Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s sense of interconnectedness before and since the Syrian War: succumbing to sectarianism or unity in resistance?

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Introduction

Research question and relevance

Not only popular media and private research centers\(^1\), but also key authors on the International Relations of the Middle-East\(^2\) often assume that Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s perceptions of each other have recently changed. Supposedly their relation has always been good, but deteriorated as a result of the Syrian war, because the organizations support opposite sides.\(^3\) This kind of analysis fits into the category of ‘realism’ and it portrays Hezbollah as hypocrite, backing the Arab Spring until it was its friend Assad’s turn to withdraw.\(^4\) Consequently, the predominantly Sunni Arab world allegedly lost faith in Hezbollah and Hamas severed itself from its Lebanese colleague in favor of fellow Sunni actors, which are ideologically more stable partners according to these analyses. For example in the words of the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center ‘[Hezbollah] has lost its halo as a voice for the oppressed and downtrodden, and has exposed itself as a partisan and sectarian party that will side with Iran and its allies even at the expense of human rights and human lives in neighboring Syria.’\(^5\)

There is something that verifiably changed since Hamas reported to support Assad’s opposition: the headquarters have been moved from Damascus to Doha in February 2012. Consequently, Western news agencies, political analysts and IR scholars have almost without exception employed a neorealist perspective on Hamas-Hezbollah relations and thereby ignore the organizations’ internal dynamics. The authors focus on the structure in which Hamas and Hezbollah operate rather than on their agency, on security rather than on their ideas and values and they bluntly divide the Middle-East in axes according to religious sect. Therefore I wonder whether the Syrian civil war really affected Hezbollah’s and Hamas’ sense of connectedness with each other, and if so, to what extent.

On the one hand, because it is the conventional way of looking at these situations, neorealism provides less new insights than, for example, a social constructivist approach. Besides, if we want to trace the influence of the Syrian civil war on perceptions of Hamas and Hezbollah, we need to look

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\(^2\) Bar 2007; Bahgat 2009 and Salloukh 2013.

\(^3\) For example: Dr. Shehadi, associate fellow at Chatham House: “Without Hamas, the Axis of Resistance is reduced to a mere sectarian alliance.” (Rowell, A.(8June2013)’When Resistances Collide’ last accessed 29Oct2014 https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/when-resistences-collide.)

\(^4\) Knio 2013:856.

\(^5\) Salem, P.(19June2012)’Can Hezbollah Weather the Arab Spring?’
further than a few possible strategic interests. We need to know how the organizations are built around specific values and norms and how decision-making comes about. Constructivism offers an interesting view in this matter, as it may be able to explain something that realism cannot: the fact that it took Hamas almost a year to decide which side it would support in the Syrian war.

On the other hand, the (neo)realist approach is helpful, because realism is a useful simplification when looking at a situation with many actors. Furthermore, as I plan to use the method of discourse analysis it is not my aim to identify individual opinions and the data will be quite one-dimensional.

This research is relevant theoretically and socially. As the Syrian civil war has begun relatively recently, there has not been done much research yet on the indirect effects of the war. Given the number of Western publications on Hamas-Hezbollah relations, it is a topic of great interest to the West. However, it is impossible to gain an understanding of Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s sense of interconnectedness without taking into consideration their own publications on the subject. So far research on these publications has not been conducted. Therefore, this study aims to fill part of the gap and attempts to cover the situation from the viewpoint of the organizations themselves instead of serving the interests of the Western audience. It may reveal changes in the balance of power in the Middle-East, affirming neorealist expectations. Furthermore, it may show the importance of shared values of Hamas and Hezbollah in their identity construction as compared to sectarian values. Hence it can give an insight in the stability of relations between Hamas and Hezbollah.

Background

An alliance between Hamas and Hezbollah is not completely logical. During the Lebanese civil war (’75-’90) the heaviest fighting took place between Shia and Palestinians. Many Lebanese in general blame Palestinians (the PLO) for instigating the Lebanese civil war, by attacking Israel from Lebanese territory and thereby inviting Israel to bomb Lebanon. Another reason for tensions is that Palestinians disturb the labor market and the political balance in Lebanon by their presence as refugees.6

The relationship between Hamas and Hezbollah started in 1992, when Israel deported hundreds of Hamas members to Lebanon as a revenge for killing an Israeli policeman, and when Hezbollah started to protect these Hamas members. Whereas some authors have pointed to instances of noncooperation between the two organizations7, others have seen a continuous cooperative relationship from 1992 onwards.8

In the early 1990s Hamas and Iran started to build a relationship as well. Iran supported Hamas financially and provided weapons and months long training sessions in Iran. The way to Iran went through Syria, but Assad also supported Hamas and facilitated a quick and safe passage through

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7 See for example Frankel 2012:55.
8 For example El-Hosseini 2010; Nerantzaki 2012.
for them. The bonds between Hamas and Hezbollah, Syria and Iran grew stronger during the second intifada and after Hamas democratically won the elections in Palestine.

Both Hamas and Hezbollah supported the revolutions that were part of the Arab Spring. A major reason for Hezbollah to support these was because the former dictators were Western-minded and therefore did not take a hard stance on Israel.9 When the popular revolt in Syria began on 15 March 2011, Hezbollah immediately chose to support Assad. Hamas on the other hand did not choose a side, but in February 2012 the Politburo left Damascus for Doha and statements that Hamas backed the Syrian opposition appeared in the media.

Literature review

Sectarianism

The essence of Hamas and Hezbollah as organizations and the relation between them are topics that have been covered extensively. Most of the literature generalizes, creates boundaries and axes or place the organizations in the position of the eternal offender, in contrast with Israel as the eternal defender. Papers produced by research centers like Wilson Center10 and the Center of Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)11 have argued that Hamas and Hezbollah indeed split up over the Syrian issue. Their papers focus on the balance of power in the Middle East and its consequences for the West. Frankel even argues that the former alliance between Hamas and Hezbollah was ‘more of a marriage of convenience than a true ideological kinship’ and that Hamas prefers Sunni allies so that ‘Hamas—Iran relations seem unlikely to return to their formally strong state any time soon.’12 When looking at this, it is helpful to take into account the underlying motivations of these research centers. For instance, both centers state on their websites that they highlight the power of the United States in the world. Additionally, the CSIS explicitly mentions that it ‘has been dedicated to finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world.’13 A divided Middle-East can indeed enhance American and Israeli power in the region. However, the evidence to support their claims about the Hamas-Hezbollah split is almost exclusively based on newspaper articles. Authors like Bar and Frankel, by describing Hamas and Hezbollah as ‘terrorist organizations,’ fail to grasp a comprehensive image of the organizations, including domestic processes and development aid carried out by the organizations. We should keep in mind that their point of departure is the danger that Hamas and Hezbollah represent to the interests of the US and Israel. However, there are also more comprehensive and balanced studies.

9 See also A4, A6.
10 Ghaddar(26Aug2013)‘The Marriage and Divorce of Hamas and Hezbollah.’
11 Frankel 2012.
12 Frankel 2012:60.
13 CSIS 2013.
Expert in Lebanese politics Knio of the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague\textsuperscript{14} has adopted a significantly divergent way of interpreting the nature of Hezbollah as an organization concerning structure and agency. He offers an epistemological critique when he argues that traditional structure/agency approaches are not applicable, nor are the post-structural accounts that place the organization somewhere in the middle. According to him, Hezbollah is neither just a proxy client of Iran and Syria, nor just a particularly Lebanese, quasi-autonomous state within Lebanon consisting of a military, political and welfare branch, nor the sum of these two.\textsuperscript{15} He prefers an approach that views Hezbollah’s military and welfare branches as one whole, embedded in a culture of resistance that is nourished by Shia theology and tradition.\textsuperscript{16} But according to Knio these approaches still cannot explain why Hezbollah supports the Assad regime while it backed the popular revolts during other attempts for revolution in the Middle-East. Knio prefers Archer’s morphogenetic approach instead, through which he assesses both the Lebanese domestic situation and the wider context of relations in the Middle-East. This approach considers the dynamics of the organization, and thus records changes over time. Without mentioning theory, Hovdenak\textsuperscript{17} offers a similar approach in his analysis of Hamas.

Knio claims that whereas Hezbollah’s relation to Iran has been one of dependence, Hezbollah’s relation to Syria has been one of opportunism until 1992, when the Lebanese civil war and the Cold War had ended; Hezbollah entered politics; Nasrallah succeeded Moussawi and Syria’s military presence in Lebanon was legitimized by a treaty.\textsuperscript{18} From this time on Syria normalized Hezbollah’s status in Lebanon and strengthened the party’s autonomy. In 2000 again a new period began: Israel withdraw from the south of Lebanon that it had occupied for 15 years, so resistance with the aim of liberating the homeland was not necessary anymore. Yet, Hezbollah chose to ‘reproduce the status quo’ (the resistance against Israel from before 2000), taking the Shebaa farms and Western and UN interference calling for independent elections in Lebanon and an international tribunal after the murder of Hariri as objects to resist.\textsuperscript{19}

However, Knio does not succeed in answering why Hezbollah wanted this status quo and what Hezbollah’s relation to Iran and Syria has got to do with it. Still, Knio’s approach is useful to place my own findings in a wider framework of Hezbollah’s dynamics, as he deconstructs and reconstructs Hezbollah using specific time-bound events and processes in a complex web of international and domestic relations. Using Knio’s morphogenetic approach, Hezbollah has been in the status quo-resistance phase during the time period that my research covers: the period just before the Syrian War until present.

\textsuperscript{14} 2013.
\textsuperscript{15} Knio 2013:857.
\textsuperscript{16} As in the work of Harb&Leenders 2005 paraphrased in Knio 2013:862.
\textsuperscript{17} 2009.
\textsuperscript{18} Knio 2013:864.
\textsuperscript{19} Knio 2013:865.
Still, all the above-mentioned authors place Hamas and Hezbollah in a sectarian framework, stressing their Sunni and Shia identities, respectively. Drawing from the existing literature, potential reasons for Hezbollah to support the Syrian government would therefore be related to sectarian alignment, for example the Assad regime being predominantly of the Shiite sect of Alawites; both Syria and Hezbollah are regional allies of Iran; or trying to prevent Saudi and Gulf (Sunni) influence in Syria. Reasons for Hamas to support the Syrian opposition would be for example religious-ideological closeness to the Syrian Sunni opposition; power-political and financial resources of the Gulf and Saudi-Arabia; or fear that Sunni Arab states will turn their back on Hamas if it does not support Syrian opposition.

*Resistance*

An answer to the question that Knio’s work evokes (why Hezbollah wants a status quo and how this connects to Hezbollah’s relation to Iran and Syria) is *resistance* as a binding and key element in the identities of Hamas and Hezbollah. Whereas Knio only highlights resistance against Western interference as an excuse by Nasrallah to block an international tribunal and to paralyze national politics, El Husseini and Sadiki adopt more of an insider view. This is relevant to my research in which the ways Hezbollah and Hamas present themselves is more relevant than how outsiders profile them, as this self-identification influences how they see each other.

Both organizations refer to their own identity as being *muqāwama*. This means resistance, opposition, fight, firmness. Hezbollah’s resistance is directed against imperialism in the Middle-East; Hamas’ resistance specifically targets the colonization of Palestine. Hezbollah perceives Israel and the United States as contemporary imperial powers that need to be opposed. It might therefore be possible that Hezbollah is more keen to back Assad in order to counter Western powers who want to intervene in Syria and thereby maybe try to enlarge Western influence in the region. According to Sadiki we should treat resistance against imperialism as the main characteristic of Hezbollah’s and Hamas’ identity, from the time of their formation. This does not mean that Hezbollah did not go through the three phases that Knio mentioned: resistance can be expressed in different ways. When Lebanon was occupied, liberating Lebanon was its priority; now that the border is restored, Hezbollah can afford to focus on the liberation of Palestine.

The notion of *muqāwama* for Hamas and Hezbollah however means more than just resistance against Israel; they have created a culture of resistance (thaqāfat al-muqāwama) which comprises disobedience and boycott of the unjust world order. As Nasrallah puts it, resistance is

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20 Knio 2013:867,869.
21 2010.
22 2010.
23 Wehr 1979:937.
24 Sadiki 2010:357-60.
not only a hand that bears the rifle and a finger that pulls the trigger. Resistance is a complete organism with a thinking brain, eyes, veins, ears that listen, a tongue that utters, and a heart filled with affection or full of anger.”

This culture implies total civil resistance, so it is not just for armed militias. Resistance, nationalism and Islam are all linked together in the ethos of resistance.

Resistance for Hezbollah is an order by God, and in Qur’ān V: 56 it was revealed that ‘Those who ally themselves with God and His Messenger and the believers must know that God’s Party [Hizb Allah] is sure to triumph.’ In line with Shia ideological tradition Hezbollah also regularly invokes the tragedy of Karbala and Hussein’s martyrdom in the context of self-sacrifice for the sake of resistance. So resistance is part of Hezbollah’s theological doctrine.

Also Hamas’ resistance is informed by a normative, religious imaginary. Freedom through self-sacrifice is an Islamic belief that Hamas’ *muqāvimūn* can hold on to. As Usama Hamdan, Hamas representative in Lebanon, says:

‘The Muqawim, or resistant, defies the stereotype [of] creatures soaked in blood and gore, some kind of bloodthirsty ‘ghouls’ lurking to massacre Jews, crusaders and Westerners… He or she are ordinary human beings not motivated by hatred or violence. They are motivated by love of God, community and the quest for freedom from colonialism.’

Therefore, although fed by different religious sources, Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s ideologies have evolved into the same culture of resistance. The identity of resistance does not make the organizations less Islamist; Islamism and resistance are compatible and intertwined to the extent that one cannot differentiate between them.

Furthermore, the ethos of resistance transgresses the national space, as both Hamas and Hezbollah are non-state actors and therefore not the sovereign over a certain territory. In the absence of sovereignty, Occupied Territories like Palestine, Iraq and in 2011 Syria became an extended homeland for Hezbollah, united by the need for resistance against the foreign oppressor. Nasrallah argued that this responsibility is reciprocal.

‘We carry a responsibility towards them; we bear this responsibility towards their liberation in reciprocity to their wish for us to be free, and towards their dignity just as they wanted ours to be intact… This in earnest is part and parcel of the ethos of resistance’.

This border-crossing unity also transgresses religious sect. Lebanese ayatollah Shamsuddin applies the typically Shi'ite Karbala’s meaning to all Islamic resistance:

‘Karbala does not concern the Shites alone. Hussayn’s revolution, sacrifice and martyrdom are articles [of faith] that represent in the Islamic conscience the apex of self-sacrifice for the [greater] sake of Islam and humankind.’

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27 Coined by Muhammad Mahdi Shamsuddin, Lebanese ayatollah and scholar.
29 Interview with Usama Hamdan, Sadiki 2010:359.
30 Sadiki 2010:364.
Hence, there seems to exist an 'umma-like Islamic solidarity between Hamas and Hezbollah according to the literature that describes them largely from the inside and this goes directly against the hypothesis that the Middle-East is divided by a Shia/Sunni axis. The connectedness between Hamas and Hezbollah appears to go so deep, that it seems different opinions on the Syrian civil war would not divide them.
Methodology

Method

In this research I will test the hypothesis that Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s perceptions of each other have deteriorated as a result of the Syrian civil war. To this end I will do two kinds of analysis: on the one hand a discourse analysis of publications by Hamas and Hezbollah members, and on the other hand an analysis of the decision-making process within Hamas to explain how and why the organization decided to support the Syrian opposition. Hamas’ behavior is at any rate anomalous in the neorealist perspective, as it needed almost a year to decide which side of the balance of power it would join.

In order to be able to analyze pieces of Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s discourse, I will look for references the organizations make to each other as signs of their degree of interconnectedness. These references can be traced through the anthropological concepts of narrative and representation. Representations consist of names and metaphors; nouns and adjectives that one chooses to describe one another. Narratives are the stories one chooses to tell and the stories one chooses not to tell about the other.

In order to operationalize interconnectedness between organizations accurately, I want to distinguish between different categories. A thorough look at the literature and some newspaper articles on Hamas-Hezbollah relations made me expect to find three types.

Three types of interconnectedness

The most obvious form of interconnection is perceivable contact. A representative did or did not pay a visit to the other group; the groups did or did not fight each other, etcetera.

A spiritual interconnection cannot be perceived from the outside and therefore needs an operationalization. In order to measure a spiritual connection between two groups, one needs to take into account a group’s self-identity. Although I will not try to get involved in theoretical discussions in the domain of psychology, the difference between collective and transcendental self-identity may be helpful. Collective self-identity arises from intergroup comparisons: one can prefer a certain group when compared to other groups in some situation. A spiritual interconnection results from a transcendental self-identity, that integrates the self and others into a ‘coherent wholeness’ that transcends the categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’. ‘At this highest level of spirituality, an individual has the widest and the most inclusive self-identity and defines the self and others in a “God’s eye view”.’

Whereas empathy and compassion are the result of emotions, spiritual interconnection goes beyond emotions and is therefore more permanent. So whereas collective interconnectedness is a variable relation that depends on comparisons to outsiders, transcendental interconnectedness is a more or less permanent conviction that the two organizations belong together before God.

33 Liu&Robertson 2011:37.
Finally, two organizations can be connected through the degree in which they resemble each other. Although this study is not about whether Hamas and Hezbollah are social movements, social movement theory can in this case indicate how identical the two movements are. A social movement by definition tries to alter a certain norm that it considers problematic.\textsuperscript{34} In social movements theory reaching the goal consists of three phases: identifying the (sources of) the problem; designing a solution; and dealing with the consequences of this solution.\textsuperscript{35} Therefore I will search for narratives and representations signaling these three phases for both organizations and compare them.

In conclusion, my data are narratives and representations that signal (the absence of) direct, \textit{physical cooperation}; a deeper \textit{spiritual interconnection} and \textit{mutual understanding} by resembling each other or being in the same situation. Each of these can be present or absent in a different intensity, as indicated in Fig. 1. Using these three types of interconnection will help me categorize the references to each other, but this does not exclude the possibility that I will encounter other, perhaps more important types of connectedness. Therefore I will use them as a tool but I will not anxiously hold on to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of interconnectedness</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Superficial</td>
<td>Superficial</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intensive</td>
<td>Intensive</td>
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<tr>
<td>\textit{Physical cooperation/Actual contact}</td>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>Allies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Spiritual connectedness}</td>
<td>Collective self-identity</td>
<td>Transcendental self-identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>\textit{Same situation/resemblance}</td>
<td>Mutual understanding</td>
<td>Sameness</td>
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Fig. 1: Model for mapping representations and narratives.

\textbf{Legend}
\textbf{Colleagues:} friendly physical contact, like gatherings, dinners, phone calls, invitations etc.
\textbf{Allies:} physical contact that shows one is ready to make sacrifices for the other, like providing military training, financial support and providing goods, fighting alongside the other.
\textbf{Indifference/autonomy:} denying physical contact; or stressing autonomy or insignificance of contact.
\textbf{Interrupting physical cooperation:} signs of consciously avoiding the other or even physical violence.
\textbf{Collective self-identity:} seeing the other as part of the self in relation to other groups, but not necessarily eternally. It can be the result pragmatism, so it could change as a result of a major difference of opinion like supporting different sides in a war.

\textsuperscript{34} Touraine 1985.
Transcendental self-identity: seeing the other as eternally part of the self in relation to other groups and before God, for example signs that the other fulfills a role in one’s divine cosmology, that one believes his fate is connected to the other, that one believes it is God’s will that they be connected, etc.

No spiritual connection: signs that the other does not have a special place in one’s self-identity.

Spiritually inspired hate: contradicting divine cosmologies; that one believes it is their fate or God’s will to be opposed to each other, etc.

Mutual understanding: understanding or respecting the other’s view, but not necessarily empathizing with the other.

Sameness: having the same characteristics or ideology, so that it empathizing with the other is not difficult.

Being/becoming different: having different characteristics or views or ideologies, or developing these over time.

Incomprehensibility: having different characteristics or ideologies, to the extent that it is no longer possible to respect the other’s view.

Data collection

Sources
For my discourse analysis I need primary sources in particular. I selected articles, speeches and interviews that have been published from 2008 onwards in which the organizations refer to either - each other
- their position on the Syrian War
- in the case of Hamas: its relation to Iran, Egypt or Qatar
- broader ideas about connectedness to others

Written and oral publications by Hamas and Hezbollah can be found on the official websites of the organizations, their Youtube and TV channels and their Twitter accounts. Hezbollah operates different media channels: al-Manar (www.almanar.com.lb); Electronic Resistance (www.electronicresistance.net) and the Electronic Resistance TV and Youtube Channel. Iranian channel Press TV and Shia TV also broadcast speeches by Nasrallah. Hamas owns different websites as well: www.hamasinfo.net, www.alqassam.ps by its military wing, and www.islah.ps by its parliamentary bloc Change and Reform. The publications are numbered A1-A19 for Hezbollah and B1-B14 for Hamas.

Incidentally other news agencies also publish interviews with and quotes of Hamas and Hezbollah officials. These secondary sources are labeled A-H.

Because my data contain original texts and their translations with the signal words and their interpretations, I put these in the appendix.

Representativeness
A major difference between the materials that Hezbollah publishes and those that Hamas publishes, is that many of the Hezbollah texts are created by one charismatic leader, Hassan Nasrallah. To take Nasrallah as the main representation of Hezbollah’s self-identity requires justification. Opinion polls among Hezbollah members reveal that Nasrallah is generally perceived as beyond human,
incorruptible and applying what he preaches to his own life. At the beginning of 2010 97% of the Lebanese Shia had confidence in Nasrallah.\textsuperscript{36} Although some question Nasrallah’s popularity since the Syrian civil war, charging him with fuelling sectarianism\textsuperscript{37}, in practice he is still massively popular. If we compare early 2010 to May 2011, when the Syrian War had begun and Nasrallah had already made clear he supported Assad, his popularity increased in Lebanon although it dropped slightly among Shia (from 97% - 2% - 24% to 95% - 15% - 24% among Shia, Sunni and Christians respectively.)\textsuperscript{38} Furthermore, he was named Lebanon’s person of the year 2013 in a poll conducted by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation.\textsuperscript{39}

Hamas officially has a leader, Khaled Meshaal, but the organization has a different structure, which will be outlined in more detail in the section below on decision-making processes within Hamas. Suffice it here to say that Hamas presents itself as an organization more than as a leadership, as is illustrated by the fact that the materials that represent Hamas’ narratives and representations are often published anonymously. The study of Hamas’ self-identity can therefore not be based on the sayings and writings of a single person and, as a consequence, the role and opinion of Meshaal as a person are less important for Hamas’ policy than the role and opinion of Nasrallah are for Hezbollah.


\textsuperscript{37} For example Assaf, M.(13Sept2013)’Since Hassan Nasrallah brought Hezbollah into Syrian Conflict, Supporters have Questioned his Leadership’ last accessed 29Oct2014, http://news.nationalpost.com/2013/09/13/since-hassan-nasrallah-brought-brought-hezbollah-into-syrian-civil-war-supporters-have-questioned-his-leadership/.


Analysis

The hypothesis that the Syrian war affected Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s sense of interconnectedness is literally denied four times in A7, B6 and B12. Still, most the officials confirmed that there was some disagreement over the Syrian issue.

Strikingly, www.hamasinfo.net regularly publishes articles from Qatari news websites al-Sharq and al-Jazeera. The articles from al-Sharq in particular are highly critical or even insulting the resistance axis. 40

On its website www.electronicresistance.net, Hezbollah has a subheading ‘Axis of Resistance’ which indicates the centrality of this alliance. The heading features articles on the resistance in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Iran and Iraq.

In general, Electronic Resistance regularly republishes articles that were published in the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar first.

Although many articles on al-Manar come with a caption that al-Manar is not responsible for the texts and that it reflects the view of the writer only, al-Manar does not publish any articles that completely contradict the view of Hezbollah.

Physical cooperation

Out of all categories of connectedness, references to an alliance between Hamas and either Hezbollah or Iran or both appear most frequently in publications by both Hamas and Hezbollah since the Syrian War. According to a publication of December 2012:

‘Thus, despite the interruption of the relationship of Hamas with the Syrian regime, this did not lead to a cut in the relation of the movement with Iran (…) Until the moment, Iran is still interconnected with the politburo of Hamas because of the question about both rocket- and financial needs. For Hamas, ‘the relation with Iran is strategic and can never be dispensable’, as one of the officials of the movement says. A Hamas official says that after ‘the completion of the war on Gaza despite what has been in the media, the Iranian financial and military support to the Strip is unchanged.’’ 41

However, Hezbollah often refers to an alliance with ‘the Palestinian resistance’, which is not just Hamas but also for example Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. And Hamas has repeatedly downplayed the uniqueness of the resistance axis by stressing their relations with other Arab countries, like Qatar.

Moreover, during the most crucial moments Hamas and Hezbollah did not fully cooperate. Hamas did not help Hezbollah in the war with Israel in 2006 and Hezbollah did not join in during Israel’s major offensive against the population of Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009, in November 2012 and the summer of 2014. If the two organizations had fought side by side against their common enemy at those moments, would they have accomplished their ultimate goal? Military training, financial assistance and oral commitment is a rather small gesture compared to actually coming to the rescue on

40 B11.
41 See A7.
a crucial moment. However, in A1 Nasrallah argues that the Palestinians have enough resources and fighting power and that is why Hezbollah fighters do not have to fight along with them; providing weapons and training should be enough to do the job.\footnote{See A1.} The fact that Hamas and Hezbollah have often not physically cooperated means that present non-cooperation is not necessarily a sign that relations between the two have cooled.

**Spiritual connectedness**

According to the discourse analysis Hezbollah’s transcendental self-identity with the Palestinian resistance partly stems from the role of al-Quds in its divine cosmology, which has always been stressed by the Shia imams and Grand Ayatollahs and which Nasrallah uses in his speeches to create a spiritual backdrop for Hezbollah’s resistance. It can also be explained by the Shia tendency to support the downtrodden in general, likening them to the martyred imam Hussain. The Palestinian cause is presented as one of Hezbollah’s ‘constant positions’, ‘because it is part of our religion, our religious commitment, our culture, our civilization, our morals and values and our past history, present time and future.’\footnote{Nasrallah therefore keeps speaking about supporting Palestine as an eternal religious duty. ‘Any other disagreement, ideological, religious, political, whatever other issues we might disagree on, our commitment must always be to Palestine, its cause and the Palestinian people, irrespective of other disagreements.’\footnote{A9.}}

No references to transcendental self-identity with Hezbollah were found in the materials published by Hamas, neither before nor since the Syrian War.

**Sameness**

Using the three phases of social movement theory (identifying the (sources of) the problem; designing a solution; and handling its consequences), different levels of sameness were identified. Although Hamas and Hezbollah are also national organizations with their own national problems, the source of their main problems is the same: Western-backed Israeli colonization.\footnote{Therefore they share an objective. The recurring solution in the interviews, speeches and news articles created by the two organizations is muqāwama ‘resistance’ and šiumūd ‘steadfastness.’ As Sadiki points out, ‘[d]espite belonging to Islam’s two different sects, Sunni Hamas and Shiite Hizbullah both operationalize the...'}

42 See A1.
43 A2.
44 A9.
notion of muqawamah with frequent and almost identical consistency of interpretation, meaning and application."\(^{46}\)

However, whereas Nasrallah maintains that Israel is a cancerous tumor that can only be stopped by eradication, Hamas has dropped the destruction of Israel in its 2006 election manifesto and turned to a more pragmatic approach, de facto recognizing Israel within the pre-1967 borders.\(^{47}\) This matches Hovdenak’s\(^{48}\) findings that Hamas has undergone a metamorphosis in the first decade of the new century. He describes how Hamas deradicalized ideologically and religiously from the nineties on and became more flexible politically. Lebanon on the other hand currently experiences little direct colonization\(^{49}\) and is not afraid to spoil opportunities to become a recognized state. Whereas other Palestinian political parties often prove ready to give up parts of land in exchange for more freedom, Hamas and PIJ stand relatively firm concerning negotiations with the enemy. According to the Islamist interpretation Palestine is a *waqf* that nobody is entitled to give up.\(^{50}\) PIJ’s approach of non-negotiation with Israel perhaps resembles Hezbollah’s approach best. Still, PIJ does not seem to have replaced Hamas as the principle representative of the Palestinian resistance for Hezbollah and Iran.

‘Rifai [PIJ representative in Lebanon] did not believe the visit “on this level and at this time, meant that Islamic Jihad will be replacing Hamas for the Islamic Republic. Although the latest battle increased the strength of the relationship, the media goes too far in its projections.” Concerning the relationship with Iran, “simply, one could say for sure that no one will replace anyone else; everyone has their own role,” Rifai told *Al-Akhbar*.\(^{51}\)

So Hamas and Hezbollah also identify the same solution for their shared problem: resistance and steadfastness, although Hezbollah applies these concepts more strictly whereas Hamas applies them more pragmatically.

Finally, in carrying out *muqāwama* and handling its consequences we can find similarities as well: both Hamas and Hezbollah use Islamist normativity; both decided to participate in the national elections as political parties and both looked for help abroad, from the same axis of resistance, in order to liberate their land. Welfare activity is an important part of the resistance for both organizations\(^{52}\), as it puts the ideology of resisting inequality between hegemon and victim into practice. Both employ a strategy of total civil resistance which includes culture, politics, media, economics and violence. This violence leads to international rejection of both organizations: they are on the terrorist lists of the US, Israel and Europe. Hamas and Hezbollah however employ the same definition of jihad versus

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\(^{46}\) Sadiki 2010:357.


\(^{48}\) 2009:60. Hovdenak’s work is exemplary as it is to a large extent based on fieldwork interviews with Hamas officials. He sheds light on the many sides of Hamas, through interviews with its men and women in higher and lower positions, with moderate or radical views.

\(^{49}\) See A10.

\(^{50}\) Hamas Charter 1988 article 11.

\(^{51}\) A17.

\(^{52}\) For example, 95% of Hamas’ budget goes to social services. (ICG (2003)‘Islamic Welfare Activism in the Occupied Territories’, last accessed 9Jan2015, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/files/middle%20east%20north%20africa/israel%20palestine/islamic%20soci al%20welfare%20activism%20in%20the%20occupied%20palestinian%20territories.ashx: 13.)
terrorism. Contrary to some other Islamist organizations, like PIJ or ISIL, for Hamas and Hezbollah jihad is not related to restoring the Caliphate. It is another word for resistance and is therefore limited to ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine, in which Judaism is opposed to both Islam and Christianity: according to Hamas and Hezbollah the two legitimate religions in Palestine that are threatened by Judaization. On the other hand, terrorism is violence against people who are not oppressors and it is inspired by the Devil. In the words of Nasrallah:

‘Resistance means those jihadi heroic operations which target the occupation forces. As for the operations that target (...) people of all factions and nationalities, mosques, churches, schools, international ministries, markets, these are criminal terrorist operations. They are organized collective killing operations. They are war crimes which cannot be mistaken by resistance operations. The resistance can’t be held responsible for such operations.’

Both Nasrallah and Meshaal link their own anti-imperialist struggle to those of other peoples in the past, notably the Vietnamese people. In order to fully grasp their perception of interconnection, light must be shed on the non-Islamic Vietnamese resistance movement led by Ho Chi Minh. Ho Chi Minh at the time argued for full societal resistance against the French imperialists, the Japanese and later the American aggressors, in a way very similar to the current resistance ethos of Hamas and Hezbollah. Sadiki argues that Islamist resistance cannot be compared to secular leftist resistance, because in the Islamist context resistance becomes

‘a way of thinking, being, and acting, and an ever-widening site of holistic struggle in which the AK-47 is not, in the scheme of resistance, more important than piety, charity, schooling, propaganda or music. It simultaneously constitutes and embodies a normative imaginary for enacting emancipation at various levels, beginning with inner self-transformation through resistance against religious, moral, and intellectual laxity, and ending with creative protest of which, for the select few, martial defence is one form of proactive engagement.’

However, Ho Chi Minh’s famous utterances regarding resistance equal to a great extent the common statements and meanings in Nasrallah’s speeches. And when we compare his statements with Ho Chi Minh’s, we must admit that both leaders even have a similar manner of speech, passive aggressively juxtaposing the steadfastness and unity of the own people against the much stronger, violent imperialists. Ho Chi Minh said in 1948:

‘Every Vietnamese, old and young, men and women, rich and poor, whatever his or her social position, must become a fighter struggling on the military, economic, political or cultural front, for the implementation of this watchword: Resistance by the entire people and in every field.’

This is a call for the total civil resistance, encompassing self-sacrifice, that Shaykh M. Mahdi Shamsiddin aims at in his book Al-Muqawamah fi Al-Khitab Al-Fiqh Al-Siyasi. In the Vietnamese resistance movement, the MIG-21 fighting jet plane was not more important in the scheme of resistance than dedication to socialism or than typical Vietnamese cultural artifacts. Other statements

A2.
A2, B12.
Sadiki 2010:358.
Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum museum, Hanoi.
Sadiki 2010:360.
by Ho Chi Minh show resemblance as well: “The Vietnamese people cherish peace, but peace cannot be separated from national independence.” 59 This statement reflects both Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s stance regarding the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In 1969 Ho Chi Minh died, and in his testament we find: “The war of resistance against US aggression may drag on. Our people may have to face new sacrifices of life and property. Whatever happens, we must keep firm our resolve to fight the US aggressors until total victory.” 60 Resistance against (US) imperialism and aggression is recurring rhetoric of Hamas, Hezbollah, the Vietnamese resistance movement, and of many more resistance or national independence movements throughout history. It was only after the 1967 defeat in the war with Israel that Islam gained ground at the expense of secularism in the Arab states, but (armed) resistance has been a constant factor. This is the framework in which we should see the Hamas-Hezbollah relationship: a sameness beyond Islam or the Middle-East, even more holistic than Sadiki accounts for. The result of the fact that the organizations share an ultimate goal and a strategy is a strong interconnectedness in the form of sameness. The concept of muqāwama is the core of this sameness. In the words of a Hezbollah publication: ‘And the parties realized, despite the ideological differences between them, that it can be the foundation for a long-term relationship, its essence being resistance.’ 61

Another constant position of both Hamas and Hezbollah, often recurring in their publications, is non-interference in the business of other Arab states. The difference between the two movements can be found in the performance of this position. Non-interference for Hezbollah means anti-imperialism; deposing Assad without giving him a chance to introduce reforms is illegitimate and a Western conspiracy. Non-interference for Hamas means that one should follow the will of the Syrian people. Hezbollah sees a need to defend Assad militarily because Western sponsored ‘takfiris’ started to fight Assad first, which is unfair. For Hamas leader Abu Marzouk Sunni terrorism in Syria does not influence the decision not to interfere militarily. Of course this is easy to say for a movement that already depends on others supporting their own cause and cannot afford to employ man and fire power for other causes.

Despite this difference in performance, all countries in the Axis of Resistance normally discourage internal disagreement and especially displaying it. For Hamas this was particularly true under the leadership of Sheikh Yasin. 62 As I will point out in the next section, the philosophy behind this is that it empowers the enemy.

60 Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum museum, Hanoi.
61 A7.
Anti-sectarianism and unity

In the discourse analysis anti-sectarianism and unity emerged as extra narratives, apart from the labels in my matrix. Hamas and Hezbollah officials repeatedly spoke out against sectarianism and their behavior confirms their dedication to this ideal. From a religious angle one would expect tensions between Hezbollah and Assad, because historically orthodox Twelver Shia like Hezbollah clashed with Alawite Shia like Assad. This is one out of many signs that the Hamas-Hezbollah relationship should not be viewed from a sectarian angle. Instead of a Sunni and a Shia axis, so common in Western analyses of the Middle-East, Hezbollah thinks in terms of an ‘Axis of opposition and resistance’ against a Western-Israeli axis that some Arab states like Saudi-Arabia decided to support. The Axis of Resistance offers unity in three ways: it consists of both 1) Arabs and Persians, 2) Sunni and Shia, 3) Islamists and Secularists. Hezbollah’s religious ideology does not stand in the way of forming a political block with Lebanon’s Christians of the Free Patriotic Movement and providing social services to all civilians. In his speeches Nasrallah often stresses that resistance is a joint Islamic-Christian struggle.

Nasrallah literally pointed out countless times what Hezbollah’s nonsectarian reasons are to support Assad and to continue to support Hamas. Hezbollah views the Western-backed Syrian opposition as another wave of imperialism. The Syrian civil war therefore became an extension of Hezbollah’s ideology of resistance and supporting Assad is a form of resistance.

In the category of unity, connectedness is not about Hezbollah/Hamas specifically, but about a broader Middle East or Islamic world or even about all powerless and oppressed. The leaders of both organizations avoid explicit accusations and emphasize unity. The practical reason is that the enemies would benefit from any sign of disagreement in the resistance camp. Ignoring differences and emphasizing brotherhood among the enemies of the enemy appears to be the most rational, practical thing to do. Senior associate at Lebanon’s Carnegie Middle East Center Sayigh expects that the Axis of Resistance weakens further if the conviction in the rest of the world grows that it is a Shia axis now. The inducement for my research proves that it is partly too late: Western media, political analysts and academic literature assume a sectarian crisis in the marriage of Hamas and Hezbollah or even believe that their alliance has always been weak and opportunistic. Sayigh theorizes on Hamas’ alleged alliance switch: “I guess they just don’t have the choice of staying in the Axis of Resistance when almost everyone else sees that in a sectarian way.”

But an answer to whether or not the Western axis succeeded in setting Hamas against the Axis of Resistance, must be found in Hamas’ decision-making process.

63 A6.
Decision-making process within Hamas

Although Meshaal never spoke out clearly against Assad and the atrocities he allegedly committed, he started to focus on Egypt, Saudi-Arabia and the Gulf in 2012, about a year after the Syrian war started. On February 24 prime minister Haniyeh declared loyalty to the Syrian rebels, during a speech in Cairo. Professor Abu Khalil65 is perhaps the person most accurately describing the event when he calls the action a ‘failed gamble’ for ideologically close mother organization Muslim Brotherhood when it came to power in June 2012 as was long expected. However, the discourse analysis suggests that there was a bifurcation within the movement. Despite efforts to preserve the unity of Hamas (E, G ) different officials give different accounts of the alleged alliance switch. In the words of Abu Marzouk, member of the leadership abroad and since 2012 living in Cairo,

‘We have paid dearly for non-intervention in the internal affairs of Syria, and the price is our exit from Syria, which was the most important arena for us. And the instruction was not easy for the leadership and not for the components, since there is no longer an arena of gathering of the politburo, and the diaspora were harsh for the sons of the movement, but it is certainly less harmful than the aligned and the intervention in internal Arab business.’

On the other hand, source F argues that ‘[c]lose observers point out that there was hardly a consensus within the top leadership on taking such a step, and that the decision was made by a minority who happened to be present at the meeting.’ And that ‘[i]nside sources reveal that tremendous pressure has been exerted on the Hamas leadership to distance itself from Hezbollah and to publicly denounce its intervention in Syria, which some in the Palestinian resistance have reluctantly obliged.’

Could this be true, considering the structure and the decision-making process of Hamas?

Hamas’ organizational structure is relatively complex and democratic.67 Whereas Hassan Nasrallah is per definition incorruptible because of his descent from the Prophet, and even more so because of his aura of personal authority, within Hamas authority depends more on the rational legal realm.68 Both Gunning and Hovdenak have laid out clearly how the Hamas management works.

‘Formal authority within Hamas is derived from elections. At the bottom of the hierarchy are small ‘cells’ or ‘usrat’ (families), which consist of a cell leader and cell members. At the next level are regional consultative or shura councils69, which consist of representatives elected biennially by established Hamas members within a particular region. In addition, each prison appears to have the equivalent of a shura council (…) The regional shura councils elect representatives to a national Shura Council, which in turn elects the Executive Council or Political Bureau (…) The Shura Council is the equivalent of the legislative power at state level. It has final authority over formal policy decisions, and determines the strategy and the political aims of the organisation. The Political Bureau is the equivalent of the executive at state level and is charged with the day-to-day implementation of the Shura Council’s strategy.’

65 Abu Khalil 2013.
66 B7.
69 The Islamic equivalent of consultation, already mentioned in the Quran and hadith. A shura implies a gathering during which decisions are made democratically.
70 Gunning 2007:98-100.
In theory Hamas policy is decided at the grassroots level: small committees with a specific sphere of competence.\(^{71}\) In turn, ‘each section of Hamas is divided into smaller sub-units, down to local neighborhood committees, led by a political leader with the title of amir al-manteqa (‘prince of the neighborhood’).’\(^ {72}\) As al-Rantisi described the distribution of power: ‘if the Shura Council says that Hamas should do something, then we, as leaders here, and Khalid Mish’al [abroad] will say what the Shura [Council] said… So the last word will be for the Shura [Council], not for Khalid Mish’al or Shaykh Ahmad Yassin.’\(^ {73}\) Keeping unity and resolving disagreements is necessary for Hamas to maintain democratic and thereby authoritative. Debate, consultation and bargaining are used to create a majority of representatives who support a compromise.\(^ {74}\) A Hamas leader does not have the authority to have it his own way. This was confirmed by ordinary Hamas members in Gunning’s research. Likewise, a large majority of these respondents reported to think of their leaders as trustworthy. Therefore, it should not be possible for a few leaders to make the decision to move headquarters to Qatar on their own.

On the other hand, there are some problems that rise from Hamas’ inclusive, broad, democratic decision-making process and its political culture of unity. As Gunning found, nomination for Shura candidates comes from above for practical reasons, so one needs to be liked by the leaders and there is no absolute freedom of choice.\(^ {75}\) Also, it is often hard to express a view that departs from the dominant view within Hamas, more so because it is difficult to know whether one’s view is deviant or shared because of the clandestine environment in which Hamas needs to operate.\(^ {76}\) Gunning gives as an example Haniyeh pulling back from the 1996 elections in Palestine even though many Hamas members supported him in participating in the elections. Members who called for a boycott of the elections started to portray Haniyeh as a traitor. Because these quarrels compromise Hamas’ eventual goal to liberate Palestine, Haniyeh withdrew his candidacy. So

> ‘[e]ven without overt coercion, the consensual model can thus be (ab)used to impose a unanimous position even if the dissenting position has technically been authorised and may have represented the majority view of the grassroots members. (...) Precisely because authority is believed to be derived from representing the collective, once a decision is taken by the Shura Council, it is accepted as authoritative by the membership, regardless of whether they agree with it. This process is aided by the trust members have in the leadership. But it also makes the decision-making process slow, unwieldy and conservative.’\(^ {77}\)

This combination of advanced democracy and the importance of consensus (shūra and ijma’) is likely to be the reason behind the year of haziness regarding Hamas’ position in the Syrian war. It also suggests that there can still be a pro-Assad majority in Hamas.

\(^{71}\) Gunning 2007: 100.
\(^{72}\) Hovdenak 2009: 64.
\(^{73}\) ‘Abdel ‘Aziz al-Rantisi, one of the founders of Hezbollah, as quoted by Gunning 2007: 101.
\(^{74}\) Gunning 2007: 139.
\(^{76}\) Op.cit.: 110.
\(^{77}\) Op.cit.: 111-2. (Italics not in original.)
Could religious ideology have played a role in a decision to back the Sunni Syrian opposition? Hamas’ organizational structure does not facilitate a clericocracy, because only elections can give someone political authority. On the other hand, Islamic norms and values influence the way Hamas members vote, the subjects they consider important, and the Islamic principles of *shūra* and *ijma*’ legitimize Hamas’ structure. Mosques are an important place for recruiting members and disseminating Hamas propaganda. Religious knowledge, piety (which expresses itself in modesty and asceticism, placing community welfare above one’s own and the readiness to die as a martyr) and connections with Islamic institutions enhance the personal authority of a Hamas leader. Many interviewees noted that Hamas turned their observance of ‘traditional’ Islam into a more activist-ideological observance, a call to action serving the liberation of Palestine. In this light the liberation of the homeland and its being Islamic is seen as the will of God. Religion therefore defines the borders within which discussion is allowed.

On the other hand, in Gazan society social life and Islam are intertwined, especially because ‘religious activities’ are among the very few available leisure activities in the small occupied strip. Also, one of the results of Gunning’s research among Hamas members was that they valued secular political expertise more than religious expertise. Religious arguments were rarely used in policy discussions and official documents. Montgomery & Pettyjohn even detect a process of de-Islamization: ‘Hamas consciously downplayed its religious agenda as well as its confrontation with Israel, choosing instead to emphasize corruption in Fatah.’ Research shows that it is not Islamic resurgence, but the high deprivation by generations of Palestinians and the inability of secular nationalism to cope with it, that accounts for the popularity of Hamas.

Combined with the strong anti-sectarian agenda of Hamas that became clear in the discourse analysis, chances are small that Sunni ideology played a role in Hamas’ choice.

Hamas knows two types of division: the Politburo versus the military wing and the management in Gaza versus the management in exile. Since the 2006 elections the difference between the latter two has become greater. The organization needs a management abroad in order to establish international contacts as a political party, because Israel controls all movement between Gaza and the outside world. The management abroad controls Hamas’ finances and theoretically authorizes violence, but in practice Hamas’ military wing has from its establishment in 1992 had its own management and its own political allies in the Gaza based management and it has often taken decisions independent from

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78 Gunning 2007:122.  
82 Montgomery & Pettyjohn 2010:526.  
84 Gunning 2007:106.  
The Qassam Brigades are not Hamas’ offspring, but originated from the Syrian-born Sheikh Mohammad Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (1882 –1935) and his followers, who already fought Jewish settlers in 1930. Leaders of the Politburo like Ahmed Yassin and Abu Shanab used to distance themselves from suicide attacks carried out by the brigades.

“In a typical statement they would say: “There is no relationship between the political leadership and the Al Qassam Brigades. The political leadership has no interest in forging a connection with the military wing. They have their own leadership and fighters, who plan and execute their attacks and everything related to this aspect.””

These Qassam brigades, supported by Gaza based leaders like al-Zahar, did not approve of an alliance switch, arguing that ‘the liberation of Palestine comes with arms, not with money.’ They experienced first-hand how much the resistance owes to Hezbollah, Syria and Iran. Judging from Hamas’ decision-making processes, moving the headquarters was probably backed by a majority in the Shura Council, but not necessarily everybody agreed. Source F claims that even within the Politburo many were opposed to the relocation of the headquarters to Doha; the decision was made when some people were not present. It also argues that ‘tremendous pressure’ on the Hamas leadership was involved. As with Haniyeh pulling back from the elections, it is possible that a unanimous anti-Assad position was imposed (even if a majority in the Shura Council was against it), for the sake of unity within Hamas.

The partial alliance switch was followed by a number of unfortunate events: the democratically chosen Ikhwan government in Egypt was deposed by the al-Sisi military regime; donor Qatar retreated into a more subordinate role to pro-US Saudi-Arabia; the Syrian opposition fell apart even more and Assad strengthened his position again. Indeed, in the words of a Palestinian activist, many Palestinians assert that Hamas made the wrong decision turning their back on Assad and they would recommend Hamas to join Hezbollah’s side, afraid that Hamas loses all its allies. Judging from the publications and interviews from the July 2014 war on, Meshaal, Abu Marzouk and al-Hayya too put an effort in repairing the relation with Iran and Hezbollah.

“Even the pro-Qatar wing recently acknowledged Zahar’s position. The politburo’s second deputy, Moussa Abu Marzouk said that Iran was the major player in “supporting the preparations for al-Asf al-Maakoul operation, through which the Palestinian Resistance faced the occupation using Iranian missiles as well as a locally-made rocket system simulating the Iranian one.””

“The current vision adopted by the Shura Council and some members of the political bureau requires that Hamas improve its relations with Iran in order for matters to return to how they were,” the Hamas sources reiterated.’

Still, we cannot account for the fact that the international community is under the impression that Hamas as a whole officially switched affiliations. Gunning’s research is also relevant in this respect.

86 Gunning 2007:115; Hovdenak 2009:64; Frankel 2012:60-1;
89 B6.
90 The Politburo consists of 10 to 20 people most of whom are not residing in Gaza. (Hovdenak 2009:65.)
91 Abu Khalil 2013.
92 Personal communication with a Palestinian activist, Bethlehem, December 2013.
93 A17.
He refers to other cases in which Hamas released contradictory public statements and comes up with several reasons. First, Hamas appeals to different audiences who want to hear different things. Second, the abovementioned tensions between different factions of Hamas may play a role. Third, for security reasons decisions are often taken clandestinely, so that leaders can easily interpret a Shura decision in a way that suits them. Fourth, due to restriction of movement not all members of the Shura Council can meet, which makes it difficult to hold public debates and to be aware of individual opinions.

Finally, according to the Resistance Axis, dividing them is advantageous to the West and therefore it may be a media and political strategy.
Conclusion and discussion

Out of the three categories of connectedness, references to physical cooperation appear most frequently in the narratives and representations by members of Hamas and Hezbollah. Spiritual interconnectedness was often referred to in materials published by Hezbollah both before and since the Syrian war, but not in materials published by Hamas. Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s sameness regarding their main problem and solution, the means to reach this and their other ‘constant positions’ is striking.

With regard to an interruption of physical cooperation, Hamas sources are contradictory. According to some, like al-Zahar (A) and Meshaal (B12), the relation with Hezbollah and Iran never changed.

‘There were contacts before and after the Gaza war, the communication was between us and the Iranians and Hezbollah, and this is not a new thing, there is no rupture of relations between us and them. However in the last two years there were some differences in the positions towards the direction of some issues, among them the Syrian issue. But the relation with Iran and Hezbollah was ongoing and there it continues. Our battle with the Israeli occupation unites us.’

Others, like Abu Marzouk (B7) and al-Hayya (E), claim that there was a temporary decrease on the level of physical cooperation (including financial aid, weapon transactions, military training) with Hezbollah and Iran. Regardless, physical cooperation intensified around the July 2014 war on Gaza, probably since this reminded the parties of who the real enemy is.

‘The relation with Iran is affected by what happened in Syria. We tried to isolate our different positions on it, and to keep the relation with Iran according to its known standard, but the relationship is affected, and we are trying to repair what is damaged from it, a service for our people and our cause, as well as the relation with Hezbollah in Lebanon.’

Therefore it is likely that at least part of Hamas’ leadership in exile decided to support the Syrian opposition. Another part of Hamas, particularly the Gaza-based wing and the military wing, views the Axis of Resistance as more important than the Sunni states, that have done little to stop Israel. The relation between the Qassam Brigades and the Resistance Axis has remained good all the time.

Hezbollah views the Western-backed opposition in Syria as another wave of imperialism. The Syrian war therefore became an extension of Hezbollah’s ideology of resistance. Supporting Assad is a form of resistance, more so because the Assad government has always joined the resistance against Israel. Indeed, my own neorealist hypothesis, inspired by mainstream media and Western political analyses, is part of the enemy’s strategy to divide and rule the Middle-East, according to Hezbollah. Therefore their very connectedness with Hamas is part of Resistance.

Whereas most literature on Hamas and Hezbollah does not use the perspective from within, in my research I have tried to focus on how Hamas and Hezbollah view each other, (which logically includes

94 B12.
95 B7.
96 B6, C, F.
the way they view themselves) to the extent that this is possible for a Western researcher. This was done by basing my analysis largely on narratives and representations by insiders. However, there are a number of limitations that must be taken into account. Firstly, in order to present the research to this Western audience, the data are interpreted by me, and therefore a Western bias that I am unaware of may have influenced the interpretation. Secondly, it was not possible to use only primary sources (accounts by Hamas and Hezbollah members themselves) as the organizations published very little on their alleged split. I managed to supplement the primary data with interviews by journalists. Still, the validity of the data would have been greater if I had conducted interviews myself, because I did not have the opportunity to ask all the relevant questions for this research. Finally, we must take into account that what Hamas and Hezbollah publish on their official websites does not necessarily match what different members of the organizations really think about each other. More research in the form of interviews is needed in order to establish a multidimensional insider view of the relations between the two.
Literature


