

DEFINING THE STRATEGIC CENTER OF GRAVITY OF HEZBOLLAH

Ph.D. student: Faisal Warikat of Security Studies in National University of Public Service

Email: Faisal.Warikat@uni-nke.hu

Abstract: *This article is about the strategic center of gravity of Hezbollah; Hezbollah is one of the toughest, and persistent semi-state actors. The author claims that Hezbollah's state-sponsorship by the Islamic Republic of Iran is its strategic center of gravity (CoG). For identification, this paper starts with the definition of the CoG; lists the main possible CoGs, and then determining the closest one to be the strategic CoG.*

KEYWORDS: CENTER OF GRAVITY, HEZBOLLAH, ISRAEL, 2006 WAR

1. Introduction

Semi-state actors (SSA) are those non-state actors whose status is less than state and more than non-state, they try to have rights and privileges to challenge states and provide services to citizens equal to the offered services by the legitimized rules, they have at least de-facto international legitimacy. Hezbollah is a clear example of non-state actor playing the role of semi-state actor.

This paper intends to investigate the strategic CoG of Hezbollah, taking into consideration its history of wars with Israel, and its capability inside the Lebanese communities.

Most of the similar studies tend to highlight ideology as the main CoG for such organizations, while this paper acknowledges the importance of ideology, nevertheless ideology can be sacrificed by those organizations if it contradicts with their survival and adopts political pragmatism instead.

The second uniqueness of this paper is that it starts with identifying the pillars of strength (broader than the definition of critical capabilities), and suggests that this concept applies to most of semi-state actors.

The assumed definition of the pillar of strength is the capability that is owned by the non-state actor that gives it the ability to survive and influence other actors.

In July 2006, Israel waged War against Hezbollah with all its military might, during which it launched more than fifteen thousand air sorties to target over (7000) targets inside tiny Lebanon.

That War, was the longest in Israel's history, at the end, Israel failed to fulfill some of its announced targets, which were: build the image of deterrence, safe return of the two abductees soldiers, destruction of the Hezbollah's military capabilities, return of sovereignty to Lebanon's government, and assist it in taking its responsibility over the southern part of Lebanon in accordance to the UN security resolution 1559[1].

At the end of that War, Israel failed to put an end to Hezbollah's military capabilities, Hezbollah succeeded in building a de-facto model of the possibility of defeating Israel when it managed to survive the massive number of Israeli artillery shells and the extreme use of Israel of its Air Force capabilities augmented by three divisions on the ground. Hezbollah managed to keep and gain the sympathy of the Arab population by its effective use of media especially the Al-Manar TV station, also convinced ordinary Arabs that their states' models are not credible competitors to the Israeli army, when with less than that force Israel defeated three Arab armies within six days. The concept of center of gravity was mainly developed by the Prussian military practitioner and theorist Carl Von Clausewitz in his book 'On War.' Clausewitz provided an insightful study for this concept, but his main contribution is that his idea is still triggering modern military researchers to find solutions for some points of that concept, one brilliant point of Clausewitz center of gravity was his writing in Chapter four:

In countries subject to domestic strife, the center of gravity is generally the capital. In small countries that rely on larger ones, it is usually the army of their protectors. Among alliances, it lies in the community of interest, and in popular uprisings, it is the personalities of the leader and public opinion. It is against these that our energies should be directed [2,3]

Theorists of Joint operations later developed the Clausewitzian concept, it is still valid, but needed some reconstructions, that

enhances its ability to tackle contemporary issues like the 4th generation of warfare.

Defining of CoG is not a straightforward, linear task, as it looks for some, but it is part of the art of military design, which makes it different from one perspective to another according to the angle of their perspective, even when correctly defining the CoG, still proper planning is needed to deal with it, in compliance with the strategic military and political objectives.

Questions like: do we want to destroy the CoG, neutralize it, does the neutralization leads to the ultimate destruction of it, or the objective of its determination is merely to avoid targeting it.

A good example of this is the US missile targeting of the Syrian Shairat military base as a result of the Syrian regime use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaikhon in a blunt defiance to the US red lines.

The CoG could be the Bashar al-Asad, but the US administration did not have in its mind to cause the collapse of the regime, they even were reluctant about the targeting as it could at that moment of history accelerate the undesirable regime's collapse.

In this research, the focus is narrowed to the strategic CoG of Hezbollah. Hezbollah has its uniqueness. The main definitions that relate to the CoG are [4] :

Critical capabilities: the primary abilities essential to the accomplishment of the objective that merits a COG to be identified as such within a given context.

Critical requirements: essential conditions, resources, and means that the COG requires to perform the critical capability. These are things that are used or consumed to act, enabling a critical capability to function wholly.

Critical vulnerabilities: critical requirements or components thereof that are deficient or vulnerable to neutralization, interdiction, or attack in a manner that will achieve decisive results.

1. Methodology

The method to be used is extracted from Eikmier [5] and Dr. Strange's method[6] with modification so that it can reflect the case of non-state actor like Hezbollah..

The start is with the identification of Hezbollah's primary objective, which is its desired end state, then the ways that the group can use to attain that end state, later out of his pillars of strength, selection of the most appropriate one by which Hezbollah can do the required action and use the proper means in order to achieve the goal.

2. Analysis

This research deals with the CoG of Semi-state actor, which is more difficult to describe than states and their conventional armies; the difficulties are in the existence of more than one CoG for these organizations, the other point is that they morph from one shape to another. In this case of study, the main pillars of strength of Hezbollah (Requirements) are:

- a) Political Leadership
- b) Military Capabilities
- c) Financial assets
- d) Public support
- e) Ideology
- f) Alliances or state-sponsorship

The desired end state of Hezbollah is controversial, but it is believed that nowadays that it lies in providing Iran with a deterrence tool from instigating any war against it, other suggested objectives can be the destruction of Israel which seems to be an unrealistic objective, third proposed objective can be the building of an Islamic state inside Lebanon which was main point of the 1985 Hezbollah's open letter, but that objective was canceled by the arrival of Hassan Nasserallah as Secretary General of the Party of God.

The ways to attain those strategic objectives are through: building strong military capabilities, recruit agents, provide social support to Shia community, build ties with Palestinian movements. In order to manage those ways, Hezbollah is in need for high level support which cannot be provided by less than sponsorship agreement with Iran.

Hezbollah provides consultation and training services to multiple armed organizations in the region, and has a direct control by the Iranian Qudos Brigade. The CoG of Hezbollah can be one of the above mentioned pillars of strength.

Political Leadership

The political system of Hezbollah is manipulated by the Shoura Majlis, Political bureau, and charismatic leader who does not have competitors. Still, Hezbollah, with its organizational maturity, developed the system of the sustainment of the leadership in the face of leadership targeting that Israel embraced against it.

Financial Assets

Hezbollah has a network of social organizations, which means that it does need economic support, Iran acts as a financial supporter of many of Hezbollah social activities.

Armed Forces

Hezbollah enjoys an excellent armed force which can be considered as an operational CoG, yet cannot be regarded as the strategic CoG.

Ideology

Counter-terrorism researchers like to focus on ideology and consider it as one of the utmost privileged factors for survivability, though this is not the real case. At times of existential threats, Shia ideology allows practicing Toqiya (Religious dissimulation), where they can better survive the ostensible threats. Besides, Hezbollah practice of political pragmatism to attain his objectives.

Financial Assets

This point is connected to the state-sponsorship to a small extent, but the organization is also diversified its resources, it gets one-fifth from its supporters annual revenues. It has local supports and from abroad, especially Lebanese Shia in *Côte d'Ivoire*, other African and Latin American states. At the time of finance decrease, the organization will most likely drop many of its social-economic activities and prioritize its expenditures on defense budget issues. Hezbollah also gets financial support from non-governmental Iranian organization, and from Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), mainly from al-Qudos Brigade liaisons officers inside the group.

Alliances

Clausewitz said that alliances could serve as a CoG, in this case, its alliance with Syria and Iran.

3. Results

From the abovementioned discussion, it is clear that semi-state actors rely on public support for the mobilization it needs.

Hezbollah maturity decreases the effects of leadership targeting of its leaders, if the organization was deprived of its leadership, it would sustain a heavy loss, however, that is not going to affect it on the long term. The armed force of Hezbollah is more dependent on the economic requirements, at the end the Iranian role is essential in the survival of Hezbollah, not only for financial support, but also for the training services and the ideological coverage it provides to the cadres of the party.

4. Conclusions

This research provides an insightful study to the strategic CoG of Hezbollah, it claims that the strategic CoG is its alliance with Iran, as nothing can be more influential on Hezbollah than that relationship mainly because of its ideological nexus. Iran is the main actor who is responsible of the sustainment of Hezbollah, the limitations of the research is that case of Hezbollah cannot be generalized to other semi-state organizations like Hamas.

References

- [1] United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004): Calls upon all remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon; Calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias; Supports the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory
- [2] Knud Bartels, (1994), "The Center of Gravity," in An Anthology of Doctrinal Papers (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations, US Army War College)13-
- [3] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 75, 77
- [4] Schnaubelt, et al.; Vulnerability Assessment Pocket Guide; (2014); https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/tools/TL100/TL129/RAND_TL129.pdf
- [5] Dale C. Eikmeier, "COG Analysis," Military Review, July-August 2004, (accessed February 17, 2006).
- [6] Joseph Strange and Richard Iron, "Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities," Quantico, Virginia: The Marine Corps Association: 1996, pp:1-12.