borders. At the same time, Iran appears to be experimenting with a more decentralized network, supporting groups that share its interests but do not require tight supervision. The future of Iran's regional role will likely depend on how effectively it adapts to these new realities while maintaining the ideological and strategic pillars that have shaped its foreign policy for decades. Now the relations of Iran and its non-state allies should be examined deeply to understand how Iran may draw its transnational policy to keep the regional influence.

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