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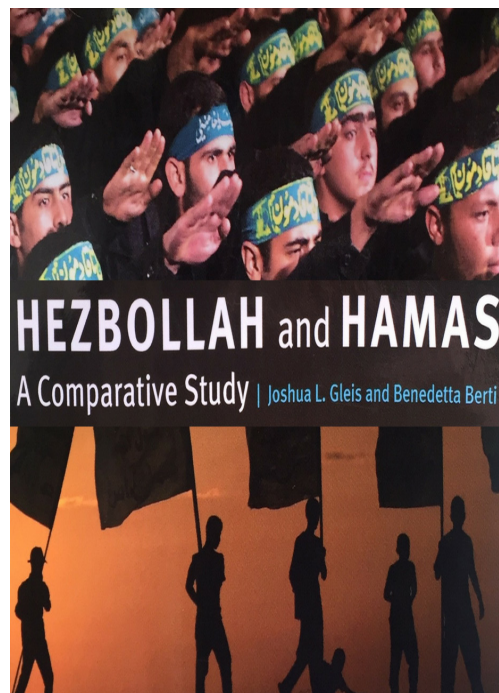
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## Book Review | EGIC Library

# Hezbollah and Hamas A Comparative Study

*by*

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Terrorist organisations – such as Hezbollah and Hamas – have become multifaceted players with political, socio-religious and military dimensions. Both groups have transitioned from disorganised resistance militias to highly sophisticated military-esque organisations incorporated in local politics. Additionally, they are both key players in the Arab-Israeli conflict and their local, regional and global importance is constantly increasing. For instance, Hezbollah’s success in the recent Lebanese elections (2018) has strengthened its national position and raised regional tensions. Hezbollah’s state sponsorship – provided by Iran – and area of operations have grown significantly since the 2000s while the wars in Syria and Yemen cemented its battlefield capabilities. Hamas, for its part, is an extremist Palestinian Islamist organisation, currently part of the *de facto* government authority dominating the Gaza Strip since 2007. With the explicit support of Syria, Iran and many in the Muslim world, Hamas continues to advocate jihad against Israel aimed at liberating Palestine. Both organisations have exploited security vacuums, taken over government responsibilities and have proliferated; gaining support from their local population. The trend indicates that their operational capacity and political influence are bound to increase and that efforts to limit it have been inadequate. To effectively understand the spread of these complex organisations, and their innovative unconventional tactics, it is paramount to expand our knowledge about their origins, methods and evolution.

The book *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study* by Joshua L. Gleis and Benedetta Berti provides a detailed analysis of two of the most sophisticated and polarising Islamist political and military organisations of recent times. Although much has happened since the book’s release in 2012, it provides a comprehensive insight into these organizations’ insurgency strategies and Israel’s counter-insurgency response. With their detailed analysis, the authors aimed to inspire the policymakers to develop more sophisticated military and policy responses to Hamas and Hezbollah. To the inattentive observer, Hezbollah and Hamas might seem indistinguishable. This, however, is factually incorrect and the work helps to uncover the nuances between them. An added advantage is the coherence of the book which facilitates an adequate comparison between the groups—unpacking both their uniqueness and their commonalities.

The research illustrates how both Hezbollah and Hamas are commonly supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran, both were created as “resistance” to Israel and both remain militant until today. However, the intensity of their interactions with Israel and Iran differ. Hezbollah – being the offspring of the Islamic Revolution, practicing Shia Islam and governed via Tehran – enjoys unwavering support from the country and has the strategic luxury to play the long-game with Israel—refusing dialogue, ceasefires and even indirect communications (for the most part). In contrast, Hamas’ relations with the Islamic Republic are only of strategic convenience:

for instance, their ideological orientation differs as Hamas is a Muslim Brotherhood, Sunni Muslim organisation. Moreover, Hamas' official position towards Israel is more flexible and it is not opposed to negotiating temporary truces (hudna) with Tel Aviv. Additionally, Hamas' political and financial relations with Syria and Iran blossomed after winning the 2006 Palestinian elections. Relations with Iran developed and created a mechanism for increasing political cooperation and the sharing of operational experiences with Hezbollah—Tehran's Levantine proxy.

The authors claim that 'the political and financial partnership between Saudi government and Hamas started in the early 1990s.'<sup>1</sup> Such a bold statement needs to be well-supported by credible sources, which, unfortunately, this work failed to do. Although there is little doubt that money flowed to Hamas from individuals, charities and banks in Saudi Arabia, the authors' interpretation of government involvement is simplistic and can be misleading. For example, the United States' State Department had concluded (2007) that although 'Hamas has received funds from benefactors in various locations, including Saudi Arabia ... [it] ... has not [sic] identified the donors as government officials.'<sup>2</sup> The misinterpretation of Saudi Arabia's financing of Hamas points out how important it is, in the complex reality of regional politics, to highlight not only the facts, but also the details.

The work presents a solid explanation of the Hezbollah's and Hamas' shift to more moderate rhetoric about domestic policies which stemmed from their participation in public life. Yet the authors argue that this is evidence of pragmatism and the capacity to adapt to the changing political and security environment rather than an abandonment of their objectives. Their militancy remains the same.

Furthermore, this study also provides insight to Israeli efforts at countering the hybrid warfare tactics deployed by Hezbollah and Hamas. While Israel faces an assortment of acute challenges from the insurgents, it is also under the scrutiny of the international community and national lawmakers and is often criticised for the disproportionate use of force. Over the past decades, Israel has developed more efficient responses and changed their military doctrines to focus on low-intensity conflicts instead of conventional wars. Tel Aviv developed a counterinsurgency strategy aimed at minimising casualties, such as controversial house destructions, security barriers and targeted assassinations of group's leaders. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution. Terror groups take advantage of densely populated areas to conceal personnel and weaponry using civilians as human shields. Israel responded with constructing Special Force units for urban warfare and, to avoid heavy civil-

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1 Joshua L. Gleis and Benedetta Berti (2012). *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study*, p. 155.

2 Christopher M. Blanchard and Alfred B. Prados, 'Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues,' *CRS Report for Congress*, 14 September 2007. This report is available at: <[https://www.osenlaw.com/sites/default/files/uploaded/Useful\\_Links/SaudiArabiaTerroristFinancingIssues.pdf](https://www.osenlaw.com/sites/default/files/uploaded/Useful_Links/SaudiArabiaTerroristFinancingIssues.pdf)> p. 27.

ian casualties, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) risks the success of its operations by warning Palestinian civilians before an operation is conducted. Hezbollah and Hamas are well-aware of the democratic dilemma that Israel faces and exploit them. With the increased usage of missiles, Israel was forced to develop and expensive anti-missile defence system – the Iron Dome – and other states are looking to follow their footsteps.

The implications of this book are broader than a simple overview of Hamas' and Hezbollah's evolution. The work could be used as a blueprint for future scholarship to contribute to the tailoring of effective military responses. The authors demonstrated that both Hamas and Hezbollah remain more than militias —they are multifaceted political and social groups able to adapt to the changing security environment while pursuing their goals. The research represents a solid, in-depth, analysis of Hezbollah and Hamas, which is enlightening not only for students and scholars but, more importantly, for policymakers and the concerned public. It contributes to a greater understanding of the groups' structures, their tactics, evolution and operations. Despite the benefits, the work is not flawless. As with all works dealing with Middle East politics, there is no shortage of contentious and controversial passage, that readers can approach with a critical perspective.

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