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Reconceiving the struggle between non-state armed organizations, the state and ‘the international’ in the Middle East

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Abstract

The main aim of this chapter is to conceptualise the conflict between states and non-state armed groups in the Middle East. It begins by tracing the colonial origin of the distinction between state and non-state violence, the emergence of counterinsurgency and its reincarnation in liberal interventions. It then considers the politics of demarcation of legitimate and illegitimate violence and its centrality in the scramble among local and international state and non-state actors to control the Middle East. The chapter analyses the effects of both physical violence and ideological confrontation in the origins and consequences of political violence in the Middle East. It finally illustrates these dynamics by analysing the concerted international and Lebanese campaign to destroy Hezbollah and the resilience of Hezbollah to withstand such enormous pressure and become stronger as a result.

Introduction

The dominant view in the literature suggests that the role of non-state armed organizations in international relations is a rather recent phenomenon, having gained notoriety mainly in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. Yet, this phenomenon can be viewed as a manifestation of a much deeper and long-standing struggle, the political history of which is essential to understand its contemporary forms. Responses to 9/11 may have indeed intensified the struggle for power and authority between states and non-state armed groups, but they have not caused it. In fact, this is a phenomenon that can be best understood as a manifestation of a perennial antagonism between the ‘state’ and the ‘partisan’, as theorized by Carl Schmitt in his 1962 *Theories der Partisanen* (*Theory of the Partisan*). Grounded in the antinomy between the *regularity* of the soldier and the *irregularity* of the guerrilla man, Schmitt questions the treatment of ‘partisans’ as mere criminals and views their struggle as inherently ‘political’—making them existential enemies of the sovereign state (Schmitt 1962/2007). Schmitt’s distinction offers a useful analytical lens to investigate the sources and forms of this type of conflict

in the Middle East, given the duration and intensity of the strife between state and non-state actors and the magnitude of international involvement in the region. Although the conflict shows some general patterns, one can also discern significant variation. In particular, some non-state armed organizations seem to be more powerful than others, sometimes rivaling state authority and concerted international action.

How certain non-state armed organizations can survive and even challenge the position of the state and the international community, given the enormous asymmetries of material and ideological power involved, represents thus an important theoretical puzzle and has been central to my research. More specifically, I have been interested in explaining the resilience of non-state armed groups in the Middle East, in light of the various measures taken by regional and international powers to dismantle and eradicate them. These measures include (but are not limited to) military interventions, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions, international peacekeeping missions and support for governments and key security institutions of relevant states. These measures have been taken with specific political aims in mind, even as they have been presented as *impartial* policies reflecting universal principles and concerns. Engraved in the ideal-type of ‘the state’—intended as the only holder of legitimate monopoly of violence—multilateral or unilateral action, both at regional and international levels, has aimed at restoring state sovereignty and erasing illegal and illegitimate non-state armed groups, which are considered the very source of state ‘weakness’ in the Middle East (Makdisi 2011; Laurence 2018).

In line with the general purpose of this book, my chapter puts forth a critical understanding of the interaction between states and non-state armed groups. The main argument is in two parts. I begin by identifying a crucial but paradoxical outcome: not only have counterinsurgencies and counterterrorism policies failed to eradicate non-state armed groups, but they have in fact further empowered and emboldened the groups they sought to eradicate, further eroding state authorities in the Middle East (Calculi 2016, 2018). Second, I argue that this paradoxical outcome is a function of the capacity of non-state armed groups to combine formal involvement in politics with informal security practices (*idem*). Put differently, I claim that non-state armed groups can exploit their multifarious roles in the wider society to circumvent, neutralize and counteract internal and external policies aimed at their destruction.

The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss how academic scholarship has treated non-state armed groups in relation to the international order. Second, I trace the contentious rationales of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the colonial and post-colonial era. Finally, I elaborate on the interaction between non-state armed groups and the international order, specifically on how non-state armed groups counteract international measures to disband them; I illustrate this dynamic by discussing the relation between Hezbollah, the Lebanese state and the international community in Lebanon, drawing from insights developed in Calculi (2018).

Non-state armed groups in the international order

Governments generally consider non-state armed groups as major threats to national and international security, and more broadly as either causes or symptoms of ‘state failure’, a view which is widely shared by realist and liberal scholars alike (Byman 2005; Aliyev 2017). It is a view that has been strengthened by the diffusion of ‘asymmetric wars’ (i.e. wars fought between regular armies and irregular fighters) throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Especially in the wake of the American invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, proponents of ‘nation-building’ in both countries embraced the Weberian ideal-type of the state as the sole holder of ‘legitimate monopoly of force’ (Fukuyama 2004). Beyond the tragic failure of ‘nation-building’ strategy in both Iraq and Afghanistan, the idea that ‘only the state’ can provide for security and stability continues to serve as the main rationale of

security policies and has been reproduced in post-2011 counter-insurgencies in Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria.

The dominant view assumes that the failure of Western interventions geared to ‘stabilize’ allegedly unstable areas has been generally the result of imperial hubris (Scheuer 2005) and miscalculation (Shafer 2014). Hence, the proliferation of irregular armed groups is mainly seen as the unintended consequence of an ill-conceived policy. Both realist and critical scholars seem to share this assumption, although coming from different epistemological perspectives. Realists tend to see irregulars as passive actors, parasites proliferating on the ashes of failed states, destined to collapse sooner or later (Richani 2010; Nord 2010). Some realists add some nuance to this view, by recognizing the autonomous role that irregular armed organizations have played in conflicts and territorial disputes (Vinci 2009; Huang 2016; Aliyev 2016; Duyvesteyn 2017).

Others highlight the need to legally categorize different typologies of non-state armed organizations to discriminate between the negative and positive effects of their involvement in conflict and post-war reconstruction (Podder 2013). Still, the mainstream literature sees irregular armed organizations as *temporary* deviations from normalcy, entities which pose a threat to the preservation of the *inter-national* even as they expect them to wither away (Ahram 2011).

More critical research agendas have attempted to challenge these mainstream approaches to non-state armed groups by highlighting how states and non-state armed groups not only can coexist, compete and cooperate, but can also mutually penetrate each other, especially in the Middle East: what we see is neither monolithic nor fragmented/failed state sovereignty, but rather “hybrid sovereignties” (Fregonese 2012). The state is indeed characterized by several poles of authority, which perform distinct practices, whose “metaphysical effect . . . make such structures [institutions] appear to exist” (Mitchell 1991, p. 94). Yet, whereas these studies capture the functionality of state–non-state interaction, they fail to trace its emergence and scope, which is dependent on contingencies and compromises between different authorities, and requires careful empirical investigation in the proper context it manifests itself (Calculli 2013). This requires a study that goes beyond the characterization of sovereignty as “organized hypocrisy” (Krasner 1999), which many scholars reproduce even as they seek to overcome it. Authority *within* and *between* states is organized in as many ways as the number of states of the international system, and such generalizations risk reifying specific views rather than elucidating the diverse empirical realities under investigation.

It goes without saying that the modern idea of state sovereignty underpins the international realm. Yet, the state is not an *a priori* concept. It is rendered such via hegemonic discourse. The state rests on sovereignty *rights*, which are seen as a consequence—and not a precondition of—sovereignty *responsibilities* (Glanville 2010). From a liberal perspective, this is the implicit assumption underpinning every viable ‘social contract’. In the real world, of course, no individual has ever signed such a ‘social contract’. Yet, the idea of sovereignty as co-constitutive of a social contract is a powerful *discourse*, as we shall discuss in the next section. Therefore, in order to effectively challenge hegemonic interpretations of the divide between state and non-state violence, we need not simply to question hegemonic concepts, such as the Weberian paradigmatic definition of state sovereignty as ‘monopoly of legitimate physical violence’ (Weber 2004, p. 33), but also to understand their functionality as *discourses*.

Interestingly, Max Weber never treated the monopoly of violence as a normative prescription, nor did he theorize it,¹ as it is often assumed. He rather described how historically it became common sense to see it as an exclusive prerogative of the state. As he argues, “[i]n the past the use of physical violence by widely differing organizations—starting with the clan—was completely normal” (*idem*). If we historicize the state monopoly of violence, then, the almost automatic condemnation of the non-state becomes rather arbitrary. The ambiguities and never-ending debate about the juridical treatment of non-state armed groups in both international and national conflicts are reinforced by the fact that International Law (IL) sets rights for individuals and obligations for states (Rodenhäuser 2018, p. 4), as exemplified by the laws of war (Noorda 2013). However, such normative *ideal* is misaligned with the *real* plethora of actors claiming authority and contesting ‘the state’ globally. More than three

decades ago, Rosenau noted that it “no longer seem[ed] compelling to refer to the world as a State system” (1984, pp. 263–264). Indeed, one wonders if such a description has ever been compelling. The universalization of the state has never *fully* eliminated alternative forms of territorial and political authority, even in cases where it has been most successful, let alone in areas where this process has been contested, like in the Middle East. Add to this the widespread practice whereby states have specifically and systematically deployed non-state armed groups as proxies to disrupt rival states or groups, albeit clandestinely, to secure plausible deniability for what would otherwise be illegal practices (Tamm 2016). As Ahrām reminds us, “[t]he legitimacy versus illegitimacy of violence has always been less an analytical than a normative distinction” (2015, p. 208). Both liberal and illiberal states have backed militias, rebels, so-called ‘freedom fighters’ and other proxy warriors. From the colonial period up to the present, states have systematically made recourse to proxies in both regular wars and counterinsurgencies. Yet, they have staunchly resisted recognizing the legitimacy of irregular fighters other than soldiers (or contractors). With the rise and expansion of the ‘international community’ over the second half of the 20th century, it seems that an implicit consensus has emerged around the basic imperative not to normalize irregular fighters.

International law codifies the obligations of non-state combatants without recognizing their rights. A case in point is the foreign fighters who have joined the Kurdish YPG (People’s Protection Units)/PYD (Democratic Union Party) to fight against the ‘Islamic State’ in Syria and Iraq after 2014. In spite of the general sympathy and support that Kurdish militias have generated by publicizing their fight against the ‘Islamic State’, the status of their combatants remains uncertain. The Turkish efforts to paint them as terrorists has not been dispelled by many countries, including European states such as the UK. This despite the fact that several European countries and the US have backed YPG militias financially and militarily. Whilst they have used Kurdish fighters to fight their common enemy, the ‘Islamic State’ in Syria and Iraq, they have disregarded and in some cases persecuted them outside of the battlefield.² For example, Denmark and Italy have even detained some of their citizens who participated in the fight against the ‘Islamic State’ or put them under special surveillance for having travelled to and fought in Syria.³ This duplicity cannot be understood in isolation, but must be seen as part of the broader intolerance of states towards non-state armed groups, even as some states arm some groups for specific purposes when their interests align. To understand this contradictory practice, we need to look into the historical construction of the *exclusivity* of state legitimacy, and its uses in the spatial-political redefinition of the post-colonial world.

The colonial origin of counterinsurgency and its reincarnation in liberal interventions

In this section, I trace the universalization of state sovereignty as monopoly of violence in the transition from empires to the ‘international community’, when a contentious politics of violence helped codify the contemporary understanding and moral undertone of state vs. non-state violence. The categorization of ‘non-state violence’ acquired a political value as the sovereign state was becoming universal. For all its obviousness, the opposition between legitimacy of state violence and illegitimacy of non-state violence is treated as an ahistorical practice, detached from the normative context in which it gained shape. This section unearths the colonial origins of such a distinction, the legacy of which dominates the doctrine and rationale of liberal interventions, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, especially in the Middle East.

Carl Schmitt’s *Theory of the Partisan* provides a key to understanding the central place that the colony occupies in the rise of ‘partisan wars’. Although Schmitt saw the first occurrence of this type of warfare in the Spanish guerrilla war of 1808–1813 (Schmitt 1962/2007, p. 3), he also identified its uncontrollable ascendance during the interbellum in the Balkans and in Asian countries (*idem*, p. 8). Schmitt described ‘the partisan’ as a central figure of civil wars and colonial wars: the partisan is problematic not simply because he fights irregularly, but mainly because he fights “on a political front” and is different from the pirate who is “unpolitical”⁴ and “possessed of . . . an *animus furandi* [felonious intent]” (*idem*, p. 10). Schmitt’s take on the ‘nature of the partisan’ complemented his

reflections on the inadequacy of The Hague Ground Provision of 18 October 1907 and the Geneva Conventions of 1949, both recognizing the existence of non-state combatants in wars (*idem*, p. 14). What Schmitt found problematic was that “the formulations of the Geneva conventions had European experiences in mind, but not the partisan wars of Mao Tse-tung and the later development of modern partisan warfare” (*idem*, p. 15). He counted as “European experience” the resistance movements of WWII (*idem*, p. 16), whilst his concerns were intimately interconnected with his disenchanted acknowledgment of the crumbling of a ‘*nomos* of the Earth’ hinged upon the centrality of Europe, and the consequent need for a new *nomos* after 1945. But as Andreas Kalyvas clarifies, the colony is central in Schmitt’s understanding of the making of the modern international system as direct consequence of the disintegration of a Euro-centric order, grounded in the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* (Kalyvas 2018). Anti-colonialism went hand in hand with the destruction of the European order (*idem*, pp. 40–41). The colony underpinned the pre-1945 Euro-centric *nomos*, in which ‘the sovereign state’ was the organizing principle of an exclusively European spatial order as much as the moral obsolescence of the ‘colony’ came to underpin the ‘new’ (post-1945) *nomos*; the new *nomos* was a post-European order, grounded on sovereign equality. For Schmitt this was a tragic, delusional trajectory. He found it paradoxical the decision by the French general Salan, a man for whom he did not hide his admiration, to relinquish French sovereignty over Algeria during the war of liberation. He noted that:

[i]n Algeria he [Salan] stood right in the middle of a situation in which 400,000 well-armed French soldiers fought 20,000 Algerian partisans, only to see France renounce its sovereignty over Algeria. The losses of human life were ten to twenty times greater on the side of the general population of Algeria than on the French side, but then the material expenditure of the French was ten to twenty times higher than those of the Algerians. Salan stood, in short, in his whole existence as a Frenchman and a soldier, before an *étrange paradoxe* [strange paradox], within an *Irrsinnslogik* [logic of unreason] that embittered a courageous and intelligent man and drove him to the search for a counter-measure.
(Schmitt 1962/2007, p. 47)

The shift from inter-state to ‘partisan war’ or—in the most popularized definition of the term—‘asymmetric war’ occurred gradually after 1945. But whilst the notion of ‘asymmetric war’ may seem conceptually viable only in its relation to the new inter-national system, the deeper logic of ‘regularity vs. irregularity’ is of colonial lineage. As Laleh Khalili notices, European campaigns in colonies and mandates were inherently ‘asymmetric wars’, even as the practice was coined as such in 1961 (Khalili 2015). *Regularity* was an exclusive prerogative claimed by European troops displayed in extra-European territories and denied to local armed groups. Up till the Algerian war for independence, Europeans conceived state sovereignty as bounded within Europe, whilst the European metropolises believed their sovereignty rightfully extended over overseas colonies. As Daniel Neep (2012) reminds us, such elitist conception of sovereignty was key to justifying the brutality of regular European troops against anti-colonial irregular rebellions in both colonies and mandates. The very *irregularity* of rebels was constitutive of the justification by which *regular* colonial troops could crush anti-colonial armed resistance. At the same time, this conduct marked a historical phase in which ‘state sovereignty’ was conceived (and fairly accepted) as an exclusive privilege—something that European empires were unsurprisingly eager to preserve. Aspiration to national sovereignty was, indeed, the by-product of the principle of *self-determination*, championed by two leaders of that time, Soviet revolutionary Vladimir Lenin and US President Woodrow Wilson, although with different intentions: Lenin intended a radical redistribution of global power; Wilson, much more respectful of the existing empires—especially the American empire in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, Central America and the Philippines—referred to the right of the people to *self-government* (Cassese 2005, p. 18). In fact, Wilson never pronounced the term ‘self-determination’ in his famous speech at the Versailles Conference in 1919 (Throntveit 2011). His fourteen points were explicitly intended as part of the enterprise of spreading American values in the world to better serve the American national interest (Smith 1994). Nevertheless, the principle of self-determination gave rise to the so-called ‘Wilsonian moment’—which largely transcended Wilson’s presidential mandate and provided a variety of anti-

colonial and anti-mandatory movements with an overarching normative and ideological framework (Manela 2007). The power of this right rested precisely in turning the universalization of 'national sovereignty'—the 'new *nomos* of the Earth'—into a *moral* enterprise. Gradually, it assumed an autonomous moral force, which European empires could hardly countervail with the overused 'civilizing mission', as it gradually lost its power to justify the expansion and preservation of their overseas dominions. Although decolonization was not a smooth or linear process, the post-1945 world order was indisputably an inter-national order, consisting of states that (at least on paper) were sovereign equals, replacing *formal* empires.

The US emerged as the principal architect of the new world order, and the *right of people* to self-government, non-intervention and non-interference was established in the UN Charter in San Francisco in 1945. Yet, the United Nations (UN) Charter echoed a specific conception of 'sovereignty', which is not what many people, especially in the third world, intended as the direct result of the right of self-determination. The UN incorporated and universalized a rather peculiar understanding of sovereignty—that of 'popular sovereignty'—derived from the intellectual legacy of the American and French revolutions. As Luke Glanville points out, this understanding of sovereignty enshrines the fundamental rights of individuals and envisions the right of *nations* to self-government, conditional upon the achievement of individual rights (Glanville 2010, p. 242). Put differently, the universalization of 'popular sovereignty' after 1945, complemented by the emergence of an international human rights regime, enshrined the very *responsibility* of the 'international community' (to continue) to interfere with the sovereignty of states in the name of human rights (*idem*). This doctrine recovers the older notion of 'civilizing mission', preserving the hierarchical position of new and old dominant powers to adjudicate the sovereign rights of lesser powers.

Sovereignty, liberalism and counterinsurgency

During the decolonization process, the international recognition of states and their subsequent admission to the international society became a peculiar politics of normatively distinguishing—from above—between the state and the non-state, the *regular* and the *irregular*; it became the defining criteria of which actors could join the international society and which ones *had to be* excluded. The universalization of sovereignty represented such an unprecedented process that Schmitt worried it could generate its own devices to autonomously evaluate the sovereignty of all states, not only of weaker states. In a 1923 critique of the idea of an international court of justice, Carl Schmitt (1923/1996, p. 30–31) interestingly noted that:

[t]he power to decide who is sovereign would signify a new sovereignty. A tribunal vested with such powers would constitute a supra-state and supra-sovereignty, which alone could create a new order if, for example, it had the authority to decide on the recognition of a new state.

New sovereignty represented a new force with unknown potential that threatened the sovereignty of even the most powerful states, due to its potential for autonomous agency, and the unknown consequences of the strategic use by some states to grant or deny the sovereignty of others. The politics of recognition and non-recognition of sovereignty serves as a device to construct and consolidate what Agnew (2005) calls "sovereignty regimes", which serve to create and preserve international hierarchies. The reinterpretation of sovereignty as responsibility provides the ultimate moral justification for liberal countries to intervene in non-liberal countries and launch counterinsurgencies against non-state armed groups deemed a threat to this notion of sovereignty. The discourse of asymmetric war is rhetorical intervention to depoliticize the war on non-state armed groups from the former colonial dominions (Winter 2011). In embracing this understanding of sovereignty, liberal states have found a new source of 'legitimate violence' to pursue the expansion and preservation of the liberal international project. It informs their justification of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, normative measures, sanctions and direct assistance to third world states, in order to secure their regimes and/or reshape their internal politics, thus to render them compliant with the

‘liberal international project’. In the same vein, they have targeted rival regimes and rival visions of political order advocated by state and non-state actors (Calculli 2019).

Working on the universality of their project, liberal states consider deviance from liberalism as inappropriate behavior and potentially as *casus belli*. It is precisely the universal claim of liberalism that justifies liberal intolerance and brutality (Bishai 2004; Brown 2015). But the liberal ‘rightful intolerance’ is inherently paradoxical, not least because it requires supposedly liberal states such as the US to take and support illiberal policies and measures, including support for non-liberal states and irregular armed groups—from the Islamist *mujahidin* in Afghanistan in the 1970s, to Marxist Kurdish fighters in post-2011 Syria—to reach their goal.

The contentious politics of ‘legitimate violence’ in the Middle East

Western interventions and resistance to them in the Middle East can be understood against this backdrop. For all their universal claims, liberal states have recognized states that have demonstrated their allegiance to liberal states, despite their illiberal nature and practices, and not because they have met the liberal criteria of statehood. The liberal states have used the liberal criteria and basic notions of sovereignty as responsibility as a weapon against states or non-state actors that have been uncooperative or challenged liberal hegemony. They have also used global institutions to advance their agenda. In particular, the US and major European states have systematically evoked and mobilized the power of *impartiality*, through UN normative measures, Security Council resolutions, UN-sponsored peacekeeping operations and other selective measures to strengthen their allies and undermine their rivals in the region. Their vocabulary is predictable: their enemies are labelled as ‘insurgents’, ‘irregular fighters’, ‘terrorists’ and accused of weakening and undermining the state, the regional and international order, whilst their allies are portrayed as legitimate holders of authority.

But this liberal preponderance has not succeeded in neutralizing or eradicating resistance to it. Rather paradoxically, some organizations have thrived because of the practice of external actors in granting statehood to their allies and denying recognition to their enemies. Whilst these groups have not been able to disrupt the hegemonic paradigm of the state, they have used the same paradigm to secure their viability. A variety of actors, including Islamists, nationalists and religious national movements have been able to present counter-hegemonic projects of ‘just political order’ without needing to relinquish the idea of the modern sovereign state.

Organizations such as the Palestinian Hamas, the Lebanese Hezbollah, or the Iraqi movement led by Moqtada al-Sadr, have participated in regular elections and operated within formal politics, despite the international label of ‘terrorism’, without renouncing their project to build an Islamic political order and their capacity to use violence. In order to explain such a phenomenon, studies on rebel politics and/or political wings of armed organizations have pointed to the pragmatic rationality of these actors to cope with uncertain circumstances (Matanock and Staniland 2018; Berti 2011); other studies see their resilience as the result of the internalization of international norms (Dionigi 2014). These accounts point to compromise and ideological transformation of these organizations, which does not, however, explain the pendulum between their support for and simultaneous opposition to the state.

In what follows below, I describe an alternative argument I have developed in Calculli 2018: non-state armed organizations can act *as if* they were compliant with hegemonic norms and institutions, without however abandoning the original commitment to their vision of the state. These actors have resisted, by appropriating the idea of the state in a way that reinforces their position outside of the formal structure of the state. Their strategy is to penetrate the state in order to turn it in their favor and emasculate the campaign against them. I have uncovered this strategy in the case of the struggle between Hezbollah, the Lebanese state and the international community. In line with the pedagogical objective of this volume, I will briefly discuss the basic choices made in conducting the research and link them back to the theoretical framework developed above.

The state, the non-state and the international community in Lebanon

Before elaborating on the main findings of my research, it is important to clarify some of the major methodological challenges of studying the discourses produced by both states and non-state armed groups about one of the most fundamental performances of the state: the provision of *security*. ‘Critical discourse analysis’ and ‘framing analysis’ provide the coordinates to capture in a systematic way how these actors justify their own action and expose or obstruct the action of their rivals.⁵ The *production* and *reception* of these discourses—through manifestos, visual images, public statements, endorsement or contestation of laws and political decisions—at once construct and are constructed by the normative and moral parameters of the political and social context in which these actors operate. Examining the battle of narratives that takes place in the public domain allows us to see how states and non-state armed organizations convey their own respective visions of the world to the intended audiences. The analysis of both the international campaign to stigmatize and marginalize Hezbollah, spearheaded mainly by the US and its European allies, but also Lebanese rivals of Hezbollah, and the ways in which Hezbollah engages in counter-stigmatization, has revealed a two-pronged strategy of ‘the party of God’⁶:

1. by exposing the normative incoherence of external actors seeking to stigmatize Hezbollah;
2. by simulating compliance with international and national norms.

The analysis of key documents, agreements and speeches, complemented with interviews with key practitioners of UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) and donor countries (especially the US, the UK, France and Italy), allowed me to identify and study the discrepancies between, on the one hand, the aspirational goal of (re)constructing Lebanon as a space of exclusive Western and Israeli influence and, on the other hand, what these international actors have failed to achieve and/or control. This dynamic can also be observed in the analysis of the contentious public narratives on security, put forth by Hezbollah, its allies and rivals in Lebanon and the region; whereas the former denounce the *partiality* of the international community in Lebanon (especially UNIFIL), the latter espouse and defend its impartial role. Semi-structured interviews with members of different rank from different Lebanese parties, army officers and security personnel, corroborate the strategy. These interviews were instrumental to detect the silent, informal strategies by which Hezbollah has manipulated the official normative standards of ‘security’, which are imposed upon Lebanon by the US and its allies via direct assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL. In particular, I have shown how Hezbollah relies on principles of neutrality and impartiality to pursue its own agenda.

Hezbollah, the Lebanese security apparatus and the international community

I can now briefly summarize the findings of this research project (Calculli 2018). The aim has been to show how the struggle between Hezbollah, the Lebanese state and the international community is in fact a struggle between competing visions of the political order which in turn mobilize rival understandings of justice. This pattern is not peculiar to the interaction between Hezbollah and Lebanon, but it is rather engraved in the formation of the Lebanese state itself. The clash between rival visions of the Lebanese state is co-constitutive of the national pact of 1943. Whereas back then the need to proclaim an independent Lebanon was unanimously accepted, different actors had different visions of “what the Lebanese state should [have been]” (Hourani 1988, p. 7). Not surprisingly, the pursuit of these visions after independence came together with the formation of rival axes between domestic and foreign actors, which have notoriously made Lebanon subject to permanent external interference. This is particularly visible in the cases of UNIFIL in 1978 and the Multinational Force (MNF) composed by the US, France, Italy and Britain in 1982. The mission of

UNIFIL southern Lebanon, established through two Security Council Resolutions 425 (1978) and 426 (1978), was to:

1. confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon.
2. restore international peace and security.
3. assist the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area.

In practice, UNIFIL aimed at limiting the activities of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and prevent it from using southern Lebanon to launch attacks against Israel. But when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Lebanon again in 1982, with the operation 'Peace for Galilee', orchestrated by Ariel Sharon, UNIFIL could not counter it. What is more, the UNIFIL mandate was adjusted by Resolution 501 (1982) to accommodate Israeli invasion. Whereas in principle, UNIFIL was an impartial actor, in practice it ended up complementing Israeli troops and the Lebanese Christian militia allied with Israel, the 'South Lebanon Army', led by Saad Haddad—the de facto Lebanese agent of the Israeli occupation from 1982–2000. As Israeli troops marched toward and later besieged Beirut, the US, France, Italy and Britain formed a peacekeeping force—the 'Multinational Force' (MNF)—to protect the US-brokered ceasefire negotiated in 1981 between Israel and the PLO. Presenting itself as a neutral international force for peace, the MNF landed in Beirut to avoid the massacring of civilians and evacuate Palestinian militants. In practice, however, the MNF served as a cover of international neutrality for the states that composed it—especially the US and France, whilst Italy. Tellingly, Italy was *explicitly* made part of the mission in order to preserve its image of neutrality and the legitimacy given that Italy did not have a well-defined foreign agenda to pursue in Lebanon (Calculli 2014).

The US sponsored Bashir Gemayel, chief of the Christian militia 'Lebanese Forces' and backed and protected his election as president on 23 August of the same year (Corm 2013, p. 280). A leader of the Christian Kataeb party, Gemayel planned to sign a peace deal with Israel, expel the Palestinians from Lebanon and enforce the idea of Lebanon and Israel as twin confessional states—a Christian state and a Jewish state—tied together by an intimate alliance. Gemayel was assassinated on 14 September 1982, five days after the MNF had left Beirut. In the vacuum left by the departure of the international mission, the IDF-backed Phalanges massacred over 3,500 Palestinian civilians in the Beirut camps of Sabra and Shatila.

This massacre serves as a catalyst in the emergence of the Shi'a Islamist organization Hezbollah. Composed of disobedient members of the Shi'a party and militia Amal, former communists and various Shi'a militants, Hezbollah declared its loyalty to the Iranian Revolution. Yet, Hezbollah emerged first and foremost as a polemical force against the Christian, exclusionary vision of Lebanon, politically allied with Israel and the West. In 1982, the Christian elite in Beirut prevented the Army from resisting the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon, where most of the Shi'a community was concentrated. Hezbollah emerged as a response to this act, and launched an armed resistance against the Israeli occupying forces, the 'Lebanese Southern Army' (LSA) and UNIFIL. The culmination of its repudiation of the 'international community' was finally the twin attack it launched on 23 October 1983 against two units of the MNF in Beirut, killing 241 US Marines and 58 French officers (Calculli 2018, pp. 70–77).

Hezbollah's *risala al-maftuha* of 1985—or the 'open letter'—usually considered Hezbollah's first manifesto, contains important leads as to the logic of the twin attack. Besides expressing a preference for the establishment of an 'Islamic state' in Lebanon, the *risala al-maftuha*⁷ is in practice a '*j'accuse*' against the complicity of the international community with Israel and its Lebanese allies, especially the Kataeb. The letter also makes reference to the "right to self-determination", which is stated among Hezbollah's objectives in Lebanon, whilst the expulsion of the US and France is seen as functional to "allow our populace to the right of self-determination; to freely choose the political system they aspire to".⁸ Although Hezbollah never admitted its responsibility for the attack,

it clearly did not perceive the US and France as representatives of the international community, but rather as occupying forces and parties in the ongoing war in Lebanon. Seen from this angle, the *risala al-maftuha* was an attempt to politicize the struggle among competing visions of the domestic order in Lebanon and expose the compliance between external preferences and interests.

After the civil war and the establishment of peace via the Ta'if agreement of 1989, Hezbollah was faced with a dilemma: to reject or accept the 'Lebanese state'. The conflict between purist and pragmatic Islamists was intense, but eventually Hezbollah decided to establish a political party operate within the state. But the decision by Hezbollah to create a party did not entail a choice between its *armed* and *political* wings. Instead it has created a liminal space to avoid direct confrontation with Israel, the US and the international community, whilst continuing to pursue its project for an 'Islamic state' (*idem*, pp. 81–90). From Hezbollah's point of view, the Ta'if agreement did not serve to put end to the Lebanese civil war, but also and perhaps more importantly, to affirm Lebanon's resolve to end the Israeli occupation. Ta'if provided the normative basis for Hezbollah for to justify its struggle to end the Israeli occupation in South Lebanon. Under the guise of Ta'if, Hezbollah could lay the foundations of a parallel security policy in South Lebanon. In doing so Hezbollah showed that it could overcome opposition from within the Lebanese state as well as from without, defying the UNIFIL presence and its mandate to preserve the *status quo* (*idem*, pp. 91–99).

Finally, the 'global war on terror' offers another illustration of Hezbollah struggle with its rivals within Lebanon and in the international community. After 9/11, Hezbollah came under increased attack from the US, starting with the 'Syria Accountability Act and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act' (2003). The 2005 assassination of Rafiq Hariri, the expulsion of Syria from Lebanon and the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon with Hezbollah as its explicit target dramatically increased the pressure on the Party of God. Following the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, the Security Council reinstated the mandate of UNIFIL through Resolution 1701, creating UNIFIL 2, aimed at dismantling Hezbollah. In conjunction, the US and other international donors came to the support of Lebanon's security institutions, especially the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), to enable their deployment in the South, for the first time after the civil war. The main aim of this military aid was to turn the LAF into a proxy of US counterinsurgency to fight Hezbollah.

Still, Hezbollah did not yield. In face of unprecedented pressure, Hezbollah exploited its participation within the Lebanese institutions and alliances with the other Shi'a party, Amal, and the Christian leader Michel Aoun to conjure up the impression of unity of purpose with the Lebanese state. Hezbollah sought to present itself as a pillar of the Lebanese state and security—not as its archrival as local and international actors portrayed it. Hezbollah showed dexterity in leveraging its roles within and outside formal politics, manipulating formal and informal rules and norms underpinning the Lebanese sectarian political system, to secure their grip on the Lebanese society and state. Hezbollah used its sectarian allotment to penetrate the Lebanese security apparatus by appointing its loyalists or allies in key positions within the LAF and the intelligence services (*idem*, pp. 101–129). This operation allowed Hezbollah to consolidate its position within the LAF and use Lebanese institutions to counteract and emasculate international efforts to use the Lebanese Army and other security institutions against its role in Lebanon and beyond. Whilst the US aimed at using the LAF as an agent to implement its own policy in Lebanon and the Levant, Hezbollah was capable of derailing the US efforts without openly refusing to cooperate with the international community, especially UNIFIL. In my work, I show how Hezbollah used the army as a cover for its actions in the UNIFIL 2 area, reinforcing its role within and without Lebanon.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the struggle among states and non-state armed groups, with a focus on the Middle East. It has argued that the nexus between states and non-state armed organizations points to an opposition as much as a symbiosis between the two. It is a struggle between forces that are similar in kind but dissimilar in the possession of material sources of power. By drawing from the

experiences of colonial and liberal counterinsurgency and counterterrorism wars, the chapter has highlighted the discursive *moral* dimension of this rivalry. To detect these dynamics, we need to treat the state as a ‘discursive construct’ and understand the process of inclusion and exclusion of various actors in its formal structures as both a material (e.g. military and economic) and ideational (e.g. ideological and rhetorical) struggle. This is part of broader struggle between rival visions of order that has informed the formation and transformation of states and international society. The distinction between the state and non-state armed forces, then, is the result of hegemonic articulation, enacting and performance of ‘state sovereignty’ and counter-hegemonic forces that seek to project rival interpretations to normalize practices and projects deemed illegitimate according to hegemonic discourse.

Notes

1. For a contextualization of the monopoly of force, see Anter (2014), pp. 25–34.
2. Nora Martin, “Terrorism policing: the YPG/YPJ, an ally abroad but a danger at home?”, *Open Democracy* (9 January 2019), www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/nora-martin-terrorism-polic-ing-ypgypj-ally-abroad-but-danger-at-home?fbclid=IwAR0tc5ZhscecRmI6-JKeuNESJeWJjexJl1t-hzXbFAgI57XA90LF_pq9BvU.
3. Chiara Cruciati, “Per l’Italia chi combatte l’ISIS è un sorvegliato speciale”, *Il Manifesto* (5 January 2019), <https://ilmanifesto.it/chi-combatte-lisis-per-litalia-e-sorvegliato-speciale/>.
4. Emphasis in original.
5. For an account of Hezbollah’s justification of the Syrian intervention, see Calculi (2017).
6. This point builds on the conceptualization of normative conflict by Macaj (2017).
7. The text of the *risala al-maftuha* is translated in Alagha (2011, pp. 15–22).
8. Alagha (2011, p. 43).

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