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## **Violent Non-State Actors' Patterns of Power: The Case of Hezbollah**

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**Abstract:** Conventional International Relations emphasises the role of states as the primary actors, with control being the ultimate form of power. However, in today's interconnected and intricate global landscape, non-state actors, particularly violent non-state actors (VNSAs), wield significant influence. This article seeks to understand the complex power dynamics of VNSAs and how they maintain dominance and exert influence in unstable environments. Focusing on Hezbollah as a primary case study, the research analyses the adaptive and coercive strategies this VNSA employs to navigate crises and assert control, often attempting to seize state authority. The research highlights Hezbollah's unique military prowess, political strength, social standing, and ideological foundation. Through a detailed examination of Hezbollah's interactions within Lebanon and its regional contexts, the article aims to reveal fluid patterns of power that challenge traditional notions of state sovereignty and authority. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of VNSAs' resilience and strategic ingenuity. It offers insights into their broader implications for regional stability and international security while laying the groundwork for future comparative analyses of VNSAs in the MENA region and beyond.

**Keywords:** protean and control power, soft and hard power, VNSAs, MENA region, Hezbollah

### **Introduction**

On October 7, 2023, when Hamas launched an attack on Israel, sparking the ongoing Gaza war, the people of Lebanon anxiously awaited the potential spillover of the conflict into their own country (Al Mahmoud 2023). This concern stemmed from the formidable presence of Hezbollah, a violent non-state actor (VNSA) in Lebanon that wields significant power and holds one of the keys to peace and war in the Middle East region. Following Israel's retaliatory actions in Gaza, Hezbollah started launching rockets into Northern Israel, leading to the displacement of civilians on both sides of the border and plunging the region into the grim prospect of a full-scale war (Prentis and Atallah 2023). Hamas and Hezbollah, who are both VNSAs with substantial military capabilities and agendas and who can incite and engage in conflicts with both state and non-state entities, are a

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reflection of VNSAs' considerable influence. However, Hezbollah is distinguished from other VNSAs in the MENA region due to its considerable military and political strength, strong social standing, well-established organisational structure, religious ideology, and significant domestic and regional influence. These attributes have collectively granted Hezbollah a unique status, often described as "a state within a state" (Kindt 2009, 123–144).

Hence, the attacks on October 7th and the subsequent events underscored the emergence of VNSAs as pivotal players in the security and political dynamics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, bringing their influence and significance into sharp focus. Despite enduring state repression, international interventions, and fluctuating alliances, VNSAs have exhibited remarkable resilience and adaptability during crises, thriving in uncertain environments through innovation and improvisation. This situation raises an important question: How do VNSAs, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, exercise power and maintain dominance in unstable and unpredictable contexts? What unique strategies do they employ to assert authority and achieve their objectives?

This article aims to present a more compelling argument regarding Hezbollah's behaviour by examining specific scenarios and analysing how patterns of power are fluid rather than static. Recognising the interplay of these dynamics in real-time contexts aids in understanding how these groups adapt their strategies within diverse political and military landscapes. Thus, the central research puzzle for this study centres on understanding the complex power dynamics of VNSAs in the MENA region, particularly regarding their impact on regional stability and international security. This inquiry emphasises the necessity for a nuanced investigation of the adaptive and coercive tactics employed by VNSAs, their resilience during periods of crisis, and the broader implications of their power on regional and global political landscapes. Such behaviour establishes a pattern of power, characterised by the predictable recurrence of specific dynamics across various periods and contexts, thereby forming discernible patterns. Building upon this puzzle, the article aims to address the research question: What patterns of power do VNSAs in the MENA region utilise, and how do these patterns enable them to exert influence, maintain control, and navigate their political environments amid crises and uncertainty?

Therefore, the article's objective is to examine and analyse the patterns of power exhibited by VNSAs in the MENA region, focusing on their strategies, tactics, and resilience during crises. Studying these groups shows that they consistently seek to assert control, often attempting to seize state authority. Utilising adaptive and coercive tactics, VNSAs thrive in uncertain times while maintaining dominance during more stable periods. A deeper understanding of the power patterns of VNSAs can shed light on their enduring strategies and tactics for navigating and influencing their environments. Additionally, grasping these patterns may provide insights into broader implications for regional stability and international security. Analysing VNSAs' patterns of power is crucial for refining theories not only related to their tactics and impacts but also concerning the concept of power itself.

To reach our objective, developing a comprehensive conceptual framework to explore VNSAs' patterns of power is essential. Such a framework should integrate various theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to provide a complete understanding of VNSAs' strategic patterns of power. To do so, this article aims to address a gap in the literature concerning the patterns of power that VNSAs exercise domestically and regionally, as well as their impact on security and stability, by analysing Hezbollah. By focusing on the form of power VNSAs exercise, precisely control or protean power, and the specific types of power they apply, such as soft or hard power, to achieve their objectives, this article presents an innovative framework to examine VNSAs' patterns of power in the MENA. While it would be beneficial for this article to explore and compare several VNSAs within the MENA region, the scope and limitations of the research will confine the study to Hezbollah.

### *Defining the Research Gap*

To grasp VNSAs' patterns of power, one must examine the literature that discusses their different forms. An analysis of this literature revealed that studies tended to focus more on VNSAs in the context of terrorism and deterrence rather than on understanding the actors and their patterns of power (Dalacoura 2009; Krause and Milliken 2009, 202–220; Englehart 2016, 171–183; Elbahy 2019, 43–54). Most research on VNSAs has primarily aimed to categorise their various forms and activities (Williams 2008; Zohar 2016, 425–450). These studies have emphasised the tactics employed by VNSAs, mainly how they exploit the vulnerabilities of weak states and the reasons for their emergence (Salem 2018; Durac 2015, 37–41; Baylouny 2014, 329–353). While these points are crucial, they do not fully capture the power employed by VNSAs, allowing them to impose their will, seize control of the state, and achieve their objectives.

The gap in VNSAs' literature also extends to the literature on power. Despite its centrality to international relations and political science, scholars grapple with the definition, nature, and methods of studying power (Drezner 2021, 31). This lack of consensus is evident in the literature, which discusses a diverse range of power forms, including “hard, soft, smart, sharp, network, social, ideational, discursive, productive, protean, symbolic, structural, and relational power” (Drezner 2021, 31). This extensive list underscores the challenges in conceptualising and defining power. Barnett and Duval (2005, 41) argue that power operates in diverse forms and has various manifestations that a single definition cannot fully capture. Guzzini (2005, 502) further points out that scholars often focus on the more practical aspects of power due to the difficulty in precisely defining the concept.

Moreover, the conventional view of power considers the state the sole legitimate form of power and the only entity capable of exercising it (Agnew 1994, 53–80). As a result, attention needs to be redirected to the contemporary International Relations (IR) approaches to power, especially those of Lukes, Pape, Mishali-Ram, Nye, Katzenstein and Seybert. These scholars identified significant instruments of power, including decision-making,

non-decision-making, ideology, leaders' traits, communication, weaponry, negotiation, diplomatic, institutional, control, protean, hard and soft powers (Lukes 2005; Pape 1940, 424–428; Mishali-Ram 2009, 55–82; Nye 1990, 153–171; Katzenstein and Seybert 2018a). However, these approaches failed to provide a theoretical framework for analysing VNSAs' patterns of power. More recent power theories, particularly in the study of protean power, which is the ability to adapt and innovate in an uncertain environment (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018b), attempted to demonstrate that VNSAs exercise protean power while applying hard power (Mendelsohn 2018, 188–208).

Evidently, there are substantial gaps in the current literature regarding understanding VNSAs and the power they employ. There is a lack of a structured framework for analysing these actors' unique patterns of power. Despite extensive research on VNSAs' operations, motivations, and impacts, there is a noticeable absence of a cohesive conceptual model that addresses how these actors gain, utilise, and sustain power across different contexts (Williams 2008). The lack of a framework hinders a systematic comprehension of the intricacies of VNSAs' patterns of power.

In the upcoming section, a conceptual framework will be developed to examine VNSAs' patterns of power based on Peter Katzenstein's and Lucia Seybert's forms of power – protean and control – and Joseph Nye's types of power – soft and hard. This framework will be applied to examine Hezbollah's actions and behaviour regarding Lebanon, the Arab World, and Israel, deducing its patterns of power. This will then enable us to map the development of Hezbollah's patterns of power, highlighting how they shifted throughout the years in line with its increased control.

## **Conceptualising VNSAs' Patterns of Power**

This article sets forth a conceptual framework for analysing the patterns of power exhibited by VNSAs. The four patterns of power described below are derived by combining Katzenstein/Seybert's control and protean power with Nye's concepts of hard and soft power. Before delineating and elucidating these patterns of power, it is crucial to provide a brief definition and discussion of the concepts of protean, control, hard, and soft power as explained by their founders.

### *Katzenstein and Seybert's Protean and Control Power*

The concept of protean power, introduced by Katzenstein and Seybert, addresses the limitations of traditional IR theories in understanding power dynamics in a constantly changing world. This form of power arises from flexible, innovative responses to uncertainty, highlighting the behaviour of agile actors in unpredictable environments. Characterised by adaptability, diverse strategies, and a network of alliances, protean power emphasises creativity and agility as key components (Seybert and Katzenstein 2018, 4). The Arab

Spring illustrates protean power, where spontaneous protests driven by social media and grassroots activism effectively challenged authoritarian regimes and caught governments off guard, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018b, 51).

While proposing protean power as a new concept, Katzenstein and Seybert emphasised that it should not negate the significance of control power. On the contrary, they viewed control power as an essential counterpart to protean power. According to them, control power, rooted in risk, involves domination, authority, manipulation, influence, resource allocation, institutional control, and resistance (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018b, 51). It requires consistency, predictability, and formal mechanisms to maintain order, and can uphold social values and support crisis management when applied wisely (Seybert and Katzenstein 2018, 9–16). An example is the European Central Bank's response to the Eurozone crisis, utilising fiscal regulations and initiatives like Long-Term Refinancing Operations (LTRO) to stabilise the euro and maintain price stability (Katzenstein and Seybert 2018a).

Therefore, gaining and using power is complex and situation-specific. While control power is crucial when analysing consequences from a risk perspective, protean power emerges in uncertain situations. However, both forms of power are interdependent, and understanding control power is key to grasping protean power.

Regarding VNSAs, it is worth noting that they exercise both types of power, protean and control. For instance, VNSAs display protean power through their unpredictability, agility, and adaptability in warfare, propaganda, and governance. The transformation of Al-Qaeda from a centralised group to a global network serves as a prime example of this. These VNSAs challenge established authorities and continue significantly impacting international security, highlighting the changing nature of conflict and power in the contemporary world (Mendelsohn 2018, 189).

On the other hand, VNSAs also exercise control power when they acquire territory and operate in a manner reminiscent of a governing body. For instance, following its occupation of parts of Syria and Iraq, ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) established administrative frameworks, enforced Sharia law, established legal systems, and delivered social services. It maintained economic dominance by seizing resources and engaging in unlawful activities while utilising propaganda to maintain control and attract recruits. This proves that VNSAs can exercise protean and control power as necessary according to their environment (Mendelsohn 2018, 207).

Accordingly, this article shows that VNSAs employ protean power to attain control. While their agility allows them to handle uncertainty, their primary objective remains to exert control. However, VNSAs become more foreseeable and less adaptable as they expand their influence and control. Thus, they combine soft and hard power, establishing a spectrum of power modalities to gain dominance over institutions or the government. To

further elaborate on this aspect, the subsequent discussion will briefly outline Nye's hard and soft power concepts before introducing the article's framework.

### *Nye's Hard and Soft Power*

Joseph Nye argues that power is often evaluated based on *ex-ante* outcomes (before action) rather than *ex-post* outcomes (after action). He emphasises that real power hinges on effectively utilising these resources through specific actions. Hence, the desired outcomes are influenced by context-specific actions, thereby highlighting the need to distinguish between power derived from behaviour and power derived from resources while recognising the imperfect correlation between the two (Nye 2021, 2–4).

Moreover, Nye's framework categorises power into three forms: hard, soft, and smart. Hard power is built on force and physical strength, utilised by state and non-state actors. Soft power, more effective in today's globalised world, influences others through media and cultural channels rather than coercion. Smart power integrates hard and soft power to achieve objectives (Nye 1990, 166).

Nye argued that resources typically linked with hard power can also generate soft power in certain situations, such as when the US Navy provided aid during the 2004 Indonesian tsunami. He emphasised that attraction, a pillar of soft power, is not exclusive to the West or liberals; even anti-liberals and terrorists can exercise it. For instance, the 9/11 attackers were drawn to Osama bin Laden by ideology, not force or money. Nye also noted that structural manipulation can be a form of hard power, but it aligns with soft power if targets accept and value the set agenda (Nye 2021, 6–7).

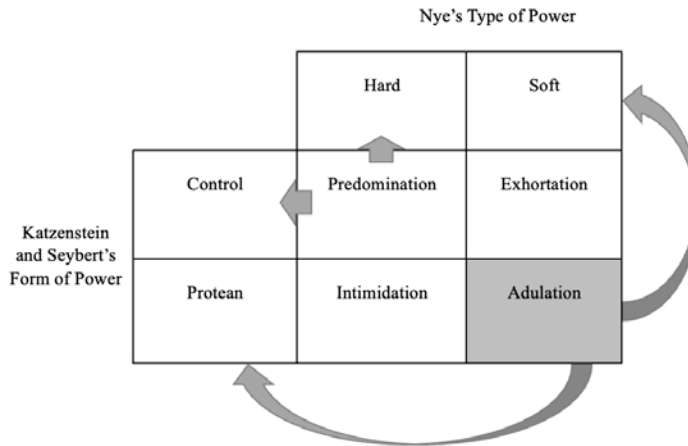
Eventually, all actors can use hard and soft power, and their behaviour determines the type of power and tactics they exercise. There is no clear distinction between hard and soft power based solely on resources and actions; the critical difference lies in the behavioural outcome. This understanding aids in developing a theoretical framework that aligns control and protean power with hard and soft power.

### *The Research Conceptual Framework*

Building on the above concepts and their explanations, this subsection will present the conceptual framework that will guide the analysis in the empirical section. The article theorises that four distinct power patterns will emerge by integrating control with hard and soft power and protean with soft and hard power. An actor's patterns of power comprise the exercised power—control and protean—influenced by the actor's experience and operating environment, combined with the power applied—soft or hard—to advance the actor's objectives. The following formula can represent this concept:

Power Exercised + Power Applied = Patterns of Power.

Nonetheless, it is essential to note that an actor can apply two different types of power and exercise two distinct forms of power, resulting in four different patterns of power. Figure 1 illustrates this fourfold outcome, representing the relationship between the power exercised and the power applied by visualising two dimensions: Nye's type of power and Katzenstein's/ Seybert's form of power.



**Figure 1:** Patterns of Power based on Nye and Katzenstein and Seybert

The figure above illustrates how actors who exercise control and protean power apply soft and hard power. The four patterns of power result from the interplay between Nye's soft and hard power and Katzenstein and Seybert's control and protean power, signalling the actors' patterns of power. As a result, these power patterns depict how actors manage uncertainty, strive for certainty, and are willing to either coerce or entice in pursuit of their objectives.

However, it is essential to note that power encompasses multiple dimensions rather than a single one, so using a spectrum to illustrate different power levels does not reflect reality. Instead, a continuum can effectively depict each dimension. This is due to the recurring patterns in various types of power, where the extremes are delineated, and the intermediate power elements bridge the gap between them. Each manifestation of power in the four cells creates a pattern of power that reinforces the two dimensions' soft or hard, protean or control aspects. The arrows in Figure 1 symbolise the endpoints of the power continuum, where Nye's and Katzenstein/Seybert's manifestations of power intersect at their utmost extremes, representing the polar practices of power.

Therefore, this article presents an original conceptual framework examining the actors' patterns of power through the perspectives of control and protean power, taking into account the specific deployment of soft or hard power to achieve their goals. Integrating



control, protean, hard, and soft powers has resulted in four distinct power patterns: *predomination*, *exhortation*, *intimidation*, and *adulation*. These patterns emerge as control and protean power intersect with hard and soft powers, offering unique insights into the actors' power patterns.

Figure 1, top left cell, shows the prevalence of coercion or obedience among individuals facing known threats. *Predomination*, indicated by the short arrows, enables violence and manipulation in a risk-based environment due to reliance on existing power structures. It represents a form of power where an actor dominates key institutions, resources, and populations. For instance, the US invasion of Iraq showcased American military dominance and unilateralism, aiming to control oil reserves and install a government aligned with its interests, all while acting without international consensus (Noshab 2003, 85–101).

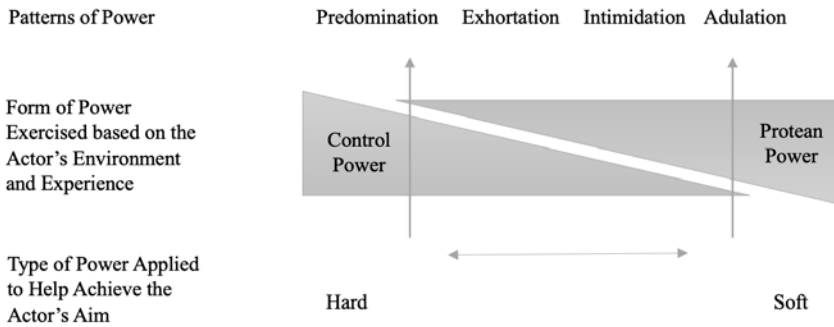
Conversely, *adulation*, in the lower right corner, represents the opposite extreme, arising from adaptable influence and gentle persuasion. It enables individuals to navigate unpredictability, using praise and respect to sway opponents and audiences. This dynamic approach effectively navigates complex political landscapes, allowing for strategic communication to achieve goals. Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel and support for the Camp David Accords exemplify *adulation's* influence in a challenging political context.

In troubled times, actors use *intimidation* to manage unpredictable situations, relying on quick thinking and resourcefulness. This power combines protean and hard power, employing strategies like tactical manoeuvring, strategic vagueness, and coercive negotiations. Actors pressure their adversaries by instilling a sense of danger, reinforcing perceptions of strength and determination. Adaptability is key, allowing individuals to adjust their approaches to challenges. Iran illustrates this *intimidation* power through military proxies, asymmetric warfare, and diplomatic outreach, primarily via the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which supports regional militias and engages in cyber warfare and propaganda campaigns (Wright 2010).

The fourth type of power is *exhortation*, which merges control with soft power. It influences behaviour without coercion, using control mechanisms to establish norms through positive reinforcement. This approach encourages actors to adopt specific behaviours aligned with the goals of those in control. A prime example is the EU, which incentivises membership by offering economic integration and stability while setting conditions like adherence to democratic principles and human rights. This method fosters cooperation and reinforces regional influence (Agné 2009).

The interplay among various power dynamics, as depicted in Figure 1, underscores the fundamental relationships and their resultant outcomes. In contrast, Figure 2 provides a more nuanced examination, revealing that the delineation between different patterns of power is not rigid. Instead, it demonstrates a flexibility wherein actors seamlessly integrate multiple distinct patterns of power.





**Figure 2:** Patterns of Power: Power Exercised and Power Applied

The exploration of different levels of power dynamics is crucial. This is because while various types of power present themselves as distinct and unchanging, their use combined with other forms of power tends to blend them. For example, *exhortation* and *intimidation* can be considered aspects of both soft control and protean hard. There is a realm where actors shift between the form of power they exercise and the kind of power they apply, fusing them. Therefore, within the same timeframe, an actor can exercise control or protean power depending on the situation they are dealing with, and the type of power, whether soft or hard, can also vary.

Each level of power displays a unique approach to wielding power. This demonstrates the actors' flexibility and ingenuity in achieving their goals and safeguarding their interests. In pursuit of these objectives, actors can transition between exercising control and protean while applying soft and hard powers depending on the circumstances and the parties involved. For instance, Al-Qaeda and ISIS seek to establish *predomination* through *intimidation*. In response, governments dealing with these agile actors aim to transition from *predomination* to *intimidation*. This allows them to harness protean power while using hard power against their violent adversaries (Mendelsohn 2018, 188–208).

Consequently, the four patterns of power provide different perspectives on how actors combine two opposing concepts of power to achieve their goals. Each pattern offers valuable insights into power dynamics, but a comprehensive understanding of power requires exploring its diverse forms and interactions. Therefore, the four patterns of power serve a dual purpose: introducing researchers to novel power practices and encouraging consideration of their intersections. To demonstrate the significance of these four patterns of power, we will analyse the actions of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Arab world, and Israel as a case study. By examining Hezbollah's patterns of power using this framework, we will explain how it transitioned between different power patterns, where it utilised protean power to achieve control power.

## Hezbollah's Patterns of Power

Hezbollah's pattern of power varies over time and circumstances. It uses *adulation*, *intimidation*, and *exhortation* to achieve *predomination*, suggesting a hierarchical relation between these four patterns of power.

### *Adulation: A Soft Political Practice to Gain Ground and Achieve Predomination*

When an agile and creative actor faces an uncertain situation, it tends to innovate and improvise to achieve its aim; in other words, it exercises protean power. However, if the actor applies soft power while exercising protean power, it will practice *adulation*. VNSAs tend to use *adulation* to achieve control power; hence, *predomination* is their primary goal in the long run. Therefore, *adulation* is the label that this research gives to the power that Hezbollah practices to capture the state institutions and gain vast ground among the Lebanese and Arab populations. Hezbollah demonstrated this long-term vision between 1990 and 2000 and did not shy away from using it simultaneously in the following periods while practising other power patterns to achieve its aim.

Hezbollah, which saw the light during the Lebanese Civil War that lasted from 1975 to 1990, was a Shia military group fighting the Israelis and other Lebanese factions, which allowed it to emerge as a dominant actor in Southern Lebanon. However, after the re-instatement of the Lebanese state, following the end of 15 years of civil war, Hezbollah found itself in a critical situation facing an uncertain environment, especially in the light of the voices that were calling for its disarming like any other Lebanese militia and for sending the army to Southern Lebanon where Hezbollah operates freely (An-Nahar 1991c, 2). This led Hezbollah to innovate by remodelling itself as a resistance movement protecting all the Lebanese and opening for collaboration with them and the state. This innovative approach showcased the adaptability of Hezbollah in the face of changing political landscapes (An-Nahar 1991a, 3). This strategic agility was Hezbollah's first step towards exercising protean power, showing its agility and ability to innovate and protect itself.

Within this socio-political climate in Lebanon at that time and the region in general, which was headed into peace talks with Israel, Hezbollah decided to exercise protean power while applying soft power during this period, merging both powers to achieve its aim. This *adulation* power took the shape of openness towards the various Lebanese political factions and the people, despite their religious and ethnic backgrounds. This was evident in Hezbollah's decision to participate in parliamentary and municipal elections, weaving political alliances with other Lebanese political factions and providing social services to the people. For instance, during the parliamentary election campaign of 1992, Hezbollah did not hesitate to open up to other Islamic Sunni movements and secular national parties to secure its seats, where it formed an alliance with the Islamic Group, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and the Ba'ath Party-Lebanon branch (An-Nahar 1992b,

4). Eventually, Hezbollah secured 12 out of 128 seats in the parliament, with 8 belonging to Hezbollah members and 4 to its allies within the parliamentary bloc (IPU 1992). Hezbollah strategically aimed to safeguard its military wing by taking advantage of state institutions through its participation in the parliament. This intention became apparent as the party stressed that its parliamentary involvement was not a compromise for their resistance but rather a means to protect it (An-Nahar 1992c, 5). Consequently, Hezbollah focused primarily on upholding and safeguarding its identity as a resistance movement and preserving its arsenal.

Perhaps Hezbollah's boldest political move and testament of practising *adulation* to secure long-term *predomination* was its strategic alliance with Maronite leader Michel Aoun, whose political party held most Christian seats in Parliament. Aoun, known for opposing both Syria and Hezbollah, aligned with the group to secure his position for the Lebanese Presidency, showcasing Hezbollah's power. This understanding between the two parties boosted Hezbollah's internal legitimacy and increased its Parliamentary allies against pro-Western politicians, granting it much-needed domestic coverage (Al-Manar 2006). Ultimately, Hezbollah's partnership with Aoun highlighted its ability to leverage its strength for political advantage. This understanding came in 2006, in a period when Hezbollah was operating in an uncertain environment fluctuating between *adulation* and *intimidation*, all to preserve its power and achieve *predomination*.

Moreover, Hezbollah's practice of *adulation* towards the Lebanese population continued by presenting itself as its protector against political domestic threats, where it took the mantle of opposition against the consecutive governments' economic policies and political actions. This was evident when the VNSA called on the Lebanese Parliament to convene to protect citizens' right to freedom of expression (An-Nahar 1996c, 7). However, through this act, Hezbollah was protecting its primary soft power tool by standing for the right to freedom of expression. Another instance of Hezbollah's support of the Lebanese people was its stand with the Labour Union strike, attributing the country's economic crisis to policies that relied on foreign borrowing without considering the people's ability to manage the resulting debt burden (An-Nahar 1996a, 5). Consequently, Hezbollah positioned itself as the champion and guardian of the people's rights.

Such a stand is demonstrated by Hezbollah's provision of social services to its population, which exemplifies its commitment to fostering a strong relationship with the community. The organisation operates various facilities, including hospitals, clinics, schools, research institutions, and agricultural centres. To further support its constituents, Hezbollah established the Islamic Health Council and the Good Loan Association, which assist followers with tuition, medical expenses, and interest-free loans. Additionally, it created organisations like the Al-Imdad Islamic Charity Association to enhance community support. Institutions such as the Jihad Al-Binaa Development Association were founded to aid in post-war reconstruction, while the Martyr's Institute and The Foundation for the Wounded focus on caring for those affected by conflict, including the injured and families of fallen members (Abdel Aati 2004). These initiatives bolster Hezbollah's image as a pro-

tector and caregiver, strengthening its support base and fostering trust and loyalty among the population. This strategy allowed Hezbollah to enhance its *predomination* power by securing election seats, capturing institutions, and establishing structural dominance.

This strategy of practising *adulation* continued, especially after the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon on May 25, 2000. Hezbollah's Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah welcomed the state's presence in the South, declaring that Hezbollah has no plans to control the area's security; instead, the Lebanese state should take charge of the situation (Noe 2007, 238). Hezbollah wanted to present itself as a legitimate part of the Lebanese system rather than a threat to its existence. This stance was intended to safeguard the VNSA and its interests by gaining acceptance and protection from the Lebanese government. Additionally, by ensuring that the Lebanese state was involved in the newly liberated territories, Hezbollah ensured that the government would be responsible for the reconstruction and development in the south. By doing this, Hezbollah freed itself from directly guaranteeing the welfare of the people while still maintaining its role as a monitor of the government and a party that attends to the needs of the people.

Moreover, following the Israeli withdrawal, Nasrallah emphasised that victory was achieved through the "harmony between the resistance, the people, and the state" (Noe 2007, 241). This triple equation of *the army, the people, and the resistance* will shape Hezbollah's narrative in the future, justifying its distinctive position and the necessity of its weaponry. Primarily, this alliance will evolve from a mere slogan to actionable decisions as it becomes incorporated into official government declarations in the coming years. This triumph demonstrates Hezbollah's long-term approach to exerting influence, which may be adaptable but ultimately seeks to assume control of institutions and wield power.

Ultimately, Hezbollah's practice aims to secure legitimacy and loyalty through positive reinforcement and public approval. The organisation has cleverly constructed a narrative that portrays it as the protector of the people against external threats and evokes a sense of pride and loyalty among its followers. Throughout all this *adulation*, Hezbollah has sought to establish a position of supremacy.

Moreover, Hezbollah extended its practice of *adulation* to the Arab and Muslim world. It rebranded itself by harnessing protean power through agility and creativity and applying soft power. Thus, as the 1990s progressed, Hezbollah altered the tone of its speeches, focused less on attacking pro-Western Arab regimes, and chose to restructure its image over the identity of Islam, mainly its soft diplomatic face. This practice of *adulation* was evident in Hezbollah's *Statement of Purpose*, released by its Press Office on March 20, 1998.

In its 1998 statement, Hezbollah expressed its vision of Islam as one that stands against "humiliation, slavery, subjugation, colonialism, and blackmail" (Alagha 2011a, 59). This interpretation emphasises resistance to external control and advocates for dialogue be-

tween civilisations. Consequently, Hezbollah positions itself as a proponent of cross-cultural harmony, opposing embargoes and championing rights, safety, and justice for all, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or religion. They prefer nonviolent political approaches to advance their vision of Islam, asserting that if they garner majority support, they will put their principles into practice. If not, they will persist in seeking dialogue to reach a mutually agreeable solution (Alagha 2011a, 60).

Accordingly, amidst the uncertain situation it was encountering, particularly the peace negotiations between certain Arab governments and Israel and the frequent Israeli assaults, the highly adaptable Hezbollah resorted to protean power to defend itself through creativity. This resulted in establishing a new identity based on the gentler aspects of Islam, aligning with widely acknowledged aspects of the faith. In this way, Hezbollah sought to present itself positively through this *Statement of Purpose*, highlighting its dedication to Islam as the core ideology guiding its decisions. This demonstration of *adulation* was designed to resonate with Muslim audiences, strengthening Hezbollah's popularity and positioning it as a resilient force untouched by sectarian conflicts. Ultimately, Hezbollah's embrace of *adulation* was a strategy to consolidate its influence over time and achieve *predomination*.

### *Intimidation: When Protean and Hard Power Collide to Achieve Control Power*

When an actor faces uncertainty, it tends to exercise protean power where it will rely on its agility and creativity to improvise and hence gain some control over the uncertain situation they are facing. However, when employing hard power accompanies the exercise of protean power, the actor practises *intimidation*. In other words, when applying soft power does not help in achieving the goal anymore, VNSAs like Hezbollah turn to hard power while continuing their exercise of protean power. However, just as *adulation*, *intimidation* is another power pattern that VNSAs, in this case, Hezbollah, practice to achieve their primary aim, that of *predomination*.

The uncertain environment that Hezbollah encountered in the 1990s continued to influence the organisation from 2004 to 2010, primarily due to Lebanese calls for the withdrawal of Syrian military forces. Syria had initially intervened in 1976 to support Christian factions but altered its position after Sadat visited Israel in 1977. The Taif Accord, which brought an end to the Lebanese Civil War, stipulated that the Syrian military presence would conclude once Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon. This led to widespread demands among the Lebanese populace for the removal of Syrian troops and their influence in Lebanon following Israel's withdrawal in 2000.

In 2004, Hezbollah found itself confronted with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1559, which called for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Lebanon and the disarmament of all non-state actors (UN Security Council 2004). In response, the

group practised *intimidation* tactics, utilising coercive language and threats against the Lebanese opposition that supported the resolution. Nasrallah asserted that “Syria is the only guarantor of civil calm” (Noe 2007, 251), leading the opposition to interpret his statement as “a veiled threat that either the Syrians stay, or chaos would reign” (Noe 2007, 252).

Hezbollah’s practice of *intimidation* has yielded significant results; due to its exercise of force and its control over the country’s security, many of its adversaries hesitate to categorise it strictly as a militia. Instead, they refer to it as a resistance faction (Ya Libnan 2006). This reaction from the opposition indicates that they recognise Hezbollah’s willingness to leverage its agility and armed strength to mount a sudden military uprising against the Lebanese government. As a result, they believe that the issue of Hezbollah’s weapons should be resolved internally, advocating for the integration of Hezbollah into the Lebanese Army and the transfer of its armament to the government (Hatoum 2006). However, Hezbollah, which derives its power from its weaponry, has refused to relinquish its arms, insisting on maintaining its unrestricted autonomy. Nasrallah has reaffirmed this stance: “The resistance remains committed to confronting dangers and challenges, benefiting from the available margin in Lebanon between the state and the resistance” (Hezbollah’s Media Relations 2004). The margin to which Nasrallah refers is the freedom Hezbollah has established due to its power level, enabling it to operate without government constraints and evade accountability. Thus, by emphasising the importance of this margin, Nasrallah aims to ensure that Hezbollah can function without government interference (Hezbollah’s Media Relations 2004).

Shortly after the passage of UNSCR 1559, and while the resulting turmoil lingered, a political earthquake struck Lebanon on February 14, 2005, when Prime Minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated in the heart of Beirut. The widespread grief among the Lebanese people, coupled with international and regional condemnation of the assassination and accusations directed at Syria and its allies, led Hezbollah to perceive its environment as increasingly uncertain. In response, the group resorted to *intimidation* to safeguard its interests and assert *predominance*. That was evident in a speech that Nasrallah delivered on March 8, 2005, under mounting pressure from the opposition and its demands for Syria to withdraw and for Hezbollah to surrender its weapons. Nasrallah emphasised that Syria cannot be forced out of Lebanon and proclaimed the rejection of Resolution 1559 (Hezbollah’s Media Relations 2005). He made it evident that Hezbollah considers certain factors, such as maintaining its weapons and preserving its military wing, non-negotiable, even in national discussions. This implies that challenging Hezbollah will result in instability and turmoil. Additionally, by stating that it aims to protect its state-building project, establish civil calm, and prevent chaos, Hezbollah indicated its intention to assert structural dominance, an essential aspect of control power (Hezbollah’s Media Relations 2005). Moreover, Nasrallah’s announcement that “we will consider any hand that tries to seize our weapons as an Israeli hand, and we will cut it off” (Noe 2007, 349) emphasises Hezbollah’s control power and continued reliance on hard power as well as setting the boundaries for any future decisions regarding its military. As a result, the intense month following



Hariri's assassination has showcased Hezbollah's flexibility and its ability to quickly adapt to different patterns of power to ensure its survival and interests.

Just a year after the assassination of Hariri, the Lebanese political landscape was abuzz with discussions regarding Hezbollah's future and its role. To divert domestic pressure, the VNSA instigated a full-scale war with Israel in July 2006 by kidnapping two of its soldiers. Hezbollah's practice of *intimidation* towards Israel is vividly illustrated by its tactics. The organisation combines protean with control in its combat strategy against Israel. While applying military force and coercion, Hezbollah demonstrates agility, adaptability, innovation, and improvisation in both its responses and its attack planning against Israel. The history of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel is replete with examples of *intimidation*, such as its guerrilla warfare and utilisation of rocket attacks to instil fear in Israeli civilians to undermine the Israeli government's authority and willingness to engage in long-term conflict. Moreover, a particularly notable example of *intimidation* is the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in July 2006, which triggered the Second Lebanon War. This event showcased Hezbollah's military capability and established it as a formidable VNSA capable of challenging state power (Alagha 2011a, 168).

Eventually, Hezbollah demonstrated agility and adaptability during the Second Lebanon War, mainly through improvisation. The group faced various risks due to pressures from domestic, regional, and international forces to disarm and comply with Lebanese sovereignty (UN Security Council 2004). Therefore, Hezbollah faced existential danger during this period and chose to address it by launching a pre-emptive attack on Israel, kidnapping two soldiers to catch Israel off guard (Alagha 2011a, 168–169). This strategy turned the uncertain environment to Hezbollah's advantage, allowing it to plan through improvisation. Hence, due to the practice of *intimidation* power, Hezbollah succeeded in retaining its weapons, increased its influence within the region, and even succeeding in exchanging the remains of two Israeli soldiers for the oldest serving Arab prisoner, nine other prisoners, and the remains of around 200 Lebanese and Palestinian militants (Landau 2008).

However, *intimidation* was directed not only inward and toward Israel but also against Arab countries. Between 1990 and 2010, Hezbollah consistently practised *intimidation* against pro-Western Arab regimes. This intimidation manifested in various forms, including attacks on their leaders, incitement of citizens to overthrow those regimes, and utilising their territories for military actions. The incentive for these practices stemmed from Hezbollah's reactions to the peace treaties and negotiations occurring between some Arab leaders and Israel in the 1990s. As a result, Hezbollah perceived the Arab world as an uncertain environment, necessitating adaptability and creativity to ensure its survival and achieve its aim.

Hence, Hezbollah has held a contemptuous view of Arab leaders for their perceived capitulation to Israel. Its former Secretary, Subhi al-Tufayli, asserted that the rulers of the Arab nations, rather than the might of the enemy, were primarily responsible for the failure to liberate Palestine (An-Nahar 1991b, 8). Furthermore, Hezbollah specifically branded



the late King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and the late King Hassan II of Morocco as “symbols of betrayal and subordination to the Americans” (An-Nahar 1990, 3). By undermining the reputations and legitimacy of these monarchs, Hezbollah aimed to bolster its popularity and credibility among the Arab population.

Hezbollah’s attacks on the Arab leaders and their regimes did not stay in the realm of words; instead, they transcended into military attacks. For instance, the Bahraini government blamed Hezbollah for the bomb blasts at two hotels in the capital, Manama (An-Nahar 1996b, 1). Hezbollah also called on the Arab people to resist their governments and oppose the West and Israel. Nasrallah also encouraged the Arab population to influence their leaders to prevent any peace agreements or establishment of relations, as well as any normalisation of relations with the enemy (An-Nahar 1992a, 5). As a result, Hezbollah practised *intimidation* power when interacting with Arab nations and their leaders. It exercised its protean power in situations of uncertainty and employed its hard power, particularly in its attacks on Bahrain and its deployment of coercive rhetoric towards the Arab leaders.

Moreover, Hezbollah’s *intimidation* power against the Arabs continued into the 2000s, especially in light of the Gaza 2008/2009 war. Its *intimidation* power was evident in its actions in Egypt, where it targeted both the Egyptian government and the Israelis. For instance, Hezbollah established a cell in Sinai to attack Israeli tourists (Schenker 2009). The cell also aimed to create a surveillance system to observe the shipping activity in the Suez Canal (Bou Khaled 2009). Such activities led former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to warn Hezbollah and Iran of “Egypt’s wrath”, accusing them of aiming to “impose their influence on [the] Arab world” (Haaretz 2009). Nasrallah stated that the cell was not planning to attack Egyptian territory but instead was smuggling weapons and explosives to Hamas in Gaza (Schenker 2009).

Hezbollah’s activities and conflict with Egypt demonstrate its remarkable adaptability, exercising protean power while applying hard power. Its capability to operate in uncertain environments and extend its influence from its usual sphere in Lebanon to Egypt clearly shows its flexibility. Moreover, the surprise it brought to its opponent further highlights its agility and strategic skill. Therefore, Hezbollah was employing *intimidation* power to establish *predomination* over the region, enabling it to exercise control and operate in an environment with certainty. However, Hezbollah relied on its protean power, sometimes coupled with both hard and soft, to achieve control.

### *Exhortation: When Control Meets Protean, Taking a Step Closer to Predomination*

The concept of *exhortation* entails exercising control power while applying soft power. An actor is compelled to adopt this practice when encountering risk in a particular environment, resorting to soft power to achieve its aim. Just like the above two patterns, Hezbollah

lah resorted to *exhortation* to achieve *predomination*, especially in Lebanon and the Arab world, between 2004 and 2010 and to a certain degree in the period that followed.

Under the leadership of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah experienced a notable rise in popularity among the Lebanese and the broader Arab and Muslim population following the death of Nasrallah's son, Hadi, during a battle with the Israeli army in 1997. This incident elevated Nasrallah's stature, framing him as a selfless and devoted leader and setting him apart from other regional political figures (Noe 2007, 169). Hezbollah's popularity further intensified after Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon (Harik 2005). As a result, many within the Arab and Muslim communities came to see Hezbollah as an entity that accomplished what Arab governments could not. Capitalising on these developments, Hezbollah demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resourcefulness to solidify its dominance. This was particularly evident as the VNSA highlighted its actions and military successes in contrast to those of Arab nations, notably as it pursued its goals without direct negotiations with Israel.

Hezbollah recognised the importance of accumulating and strategically using its capabilities to exert influence. This enabled it to dominate the Arab world, particularly among the people. Following the Israeli withdrawal, which Hezbollah viewed as a triumph, it gained confidence, perceiving the world as risky and operating within such a context. As a result, it sought to exercise control power through affirmation, believing that its past strategies and actions in the 1990s, which led to the withdrawal, could serve as a power template for predicting future outcomes.

Additionally, Hezbollah aimed to establish structural dominance in the Arab world by presenting its resistance model as the approach to liberating Arab lands. This was evident in its encouragement of Palestinians to emulate its methods for achieving victory. However, when addressing the Arab and Muslim populations, Hezbollah deployed soft power, as seen in its motivational speeches that had psychological effects, particularly in emphasising the end of the age of humiliation (Noe 2007, 241–242). Thus, Hezbollah engaged in *exhortation* towards the Arab and Muslim populations after the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

Another instance of when Hezbollah practised *exhortation* was in 2004, in the light of the reports that were circulating that the “Jewish extremists were planning on demolishing the sacred al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third-holiest site, in Jerusalem” (Noe 2007, 314). As a result, Nasrallah wrote a letter to the Arab and Muslim nations, which was printed in various regional newspapers. In the letter, Nasrallah urged the Arab and Muslim nations to recognise the threat to the al-Aqsa Mosque seriously and take a decisive position that cautions the adversary against considering such an action. Nasrallah emphasised that the Arab and Muslim nations should hold Israel, its government, and political parties responsible for any threat to the al-Aqsa Mosque. Nasrallah called on the nation to stop debating the approach to resistance and which is the best way to safeguard Palestine and the holy

sites. He acknowledged that everyone has their way of doing things, and despite differences in tactics, they should all protect their sacred places (Noe 2007, 315).

From these statements and positions, it is clear that Hezbollah strategically tailors its messages to the Arab and Muslim communities, applying soft power which is grounded in religious principles. Through its narrative, Hezbollah practised *exhortation* on the Arab people, exercising control power while applying soft power. Hezbollah's control power stemmed from its perception of a triumph in 2000. As a result, Hezbollah believed it possessed a proven strategy and a predictable model that could lead the Arab population to victory, reflecting its prevailing framework.

Furthermore, Hezbollah's practice of *exhortation* was evident in 2009 when it introduced the *New Manifesto*, which demonstrated its increasing and flexible power and emphasised its move towards practicality. Nevertheless, the *New Manifesto* was evidence of Hezbollah's growing control power, gradually taking over state institutions and establishing structural dominance. The plan signified Hezbollah's complete engagement in Lebanon's internal political arena and mirrored its escalating impact. The 2009 declaration focused on three essential internal aspects: acknowledging Lebanon as a homeland for all its inhabitants, embracing the political framework with minor reservations concerning the sectarian system, and ceasing the scrutiny of the Lebanese National Army's dedication to the nation and its people.

However, another aspect of the 2009 Manifesto was its more moderate stance and tone while pushing for the sectarian system's abolition. It acknowledged the importance of consensual democracy for effective governance until this goal is achieved (Alagha 2011a, 126). This change indicated that Hezbollah embraced and promoted consensual democracy while ensuring its representation in all branches of government. Thus, although it might seem like Hezbollah was cooperating with the Lebanese establishment, it was using it to further its interests and maintain its political power. Therefore, as evidenced by Hezbollah's New Manifesto, the VNSA practised *exhortation* to secure its *predomination* power.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the subsequent civil conflicts in several Arab nations, particularly Syria, Hezbollah perceived threats to its power. Consequently, the group did not hesitate to employ *exhortation*, which involves mobilising action by emphasising shared values and objectives. Hezbollah frequently tapped into sectarian narratives, appealing particularly to Shia communities within Lebanon and the broader region, including Iraq and Iran. The rhetoric surrounding the struggle against perceived injustices faced by Shia in Iraq and Syria was crafted to galvanise support and foster a strong sense of communal identity. A notable example of this can be seen during the campaign against ISIS, where Hezbollah's leaders framed their military involvement as a crucial effort to protect fellow Shia, thereby encouraging volunteerism and active participation among sympathisers.

It is worth noting that Hezbollah's practice of *exhortation* was intensified through its media empire. Hezbollah recognised the importance of propaganda and communication as a strategic tool for promoting its ideology and policy. For this reason, it has found various communication channels, including Al Nour radio station, Al-Manar satellite television, Al-Ahed newspaper and a publishing house (Al-Sabbagh 2005).

Ultimately, *exhortation* is viewed as a mechanism for mobilisation. It relates to the VN-SA's capacity to inspire followers or supporters through rhetoric, ideology, or collective action. This dynamic builds upon *adulation*, as a populace that holds the VN-SA in high regard is more inclined to respond to its calls to action. Furthermore, *exhortation* is crucial in reinforcing *predomination* by cultivating a sense of collective identity and purpose among supporters, aligning them with the VN-SA's vision and objectives.

### *Predomination: Achieving Control While Applying Hard Power*

Like any other VN-SA, Hezbollah's main aim from the very beginning was to achieve *predomination*. This pattern of power occurs when an actor exercises control power while applying hard power. An actor arrives at this position after moving from an uncertain environment to a certain one where the risks can be calculated. The actor would not hesitate to use hard power in response to those risks.

Hezbollah publicly demonstrated its *predomination* power, leveraging control and hard power, on May 7, 2008. This occurred when the VN-SA took a step it had pledged not to take, using its weapons against fellow citizens (Alagha 2011b, 141–154). The stated reason was the pro-Western government's move to dismantle Hezbollah's communication system and remove the head of security at Beirut Airport, who was considered an ally of Hezbollah (Blanford 2011). Nasrallah interpreted these actions as a direct challenge, viewing it as an act of war. Feeling the grave nature of the situation, Hezbollah seized control of West Beirut and clashed with pro-government forces in northern Lebanon and Mount Lebanon (Worth and Bakri 2008). The conflict, lasting a week and reminiscent of the civil war, concluded when the government revoked the decisions that had antagonised Hezbollah (International Crisis Group 2008).

After the conflict in May 2008, Qatar played a key role in organising peace negotiations among the different Lebanese factions in Doha. The Doha Agreement resulted in two critical provisions. First, it guaranteed that Hezbollah would be given one-third plus one of the government seats, granting it the power to veto any decisions made by the cabinet. Secondly, it established the "army, people, resistance" formula, which Hezbollah often refers to as a justification for its political and violent activities (Khatib 2021). This formula provided Hezbollah with legitimacy within the state without the same level of accountability it would have as a state institution. It also allowed the group to expand the scope of its legal actions by claiming to protect Lebanon from any form of aggression, as stated in ministerial statements (Khatib 2021). However, it distinguished between the army and

the resistance. This meant that potential reforms in the security sector, such as disarming, demobilising, and reintegrating Hezbollah, were not considered. As a result, Hezbollah emerged as the clear winner, and Lebanon's security framework became a permanent blend of Hezbollah's security and that of the government (Khatib 2021). Despite Qatar's efforts to present the Doha Agreement as a "no victor, no vanquished" deal between Hezbollah and the government forces, the reality was that Hezbollah was able to advance its interests at the expense of Lebanese state sovereignty (Al Jazeera 2008). Therefore, Hezbollah established control over Lebanon and gained *predomination* power through this agreement.

Moreover, in October 2016, Hezbollah accomplished a major achievement by adeptly manoeuvring through the political arena. With Hezbollah's support, former general Michel Aoun secured the presidency, ending a 29-month political deadlock stemming from significant divisions within the parliament (BBC 2016a). This success signalled the dawn of a new chapter for Hezbollah, firmly solidifying its control over Lebanese politics. Even the reinstatement of Saad Hariri as Prime Minister was viewed as a victory for Hezbollah, as the Saudi-backed Sunni leader offered crucial protection and connections during the tumultuous Syrian Civil War, in which Hezbollah played a significant role (BBC 2016b). The ultimate political triumph came in May 2018, as Hezbollah and its allies secured a decisive victory in the parliamentary elections, effectively marking the conclusion of the era of pro-Western governments and politics in Lebanon (Nassif 2018). This bolstered its *predomination* power by further entrenching its structural dominance and seizing control of state institutions.

Another instance of Hezbollah's practice of *predomination* power is its involvement in the Syrian Civil War. Nasrallah justified Hezbollah's intervention in Syria by stating that it is morally, religiously, and strategically important to defend the Assad regime, a key supporter of the resistance movement and its partner, from both foreign and domestic interference in its internal affairs (Hezbollah's Media Relations 2013). Hezbollah viewed the Syrian government's continuity as crucial to safeguarding its interests. Despite this, Hezbollah continued to use the Palestinian issue as justification for its intervention in Syria, claiming that "the path to Jerusalem goes through Syria because if Syria is lost, then Palestine is lost" (Hezbollah's Media Relations 2018). By doing so, Hezbollah aimed to maintain its reputation and identity as a resistance movement, seeking to distance itself from accusations of being a sectarian Shia organisation fighting Sunni insurgents while supporting the Alawi government.

Hezbollah faced increasing costs to its lives and reputation due to its role in the Syrian Civil War. However, it also experienced a significant triumph. Hezbollah saw its survival as linked to the survival of the Assad regime on the Syrian front. Its main goals were achieved, including the survival of the Assad regime, the security of its existence, and the protection of its interests. Through its military presence and operations in Syria, Hezbollah provided itself and Iran with a strong foothold, granting them flexibility and leverage as key players in the MENA region. This role could not be overlooked. Therefore, Hez-

bollah's participation in the Syrian Civil War indicated its practice of *predomination* as a pattern of power.

Another instance of Hezbollah's practice of *predomination* came in the shape of calculating its actions towards Israel during the 2008/2009 Gaza War. Despite not directly intervening, Hezbollah's impact on the Gaza War was apparent, mainly due to its consistent communication and coordination with Hamas (Berti 2009). Furthermore, Hezbollah's military assistance to Hamas was evident in the tactics employed by the latter during the Gaza war, as seen in the increased use of rockets rather than solely relying on suicide operations (Berti 2009). It can be argued that the war in Gaza provided Hezbollah with a new opportunity to assert its *predomination*. This is because Hezbollah's decisions were based on calculated risk, as it chose to engage in border skirmishes to avoid opening the Lebanese front, thereby exercising control. Hezbollah combined hard power to confront its enemy with control power. Therefore, by asserting *predomination*, Hezbollah ventured towards control power and expanded beyond its established practice of *intimidation* power. Nonetheless, Hezbollah is likely to continue its rhetoric of *intimidation* against Israel.

Eventually, *predomination* refers to establishing dominance over a territory or a specific group, often through force or influence. This is precisely what Hezbollah has accomplished in both Lebanon and Syria. In Syria, Hezbollah has asserted its dominance in various regions through military intervention, particularly by supporting the Assad regime during the civil war. By providing ground troops and maintaining crucial supply lines, Hezbollah has secured a significant role in the conflict, enabling the group to control areas and establish itself as a leading force in Lebanon's foreign policy and regional alignments. This pattern illustrates the shifting dynamics of power in the MENA region, where Hezbollah's influence has expanded under the pretext of state sovereignty and protection.

### Discussion

Following the thorough analysis of Hezbollah's patterns of power, one can draw several inferences regarding the patterns of power exhibited by various VNSAs. Henceforth, it can be asserted that *adulation* is often posited to originate from the benefits or protection that the VNSA provides to the community. This dynamic can reinforce *predomination* by establishing a social contract in which the population backs the VNSA in exchange for security or resources. Additionally, *adulation* can safeguard against *intimidation*; communities that feel a sense of allegiance to the VNSA may be less vulnerable to fear tactics employed by rival actors or state forces, reinforcing the VNSA's power.

Conversely, *intimidation* can be employed to assert control over dissenting voices or to suppress opposition. This power dynamic can coexist with *predomination* and *adulation*—while a VNSA may predominantly hold authority, it might still resort to *intimidation* against those who challenge its power. Conversely, excessive or unjust *intimidation*



can erode *adulation*, engendering resentment among the populace. This highlights the necessity for VNSAs to balance using *intimidation* and maintaining community support.

*Exhortation*, on the other hand, relates to the VNSA's capacity to galvanise its followers or supporters through persuasive rhetoric, ideology, or coordinated action. This process builds on the foundation of *adulation*, as a populace that holds the VNSA in high regard is more inclined to respond positively to its calls to action. Moreover, *exhortation* can strengthen the VNSA's *predomination* by cultivating supporters' collective identity and sense of purpose, aligning them with the organisation's vision and objectives.

Finally, *predomination* refers to a VNSA's capacity to assert control and authority over a specific region or population. This essential power allows the VNSA to establish legitimacy and exert influence. When a VNSA successfully attains *predomination*, it creates a foundation for additional power dynamics to emerge. For example, a VNSA that dominates a territory can use this control to cultivate admiration from the local population, effectively presenting itself as a protector or benefactor.

The interaction among these patterns establishes feedback loops that can reinforce or undermine the control of VNSAs. For instance, a strong sense of *predomination* and *adulation* may result in heightened mobilisation through persuasive *exhortation*. However, the equilibrium may be disrupted if *intimidation* tactics provoke a backlash. Conversely, if a VNSA effectively employs *intimidation* to eliminate its rivals, its *predomination* may be strengthened, allowing *adulation* and *exhortation* to thrive again. Furthermore, the transition between different power patterns in the same period demonstrates VNSAs' agility and adaptability to the environment and actors they encounter. For instance, Hezbollah demonstrates that VNSAs can practise *exhortation* towards the population while simultaneously practising *intimidation* against the regimes.

By recognising the interrelationships among these factors, this research framework can provide a more nuanced understanding of how VNSAs function within their environments. This perspective can inform strategies for addressing VNSAs by identifying the patterns of power and exploring ways to disrupt or counter them. For example, undermining the basis of *predomination* could lessen the reverence afforded to these actors, thereby reducing the effectiveness of their *exhortations*. This shift could allow state actors or rival groups to reclaim influence. Ultimately, the interplay among these four patterns of power is complex yet essential for comprehending the resilience and adaptability of VNSAs.

## Conclusion

Comprehending VNSAs' power is complicated because they leverage power in various ways, which is translated into their actions and decisions. Researchers predominantly focused on the reasons behind the emergence of VNSAs and how to deter them, with little mention of the specific form and type of power they exert or whether there are discernible



patterns of power under particular conditions. To help scholars grasp the diverse powers employed by VNSAs, this article has developed a framework that identifies the different patterns of power practised by VNSAs. Through this framework, the article provides a new perspective on VNSAs' patterns of power. It encourages scholars to view power concepts as complementary and to recognise the use of multiple power concepts in combination. This encouragement is aimed at motivating scholars to explore new avenues in their research.

However, the question remains: what are these power patterns, and how are they related? To answer this, the article has developed a theoretical framework for examining the power dynamics of VNSAs. It argues that by combining Katzenstein and Seybert's control and protean power with Nye's hard and soft power, a new set of powers emerges to represent the power patterns of VNSAs. The significance of integrating the Katzenstein/Seybert and Nye frameworks lies in establishing a robust foundation for analysing VNSAs. This combined approach fuses constructivist and soft power insights, providing a deeper understanding of how VNSAs operate and influence their surroundings. Unlike traditional analyses focusing on material power, this framework emphasises the importance of legitimacy, unpredictability, and networked influence. It demonstrates that VNSAs employ force, shape identities, and challenge state authority through cultural and ideological avenues. By integrating these perspectives, the framework equips policymakers to anticipate the evolution of VNSAs and adjust counterterrorism strategies to encompass interventions that prioritise narrative control and legitimacy.

The practical application of this theoretical framework to a case study reveals three key findings. Firstly, actors can effectively merge control-soft and protean-hard, challenging the idea that control power relies solely on hard power and that protean power is synonymous with soft power. Secondly, this combination results in four power patterns covering applied and exercised power. Lastly, the power patterns of the actors are context-dependent, shaped by their activities and perceptions. These findings contribute to understanding power dynamics by highlighting the importance of considering multiple facets of a theory or approach to comprehend its intricacies.

Accordingly, VNSAs aim to gain control power by harvesting protean power. However, to achieve their goal, VNSAs combine protean and control power with both hard and soft power, resulting in four power patterns: *predominance*, *exhortation*, *intimidation*, and *adulation*, which they employ simultaneously depending on the situation they are in. To illustrate the above argument and support the framework, the article took Hezbollah as a case study. The examination of this VNSA showed that while *predomination* is the ultimate objective of Hezbollah, it is not the dominant power pattern in different periods. Instead, Hezbollah uses *intimidation*, *exhortation*, and even *adulation* in its attempt to take control of the state institutions in Lebanon and establish dominance in the MENA region. As a result, a hierarchical relation dominates the relationship among these patterns, in which practising one pattern of power leads to attaining another.

By introducing a unique framework for examining power patterns and connecting them to VNSAs, this article has opened new avenues for security researchers, encouraging future studies on VNSAs' power dynamics. This research, grounded in empirical evidence, uniquely combined Katzenstein and Seybert's form of power with Nye's type of power and applied it to a case study of Hezbollah, a prominent VNSA in the turbulent Middle East. As a result, future scholars will find valuable research opportunities by further exploring VNSAs' power patterns and applying this framework to various actors and regions. By analysing Hezbollah's power patterns through the lens of protean-control and hard-soft powers, the article strongly encourages scholars to use similar approaches in future research and apply them to other VNSAs in different contexts, regions, and periods.

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