

Forum: United Nations Security Council

Issue: The impact of Iran-backed military groups on regional security in the Middle East

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Introduction

The topic of Iran-backed militia groups in the Middle East is a topic of utmost importance for the region. This topic is not only important for its regional effects, but also the international repercussions surrounding the issue. Both as a result of USA's and Iran's policies regarding the Middle East, both parties have been politically active in the region. Although they have been active politically, as a tendency to avoid liability in a region as troubled as the Middle East, both parties have avoided using their own forces to achieve their goals. Instead, they have enacted a proxy war, using already involved militias as proxies to oppose the other party. From a larger point of view, this conflict can be seen as a political battle between Iran and the United States of America. While this topic may seem easy to the blind eye, this topic involves serious issues from Hezbollah to Hamas, therefore, I warn the delegates of IELMUN'24 Security Council to not underestimate this agenda item and prepare for it as best as they can.



Definition of Key Terms

Proxy War:

It is a type of conflict in which the main conflicting parties do not directly go into official war with each other, but use other and usually smaller parties to enact war. This is usually done by the involvement of the bigger parties supporting conflicting sides in an already existing conflict. For example, for the instance regarding our agenda item, there are either two militant groups supported by Iran and another party and Iran uses them to eradicate the influence of the other party, or a militant group is directly targeting one of Iran's rivals and consequently Iran decides to support that militant group. The main reason countries use proxies to engage in political warfare is to avoid the liability of directly attacking another state as strong as themselves, putting themselves in grave danger upon defeat. If such strong actors in the world stage were not to use proxies, both sides would have to put all of their resources into that specific war because in today's political circumstances, the crisis could spiral into a larger conflict as seen in the two previous world wars. The nations of the world have taken their lesson from the previous world wars, and most world powers have come up with such doctrines and policies that set up proxies and support them to reach their goals. This new style of war, although cruel for the proxies that are involved, are ultimately the reason why the chances of another world war are so low.

Militia:

A militia is a military group that is made up of civilians, generally for rebel purposes. For example, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad are militias. Generally, the proxy war in the Middle East's most heated fronts contains militias that are being supported by states.

Background Information



There are several foreign militias that Iran utilizes in the Middle East, most of them being organizations supporting or directly advocating for Shiite Islam. This is not to say however, that Iran's main usage of the non-governmental militias is to support Shiite Islam in neighboring countries, since there are also a few militant groups in the Middle East like Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and at times even Al-Qaeda. As of this argument, it can be inferred that the policy of the utilization of foreign militants Iran is using is purely based on the strategic evaluation of the conjunctural needs and aims of the nation. As such, it is needed to examine Iran's doctrines and policy on the usage of foreign militaries along with USA's policies on the Middle East.

Iran's foreign policy on the Middle East

Iran's foreign policy on the Middle East can be considered imperialistic by some. Although Iran does not legitimately claim other sovereign states territory, it has a policy to gain as much influence in its neighboring countries as practically possible. One can argue that this policy of Iran does not come from a choice, but rather a necessity that comes from the struggle of political power and high tensions in the region. To further support this argument, it can be inferred that the United States of America's overreaching policies on the Middle East drives not only Iran, but also other parties in the Middle East to adopt such invasive and aggressive policies. This argument also fits into the overarching structure of the conflicts and the proxy war in the Middle East. As the main forces in the Middle East, Iran and Israel stand as the stem of the trouble. While Iran is supported by the Russian Federation, and Israel is supported by the United States of America, there is practically no chance that this conflict will not turn into a conflict between the East and the West bloc. So even if there would be a direct conflict between Iran and Israel, it should still be considered a proxy war, because they are both supported by conflicting superpowers. The same way USA and Russia are supporting Iran and Israel, Iran also has decided to support territorial militias in order to harm Israel.



The United States of America's policy on the Middle East

The United States of America has been one of the most politically active countries in the Middle East despite being located in North America. As the United States of America continued to pursue its objective to control the oil market in the Middle East, political and ideological fluctuations showed threatening signs for the American dominance in the Middle Eastern oil market. Although the United States was able to close agreements with reserve-rich countries like Saudi Arabia, they failed to control the market in more ideologically unstable regions, like Libya under Muammar Gaddafi's rule. There was a significant Soviet influence in certain parts of the Middle East, and even if the USA could have offered the states better agreements than the Soviets, certain States were reluctant or even defiant against the United States of America due to ideological and political reasons. Although, for the record, it should be noted that most of the countries in the Middle East were acting based on their financial strategies, not political beliefs. But even a couple of anti-American states were harmful for the American control of the market, as such, this issue was soon to be turned into another conflict; East against West, Capitalism against Socialism.

An important doctrine to talk about is the Eisenhower Doctrine; promising support to all the nations troubled with internal uprisings and direct offenses from the Soviet Union. Aiming to decrease Soviet influence, the main target audience for this doctrine at the time was the Middle East. Eisenhower Doctrine, not to be confused with the Truman Doctrine, was essentially a helping hand to the nations in the Middle East that were struggling with oppression from other nations (mainly the Soviet Union) and large internal conflicts. This helping hand was not put forth altruistically, however. This doctrine of the United States of America helped them to gain influence and control over the countries that they provided support to, sometimes forcing the countries that are in heavy internal disruption to cooperate.



Implications in Iraq and Syria

Both Iraq and Syria have been going through turbulent times in the past 20 years. Iraq was at war for a long time with Iran, then shortly after they got invaded by the United States of America. Likewise, Syria was in an unpredictable situation with their ongoing inner conflicts. Especially the Syrian Civil War, which had a long-lasting and major impact worldwide: both political and both humanitarian. In Syria, the conflict was between Bashar Al-Assad, the head of state, and the rebel forces. Iran was in support of the Assad regime and was assisting them militarily and politically. Both the Iranian army and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) had an involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Iranian-backed groups like Hezbollah also intervened in the conflict.

Even though Iraq and Iran had a conflict in the past, in the Us-led invasion of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran decided to take the side of the government in Baghdad. This was the most logical move Iran could take: the United States of America is a larger and stronger competitor compared to Iraq, and weakening the USA's hold on the Middle East was more important than undermining Iraq at the moment for Tehran. As a matter of fact, Tehran was able to spread its influence in Iraq in the aftermath of the conflict, so this was a win for Iran on both prospects.

Can Iran's cooperation with non-state regional actors be considered as a proxy-patron relationship?

It is important to analyze the relationship between Iran and its cooperators correctly in order to understand the issue as a whole. There is not a direct consensus on whether the said relationship can really be considered as a patron-proxy relationship. It is a fact that certain cases may imply such a relationship, such as parallels between Iran's strategic goals in the region and actions of the non-state parties, but there are arguments that help to explain how there may be no such relationship even though there are such apparent parallels. I would like to point out



a study from 2019. The International Institute for Strategic Studies claims in their study that the relationship between Iran and its partners should not directly be considered as a proxy-patron relationship because it would not be correct to simplify those relationships of Iran, which are of both great variety and great complexity. Therefore, avoiding such simplification, the study points out 4 factors that the said relationships can be systematically considered. These four factors include ideological affinity, strategic convergence, political expediency, and transactional value. Following these factors, the study also aims to divide the types of collaborations Iran has in the region. Iran's collaborations in the region fall under certain categories, such as; partner, strategic ally, ideological ally, proxy, and state organ.

In this conjuncture, a partner of Iran would be a party that actively collaborates with Iran to further both parties' interests. As per the definition of the word, a partnership would be a situation where Iran and the said party are standing as equals and share somewhat similar goals. This kind of relationship does not fall under the category of "proxy". Both Iran and the said party would not be directly entitled to obey each other, and both would remain sovereign.

A strategic ally would be a party in the region that acts as an ally of Iran under certain circumstances. A conjunctural alliance would be the best way to describe this term. The party may not entirely share the same goals as Iran, but if under a certain circumstance, Iran is able to collaborate with the party, they will engage.

An ideological alliance in this context is when another party follows similar ideologies with Iran, and therefore, is able to work simultaneously on certain issues or cooperate actively regarding that ideology. Since Iran's religion is Shia Islam, it is naturally able to cooperate with other followers of Shia Islam against parties of other sects or other religions.

As explained, a proxy is what is defined as a non-affiliated organization that is under the command of its patron. Iran is a patron to many proxies in the Middle East,



as told by Western sources and certain experts. As explained previously in this issue, the definition of the term "proxy" makes this a rather debatable issue, so I will abstain from using the term "proxy" when I am explaining such an undecided issue.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is also utilizing organs of other sovereign states in the Middle East. It cannot be said that Iran is directly utilizing those state organs, but supporting them on issues that will benefit themselves since Iran has no legitimate reach or control over other sovereign state's organs. To avoid any confusion, I would like to further explain that the state organs talked about in this paragraph are not the three main organs of states, the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary organs, which are the fundamentals of a state; but the organs and bodies a state may use to overlook issues regarding any topic, usually bound to the ministries.

To analyze these types as a whole, I would like to divert attention to the fact that in most of the mentioned partnership types, Iran has no absolute control over their cooperators. Iran has a whole network of connections in the Middle East, and they have vast options to choose from when handling any situation, therefore they do not need their partners to be absolutely dependent on themselves. As such, officials have restrained from using the term "proxy" to describe these partnerships of Iran. In the same way, I would like the delegates of IELMUN'24 to also restrain from using such language if the conditions to call a party a proxy are not met.

The Quds Forces

The Quds Force is a branch of the Islamic Republic of Iran's IRGC (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps), mainly specializing in military intelligence and other unconventional ways of warfare. To understand this force, one must understand Iran's extraterritorial policies on the Middle East, which we have previously explained in this paper. This force was established in 1988 with the aim of supporting militant



organizations that were cooperating with Iran in the area. Although this force is an official government branch, the United States of America chose to identify it as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). We mentioned the Quds Force supporting Iran-backed militant organizations in the area. The operating region of the Quds Force is not only the Middle East, however. They are known to be operating in many Western countries, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan, Türkiye, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and even the Soviet Union when it was still standing. This data is not certain but is provided directly by the U.S. Military Intelligence branch, which is a credible source (most of the time).

Outside of their military presence, they are also active financially. The Quds Force is known to control a number of companies, which provide the Quds Force with extra funding.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Islamic Republic of Iran

As discussed earlier, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the focus of the topic in the way that they support many militant organizations in the Middle East. It is one of the biggest parties in the Middle East and probably the biggest rival to the State of Israel in the region. If we look at this issue from a global perspective, it can be said that it is some sort of proxy of the Russian Federation against the American-backed Israel to uphold the values and objectives of the East block in the Middle East.

State of Israel



The State of Israel is the other counterpart of Iran in the Middle East, in the way that it is a sovereign state that is being backed by a global superpower and somewhat used as a proxy in the Middle East. If Iran can be considered as the proxy of Russia, then Israel is the proxy of the United States of America. As a Jewish state in the Middle East, Israel is in an extremely difficult position; constantly in conflict with the Arab countries, they have adapted to this state of constant struggle and devised their military and doctrines accordingly. As seen in the current Israel-Hamas conflict, Israel utilizes policies most ruthless and some may even consider certain acts of Israel as genocide. This situation is very controversial, therefore this argument of mine may not be appreciated by some; but I think the utilization of such policies by Israel stems from the need for Israel to establish authority and dominance in order to keep up with other hostile states in the area. This is not to say that any breach of humanitarian law by Israel is legitimate, however. This is simply to state the facts about Israel's policies.

United States of America

The United States of America has extraterritorial aims and policies in the Middle East due to geological and economic circumstances. As per the need for oil and the need of the USA to control the oil market, the United States of America was bound to intervene in the political dealings around the Middle East. With the rise of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks, the United States of America began to strengthen its counter-terrorism operations. Since then, the United States of America has invaded a plethora of Middle Eastern countries, including Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. In all of these invasions, the United States almost always legitimized their invasions with the prevalence of terrorism in the region or undemocratic behavior. It is necessary to understand that while these claims may have some truth to them, it should not be neglected that a major necessity for such invasions for America was economic reasons.



Russian Federation

The Russian Federation's role is partly economical and partly political if there is a necessity for such a division. Although they are not actively partaking in warfare or any major proxy warfare in the region, it is crucial to note that Russia is still supporting Iran against Israel and has much to gain from such a partnership. Unlike the USA, Russia is close to the Middle East and therefore it is crucial for them to be engaged in the affairs that take place in the region due to the fact that any tension carries the capacity to directly involuntarily involve them in it. As a global superpower, the Russian Federation would also have much to gain from control over the oil market. Besides, looking at the long-lasting rivalry between Russia and America, it would be beneficial for Russia to prevent the USA from growing its power, and as such it needs to prevent its dominance over the oil market. Once again, I want to emphasize that Russia is not actively engaging in a proxy war, but it is strengthening its bonds with its allies in the region. To define Iran as a proxy of Russia just because they are being supported by Russia would be to underestimate Iran's power as a nation.

Hamas

The Haraqat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (Hamas) is a Sunni-Islamic Palestinian Resistance movement that is aiming for the liberation of Palestine from the State of Israel. It has both political and military branches that are operating against Israel. Hamas is a movement that mainly operates in the Gaza Strip. In the other Palestinian area, the West Bank, Hamas has no current actions, nor militarily nor politically. Among Hamas' founders are Ahmed Yassin, Hasan Youssef, Ibrahim Fares Al-Yazouri, Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, and other influential Palestinians. Until 2007, the Palestinian Authority selected by Israel was the ruling government of the Gaza Strip. In 2007, Hamas ousted the Palestinian Authority from power and became the de facto ruling



body of the Gaza Strip. They are also operating in Palestinian refugee camps spanning nearby states like Lebanon, and cooperating internationally with other military organizations like Hezbollah. Internationally, the topic of Hamas is a controversial topic, as Hamas is recognized as a terrorist organization by many countries and recognized as the rightful defender of Palestinian rights by many other countries. As of today, the Islamic Republic of Iran is officially supporting Hamas in its conflict against Israel.

Hezbollah

Hezbollah is a Shia Islamist Lebanese political and military organization. Hezbollah is officially in the Lebanese parliament. As per its ideological beliefs, Iran supports Hezbollah. It is not uncommon for the Islamic Republic of Iran to support Shiite organizations since the religion of the Islamic Republic of Iran is Shia Islam. Hezbollah is an example of that. The military power of Hezbollah is not to be underestimated. It is assumed to be around the same as a modern medium-sized army of an average nation. Also, Hezbollah's army also contains around 100,000 trained soldiers, if the statements made by Hassan Nasrallah, the Leader of Hezbollah, are true. This is very good for a militant organization that is not a governmental army. Usually, such organizations tend to have groups of guerilla fighters to run military operations, but they do not have real military personnel with training. Since these organizations also usually have the advantage of knowledge over the territories, small guerilla groups are more advantageous for them to keep. Because Hezbollah has such an unordinary military force, countries are usually reluctant to engage in conflict with them.

Ansar Allah (The Houthi Movement)



Ansar Allah means "Supporters of God" in Arabic. The official name of this organization is Ansar Allah, but they are more commonly known as the Houthis. They are a Shia Islamist military and political organization. The aim of the Houthi Movement is to cede control over the Yemeni Government and support extraterritorial operations against Israel and the United States of America. The Houthis come from a mostly shared tribe, the Houthi tribe. A slogan of the Houthi Movement is: "God is the greatest - Death to America - Death to Israel - A curse upon the Jews - Victory to Islam". From this slogan, it is clear that the aim of the movement is not upon one singular conflict but rather a polarity of concurring conflicts in the Middle East.

Palestinian Islamic Jihad

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad is a Sunni-Islamist Palestinian movement that aims to liberate the Palestinians from the State of Israel and create a government governed by Sharia Law. Besides the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad is also supported by the Syrian government and Hezbollah. Currently, Palestinian Islamic Jihad is secondary to Hamas in terms of influence in Palestinian areas.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event*
1979	Foundation of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad with the aim of driving out the Israelis out of Palestine. This



	organization found immediate support from Iran.
1982	Hezbollah is founded with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and finds support from the Iranian government
1982-1990	Hezbollah starts an offensive against the State of Israel, aiming to drive them out of Lebanon.
1980	The establishment of the Quds Forces by the hand of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to serve as a force in Iran's operations outside its territories
1992	The Houthi Group is founded north of Yemen
2004-2010	Initiates unorganized attacks against the government of Yemen
2006	The year-long 2006 Lebanon War took place



2013	Hezbollah became involved in the Syrian Civil War, supporting the Syrian government against the rebels
2014	Houthis take control over San'a, the capital of the country along with many other cities
2014	Popular Mobilization Forces were established with the aim of fighting against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)
2015	Houthis gained the support of Iran in a conflict with the Saudi-led coalition forces
2017	The Popular Mobilization Forces declare their victory in the conflict against ISIL, meanwhile, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant remains a major party in the region.
2019	Officially goes under the army of the Iraqi Armed Forces while remaining its ties with the Islamic Republic of Iran



Relevant UN Resolutions and Other Documents

- Security Council Resolution 1701 - This resolution is about Hezbollah, which is a militant organization backed by Iran, and one of the only current resolutions regarding our agenda item.

<https://peacemaker.un.org/israellebanon-resolution1701>

- United States Department of State Report on Iran regarding Terrorism

<https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/iran/#:~:text=Designated%20as%20a%20State%20Sponsor,elsewhere%20throughout%20the%20Middle%20East.>

- CIA - The World Factbook - Iran

This is essentially a report of Iran made by the CIA, one of the largest intelligence organizations in the world. Generally, the World Factbook is a reliable source to use in academic affairs, but still, I feel the need to warn the delegates that they might not find all of the information about Iran's situation with terrorist groups in this source, which also goes for the United States Department of State reports.

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/iran/#terrorism>

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

There has not been any direct attempt to solve the issue of all of the militant groups backed by Iran yet, but there have been very few attempts to solve the issue of Hezbollah, a major party supported by Iran. The Security Council had passed one resolution about it, but other than that this issue did not see much help from



diplomatic efforts, which is why the delegates of IELMUN'24 Security Council will be providing new data for this endeavor. Outside of multilateral diplomatic negotiations, there have been individual attempts of certain countries to negate terrorism in the Middle East as a whole, but Iran's support has not been the main target of any party yet since no country today wants a direct conflict with the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the attempts against terrorism in the Middle East included the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States of America to eradicate the terrorist organization known as Al-Qaeda, which was at some point allegedly supported by Iran.

Possible Solutions

This issue is a very controversial issue and the aims of the delegates will radically change based on their country. Therefore, in terms of clause-like solution ideas, I cannot offer you much. But I do anticipate a very realistic simulation of diplomatic conflict in a scenario where the sides have radically different policies on the issue. Therefore, I trust the delegates to compromise along realistic lines in accordance with the main goal of this committee: to ensure peace and regional stability. Also, there are some goals the committee can try to aim for in this agenda item, such as the demilitarization or the non-proliferation of militant groups related to the issue. Also as the expert chair of this agenda item, I would be interested in seeing how the Non-governmental organizations (NGO's) can be utilized in such a scenario. I would like to remind you that the jurisdictional instability in the region along with the lack of appropriate governance and law enforcement forces are some of the most important aspects to keep in mind when dealing with the situation.

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