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# Iran's proxy network in the Middle East

*Ibolya Lubiczki*

July 2024

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*Iran's use of proxies to expand its influence throughout the Middle East and beyond is a complex and organised aspect of its foreign policy. By creating, funding, and endorsing several proxy organisations, Tehran has been able to combat rivals, project power, and advance its geopolitical goals without turning to direct armed conflict. These proxies, including Hezbollah in Lebanon, various Shia militias in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, and other aligned factions in Syria and beyond, serve as instrumental tools in Iran's asymmetric warfare strategy. Iran's support for these groups encompasses a wide range of activities, from providing weapons, training, and financial assistance to offering ideological guidance and strategic direction.*

## Introduction

Iran has dedicated itself for many years to following the written preamble of its constitution, which states that the country's goal is "to continue the Revolution at home and abroad."<sup>1</sup> This has provided the Persian state with a solid basis for growing its network of partners in various Middle Eastern countries. Although the connections between the various non-state actors and Iran vary on many levels, the senior Ayatollah Ahmad Alamolhoda once said, "The Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq, Hizballah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, the National Defense Forces in Syria, the Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Palestine are all Iran."<sup>2</sup> An essential element of Iranian defence strategy is the proxy network, which consists of various militias and groups with ideological, political, and military ties to Iran. By maintaining and expanding its alliance with these groups, Iran effectively employs them as instruments of destabilisation and, with their assistance, can broaden its influence and authority abroad. Additionally, Iran can more affordably achieve its strategic interests in the region against its main rivals, the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, by using the network system rather than its power sources.

## Characteristics of the relationship between Iran and its proxy partners

After the Islamic Revolution, the utilisation of proxies became a key component of Iran's national security strategy and its initiatives in the region. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been recruiting non-state groups since its founding, and these groups have grown into a network including tens of thousands of militants who have maintained ties with Iran at different levels throughout the years. The proxy network has a loose structure and is diverse in terms of its members' ethnic backgrounds, political affinities, degree of influence in the nations in which they operate, and degree of ties to Iran. Tehran offers financial, political, and military organisational support for the network.

In terms of legality, the network that Iran established lacks formal agreements such as treaties, charters, or agreements on the status of different non-state entities or the relationship between Iran and local actors. Iran typically uses emotive or religious language when referring to the non-state actors in the network, but adversaries and commentators view it as a coherent and cohesive identity and describe it as an ideological, military, and cultural opposition to Western domination, Israel, and the Arab governments that are subject to Western powers. Iran is characterised in this network-building process as an expansionist power that has steadily extended Iran's reach into other jurisdictions, but it has not imposed, for example, Iranian administrators or garrisons.

According to Omar Karmi, the network members can be classified into five alternative models depending on the degree of Iranian control.<sup>3</sup>

- In the first group can be found **allies like Hezbollah**, which, in exchange for significant military, financial, and political support, maintains a decision-making process that Iran strongly influences; however, it enjoys a high degree of autonomy in carrying out its agenda.
- **Independent allies or partially controlled partners**, like the Houthis in Yemen, which sustain an autonomous decision-making process and choose their strategy and goals while being influenced by Iran.
- **Sunni military groups** that work with Iran but are not under its direct control or significant influence, such as Hamas.
- **Shiite opposition movements**, like those located in Bahrain, are funded by Iran but do not fall under its authority and rebel against Sunni or secular regimes.
- and **Shia groups around the world** that Iran supports religiously or culturally and that it views as potential sources of assistance.

Although the control within the Iranian proxy network has differed since its existence, in the years since Qassem Soleimani's 2020 assassination, Iran's network operation can be characterised as being more decentralised than it was in the past. Iran still exercises

an important degree of influence within it, although it does not always hold complete and permanent control of all the network's components. It is feasible to identify a growing Iranian preference for direct offensive action by its forces over the activation of proxy groups, even though the usage of these organisations continues, along with the decentralisation trend of the Iranian proxy network in recent years.<sup>a</sup>

The official definition, which claims that a state, in this case, Iran, directly or indirectly supports third parties, usually non-state actors, to influence the conflict's outcome and thereby advance her strategic interests or undermine those of her opponents, fits into the general framework of Iran's relationship with the non-state actors involved in her proxy wars. This type of partnership benefits the third party as well as the sponsoring state. On the one hand, this kind of warfare allows the more powerful side to stay out of direct combat with the enemy. However, the non-state actor benefits from the patron's influence and authority and gets various forms of assistance.<sup>4</sup> However, a deeper examination shows that the relationship between Iran and its allies is not adequately represented by the term "proxy" since each network member has a unique set of ideological, strategic, political, and logistical ties with the "patron." The distinction between the Houthis in Yemen and the Lebanese Hizballah, for instance, demonstrates the complex nature of the network. The Houthis are a branch of a tribe that is part of a Shia group that does not adhere to Velayat-e Faqih<sup>b</sup>, "guardianship of the jurist" while Hizballah was established by Iran and accepts the Velayat-e Faqih. As a result, it is more practical to refer to the operational relationship between the network's parties and the leader as a "partner."<sup>5</sup>

Members of the network are wary of one another and their relationship with Iran. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies research, the four criteria that highlight the differences among the non-state actors in the network are ideological affinity, strategic convergence, political expediency, and transactional value.<sup>6</sup> Ideological affinity is the degree of ideological alignment and the resulting loyalty that it creates. Strategic convergence is the degree of strategic alignment. Political

expediency reflects the nature and significance of the partnerships' political advantages. The transactional value defines the degree of mutual security and the military, political, and financial gains brought about by the partnership.

Using these criteria, the actors can be classified as partners, strategic allies, ideological allies, and proxy states or organs.

According to this classification, within the Iranian proxy network,

- The client that maintains its relationship with the patron-only for political or transactional benefit is known as the **partner**. Without the patron's assistance, the partner may or may not continue to pursue joint goals. Hamas is a striking great example of a partner within the network.
- A **strategic ally** is a member who, even with fewer resources, would continue to pursue shared goals based on strategic convergence with the patron without the patron's support. In Yemen, the Houthis are an example of a strategic ally.
- The member who, even without the assistance of the patron's funds, would still pursue goals that share an ideological affinity with the patron despite their limited resources is known as an **ideological ally**. In Lebanon, Hizballah is an example of this type of member.
- The **proxy member** is the one who, even with the lack of the patron's support, would still share goals with the patron (due to shared ideologies or pragmatic concerns) but would be unable to carry them out. The Syrian National Defence Force is an example of this type of member within the Iranian network.
- The **state organ** is the one that wouldn't survive without the patron's backing. Liwa Zainabiyoun and Liwa Fatemiyoun are two revealing cases of this type of player.

A different perspective on the relationship between non-state actors and Iran can be utilised in examining Iran's objectives in creating and sustaining a proxy network. All in all, Iran uses the proxy network to maintain its area of immunity and denial, discourage

its adversaries, exercise influence in the region, and reduce the probability that its actions will have negative military and political repercussions.<sup>7</sup>

The specific circumstances of Iran's various arenas and the capacity of the groups it supports to advance its strategic goals in these arenas impact Iran's decision about how, when, and whom to assist. It is possible to distinguish four types of strategic interests in the relationship between Iran and its proxies.<sup>8</sup> Different groups can be included in several categories at the same time.

- **Targeters** whose goal is to reduce American influence in the area. The Iraqi Shiite militias, Kata'ib Hezbollah (also known as the Hezbollah Brigades) are included in this group.
- To enhance Iran's power balance, the **deterriers** are meant to intimidate and harass its regional rivals. Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and Hezbollah are a few of the many diverse and significant organisations that make up this group.
- The goal of the **stabilisers** is to keep Iran's regional partners, like Syria, stable. The Zainebiyoun Brigade (a Shiite militia from Pakistan) and the Fatemiyoun Brigade (a Shiite militia from Afghanistan) are two examples of this group.
- The **influencers** aim to establish Iranian influence on political institutions in the neighbouring countries, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon or the Badr Corps in Iraq.

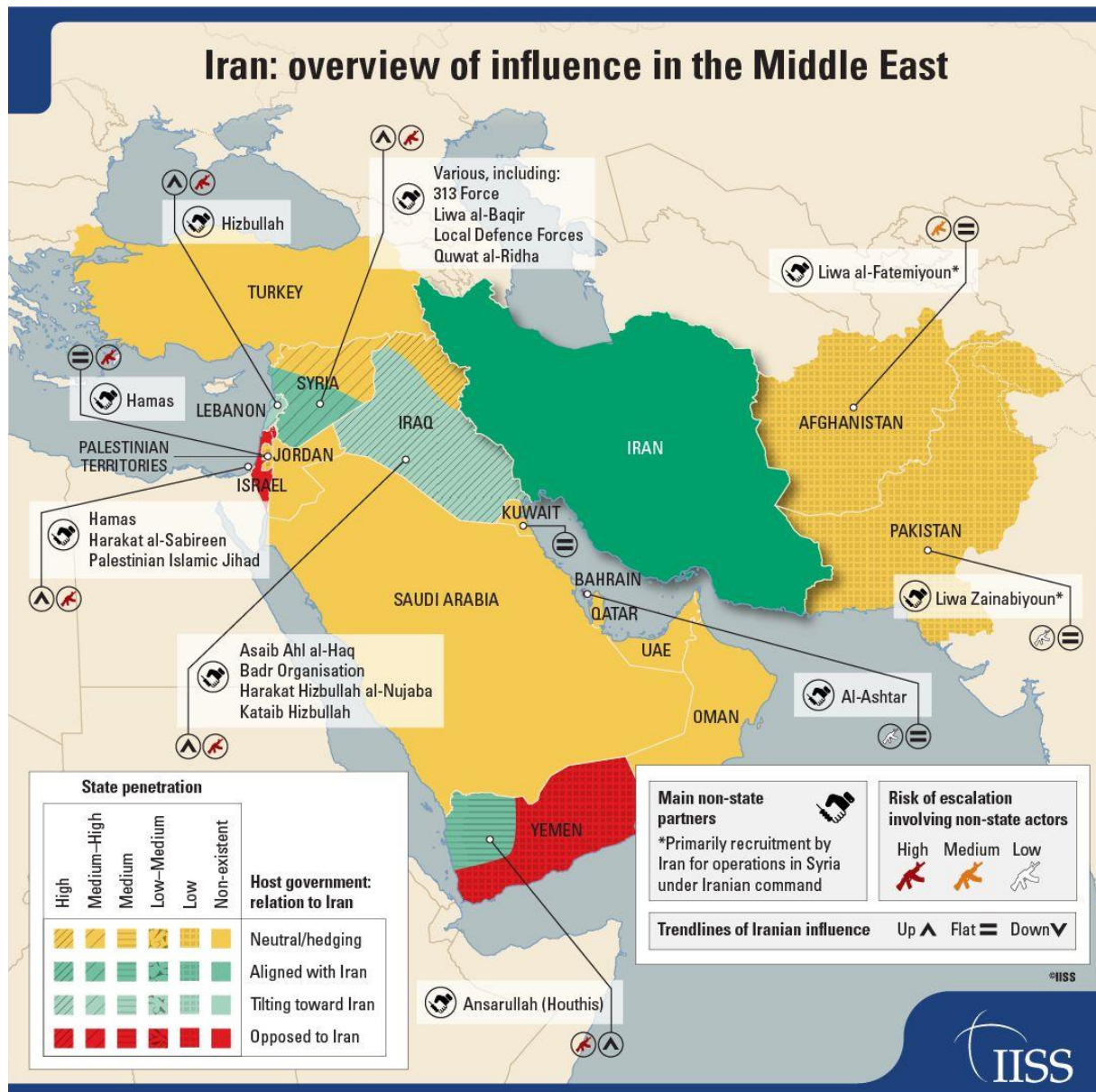
Naturally, Iran's influence and control over these groups and the nature of its connections with them, will change over the years. Thanks to the variety of operation branch models that are open to it, Tehran has the flexibility to modify its activities in response to changing circumstances and maintain a flexible presence with various groups based on shared ideologies or shifting interests.<sup>9</sup>

## Iran's proxy partners

Iran has attempted intensively to spread its revolutionary doctrines since the revolution, particularly among Shiite people who were more open to the revolutionary rhetoric. However, to achieve its strategic goals, Iran must adopt a practical policy of

supporting a broad spectrum of non-state organisations, including Sunni groups and groups that do not adhere to the core principles of the Islamic Republic. Iran has significant military capabilities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen thanks to decades of building up its proxy network and engaging local conflicts on the side of one of the actors. Iran backed a separate organisation in Lebanon known as Hizballah; in Iraq and Syria, it backed the government and formed alliances with armed non-state actors; and it supported the Houthis, the opposition, in Yemen. Iran has attempted to use its capabilities to increase its influence in the Gulf states, although there hasn't been any relevant armed conflict.





Iran: an overview of influence in the Middle East, IISS, Accessed July 22, 2024, [https://x.com/IISS\\_org/status/1780143864705159627](https://x.com/IISS_org/status/1780143864705159627)

### Hezbollah in Lebanon

One of the most significant achievements of Iranian foreign policy was the creation and rise of the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon. The presence of a majority Shia population in Lebanon, which has long maintained ties with Iran, underwent a social and political awakening during the First Lebanon War, and the absence of a solid central authority has led Iran to view Hezbollah as an ally in the region.<sup>10</sup> Hezbollah's significant and successful engagement in the Syrian conflict and its backing of Shia militias in Yemen and Iraq demonstrated to the Iranians the organisation's essential role in promoting

their regional goals. The three sets of capabilities that Hizballah possesses—its missile (and more recently, uninhabited aerial vehicle) arsenal, its foreign operations activities, and its ability to demonstrate power regionally—are directly related to Tehran's guidance and account for the group's strategic significance and operational usefulness for Iran.<sup>11</sup>

One of the most potent and adaptable transnational Middle Eastern non-state entities, Hizballah's history started in 1983, when middle-ranking Lebanese clerics, with Iranian guidance, established it in reaction to Israel's invasion of Lebanon. The new organisation was a rival to Amal, the prominent Shiite militia in Lebanon at that time, which declined to adopt the halachic rule. Establishing the organisation and constructing the infrastructure were significant tasks for the Revolutionary Guards Corps, stationed in the Lebanon Valley in 1982 as part of an agreement for military cooperation between Iran and Syria. In 1996, following the reorganisation of the Revolutionary Guards' command structure to improve its capacity to support Hezbollah, the number of Shia recruited for Hezbollah's military wing increased; these individuals received salaries from Iran, had much Iranian weaponry, and received training from Iranian instructors on how to fight and conduct attacks.<sup>12</sup>

From an Iranian perspective, Hizballah's strategic objective experienced a significant shift following Israel's 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon. The withdrawal diminished the organisation's prestige as a force directly fighting Israel the same time, as Israel and Iran were faced with increased tensions due to the Iranian nuclear issue, Hezbollah expanded to become Iran's strategic wing, one capable of threatening Israel with missiles in case of an Israeli attack on Iran. As IRGC commander Major-General Mohammad Jafari expressed clearly, "The essence of Hizballah is to be armed and equipped against the sworn enemy of the Lebanese nation because the Israelis' first goal is the country of Lebanon. ... It is natural that Hizballah must be equipped with the best weapons for its security, and this issue is non-negotiable."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is unsurprising that after the Israelis withdrew, the Quds Force continued to provide (and

even increased) support to Hezbollah, establishing a long-range rocket infrastructure that posed a threat to Israel's front. Since the end of the Second Lebanon, Iran has been crucial in assisting Hezbollah in rebuilding its military infrastructure, which consists of over a thousand rockets and missiles. The Iranian financial aid is also a considerable part of its commitment to Hizballah, which is estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars a year; between 2012 -2018, it was about 700 million USD. <sup>14</sup>

### **Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad**

The Iranian government partnered with Sunni organisations such as the two main Palestinian actors, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, in addition to Shiite militias because of Iran's hostility to both Israel and the US. Over the past few decades, Iran has given the two main strategic allies in the Palestinian arena weaponry, training, finance for continuous operations, and technical and operational support, including information for making homemade weapons.

If it came to ties with Iran, Islamic Jihad is closer than Hamas. The founder of the relatively tiny Sunni Islamic organisation, Fathi Shaqaqi, saw Iran as a role model under the revolutionary leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the movement had a strong ideological connection with Iran. The organisation was founded in Gaza in 1981. The group is compelled to collaborate with Iran due to its limited financial resources. Even though the group was founded in the early 1980s, the Iranian government didn't become interested in it until the end of the decade, following its withdrawal from the Iraq War.<sup>15</sup>

Iran has a different connection with Hamas than it does with the Islamic Jihad. Since they view it as a potent rival to Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and the US during the peace process, as well as a political cover for their own political outreach in the Arab world and a potential military ally in a multi-front conflict, Iran and Hizballah have emerged as the primary backers of Hamas. The Palestinian military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, was founded in 1988 following the start of the first Intifada and is a larger and more expansive organisation than the other Palestinian groups.

However, Hamas had weak ideological ties to Iran and did not see the Islamic government as an example. Hamas has access to more funding sources than the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, allowing it to maintain more independence.

During the first intifada, Iran had a bigger platform to show its active involvement in the Palestinian conflict and against Israel through Hamas. Hamas's desire to partner with Iran also emerged from practical worries regarding Hamas's conflict with the PLO. Regular contacts between the leaders of Iran and Hamas led to the training of Hamas fighters in Iran, the establishment of a permanent representative office for Hamas in Tehran, and the provision of financial support for Hamas. To continue its terror campaign against Israel, Hamas was compelled to escalate its military development after taking control over the Gaza Strip in July 2007. Hamas needed outside strategic support to keep building its military and ensuring its political survival.<sup>16</sup>

Hamas's backing of the Syrian opposition during the start of the country's civil war damaged relations between Iran and Hamas. The 2014 Gaza War presented a chance to bring the partnership to a previous light. With the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood's regime in Egypt in the summer of 2013, Teheran could expand its influence in the Palestinian arena, while Hamas recognised that it required Iran's financial and operational help more than ever. Even though Hamas did not wholly accept Iran's demands, Iran's primary strategic interest in seeing Hamas established and strengthened in the Gaza Strip is enabling it to continue its violent conflict with Israel on its southern border.<sup>17</sup>

The 2014 Gaza War presented a great chance for Iran and Hamas to renew their cooperation; the terrorist group's October 2023 invasion of southern Israel further strengthened ties between Tehran and Hamas. The October 7 massacre was made possible by Iran's long-standing terrorist training programs for Hamas militants and the wide-ranging material backing the organisation received over the years.<sup>18</sup> Iran participated in the attack's planning, and at a meeting in Beirut, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps authorised it.<sup>19</sup>

Iran has been giving enormous financial support to its proxy partner to increase its activities close to Israel's border, encircle Israel with a siege ring, and undermine Israel's security in general. Between 2012 and 2018, the Iranian budget gave the Palestinian groups Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad over USD 100 million annually.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Houthis in Yemen**

Yemen's geographical position in the southern region of the Arabian Peninsula, close to Egypt and East Africa, and bordering Saudi Arabia, makes it important for Iran. With the help of the Houthis, Iran was able to expand its network of proxies without making significant financial or military investments in the southern borders of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, its main adversaries. With Iranian assistance, the Houthis were able to consolidate their position in Yemen and the Middle East.

The movement's founder, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, travelled to Iran in 1979 in search of refuge. During Yemen's civil conflict in 1994, his son Hussein made one of several subsequent visits. The existing connection with Tehran was made possible by such visits and the partnerships that resulted from them. After the 2011 Arab Spring crisis, Tehran started giving the group funding, weapons, assistance, and training. The most crucial event in the movement's history occurred when, following the 2004 protest against the Yemeni government, Iran started providing it with financial support, political backing, military training, and weapons. In 2011, Iran began to give the Houthi movement more financial support in reaction to significant rioting and protests against Ali Abdullah Saleh. After the collapse of the Saleh regime, Iran began to arm the Houthis with ballistic and anti-tank missiles as well as unmanned aerial vehicles to empower them.<sup>21</sup> Even though the coalition forces, with the help of its Western allies, imposed an air, sea, and land blockade on the territories under Houthi control, Iran was still able to supply the movement with weapons and send advisors from the Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah to train the Houthi forces in their operations.

## **Iran's proxies in Iraq**

The most significant aspect of Iran's foreign policy is Iraq. Iraq is a more important field of operations for Iranian officials than other nations where Iran backs local armed organisations. Iran is determined to influence Iraq's internal politics and strategic orientation since Iraq still presents a threat to Iranian national security. Iran has successfully infiltrated the Shia population of Iraq since 2003, taking advantage of their long-standing shared border as well as their close cultural, religious, and economic links. Iran's influence is diverse and has reached out to a wide range of social and political actors.

Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq, Harkat Hezbollah al-Nujaba (officially the 12th Brigade), and Kata'ib Hezbollah (also known as the Hezbollah Brigades) are the three primary militias that continue to partner closely with Iran.

After members of Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army, another Shiite organisation in Iraq, retired, Kata'ib Hezbollah was founded in 2006. The new militia's primary goal was to combat and drive out the American troops from Iraq after Sadr decided to cease fighting the Americans. Aside from detonating side explosives along the axis where the forces marched, Kata'ib Hezbollah increased its guerrilla activity against US forces and their allies in 2011. Following the 2011 withdrawal of American troops, the militia declared that it would keep attacking any American forces still in place, especially in the province of Al-Anbar. Kata'ib Hezbollah has been operating under the auspices of the Popular Mobilization Forces since 2014. In 2018, the militia, like the other militias within the Popular Mobilization Forces, was formally recognised and founded by the Iraqi government as a vital component of the security forces. Kata'ib Hezbollah was also involved in the 2019 suppression of civil protest in Iraq; through the social institutions it founded and its incorporation into the nation's governmental structures, the militia gained access to power and influence.

Under the direction and support of the Revolutionary Guards, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haqq also played a significant part in the battle against the US Army from 2006 to 2011, and its

members continued to carry weapons even after the US Army withdrew from Iraq. Following the start of the Syrian civil war, militia members were sent to the country and took part, for example in the fight of Aleppo. The militia, like other pro-Iranian Shiite militias, was a crucial component in the forceful suppression of protestors during the recent waves of turmoil in Iraq.

Sheikh Akram al-Shaabi established the third central Iraqi Shiite militia, Harkat Hezbollah al-Nujaba, in 2013. The Lebanese Hezbollah, with which the group has had strong relations for a long time, supports and operates this militia in addition to the Quds Force. In the regions of Aleppo, Damascus, and Deir ez-Zur, this militia supported the Syrian army in its battles against Daesh and opposition groups. Additionally, the militia supported the Iraqi army in its struggle against Daesh and in cleansing the border between Syria and Iraq.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Iranian-backed militias in Syria**

To maintain its freedom of action, avoid engaging in direct combat with its rivals like the United States or Israel, and protect the lives of its fighters, Iran chose to use Shiite militias in the Syrian civil war primarily. Specifically, it preferred to use fighters from Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Furthermore, Iran demonstrated that the conflict in Syria affects both the Shiite camp and the Islamic Republic. Iran supported the armed Shia militias that were established in Iraq over a decade ago to help the Shia camp seize control of the country's security forces and government institutions and drive out American forces. These militias also included thousands of Hezbollah fighters who were sent to Syria to support the Assad regime in its fight against its enemies.

The Fatemiyoun and Zainebiyoun Brigades are two unique examples of proxy groups requiring attention in the context of Iraq. These groups' members were recruited mainly by Iran from among refugees, not the local population. In 1979, during the Iran-Iraq war, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, marking the first time Iran has used Afghans for military purposes. The Hazara Shiite ethnic minority, comprising 15–20% of Afghanistan's population, received assistance from Iran in forming an army to resist

the Soviet occupation. Afghans were enlisted by the Revolutionary Guards in the Abuzar Brigade to fight the Iraqi army in the 1980s.

The growing number made it necessary to form an Afghan-specific brigade. The Iranian government exploited the financial difficulties of the Afghan immigrants in Iran by enlisting combatants from among them. The Revolutionary Guards promised the Afghan refugees long-term residency permission in Iran in exchange for their recruitment, along with monthly payments of up to \$500 and \$1,000. Furthermore, Iran provided them and their families with a permanent residency card in some situations, and if a family member passed away, they may even become citizens. But several Shias from Afghanistan and Pakistan also offered their services to fight for religious causes, namely to defend the Shia sacred sites in Syria.

Besides the militias that Iran introduced, the Revolutionary Guards also established militias in Syria based on the local population. These militias have been in Syria since the civil war, and their presence has been crucial in implementing the Iranian strategy in both Syria and Lebanon. This strategy aims to strengthen Iranian influence and establishment in Syria, guarantee Syria's continued reliance on Iran, establish Iran's primary position in the Levant region, and provide constant backing for Hezbollah. Iran attempted to provide local pro-Iranian militias legal legitimacy and protection from US and Israeli airstrikes by integrating them into Assad's army as part of the so-called local defence forces as part of its efforts to strengthen its military and security dominance in Syria. Syria is another country that gives Iran enormous financial support. For instance, between 2012 and 2018, the Iranian government spent at least 4.6 billion USD to back the Assad government in Syria.<sup>23</sup>

### **Iran's proxy partners in the Persian Gulf countries**

Iran's ability to run proxy groups in the Arab Persian Gulf states is still minimal. Iran supported political subversion and terrorist acts through Shia activists in various Gulf nations following the Islamic revolution. In December 1981, a coup attempt was made in Bahrain by Shiite activists who had received training in Iran. Shiite radicals in Kuwait



carried out several terrorist strikes in the 1980s, including the 1984 hijacking of a Kuwaiti aircraft headed for Tehran and the unsuccessful 1985 assassination attempt on the country's emir. None of the terrorist organisations in the Gulf, however, attained the status of an Iran-friendly strategic ally. In addition, the Gulf states utilised the terrorist attacks of the 1980s as justification for their continued oppression of Shiites.

Iran's attempts to operate affiliates on its behalf were severely limited by the existence of a strong and relatively stable central government, which prevented Iran from successfully organising the Shiite population to form effective affiliate organisations, even in Saudi Arabia. A series of terrorist operations against police stations and oil and gas facilities were carried out by the Hezbollah al-Hejaz organisation in the late 1980s. The Saudi government effectively took these organisations down until the end of the 1990s. Iran attempted to back revolutionary Shiite activities in Bahrain in 1993 after the regional upheaval, but it was unable to establish a reliable ally or even to create a loose network of proxies like the Shiite militias in Iraq.

## Conclusion

Iran's proxy network, which reflects its complex approach to regional influence and power projection, is crucial to its foreign policy and national security strategy. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has systematically created and backed a wide range of non-state entities throughout the Middle East. Tehran can achieve its strategic goals using this network without turning to direct military conflict. Iran's proxy network is notable for its flexible and diverse structure. The Houthis are among the more autonomous players in this network, while Hezbollah and other closely managed organisations have varying degrees of influence and control over one another. Iran provides these proxies with military, political, and financial backing, which strengthens their capacities and keeps them functioning. The network functions based on a common ideological and strategic alignment, even without formal agreements. However, there are challenges related to this partnership because the network members have distinct political,

ideological, and strategic relationships with Iran that affect the type and scope of their cooperation.



## Endnotes

<sup>a</sup> Velayat-e Faqih is the fundamental political framework that has guided Iran's policies since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The Shia Islamic principle of velayat-e faqih, in its basics, the clergy's authority over the state. The idea gives the Shia clergy complete control over politics and religion, and it subjects all significant choices made by the state to the approval of a top clerical figure known as the vali-e faqih. By exercising guardianship (velayat) over the country, the supreme clerical authority (faqih) guarantees the top-down Islamization of the state.

<sup>b</sup> Examples of direct offensive actions by Iran in recent years: sabotage of oil tankers in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman (summer 2019), the downing of an American drone (June 2019), and an attack The Saudi oil facilities using cruise missiles and drones (September 2019) or in the Syrian arena increasing willingness on the part of Iran to carry out direct offensive operations against Israel using UAVs and rockets.

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<sup>22</sup> Garrett Nada and Mattisan Rowan, "Profiles: Pro-Iran Militias in Iraq", Iran Primer, November 10, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Habithonistim. (2021). How to Navigate the New Middle East. Habithonistim. p. 18-19.

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