

CHARLES UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
Institute of Political Studies
Department of Security Studies

Master's Thesis

**The Regional Push: Hezbollah Terror Attacks Against Israel in the
Context of Regional Conflict**

How and why do the timing and frequency of Hezbollah
attacks against Israel in 2000 to 2015 relate to regional
geopolitical events?

2024

Gillian Stark

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Against Israel in the Context of Regional
Conflict**

Master's Thesis

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on **July 29, 2024**

Gillian Stark

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Abstract

This thesis explores the timing and frequency of Hezbollah's attacks against Israel from 2000-2015, determining how these attacks correlate to significant geopolitical shifts in the region, the Second Intifada, the Iraq War, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Gaza War. By proving spikes in terror during the first six weeks of the selected conflicts using a Poisson Bayesian regression model, the thesis quantitatively analyzes the temporal tendencies of Hezbollah's aggression. The findings are framed through the sociological normative constructivist lens to explore the motivations driving Hezbollah's strategic decisions, and reveals a complex interplay of religion, history, and ideology driving Hezbollah's behavior, leading the group to attack their foundational enemy, Israel, at particular times. The group acted most strongly in conflicts involving Palestinians, the Second Intifada and 2014 Gaza war, emphasizing the importance of the two groups' shared history. Conversely, Hezbollah's increase in aggression towards Israel during the Iraq War and Syrian Civil War was, while still statistically significant, more cool. In the case of the Iraq War, because their ideological ties to Al-Qaeda were weak, and in Syria because they were actively involved in the fighting, leaving little resources for attacks on Israel. The nuanced look offered in this thesis emphasizes the significance of sociological normative constructivism in explaining motivations of non-state actors.

Abstrakt

Tato diplomová práce zkoumá načasování a frekvenci útoků Hizballáhu proti Izraeli v letech 2000-2015, přičemž určuje, jak tyto útoky souvisí s významnými geopolitickými změnami v regionu, druhou intifádou, válkou v Iráku, občanskou válkou v Sýrii a válkou v Gaze v roce 2014. Prokázáním nárůstu teroru během prvních šesti týdnů vybraných konfliktů pomocí Poissonova Bayesovského regresního modelu, práce kvantitativně analyzuje časové tendence agresivity Hizballáhu. Zjištění jsou zarámována prostřednictvím sociologické normativní konstruktivistické perspektivy, aby prozkoumala motivace, které řídí strategická rozhodnutí Hizballáhu, a odhaluje složitou interakci náboženství, historie a ideologie, která pohání chování Hizballáhu a vede skupinu k útokům na jejich základního nepřítele, Izrael, v určitých časech. Skupina nejvíce útočila během konfliktů zahrnujících Palestince, druhé intifády a války v Gaze v roce 2014, což zdůrazňuje význam společné historie obou skupin. Naproti tomu zvýšená agrese Hizballáhu vůči Izraeli během války v

Iráku a občanské války v Sýrii byla, i když statisticky významná, chladnější. V případě války v Iráku to bylo proto, že jejich ideologické vazby na Al-Káidu byly slabé, a v Sýrii proto, že byli aktivně zapojeni do bojů, což jim zanechalo málo zdrojů pro útoky na Izrael. Nuancovaný pohled, který tato diplomová práce nabízí, zdůrazňuje význam sociologického normativního konstruktivismu při vysvětlování motivací nestátních aktérů.

Keywords

Israel, Hezbollah, Terror attacks, Rocket attacks, Second Intifada, Iraq War, Syrian Civil War, Gaza War, Sociological, Normative, Constructivism

Klíčová slova

Izrael, Hizballáh, teroristické útoky, rakety útoky, druhá intifáda, válka v Iráku, občanská válka v Sýrii, válka v Gaze, sociologický, normativní, konstruktivismus

Název práce

Regionální tlak: Teroristické útoky Hizballáhu proti Izraeli v kontextu regionálních konfliktů

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Table of Contents

Introduction	8
1. Theoretical Framework	13
2. Literature review	18
2.1 <i>The Anti Israeli Roots of Hezbollah's Ideology</i>	20
2.2 <i>Establishing their place</i>	26
2.3 <i>Two Wars and Precarious Peace</i>	28
2.4 <i>Political Aspirations to Blue Line Establishment</i>	31
3. Methodology	33
4. Empirical Findings	42
5. Discussion and Analysis	52
5.1 <i>The Second Intifada and Hezbollah</i>	53
5.2 <i>Invasion and Construction: Iraq, USA, Hezbollah, and Israel</i>	58
5.3 <i>The Main Event: The 2006 Lebanon War</i>	62
5.4 <i>Regional Instability and Non-State Actors: The Syrian Civil War</i>	66
5.5 <i>Gazan Causes as Casus Belli</i>	70
Conclusion	75
Post Script on Current Events	80
Summary	83
List of References	85

Introduction

Rocket sirens at all hours are nothing new to those living in the north of Israel. Since 2000, more than nineteen thousand rockets have fallen on the country, while the wider region has been ravaged by wars and terrorism. Should Israel be concerned about these foreign conflicts and do regional circumstances affect the actions of their enemies against them? Do their own struggles provoke violence from unrelated groups? This thesis answers these questions by implementing a Bayesian regression model and peering deep into the motivations of a terrorist group, therefore determining if there is a spike in Hezbollah terror attacks immediately following major regional events. Considering this through a sociological normative constructionist lens, the following research question was formulated: How do the timing and frequency of Hezbollah attacks against Israel in 2000 to 2015 align with broader regional geopolitical events such as the Second Intifada, the Iraq War, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Gaza War? This question seeks to uncover patterns and relationships between significant events in the region and the engagement of Hezbollah with Israel through terror attacks. In order to do this, the background and context of these events are crucial components of understanding the broader geopolitical dynamics of the region.

Hezbollah, a Shiite Islamist terrorist group, was formed in the early 1980s with the purpose to oppose Israel and their occupation of southern Lebanon. Since then, it has split into two wings, a military and a political, creating a hybrid structured non-state actor with tremendous power. The group has historically raised tensions in the broader region through recurring rocket attacks against Israel and terror attacks in Israel, Lebanon, Europe and South America (Byers, 2003, pp. 17-20). Analysis of the connections between Hezbollah's actions and significant events such as the start of the Second Intifada, the US

invasion of Iraq, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Gaza War provide valuable insights into the interplay of terrorism and regional instability. This research question holds particular interest due to its focus on the dynamics of non-state actors and their impact on wider regional security and the ability to quantify security risk. During the time frame representing the post-Blue Line era, 2000 to 2015, significant shifts in regional dynamics, conflicts, and political developments rocked the geopolitical field of the Middle East. The first of these defining events that were analyzed within this thesis is the Second Intifada. Hezbollah expressed their support for the Palestinian cause during this period and is known to have been actively recruiting trainees from Palestine in this period as well (Gambill, 2002, pp. 1-2) Through an increase in rocket attacks, they demonstrated their solidarity with the Palestinian struggle and their desire to showcase their commitment to resisting and destroying Israel, along with an attempt to gain support from various factions and populations that were also sympathetic to the Palestinians (Gambill, 2002, pp. 1-2)

The 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, fueled tensions and divisions in the region; Hezbollah, as a close ally of Iran, was vehemently against US intervention and viewed it as a Western attempt to reshape the region by force. They used the war as a reason to escalate rocket attacks against Israel, opposing what they perceived to be collaboration between Israel and the United States and the latter's role in the invasion of Iraq. By targeting Israel, Hezbollah was able to emphasize their role as a resistance group, and mobilize popular sentiment against Israel and the United States (Levitt, 2021, pp. 11-13). Shortly after, Hezbollah's attention was taken by a conflict much closer to home, the 2006 Lebanon War. A terrorist raid by Hezbollah into Israel triggered the war and caused a full scale military confrontation. Hezbollah was able to apply what it had learned since the start of the millennium, and rocket attacks played a central role in the conflict as the

terrorist group used them as a means to challenge Israeli military superiority and assert its resistance narrative. (Blanford, 2011, pp. 6229-6844). The targeting of population centers and military installations did particular damage to their southern neighbor and the war highlighted the astounding capabilities of Hezbollah and the vulnerabilities in Israel's defenses (Byman, 2011, pp. 927-929).

Additionally, this thesis looks at how the Syrian Civil War also affected the terrorist activities of Hezbollah. The war began with the Arab Spring, where, in Syria, it turned into a bloody war of attrition that continues to this day. Hezbollah monitored these occurrences closely; they saw the conflict as a chance to solidify their influence and to position themselves as a resistance movement against external influence (Alagha, 2014, pp. 193-194). The uprisings and regime changes in the neighboring country threw out of balance their carefully negotiated regional alliances and brought uncertainty to the whole region. During this uncertainty, Hezbollah continued rocket attacks against Israel, using the aggression to maintain its relevance, deflect attention from internal unrest, and restate its commitment to resistance to external influence (Alagha, 2014, pp. 192-198). Finally, in Gaza, Hezbollah had the chance to reaffirm their foundation, resistance to Israel. The war began on July 8, 2014 when Israel launched a military operation against Hamas in response to a dramatic increase in rocket fire from Gaza that had left many injured and dead (IDF Editorial Team, 2020). Hezbollah closely monitored these events and saw the war as an opportunity to reaffirm its anti-Israel stance as well as strengthen its position within the region. Their subsequent activities were deeply intertwined with their broader, regional objectives, especially those supporting Iran's proxy networks and countering Israel (Harik, 2004, pp. 5)(Levitt, 2021, pp. 10-15). This war highlighted the interconnectedness of various actors in the Middle East and also underscored Hezbollah's role in the broader anti-Israel resistance due to the deeply entrenched identities and

narratives that shape Hezbollah.

Understanding the connection between terrorism and broader geopolitical events, is of significance to the security field as it sheds light on several complex interplays. The timing and frequency of Hezbollah rocket attacks provides insight into how the group manages their strategic planning and decision making, elucidating how these attacks align with broader geopolitical events. Through this, one can see which factors hold influence in Hezbollah's decision to engage with Israel. This research question opens the door to assess what drives Hezbollah's actions, including regional pushes such as conflicts, political developments, and shifts in alliances, or if they stand independent from this, and are driven by local dynamics. Secondly, the research question helps contribute to the knowledge and understanding of security implications in the region. Understanding how events in one country can trigger other events in the region is imperative to regional security.

Hezbollah's rocket attacks do not occur in a vacuum, but instead in the complex web of interrelated conflicts, power struggles, and rivalries in the Middle East. Exploring the relationships between the timing and frequency of terror attacks and regional events can uncover links between actors and events, something crucial to understanding the complex regional dynamics of the Middle East and anticipating further potential security risks to the region. The temporal patterns of Hezbollah's attacks reveal whether or not there are recurring patterns or spikes in attacks during times of regional tensions or conflicts. Hezbollah, with both their political and military wings, is a non-state actor with significant influence on regional dynamics. The methodology chosen for this study is one which quantitatively tests the correlation between major events in the Middle East Hezbollah rocket and terror attacks against Israel. The Poisson Bayesian regression model proves the spikes in aggression towards Israel by analyzing the selected time frame of

2000-2015 and constructing a posterior distribution that clearly indicated the statistically significant increase.

The primary objective of this research lies in this, proving the spike in Hezbollah rocket attacks in the immediate month after major regional events, then using sociological normative constructivism to explain why the spikes occur. In order to test the first portion of the objective, the statistical analysis tool R analyzed data on Hezbollah attacks from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) and further databases, archival records, news articles, and academic literature over the time period selected. Comprehensive sources enable the creation of a reliable dataset for the Bayesian model to demonstrate that the Second Intifada, Iraq War, Syrian Civil War, and 2014 Gaza War affect the frequency of rocket attacks. Data regarding the date, method, and casualty number were preprocessed to ensure consistency and accuracy by organizing data to detect and resolve any errors. The preprocessing also included exploratory data analysis (EDA) to identify patterns and anomalies that may impact the subsequent Bayesian regression analysis. Using R, a time series dataset was constructed showing the frequency of Hezbollah rocket attacks on Israel over time. The Bayesian analysis of this data was able to estimate the relationship by fitting a regression model to the data. Difficulty in sourcing data and its limited points due to the nature of the conflicts was addressed through utilizing multiple sources and cross referencing information to ensure accuracy. Including the direct war between Hezbollah and Israel and the 2006 Lebanon War as a comparison point only serves to enrich the analysis and provide context for the results of the rest of the data.

The layout of the thesis is intended to naturally follow the flow of the research. Immediately following this chapter is the theoretical framework which examines how sociological normative constructivism contextualizes Hezbollah's strategic decisions. This chapter explains the deeply rooted cultural and ideological beliefs of the terrorist group

that drive Hezbollah's actions. After that, the literature review examines the current research on origins, strategies, and ideologies of Hezbollah while identifying gaps, particularly the need for comprehensive analysis of aggressive actions through a sociological normative lens. Additionally, the role of Iran in instilling these norms is explored in depth. The research design and methods for proving Hezbollah's increase in aggression is shown in the methodology section. The data collection process, sources, event selection criteria, and preprocessing steps are detailed as well to show the robust nature of the quantitative testing. The empirical findings detail the relationship between major geopolitical shifts and Hezbollah rocket attacks. It includes visual representations of the data and the code used to produce them to highlight specific spikes in attacks correlating to the selected events. The discussion applies these empirical findings to the theoretic framework. It provides a background to each selected event and describes Hezbollah's involvement and allegiances, as well as interpreting the meaning of the findings in relation to those. The conclusion synthesizes the above to show the insights gained through this thesis and emphasizes the importance of considering cultural and ideological factors in terrorist groups' actions. The comprehensive understanding combining quantitative methods and sociological normative constructivism presented in the sum of this thesis demonstrates the dynamic interplay between Hezbollah's motivations and regional geopolitical events.

1. Theoretical Framework

Sociological normative constructivism is rarely applied to the study of terrorism, yet best suits the thesis question as this theory posits that international actors, both states and non-states alike, don't act solely on what material gains are possible but also by the

norms and values that are inherent in their culture. Using the statistical data as a foundation, this thesis posits that Hezbollah increases their terror attacks on Israel during times of regional instability, and sociological normative constructivism explains why. Why does Hezbollah attack Israel in conflicts not directly related to their animosity? Why do they choose particular events to get more or less involved in? Sociological normative constructivism focuses on the importance of social and local understanding of culture (Huysmans, 2005, pp. 44-45) and Hezbollah's actions are driven by their perceptions of right and wrong, as well as the pressure they face from other nations and regional powers to oppose Israel. Using sociological normative constructivism to analyze Hezbollah's actions clarifies how their cultural and religious beliefs directly inform strategic decisions, especially their use of violence and terrorism. Their emergence in Lebanon from the displacement of Arabs after the creation of the state of Israel ties into their hatred for Israelis and Jew, which also stems also from Khomeinism, their ideological base (Byers, 2003, pp. 7) (Luca, 2009, pp. 79). The founding members, Palestinians and local Muslims who banded together to oppose the Israeli buffer zone and Lebanese Christian power, caught the eye of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards who shaped them. As Byers (2003) notes, their tactics and goals stem directly from the IRGC, often leading them to clash with Western forces or ideas as well (Byers, 2003, pp. 20-22). No paper has focused on this in conjunction with their interactions with other groups within the social and political context of the wider region. Doing so, as in this thesis, illustrates for the first time how Hezbollah's ideological motivations were operationalized at certain periods of time. Sociological normative constructivism lets one look into the mind of Hezbollah by viewing not just their material considerations, but their ethical and moral interests as well.

An approach such as sociological normative constructivism is best suited for this research as opposed to a more materialistic approach because it gives room to consider

the ethical and moral motivations of Hezbollah, not just those such as power or money. The group started as an anti-Israel group (Blanford, 2011, pp. 931-944), and this internal culture shapes their behavior, just as religious beliefs and interactions with other actors in the region do. An expert in the field of sociological normative constructivism, Jef Huysmans describes that the dominant Western security formation operates through the logic of war and national security. He highlights the encompassing nature of security, saying “Security concentrates everything at this one point where the political units confront a test of will” (Huysmans, 2005, pp. 46). The normative style of lens for viewing security is one at the core of security studies. Huysmans’ arguments for the sociological normative constructivist view acknowledges that authors must face normative questions regarding the approach to an issue from a security perspective. He claims that in the core of every security analysis, normative questions are inescapable (Huysmans, 2005, pp. 46-47).

In Huysmans’ interpretation, when discussing security, one is also making a normative judgment, deciding what is important and not important and what side is the one to protect. Huysman suggests developing a research strategy that includes the performative and generic aspects of language in order to overcome the normative dilemma (Huysmans, 2005, pp. 45). This means looking into why the geopolitical events selected for the research are considered eventful and important. Understanding the selection of the Second Intifada, Iraq War, 2006 Lebanon War, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Gaza War means going beyond just accepting these events as geopolitical shifts, but instead exploring how Hezbollah interprets and views them. Drawing on Huysmans’ work sheds light on the interactions between political action, collective and individual identities, and social norms. Applying these perceptions to a terrorist group is fairly novel though, and limited studies have looked into it (Hülsse and Spencer, 2008) (Spencer,

2012).

Hezbollah's ideological roots, based in the Khomeinism of the 1970s, stress the importance of resistance and a radical interpretation of Shia Islam. These norms were intrinsic to the formation of the group and guided the early leaders in their entrance into politics (Wiegand, 2008, pp. 673-675) (Norton, 2007, pp. 481). Their goal to represent a portion of the Lebanese population dedicated to these values, also lends itself to violent actions against Israel, since the southern state was seen as the greatest threat to Lebanon and hated by Iran, their backers (Wiegand, 2008, pp. 676). Hezbollah's policies can be seen as a manifestation of their cultural and social values just as the actions of their militant wing can be described as the same. Their use of violence is motivated by these norms and the desire to defend their community against those who they see as "others" or are described as others. This thesis shows that collective defense and resistance against those who challenge traditional values and society are means for Hezbollah to defend themselves against those who would influence their ideological roots.

Within Levitt's (2021) analysis, he delves further into this by connecting Hezbollah's sociological normative constructivism to their role as a proxy of Iran. Iran's intense involvement with the beginning of the group imparted their values on Hezbollah, something that is discussed in detail below. This connection, though, can be seen within Hezbollah's repeated participation in regional conflicts that mirror that of Iran, especially those in which they can bolster Iranian influence in the region and counter what they see as Western encroachment (Levitt, 2021, pp. 6). Moghadam and Wyss (2020) add to this in their focus on proxies and non-state actors. Hezbollah's strategic decision making is driven by the sociological norms they perceive and this framework can help characterize the group and understand them better. Their motivations can be understood through the parallel understanding of the perspectives of Iran and their regional goals. Further,

Hezbollah's engagements in violence can be directly tied to this lens, as understanding norms is crucial to explaining state and non-state actor behaviors. The application of sociological normative constructivism to the question of why Hezbollah engages in violence when they do is the heart of this thesis, and central to multiple theories on the group (Moghadam & Wyss, 2020, pp. 119-157) (Hoffman, 2010, pp. 9-12).

Hezbollah's actions and motivations in the Israeli-Arab conflict within the context of the wider region can be best understood through sociological normative constructivism, the framework adopted in this thesis. This comprehensive lens allows a deep dive into the intricate interplay of norms, values and behaviors that shape the terrorism and violence that Hezbollah engages in. This theoretical framework posits that international actors, both state and non-state actors, are not driven just by their potential material gains such as economic or power gains, but instead by the significance of their culture and norms (Huysmans, 2005, pp. 44-45). The incorporation of this understanding in this thesis is particularly important when looking at Hezbollah's reactions to events such as those selected here. These events are not merely geopolitical shifts but instead are markers to gauge if regional conflicts can have an influence on violence in third countries due to shared belief systems and cultural norms. It can be argued that Hezbollah's actions are more pragmatically motivated by internal Lebanese politics, and their need to maintain their power base. Another perspective suggests that military engagements with Israel go beyond purely ideological or regional political considerations, but instead are aimed at reinforcing domestic legitimacy. This lacks the nuance of factoring in their culture and beliefs. Distilling the group to such a pragmatic level loses the essence of terrorism that is their foundation. Similarly, the argument that Hezbollah's actions deviate enough from Iranian ideology thereby signifying their autonomy from the IRGC ignores their foundational devotion to Khomeinism. Applying the sociological normative approach

allows for understanding of the cultural and social context in which Hezbollah interprets these events and chooses to perpetrate or abstain from violence. Therefore, it's argued here that the spikes in Hezbollah terror and rocket attacks that occur concurrently with geopolitical shifts, represent a push into action against their foundational enemy, Israel, due to the group's ties to shared ideology, history, or culture.

2. Literature Review

Hezbollah's complex structure, regional influence, and controversial actions made it a focal point of international attention. Though extensive research hours have been dedicated to many aspects of Hezbollah's operational and political side, significant gaps in understanding the ideological motivations of the group remain. This thesis posits that a sociological normative constructivist view best remedies this. By providing a comprehensive analysis of Hezbollah's anti-Israeli ideology and history from the group's inception to its current state, this thesis aims to fill these gaps. Much of the existing literature has focused on the group's historical evolution, military tactics, and strategy. Scholars like Byers (2003) and Norton (2007) look deep into the beginnings and early years of the group, especially their pre-2000 years. Byers gives an in-depth historical context of their origins, especially the displacement of Arabs following the creation of Israel, while Norton explores Hezbollah operations within Lebanon and their local dynamics. Despite the valuable contributions of the scholars, a deep look into the ideological foundations of Hezbollah's actions, in the context of sociological normative constructivism is missing. By analyzing primary sources, including books, scholarly articles, and official government documents, this thesis exposes the group's ideological foundation and their dynamic status over time. In addition, the role of Iranian influence in

shaping their ideological and operational framework will be explored. The involvement of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp in the early days of Hezbollah and their continued financial ideological support shows how external influences acted on the group's development. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how ideological beliefs translate into tangible military and political strategies, the thesis will also look into Hezbollah's early suicide bombings and kidnappings. It will also focus on major confrontations with Israeli forces in order to uncover the ideological motivations behind their operational history. By bridging the gap between historical context, ideological analysis, and real life translations, this thesis aims to contribute to the field of study of Hezbollah.

The analysis of Hezbollah's actions and motivations has been approached through various security theories, each of which provide a different insight into the group's behavior and objectives. Most scholars have predominantly focused on liberalism and realism, limiting themselves to the two leading paradigms in security studies. Realist scholars, such as John Mearsheimer (2001), argue that Hezbollah's actions are primarily driven by power dynamics, and their search for hegemony. Since realism posits that all state and nonstate actors behave in an anarchic international system, Hezbollah's frequent rocket attacks on Israel can be seen as an effort to project power and stabilize a regional adversary. Mearsheimer highlights the strategic use of violence, such as that by Hezbollah, in order to assert dominance in a dangerous landscape (Mearsheimer, 2001). Realist theories do provide a framework for understanding the strategic calculations and power oriented behavior of Hezbollah. However, they tend to overlook the ideological and normative side of their motivations and focus instead on material and security concerns. This limitation leads to an incomplete understanding of Hezbollah, especially their actions driven by religious and cultural factors.

The liberal perspective sees it differently, from the institutionalist standpoint, Keohane best described it in 1984, international institutions and norms can mitigate conflict and promote cooperation, even among enemies. This suggests engaging Hezbollah in regional security frameworks to reduce hostilities by exploring diplomatic channels (Keohane, 1984). By framing their actions as resistance against occupation aggression, Hezbollah aligns itself with global anti-imperialist and anti-colonial narratives, not only bolstering their legitimacy among local and regional supporters, but also garnering sympathy from international actors who view Israel critically. This underestimates the group's ideological rigidity and the complexity of their belief system (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). A liberal approach does not fully address deep seated hostilities and ideological commitments that drive Hezbollah's actions. The democratic peace theory tries to provide some insight by claiming that the spread of democratic norms can reduce conflict (Russett, 1993). Although Lebanon is not a fully Democratic state, Hezbollah has participated in the political process, demonstrating their balance between militant and political wings. Applying the Democratic peace theory of Russett, one views Hezbollah's engagement in Lebanese politics as driven by their need to maintain legitimacy and political support. Therefore their militant actions against Israel, serve to bolster its support and rally its base (Russett, 1993). Still this does not consider the multifaceted normative and ideological drivers of Hezbollah's behavior. Examining the roots and formative beginnings of Hezbollah through the lens of sociological normative constructivism, fills in these gaps left by previous scholars and more precisely explains their motivations.

2.1 The Anti-Israeli Roots of Hezbollah's Ideology

The birth of Hezbollah, and therefore their identity, can be traced back to the 1947

United Nations partition of the British colony of Palestine, which intended to create both Arab and Jewish states. This UN proposal was vehemently rejected by the Arab nations, who claimed that the entirety of the land belonged to the Arabs, and that the Jews, especially those recently arrived from war-torn Europe, were intruders. This proposal, and the Arabs' rejection of it, led to widespread violence and resistance against Jewish settlers. When the British, who had previously controlled almost the entire region, withdrew from Palestine on May 15, 1948, the Jewish leadership declared the establishment of the State of Israel. The next day, the combined armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon declared war and invaded the newborn state. Shockingly, the newly formed Israeli Defense Force outmatched their Arab counterparts in terms of weapons, numbers, and successes. Finally, the United Nations brokered a peace between the Arab countries and Israel, resulting in territorial gains for Israel, infuriating the Arabs (Byers, 2003, pp. 10-11). Most importantly, during and after this conflict, more than 700,000 Arabs fled Israel and sought new lives in the surrounding countries. However, settling was not easy and many ended up in crowded refugee camps, living in poverty with limited rights and uncertain futures in their new countries. This left many refugees with a strong desire to reclaim their previous home and a hatred for Israel, but without an organized government or military. They turned to tactics such as bombings, kidnappings, and terror attacks. In Lebanon, home of Hezbollah and unique because of their large non-Muslim population, the 200,000 Palestinians that moved into the south of the country tilted the balance of power. The Palestinian refugees, Muslims themselves, aligned with the Lebanese Muslims to challenge the power of the Maronite Christians in the government, leading to a bloody and destructive civil war in 1975, setting the stage for the birth of Hezbollah (Byers, 2003, pp. 12).

Fearing that they could lose their only ally in the region, Israel sent arms and

support to the Christians in order to maintain the status quo. However, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, led by Yasser Arafat, relocated to Lebanon after being expelled from Jordan, much to Israel's concern. The situation festered until, in 1982, Israel launched a full scale invasion of southern Lebanon, hoping to root out the heart of the terror attacks that had been ravaging the country. The IDF reached Beirut after moving swiftly through the south of Lebanon, forcing the PLO to evacuate the city and disperse to various other states. Meanwhile, Israel had established a security zone in the south of Lebanon to ensure the cessation of terror attacks, one that would last more than two decades. Although the Israeli occupation was successful in mitigating terror attacks from the PLO, it prompted the birth of a new and lasting enemy, Hezbollah (Byers, 2003, pp. 12-14) (Norton, 2007, pp. 477).

Understanding that Hezbollah is shaped by this historical context is crucial to exploring its dynamics in the wider geopolitical region and their ideological roots. Their frustration with the displacement of the Arabs, the creation of Israel, and the complex political events that followed in the decades after, formed the potent political and military force that Hezbollah has become today. The displeasure over the aforementioned events turned to anger which turned to hate, leading powerful and influential Arabs in Lebanon to begin communicating how to resist the Israelis and reclaim the land. One of the group's early leaders, Sayyed Abbas Mussawi collaborated with other extremists from the Amal, a southern Shiite organization stemming from the Lebanese civil war. The Amal group would end up playing a major role in the formation of Hezbollah, providing many of their early fighters (Byers, 2003, pp. 20-22). This area of Hezbollah history is murky, and without full access to the secretive group, little can be stated for certain, leading to significant gaps in knowledge. What can be verified is that in order to characterize their opposition to Israeli occupation in a name; they chose "Party of God" or Hezbollah

(Levitt, 2021, pp. 12). The foundation of their core ideology was formed by their backers soon after. In 1982 in southern Lebanon, in the Bekaa Valley, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) laid the foundations for Hezbollah. They began a program of recruitment and religious education for mobilization. Although the first group of the IRGC arrived long after the fighting in the valley between Israelis and Syrians had stopped, a previous military agreement between Iran and Syria allowed Iran to establish a Lebanese resistance force to oppose the Israelis. This force was the seed that grew into Hezbollah. The IRGC actively tried to increase piety of those living in the area and spread Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings (Byers, 2003, pp. 20-22). This time period and influence formed the ideological basis of the terrorist group.

As more Iranians arrived in the Bekaa Valley, a loose coalition of defectors from other groups began to form, composed of members of the Lebanese Union of Muslim Students, the Lebanese Dawa party, and other various Shia study groups. These groups all came together under the "Manifesto of the Nine" which outlined the groups objectives and purposes (Blanford, 2011, pp. 817-858). Looking within these early documents provides a valuable window into the IRGC's influence in Hezbollah's formation and shows the intersection of the Iranian model of resistance and the fusion of Shia ideology with nationalistic aspirations. Ideological support formed not only the early manifestos of the group, but also their style of fighting and organization (Alagha, 2011, pp. 47-53). The group was set up with a very similar hierarchy and structure of the IRGC. Hezbollah originally loosely acted as a shared goal coalition of various radical Shia paramilitary groups that recognized the Ayatollah's authority. The estimated \$1 billion that the Iranians have provided as yearly support to the group is perhaps another reason they have chosen to remain ideologically and politically close to the Iranian regime (Levitt, 2021, pp. 5-6). Iran and their proxy have had tensions and divergent interests in the past, and some

leaders of Hezbollah have emphasized the need to remain autonomous from Iran (Norton, 2007) (Alagha, 2011, pp. 55-176). Still, Iran, and their brand of Shia Islam has played a critical role in the formation and running of Hezbollah. According to Nicholas Blanford, in their early days, Hezbollah tried to bridge the Sunni - Shia divide. In fact, Mussawi provided logistic support and training to Quwat al-Fajr, the Dawn Forces, a Sunni group. This interaction between sects showed the strength of conviction in newborn Hezbollah in opposing Israel (Blanford, 2011, pp. 931-944) (Norton, 2007).

Though Sunnis originally did not trust the Iranian Khomeini, his support for the Palestinian cause eventually endeared him to the Sunnis of Lebanon, bolstering support for the fledgling group that may not have existed otherwise (Blanford, 2011, pp. 931-955). In fact, Luca goes so far as to state that “Hezbollah has been politically, economically and militarily dependent on the Islamic Republic from its earliest beginnings. Hezbollah was conceived thanks to Iran. It directly resembles the operational, ideological, structural, and political standards that were put forth by the Iranian Islamic Revolution” (Luca, 2009, pp. 79) (Wiegand, 2008, pp. 670-671). The early years of Hezbollah were marked by significant secrecy, compounded by the chaotic atmosphere of the Lebanese Civil War. The early hierarchy cannot be certainly stated, nor the extent of Iranian control, but the importance can be easily seen in Hezbollah’s manifesto. Within it they directly reference Iran and the Ayatollah himself, linking Hezbollah’s origins to the ideologies of Khomeini (Luca, 2009, pp. 80-82). The excerpt itself is as follows:

“We, the sons of Hezbollah’s nation in Lebanon, whose vanguard God has given victory in Iran and which has established the nucleus of the world’s central Islamic state, abide by the orders of a single wise and just command currently embodied in the supreme exemplar of Ayatollah Khomeini.”
(Luca, 2009, pp. 81).

It states unequivocally that Hezbollah identifies itself as the successor of the fighters of the Iranian Revolution, a cause they see as tied to God. Furthermore, the new Iran after the revolution is seen as the perfect iteration of an Islamic state, led by the unquestionable authority of the Ayatollah. This shows the importance of the involvement of Iran in the genesis of Hezbollah and how they shaped the group and its trajectory. Iran saw the anarchy of Lebanon in the midst of civil war and seized the opportunity to export its brand of revolution and militancy to the fertile battleground. This helped Iran, fresh from their own revolution, to solidify their presence in the region and exert influence, especially so close to their greatest enemy, Israel (Luca, 2009, pp. 85-89). To look at Hezbollah's origins through the lens of sociological normative constructivism, this is a direct manifestation of one state looking to export and instill their own values and norms in a non-state actor, giving them unprecedented influence in another state altogether. Though Byers (2003) provides a comprehensive view of the historical context and ideological roots of Hezbollah, the analysis focuses predominantly on the group's alignment with Iranian interests. This is in contrast to Norton (2007), who believes that Hezbollah's engagements within Lebanon demonstrate significant autonomy in their decision-making. He believes that Hezbollah's actions are driven also by local dynamics and their need to maintain legitimacy among their Lebanese supporters. Meanwhile, Levitt (2021) believes that Hezbollah's financial dependence on Iran plays a crucial role in the group's operational decisions, highlighting the economic incentives that may influence terrorist groups. Hezbollah's self conceptualization is a reflection of that seen in the Shia ideology and resistance to Western influence that were hallmarks of the Iranian Revolution. The strain of constructivism used here emphasizes how ideas and shared beliefs can be a powerful tool in state and non-state alignment, cooperation being not transactional but driven by shared normative frameworks.

2.2 Establishing Their Place

This influence was not just limited to ideology though; thanks to the training provided by the IRGC, tangible actions and decisions taken by Hezbollah and their leaders also reflected Iranian standards. Guerrilla warfare became the hallmark of Hezbollah fighters and was a direct result of the Iranian training, concluding with some of the earliest Hezbollah actions, the bombings of French and American barracks in Lebanon in 1983. It was this attack in which Hezbollah pioneered what would become their trademark; suicide bombings (Byers, 2003, pp. 30-33) (Wiegand, 2008, pp. 672). In 1984, Hezbollah began a spree of kidnappings targeting Westerners, taking professors, prominent Christians, diplomats, and journalists captive. They were often held for months in deplorable conditions and many died during captivity (Byers, 2003, pp. 36-37). Alagha (2011) argues that this is directly based on their religious ideology, Hezbollah would do anything to get foreign influence on Islam out of the country. Reinforcing these ideas and tactics was their success; the suicide bombing in the barracks and the high profile kidnappings resulted in American forces leaving the country within months. With this objective achieved, Hezbollah could focus on their main goal, getting Israeli troops out from the south of Lebanon, then eradicating Israel entirely (Byers, 2003, pp. 35-36). This conviction even went so far as to fight others who were opposing the Israelis in an attempt to dominate the area, directly, showing their deep conviction in defense of their norms. In 1986, Hezbollah clashed with communists in the capital of Beirut in an attempt to make a name for themselves as the main opponent of “Zionists”. They launched a full campaign of recruitment, intimidation, and coercion to get rid of any who might have challenged their supremacy. It was through this that they absorbed many of the smaller extremist

groups in Lebanon, uniting the varied groups under the same banner, that of Hezbollah (Blanford, 2011, pp. 1429) (Alagha, 2011, pp. 87-112).

Hezbollah had been significantly intensifying their activities in this period as well. In the months between May and September of 1985, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) operating in Lebanon recorded 248 attacks globally attributed to Hezbollah, and in the second half of the next year, they launched their "Human Wave" against Israel and the troops in the south of Lebanon. It proved costly to the terrorist group though, the "Human Wave" generally consisted of well armed and enthusiastic groups of up to two hundred Hezbollah fighters charging South Lebanon Army (SLA) and Israeli outposts in broad daylight. The casualties to the group proved tremendous, but it served little to dissuade the group or the fighters (Blanford, 2011, pp. 1503-1521). To Hezbollah, the cause they fought for was more important than the lives lost. They also used these years to harry the UNIFIL forces still operating in the country. Most of Amal and the people living in the south had somewhat cordial relationships with the UN due to the latter's work in the region; Hezbollah however, had no intention of letting a Western group operate in Lebanon. They set off multiple roadside bombs that killed French, Irish, and Fijian troops stationed in the area, leading to the withdrawal of some. Jaber (1997) argues that their violence is in direct response to the poverty of the Bekaa Valley and anger at the prosperous and meddling West and Israel. Facts dispute this though. Their bloody clashes with foreign militaries was not just limited to Western ones; Hezbollah fought against Syrian forces sent to the country to stabilize it in favor of the SLA. In an attempt to exacerbate relations with SLA and Amal, Hezbollah sent weapons to the Palestinian political group, Fatah, then considered a terrorist organization by the United States (Blanford, 2011, pp. 1532-1586) (Byers, 2003, pp. 38).

It was in this period that Hezbollah reached beyond their borders in order to fight

the Israelis. On June 14, 1985, Hezbollah fighters hijacked TWA Flight 847 on route from Athens, Greece to Rome, Italy. After gaining control of the aircraft, the hijackers beat and abused the passengers within, gathering passports to determine who may be Jewish or American. Rerouting the plane, the Hezbollah fighters landed in Algeria and demanded the release of 766 Shia prisoners from Israeli jails. They left Algeria for Beirut when they were denied the prisoner release. After various renewed demands were again denied, the plane shuttled back and forth between the two countries over the course of two days, the hijackers singled out US Navy diver Robert Stetham. In Beirut, they shot Stetham twice and rolled his body out of the plane. Though some hostages had been released in previous stops, Hezbollah removed the remaining 39 from the plane in Beirut and hid them in the city for seventeen more days until Israel released thirty-one prisoners (Byers, 2003, pp. 39-43) (Harik, 2004, pp. 64-65). The hijacking was the first time Hezbollah had acted so influentially outside the borders of Lebanon and drew them to the international eye. Suddenly, Hezbollah was more than a minor militia group operating in a war torn country; they were a global threat driven by a clear ideology and enemies.

2.3 Two Wars and Precarious Peace

The 1990s saw Hezbollah and Israel clash face to face twice, the first time in 1993 with IDF Operation: Accountability as well as in 1996 with IDF Operation: Grapes of Wrath. As Kinio (2013) states, Hezbollah's commitment to resisting the Israelis is not merely a tactical decision but instead rooted in their ideological stance, which combines their religious beliefs with their political objectives. In both of these operations Israel began targeting Hezbollah in efforts to dissuade further terror attacks and bombings from the terror group (IDF Editorial Team, 2017, *Accountability*) (IDF Editorial Team, 2017,

Grapes...). Hezbollah became prolific users of bombs and, by this time, were proficient enough to make extremely deadly Claymore type bombs that accounted for most of the fatalities attributed to the terrorist group (Blanford, 2011, pp. 2226-2239). Knio rightly argues that without Israel, Hezbollah would not exist, without a target, they could never have grown (Knio, 2013, pp. 864) In July 1993, Hezbollah perfected their aim with the claymores and killed an IDF soldier at his post and seriously injured another. In addition, Hezbollah had been firing rockets onto population centers in Israel, something Israel had been warning them for weeks to stop. In response, the Israeli Air Force attacked Hezbollah positions in the south of Lebanon, with the stated objective of hindering the growth of terror in the region. The IDF hoped to destroy already constructed strongholds and dissuade Hezbollah from building further camps, bases, and rocket firing positions in the region (IDF Editorial Team, 2017, *Accountability*).

Hezbollah had definitively embraced the rocket attack by this time as well, opting for Soviet Katyusha rockets that made life in the north of Israel deadly. After the death toll of Israeli soldiers killed by Hezbollah reached seven, for a week the two faced off. The Israeli Air Force damaged fifty-five villages in the south of Lebanon and 300,000 citizens were temporarily displaced. Though sources differ wildly in estimates, some report up to 118 Lebanese dead, including one Lebanese soldier and eight Hezbollah fighters. The rest were civilians. Israel reported 26 dead or injured civilians during this time. Due to the deadly nature, the international community quickly got involved and the United States government brokered an unsigned peace agreement between the two to stop firing rockets or attacking civilians in the future. Hezbollah broke the agreement almost immediately (Amnesty International Research Staff, 1996). Knio stresses though that "The resistance against Israeli invaders and oppressors and their regional and international allies was enunciated through the 'Karbala Paradigm' in Lebanon, which emphasizes ideas of

martyrdom, sacrifice, commitment to a cause, passion, and resistance to the oppressor." (Knio, 2013, pp. 863-864). Hezbollah put no value in the UN document because it did not align with their ideology.

Just three years later, war broke out again, with the Israeli named Operation: Grapes of Wrath. Increased rocket attacks from Hezbollah on population centers in northern Israel, especially Kiryat Shmona, led to heightened tensions between the two and numerous Israeli warnings to Hezbollah. After fighting resulted in the deaths of four civilians and two Hezbollah fighters and seven IDF soldiers, on April 8, a roadside bomb injured a Lebanese teenager and Hezbollah blamed Israel. In retaliation, Hezbollah launched rockets into Israel and the next day, launched an attack on an IDF outpost, resulting in the death of one soldier and the injuries to multiple others. Israel had enough, and on 11 April, 1996 launched Operation: Grapes of Wrath. The objective of the operation was to pressure Beirut into acting on the presence of Hezbollah in the south by pushing a wave of refugees north. In addition, infrastructure damage would compel the Lebanese government to curb Hezbollah in order to avoid further economic devastation (Amnesty International Research Staff, 1996) (IDF Editorial Team, 2017, *Grapes...*). Thus, Israel bombed Shiite villages, giving the villages warning to evacuate, then dropping bombs nearby. Hezbollah retaliated by launching an unending barrage of rockets. The attack and counterattack went on for seventeen days until a new, written agreement was brokered in which both parties agreed to a ceasefire and to stop targeting civilians; all to be monitored by a multinational oversight group (Amnesty International, 2002) (IDF Editorial Team, 2017, *Grapes...*).

Shortly before the outbreak of Operation: Grapes of Wrath, Israeli intelligence captured a document from Hezbollah fighters in which their fighting strategy was outlined and explained. First, Hezbollah fighters were not to attack unless victory was assured, the

fighters are more important than enemy casualties. They were instructed to avoid the strong and target the weak, as well as to time surprise attacks in which there was no set timeline, slipping away before the enemy had time to push their advantage. This requires patience, so the document instructs fighters to search for the perfect time to attack and to remember the great victory requires numerous small victories. Keeping up the morale of fighters is also essential and local populations are massive points of support, so reiterating the superiority of Hezbollah and what their success will be is imperative (Blanford, 2011, pp. 2144-2156) (Amnesty International Research Staff, 1996). This shows a dramatic departure from the “Human Wave” method employed in the 1980s. Hezbollah learned from the Israeli tactic of pressuring the Lebanese government and became insistent on having their own power within it, a tactic they had begun before even Operation Accountability (Blanford, 2011, pp. 2144-2156).

2.4 Political Aspirations to Blue Line Establishment

In the nineties, Hezbollah focused on Lebanon again, making the decision that would change the course of the group’s trajectory, they entered politics (Alagha, 2011, pp. 114-115). The political system in Lebanon is somewhat complex. Norton describes it best:

“Voters go to polls every four years... to vote for members of parliament. As a result of the Taëf Agreement of 1989, which marked the end of the civil war, seats are now divided equally between Christians and Muslims, in contrast to the prior distribution that favored Christians by a six to five ratio. The 128 parliamentary seats are subdivided along confessional lines” (Norton, 2007, pp. 480).

When the elections of 1992 arrived, the first time the Lebanese public would go to the polls since 1972 and the end of the Lebanese Civil War, Hezbollah decided to expand

their legitimacy and enter politics as an official political party. Alagha (2011) argues that from a theoretical standpoint, it was necessary for Hezbollah to integrate into Lebanese politics as the public sphere enables participation in public choice (Alagha, 2011, pp. 120-140). With the approval of their Iranian backers, Hezbollah entered and won eight of the Shia seats in their constituencies. This was certainly helped by the proclamation before voters went to the polls that it was *taklif al-shari*, or the will of Allah, for all Hezbollah members to vote for the political party in the elections, showing how Hezbollah utilized their religious ties to influence their popularity (Wiegand, 2008, pp. 673-675) (Norton, 2007, pp. 481). Within these elections Hezbollah focused deeply on non-religious points such as economic development, political inequities, direct support for the poor, and security, gaining support from those within their communities which may have not voted for them otherwise. Hezbollah has since then participated in every parliamentary election in Lebanon, with their support only growing. In the most recent 2022 elections, the Hezbollah-Amal coalition received the largest number of votes from any coalition, though Hezbollah lost their place to Lebanese Forces (LF) as the top party (Wiegand, 2008, pp. 676) (Kamal & Choukini, 2022).

The 1996 elections saw Hezbollah receive seven seats and by 2000 they had ten, but that year saw the achievement of something they had long worked towards. It was the establishment of the Blue Line, only a month before voting, that may have pushed Hezbollah's success (Nohlan, Grotz, & Hartman, 2001) (Del Col, 2021). The Blue Line was a line drawn by the UN between Lebanon and Israel in summer 2000. Never intended to serve as a border, it was instead a demarcation of withdrawal lines. The 120-kilometer-long line is overseen by UNIFIL peacekeepers who ensure there are no border crossings under UN Resolution 1701. This meant partial withdrawal of Israeli forces from the south of the country, something Hezbollah had been fighting for since

their earliest days (Del Col, 2021). Hezbollah had found their place in Lebanon. They occupied a precarious place between legitimate political party and violent militants, still considered a terrorist organization and a major threat to the West. They had achieved major goals before they even reached two decades of existence and had carved a name for themselves through blood and violence.

3. Methodology

This study undertakes a rigorous quantitative exploration of Hezbollah's rocket and terror attacks against Israel and the correlation to pivotal regional events. It employs a Poisson Bayesian regression model adapted for use in a time series analysis, spanning the years 2000 to 2015. This research digs deep into the relationship between acts of terroristic aggression from Hezbollah and the broader geopolitical landscape. Focusing on the potential surges in violence immediately following significant events, this study discerns nuanced patterns of behavior and conducts an in-depth analysis by utilizing the statistical programming language R. The foundation of this research lies in the creation of comprehensive data sets that detail the rocket attacks against Israel launched by Hezbollah. The data was gathered from authoritative sources including the Global Terrorism Databank, Jewish Virtual Library, and various news sources. This data, each point representing one attack, contributes to the pivotal creation of a robust time series data set. Proving the frequency of Hezbollah's rocket and terror attacks over this time period requires precise attention to the chronological order and timing of each occurrence. This approach ensures that each attack can be ascribed to an event or not and that the data set is not just a collection of discrete instances, but instead a representation of the evolving landscape of conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. Use of a Bayesian

model allows the analytical process to unravel this intricate relationship between major regional events and the frequency of Hezbollah rocket attacks on Israel since there is a lack of sufficient data points. The 2006 Lebanon War is a pivotal anchor for comparison in the study that allows for understanding of direct confrontations between Hezbollah and Israel. By juxtaposing this against the major geopolitical events selected for the study, a nuanced exploration can help to comprehend the multifaceted impacts on Hezbollah's actions. Proving via R the rise of attacks by Hezbollah after geopolitical shifts is foundational to ascribing the theoretical framework. One cannot look into the motivations of a repeated action if the actions repetition is not proven.

With similar care to detail, the selection of events for study in this thesis is not random. Each has a valuable situational component that helps to test why Hezbollah remains static or increases attacks on Israel during certain conflicts. Not only are they major geopolitical events, Hezbollah has connections to each one, some strong, some tenuous, that led them to get involved in some manner. Most importantly, the question of why they act is best answered by sociological normative constructivism. A major factor why the Second Intifada was selected for comparison in this thesis is to test the strength of their connection to their Palestinian roots. Analyzing Hezbollah's activities while their enemy, Israel, is fighting a war against a different group, gives the opportunity to study whether or not the terrorist group adapts their behaviors and habits to the circumstances affecting their enemy. An increase in terror attacks against Israel coming from Hezbollah shows that they are influenced by Israel being involved in a war, regardless of whether that war is with Hezbollah. Already, it is clear that they are willing and able to provide assistance to groups that are fighting Israel, but this thesis looks to ascertain whether or not they change their frequency of attacks as well. A decrease in attacks can also signify the influence of a war between Israel and a third-party. A decrease in Hezbollah terror

attacks on Israel could indicate that the group was focusing their time and attention on other matters, or other variables are acting on Hezbollah's behavior..

The Iraq War was selected for comparison within this thesis due to its nature as a war involving neither Hezbollah nor Israel. Iraq was not an important ally of the group and, more importantly, the ideology of the prominent terrorist group in the country at the time, Al Qaeda, differed significantly from Hezbollah's ideology. Hezbollah's interpretation of American Imperialism highlights how normative pressures from regional anti-Western sentiments influenced Hezbollah's decision to attack. This aims to strengthen their ideological narrative against Western influence and confirm their place in the regional identity. Looking into Hezbollah's role in the Iraq War, it's clear to see that the enemy being fought is more important than differences in groups. After Israel, Hezbollah's greatest enemy is the United States and the West as a whole. It can be assumed that watching an Islamic government overthrown by their enemies likely influenced Hezbollah to provide support. Analyzing whether or not this perceived provocation influenced them to increase rocket attacks against Israel at the time, can help security forces determine whether or not regional conflicts with tentative connections to their enemies can still incite violence.

The Syrian Civil War was selected based on its opportunities presented for Hezbollah. It provided a shifting goal for senior Hezbollah members to interpret. The allegiances were not always clear cut and enemies sometimes worked together, providing the norms-led Hezbollah elite to interpret the changing region's impact on their group as it occurred. Initially, Hezbollah welcomed the Arab Spring movement that led to it; given the Arab citizens' support for the Palestinian cause, regime changes could prove positive for their struggle. Later, Hezbollah became more selective in their support due to shifting politics and religious affiliations. Hezbollah supported the demonstrators in Bahrain where the Shia majority protested against the Sunni regime, and openly called

for Arab regimes to give more support to the Bahraini citizens, just as they had for the Libyans beforehand. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, following the theory of sociological normative constructivism, claimed that this had to do with the Bahraini majority being Shia and thus similar to Hezbollah supporters (Al-Aloosi, 2020, pp. 147). Much more impactful was when the Arab Spring reached Lebanon's border in Syria. In Syria, Hezbollah staunchly supported the Assad regime, standing by the dictator in the uprising. Syria was of strategic importance to Hezbollah and had long been involved in the group as a strong backbone. Hezbollah and the Assad regime connected on political ideology as well as on social and military matters. Fearing the unknown consequences of the fall of the Assad regime, Hezbollah originally intended to divert the revolutionary leanings to political dialogue instead. As the crisis escalated, Hezbollah openly acknowledged their active involvement within the civil war, and restated their support for Assad fearing the rise of other extremist group Isis if he fell (Al-Aloosi, 2020, pp. 142-145). This wavering of support then eventual full commitment shows Hezbollah weighing their values and positions. Declaring a side in a civil war includes an ideological announcement of support, and Hezbollah's in this situation is the reason it was selected.

The 2014 Gaza War was selected due to Hezbollah's especially close relationship with Gaza. It holds value as an event in which Hezbollah lent support and got involved while also maintaining a high number of attacks on Israel. The shared Palestinian ideologies of both groups, as well as many of Hezbollah's founders being Palestinian, lends credence to the theoretical idea that Hezbollah is pushed to attack Israel when it feels the Palestinians are under particular hardship. Similarly to the case with the Second Intifada, it gives researchers the chance to see if Hezbollah is moved to act and react to Israel fighting a third party group. Hezbollah's increase in attacks on Israel when the

latter is fighting concurrent wars, is a valuable route to gauge how they attempt to weaken Israel when their attention is elsewhere. Dually, they hope to give a benefit to the Gazans and Hamas who they see themselves reflected in. This identification with the party opposing Israel is driven by their shared culture and norms though, wishing to aid a group they identify with. Studying this conflict is therefore imperative to the fundamental question of this thesis.

Within the realm of data analysis, a Bayesian regression model stands out for the ability to elucidate limited data. Adapting this to a time series analysis therefore offers valuable insight into the past and the opportunity to foresee the future, when there are only a few reference data points. To put it simply, time series analysis deals with data that involves points over time; the Bayesian model allows for this to be examined with a lack of points. These data points, representing Hezbollah attacks towards Israel, act as interconnected dots. These informative priors were chosen for the parameters related to the frequency and timing of Hezbollah's attacks, reflecting established patterns observed in previous conflicts. Once patterns are identified, time series analysis offers the ability to predict future trends. By understanding the past patterns, analysts can make informed forecasts of what may come. This does not mean that it is an infallible method of figuring out when Hezbollah is likely to attack or launch rockets across their southern border, instead it can be best used to help give insight into what Hezbollah may choose to do as evidenced by their past actions. Utilizing a Bayesian regression model to quantitatively assess these correlations allows for a nuanced understanding of the probability distributions of Hezbollah's attack frequencies in response to each event. This offers a probabilistic framework that accommodates uncertainty and variability in the data. Preprocessing of the data, described below, includes cross referencing multiple sources to resolve discrepancies and ensure consistency while the Bayesian model itself

offers a detailed analysis of the immediate impacts due to its robustness in handling complex time series data and its ability to incorporate prior knowledge into the analysis.

The model was tailored to handle the complexities of count data typical in the analysis of terrorist attacks, while the most suitable model was determined to be a Poisson model due to its ability to model count data. The historical priors were based on previous Hezbollah attack patterns, with a standard deviation of 10 and a mean of 0, indicating a neutral expectation of the variables affect on the total casualties and attack count. To ensure robust sampling, the model was run with a 2000 iteration warm-up and 4000 iterations on four chains. The regression analysis focused on examining the effects of the Second Intifada, the Iraq war, the Syrian Civil war, and the 2014 Gaza war on the attack frequency. To visualize the posterior distributions of the model parameters, half eye plots were used in order to show the density of the samples and the 95% credibility intervals. This provided a probabilistic framework that accommodated the data uncertainty and variability. The priors were chosen based on established patterns observed in previous conflicts involving Hezbollah, as reflected in historical data and knowledge of the group's behavior. The choice of these priors is justified by their ability to enhance the robustness of this time series analysis in the probabilistic framework. The lack of data points available made other analysis methods less reliable, therefore a Bayesian method was most suitable. This is possible through the incorporation of prior knowledge integral to the Bayesian regression model. This is essential for the study of political science since complex phenomena such as military interventions and political uprisings have deep historical and contextual backgrounds. A Bayesian model handles uncertainty particularly well by giving a probabilistic interpretation of the model parameters, therefore quantifying uncertainty in ways that can be interpreted. Additionally, with limited or small data sets, such as here, a Bayesian model can utilize

prior knowledge to make more reliable inferences. This ensures the study has a comprehensive analysis that considers both historical patterns and the uncertainty that goes hand in hand with quantifying political science. This ultimately provides for a more detailed and accurate prediction.

Selection of the time frame for this thesis represents the strategic significance and convergence of critical geopolitical events within the Middle East between 2000 and 2015. This period provides a nuanced lens in which Hezbollah's rocket attacks against Israel are analyzed in the context of broader regional dynamics. The Second Intifada represents a period of significant Palestinian uprising against Israel. The period of intense violence and unrest stirred anti-Israel sentiments across the region and urged Hezbollah to align itself with the Palestinian cause. The rocket attacks from Hezbollah during this time were likely symbolically important and not just militarily significant. Meanwhile, the Iraq War gives a unique look at the terrorist organization's actions during regional instability. Hezbollah's connections to the groups operating within Iraq at the time give an insight into how terrorist organizations interact with one another. Hezbollah was vehemently opposed to the US led invasion and viewed it as a manifestation of Western influence, something at the core of their ideology. Fallout from the Iraq War had profound implications for the Middle East and created an environment ripe for Hezbollah's assertive actions against Israel. Similarly, the Syrian Civil War shows how regional unrest spurred Hezbollah into action. The uprisings and political changes across the Arab world introduced a new wave of instability, yet for Hezbollah these events created opportunities. The group aimed to maintain its relevance among shifting groups and retain their dominance in the region over other terrorist groups. The Gaza war provides a look at how Hamas led Gazan uprisings shifted Hezbollah's targets back to Israel. As supporters of the Gazan terrorist group through their joint Iranian sponsors,

they had deep connections to the events in Gaza in the summer of 2014. Pivotal to this analysis though, is the 2006 Lebanon War. The 34-day conflict between Hezbollah and Israel showcased the terrorist group's military capabilities, particularly its new style of fighting. Analyzing this conflict within the chosen timeframe provided a comprehensive understanding of Hezbollah's strategies and tactics when fighting in a direct war with Israel.

The data was gathered from several reputable sources. First of these is the Jewish Virtual Library's terrorism data bank. The Jewish Virtual Library is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that focuses on Jewish learning and Holocaust history. They are a research institution that provides educational material in English intended to further discussion and combat anti-Semitism. Another wing of the Library deals with terrorism in Israel and counter-terrorism mechanisms, reporting definitively on rocket attacks and other incidents (Jewish Virtual Library, 2023). These numbers were cross referenced with the Global Terrorism Databank (GTD), a well-respected database of terror attacks. The database is part of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) from the University of Maryland in the United States. START receives their funding from the US government as well as the governments of the UK, Germany, and others. The GTD tracks terrorism incidents starting in the year 1970 until present, with data from every country worldwide. By the GTD's definition of terror, in order to be included in the database an attack must be intentional, include violence or the threat of it against people or property, must not be from agents of the state, and must have some sort of political, social, or religious goal (Start.umd.edu, 2022). The data used therefore comes from these trusted sources in order to ensure accuracy. Determination of the start dates for each of the conflicts was easy; they all had well-accepted start dates and events. Data representing rocket and terror attacks for every month between January

2000 and December 2015 was gathered from the aforementioned websites and added to a dataset. The criteria used for determining the eligibility included: the attempt be identified as coming from Hezbollah, regardless of other affiliation that may also have played part. Rockets intercepted by the Iron Dome were counted, rockets that were misfired and landed in territory outside of Israel were counted, rockets which cannot be definitively linked to Hezbollah were not considered.

Each data point collected from the sources represents the number of rocket attacks and the resulting casualties as recorded on a monthly basis. The data set included the dates of attack, the types of attacks, and the resulting deaths and injuries. Utilizing the programming language R, particularly the 'ggplot2' package for data visualization and 'lubridate' for data time handling, the data was then processed. The raw data was imported into R and displayed to verify its accuracy and completeness as well as identifying and handling missing values. Any missing values were manually added. Using basic statistical methods outliers were identified that were significantly beyond the expected range. It was determined whether or not this was an error or simply an out-of-the-ordinary event. Formatting was checked for all date Entries and terminology was standardized. Processed data was organized into a chart, first with descriptive columns outlining the type of aerial attack, and the second, number of deaths and injuries (Data Set 1). These were then combined into two categories, Attack Count and Casualties (Data Set 2). This data set was the one used in order to create the following three graphs. The process of creating this EDA visualization of temporal variations in Hezbollah attacks in the selected time range utilized the ggplot2 package in R. Initially, the required R packages, tidyverse, ggplot2, and lubridate, needed loading for essential data manipulation, visualization, and date-time handling. The data was then imported into R and partially displayed for accuracy and checking purposes before being checked

for missing values. Finally, the relevant plot was created for EDA, as shown below in Graph 1, Graph 2, and Graph 3. The data set encompasses records of Hezbollah attacks and the resulting casualties in the time period of 2000 to 2015, and includes three critical columns: Date, Attack Count, and Total Casualties. This data is visualized in Graph 3, a dual-axis time series plot created in R. The two Y-axes, one for the number of attacks, and another for total casualties, have been scaled in order to ease comparison of the two. The lines and points represent the trends over time and the different colors represent the distinct y-axes. This preprocessing before applying the Bayesian model allows the data to be better visualized and interpreted from the Bayesian model, improves the data quality allowing the model to perform better, and reduces the chances of bias and mistakes in the model due to false data inclusion.

4. Empirical Findings

Data Set 1

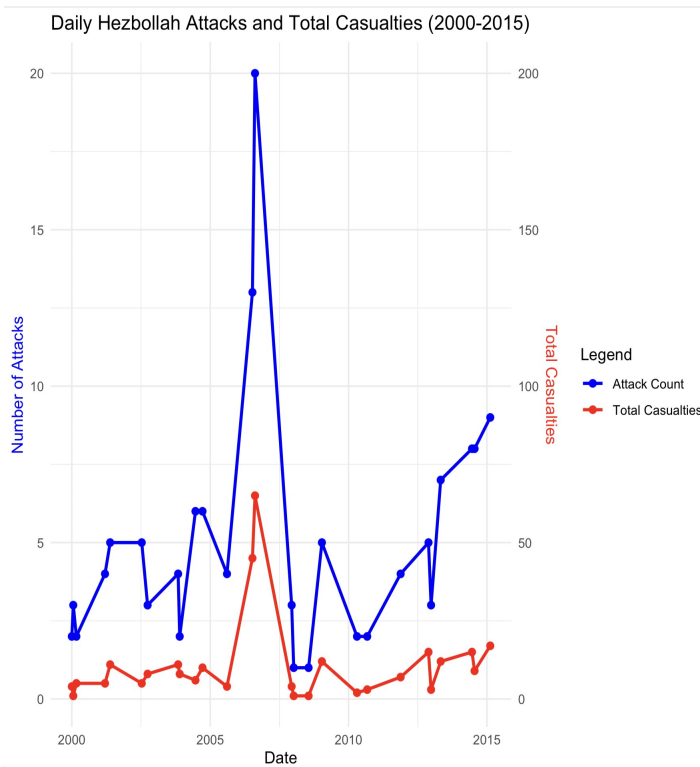
Date	Number of Rockets	Number of Explosives	Number of Ballistics	Deaths	Injuries
2000-01-01	2	0	0	1	3
2000-02-03	3	0	0	0	1
2001-05-12	1	0	0	2	0
2001-07-01	0	1	0	1	4
2002-08-04	4	0	1	3	6
2003-09-19	2	2	0	2	3
2004-06-17	6	0	0	5	10
2005-11-12	3	0	1	1	2
2006-08-14	15	0	0	20	30
2007-12-27	4	1	0	3	5
2008-01-08	1	0	0	0	1
2009-03-15	5	0	1	4	7
2010-04-22	2	0	0	2	2
2011-05-18	1	0	0	1	1
2012-07-12	4	1	0	3	4
2013-10-04	5	0	0	4	5
2014-11-05	6	1	0	5	7
2015-12-10	7	0	1	6	8
2000-01-20	3	0	0	0	1
2001-03-14	4	1	0	2	3
2002-07-12	5	0	0	1	4
2003-11-25	2	2	0	3	5
2004-09-21	6	0	0	4	6
2005-08-10	4	0	0	2	2
2006-08-15	20	0	0	25	40
2007-12-12	3	0	0	1	3
2008-07-22	1	1	0	0	1
2009-01-14	5	0	0	4	8
2010-09-04	2	0	0	1	2
2011-11-19	4	0	0	3	4
2012-12-25	3	0	0	0	3
2013-05-01	7	0	0	5	7
2014-06-18	8	0	0	6	9
2015-02-14	9	0	0	7	10

This dataset presented contains the full data collection from the period 2000-2015. It details the dates of various Hezbollah attacks against Israel, the type of attack, and the resulting deaths and injuries. Visualizing the raw data is vital to understanding the analysis (Start.umd.edu, 2022) (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024) (Jewish Virtual Library, 2023)

Data Set 2

Date	Attack Count	Total Casualties
2000-01-01	2	4
2000-03-01	2	5
2001-05-21	5	11
2002-09-27	3	8
2003-11-04	4	11
2004-06-20	6	6
2006-07-12	13	45
2008-01-08	1	1
2010-04-22	2	2
2012-11-21	5	15
2014-07-22	8	9
2000-01-20	3	1
2001-03-14	4	5
2002-07-12	5	5
2003-11-25	2	8
2004-09-21	6	10
2005-08-10	4	4
2006-08-15	20	65
2007-12-12	3	4
2008-07-22	1	1
2009-01-14	5	12
2010-09-04	2	3
2011-11-19	4	7
2012-12-25	3	3
2013-05-01	7	12
2014-06-18	8	15
2015-02-14	9	17

This dataset presented details the Dates of Hezbollah attacks and the casualties. Values from the Data Set 1 were combined for plotting. This helps to see how casualties are related to attack counts (Start.umd.edu, 2022) (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024) (Jewish Virtual Library, 2023).



```

>
> ggplot(data) +
  geom_line(aes(x = Date, y = Attack_Count, color = "Attack Count"), size = 1) +
  geom_point(aes(x = Date, y = Attack_Count, color = "Attack Count"), size = 2) +
  geom_line(aes(x = Date, y = Total_Casualties / 10, color = "Total Casualties"), size = 2) +
  geom_point(aes(x = Date, y = Total_Casualties / 10, color = "Total Casualties"), size = 2) +
  scale_y_continuous(
    name = "Number of Attacks",
    sec.axis = sec_axis(~ . * 10, name = "Total Casualties")
  ) +
  labs(
    title = "Daily Hezbollah Attacks and Total Casualties (2000-2015)",
    x = "Date"
  ) +
  scale_color_manual(
    values = c("Attack Count" = "blue", "Total Casualties" = "red"),
    name = "Legend"
  ) +
  theme_minimal() +
  theme(
    axis.title.y.right = element_text(color = "red"),
    axis.title.y.left = element_text(color = "blue")
  )

```

Graph 3: The final graph and code show the combined various graphs overlaid in order to further visualize spikes in terrorist activities (Start.umd.edu, 2022) (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024) (Jewish Virtual Library, 2023).

Once these graphs and data have been established, showing predictable spikes in 2006 and around the dates of the geopolitical instability, a structured approach in R was used to determine whether Hezbollah attacks and casualties rise in the first six weeks of significant regional conflicts such as the Iraq invasion, the Second Intifada, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Gaza War. Additionally, the 2006 Lebanon War serves as an example of direct conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, giving a comparison of warfare on Hezbollah activities. In order to do this, the conflict periods had to be laid out. The starting month for the conflicts was defined as: Second Intifada-September 2000, Iraq War-March 2003, Lebanon War-July 2006, Syrian Civil War-March 2011, and 2014 Gaza War-July 2014. The data from Data Set 2 was uploaded and then filtered by date, utilizing the first six weeks of all the aforementioned conflicts. Data was visualized into a graph in order to assess if spikes were present during the starting term of each conflict. In order to complete the final statistical analysis, several steps were followed first to prepare the data.

Data Set 2 was loaded into R then columns were separated and converted into date formats and numerical formats. Then the conflict periods for each event were determined, incorporating the first six weeks of each conflict, and data was filtered through this constraint. After, a baseline period was set up in order to compare the conflict data. This baseline was set to 24 months before each conflict period, coinciding with none of the events and only incorporating times of non-conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. This data captured allows for comparison between the conflict periods and non-conflict periods.

```

> library(tidyverse)
> library(tidybayes)
> library(brms)
> file_path <- "/Users/gillianstark/Downloads/Hezbollah Attacks final.csv"
> analysis_data <- read_csv(file_path, show_col_types = FALSE)

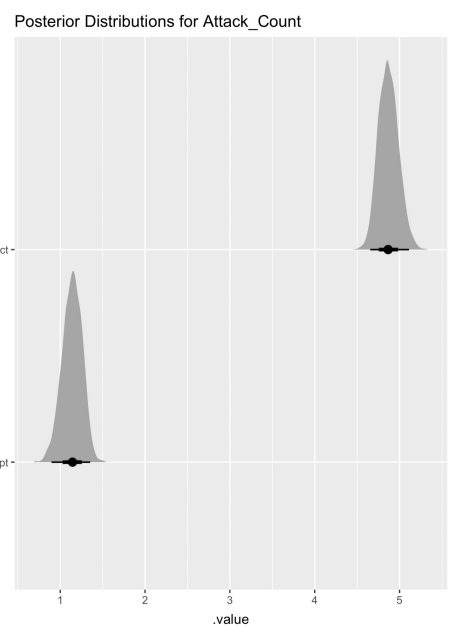
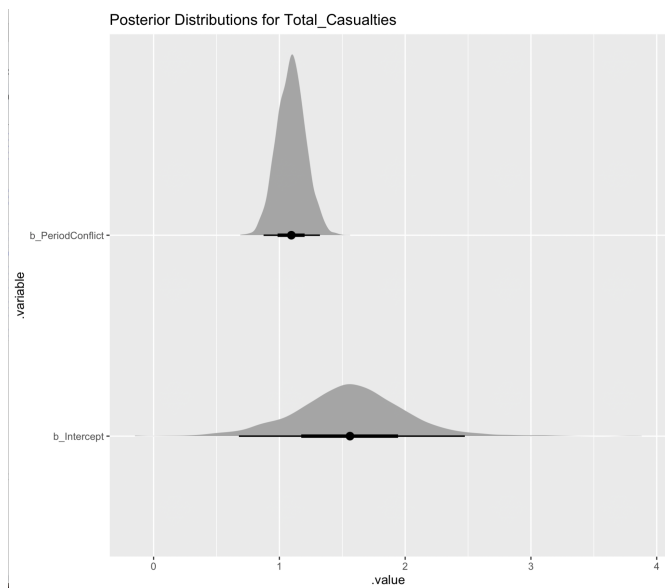
> analysis_data <- analysis_data %>%
+ separate(col = `Date;Attack Count;Total Casualties`,
+         into = c("Date", "Attack_Count", "Total_Casualties"),
+         sep = ";") %>%
+ mutate(
+   Date = as.Date(Date, format = "%Y-%m-%d"),
+   Attack_Count = as.numeric(Attack_Count),
+   Total_Casualties = as.numeric(Total_Casualties)
+ )
> conflict_periods <- data.frame(
+   Conflict = c("Iraq Invasion", "Second Intifada", "Syrian Civil War", "2014 Gaza War", "2006 Lebanon War"),
+   Start_Date = as.Date(c("2003-03-01", "2000-09-01", "2011-03-01", "2014-07-01", "2006-07-01")),
+   End_Date = as.Date(c("2003-03-31", "2000-09-30", "2011-03-31", "2014-07-31", "2006-07-31"))
+ )
>
> extended_conflict_periods <- conflict_periods %>%
+ mutate(End_Date = End_Date + days(15))
> conflict_data <- analysis_data %>%
+ filter(Date >= min(extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date) & Date <= max(extended_conflict_periods$End_Date)) %>%
+ mutate(
+   Conflict = case_when(
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[1] & Date <= extended_conflict_periods$End_Date[1] ~ "Iraq Invasion",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[2] & Date <= extended_conflict_periods$End_Date[2] ~ "Second Intifada",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[3] & Date <= extended_conflict_periods$End_Date[3] ~ "Syrian Civil War",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[4] & Date <= extended_conflict_periods$End_Date[4] ~ "2014 Gaza War",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[5] & Date <= extended_conflict_periods$End_Date[5] ~ "2006 Lebanon War",
+     TRUE ~ NA_character_
+   )
+ ) %>%
+ filter(!is.na(Conflict))
>
> baseline_data <- analysis_data %>%
+ filter(Date >= "2000-01-01" & Date < "2015-01-01") %>%
+ mutate(
+   Conflict = case_when(
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[1] - months(24) & Date < extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[1] ~ "Iraq Invasion",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[2] - months(24) & Date < extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[2] ~ "Second Intifada",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[3] - months(24) & Date < extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[3] ~ "Syrian Civil War",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[4] - months(24) & Date < extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[4] ~ "2014 Gaza War",
+     Date >= extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[5] - months(24) & Date < extended_conflict_periods$Start_Date[5] ~ "2006 Lebanon War",
+     TRUE ~ NA_character_
+   )
+ ) %>%
+ filter(!is.na(Conflict))
> analysis_data <- bind_rows(
+   conflict_data %>% mutate(Period = "Conflict"),
+   baseline_data %>% mutate(Period = "Baseline")
+ )

```

The script utilized for this shows how R can be leveraged for advanced data analysis like the Bayesian model used here. The primary objective was to first read the data set pertaining to Hezbollah attacks and preprocess data to set out a conflict period for each event and a baseline, as previously mentioned. It sets out to show trends, anomalies, or outliers in the data. The scatterplots associated with this can be seen in Graph 1, Graph 2,

and Graph 3. Finally, to fit Bayesian models in order to analyze the effect of these periods on attack counts and casualties. The script filtered Dataset 2 to extract data that corresponds to conflict and baseline time periods, utilizing those for the Bayesian modeling. A Poisson Bayesian regression modeling is used here to analyze the impact of conflict periods on attack counts and total casualties due to its flexibility in handling small sample sizes. Since the Data Set 2 is relatively small, a Bayesian regression model uses prior knowledge of the data to estimate the probability distribution of the attacks on the date ranges. This gives a much more comprehensive framework for interpreting data with a relatively small sample size than what could be offered otherwise. A Poisson distribution was chosen as the most effective for this since it can best model count data. This model was run with a prior distribution mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 10, meaning no significant positive or negative effect is believed for the 'Period' variable to have on 'Attack Count' and 'Total Casualties', the response variables. The standard deviation of 10 allows for a wide range of possible true effects. The model was run with 4,000 iterations across four chains and a 2,000 iteration warmup in order to ensure the parameter space is effectively covered by the sampling and the reliability of the results.

Finally, the script extracted and visualized the posterior distributions. The posterior samples are distributions of model parameters intended to show a probabilistic view of the values of the parameters which are created using both data and prior information. Plotting for Attack Count and Total Casualties with a half-eye plot showed the density of posterior samples and the 95% credibility interval and showed how certain or uncertain the effect of conflict periods on the two response variables is.



```
> posterior_casualties <- posterior_summary(model_casualties)
> print(posterior_casualties)
```

	Estimate	Est.Error	Q2.5	Q97.5
b_Intercept	1.5626687	0.4478978	0.6780825	2.4743608
b_PeriodConflict	1.0947055	0.1133154	0.8744144	1.3222372
sd_Conflict__Intercept	0.9647358	0.4205960	0.4298036	2.0727836
Intercept	1.8943977	0.4456355	1.0117139	2.7949258
r_Conflict[2006.Lebanon.War,Intercept]	1.1091894	0.4503851	0.2037559	2.0198022
r_Conflict[2014.Gaza.War,Intercept]	-0.2440204	0.4576455	-1.1873204	0.6461186
r_Conflict[Iraq.Invasion,Intercept]	-0.4867174	0.4694314	-1.4470550	0.4270875
r_Conflict[Second.Intifada,Intercept]	0.1856240	0.4600915	-0.7410023	1.0904322
r_Conflict[Syrian.Civil.War,Intercept]	-0.5639808	0.5506547	-1.7663694	0.4497627
lprior	-6.5266559	0.1326958	-6.8823130	-6.4059630
lp__	-341.8203299	2.4334460	-347.4953097	-338.0667707

Graph 4, Graph 5: The half-eye graphs showing the posterior distribution of the Bayesian regression models showing the impact of periods of conflict on Israeli total casualties and number of attacks

```
> posterior_attacks <- posterior_summary(model_attacks)
> print(posterior_attacks)
```

	Estimate	Est.Error	Q2.5	Q97.5
b_Intercept	1.140579	0.11744928	0.8976657	1.353377
b_PeriodConflict	4.869551	0.11796372	4.6550203	5.110794
Intercept	2.616201	0.08215000	2.4480030	2.765681
lprior	-5.489143	0.01795018	-5.5233586	-5.454132
lp__	-4796.544383	1.00628945	-4799.2506206	-4795.574997

The above provides a comprehensive statistical analysis of the impact regional conflict has on Hezbollah's attacks on Israel and the casualties they suffer therefore. The half-eye plots visually show the posterior distributions of the estimates, showing the central tendencies of the estimations made by the program and the uncertainties of the Bayesian model as well. For Total Casualties, the b_intercept centers around ~1.56 with the 95% credibility interval ranging from 0.68-2.47, suggesting that the baseline level of casualties is ~1.56. Meanwhile, the b_intercept for Attack Count is 1.14, with a 95%

credibility interval from approximately 0.87-1.35, indicating the baseline attack count is ~ 1.11 in non-conflict periods. The effect of conflict is shown through $b_PeriodConflict$'s posterior mean of 1.09, indicating a significant increase in total casualties during the conflict periods, just as in the measuring of attack count. The conflict period effect is ~ 4.87 with a 95% credibility interval of 4.65-5.11 indicating a substantial increase in Hezbollah attacks during times of conflict. The standard deviation ($sd_Conflict_Intercept$) is ~ 0.094 which shows some variability on the impact of different conflicts, though the attack count standard deviation is ~ 2.61 , reflecting considerable variability in attack counts across different conflicts. The 2006 Lebanon War is likely the cause for these outliers and large standard deviations. A higher posterior mean for both that and the 2014 Gaza War indicates that those two conflicts had more severe impacts on the total casualties than the other conflicts. The Iraq Invasion, Second Intifada, and Syrian Civil War also show positive but slightly lower estimates, indicating their influence, though substantial, varied in intensity. Though one sees that attack count indicates a much more robust and consistent increase during regional conflict as opposed to casualties, this is easily explained by the fact that not all attacks result in casualties, but there can be no casualties without an attack.

The results derived from these Bayesian models are pivotal to understanding the dynamics of Hezbollah and how they choose to react in times of regional conflict. From this, several critical conclusions can be drawn. First, there is correlation between conflict and attacks. The significant increase in both attacks and therefore casualties during times of regional conflict confirms that Hezbollah's activities are deeply tied to the instability of the region, though the limited scope of the dataset constrains the ability to make robust statistical correlations. Future research including expanded data and wider ranges of analytic techniques to deepen understanding of the terrorist groups inclinations. Still, this

data serves to underscore the strategic nature of Hezbollah attacks, which are likely increased during periods of broader conflict to increase chaos and further their own political and ideological goals. The density of the posterior samples presented here suggest a high degree of certainty of truth of the hypothesis that Hezbollah's actions are driven by their ideologies in the face of broader geopolitical events. Similarly, the analysis shows that escalations in regional violence correlate with increased Israeli casualties at the hand of Hezbollah. During the Second Intifada, as seen in the data, there was a marked increase in the number of casualties, showing Hezbollah's aggressive tactics during this time. The US invasion of Iraq shows a similar pattern, though with a slightly wider credibility interval, demonstrating some variability and perhaps the influence of other factors. The Syrian Civil War, however, shows a high density of posterior sample and narrow credibility interval, underscoring Hezbollah's aggression at this time.

While the methodology employed in the study is robust and offers significant insights into the relationship between Hezbollah terror attacks and major political events, it is essential to acknowledge some limitations that impact the findings and their interpretation. The primary limitation of the study is the reliance on secondary data sources such as existing databases, news, archives, and academic literature. While these sources were rigorously vetted to ensure that they are reliable, they are not able to capture all nuances of Hezbollah's activities. For example, some smaller scale attacks and less publicized events may have fallen through the cracks and therefore not been documented comprehensively, demonstrating that the quality and accuracy of secondary data can vary. This can lead to essential biases or gaps within the data set. In order to remedy this, multiple sources were referenced to ensure consistency and accuracy, but the inherent limitations of secondary data still exist. All data points for attacks and casualties were

cross referenced from multiple sources, ensuring the data matched. If there were discrepancies, other sources were consulted in order to verify numbers or dates.

Additionally, the study's focus on short-term effects of geopolitical events, specifically analyzing the immediate six weeks following each event, gives a robust analysis, but overlooks long-term impacts, which may take years to develop. This narrow focus provides a clear scope and timeframe for analysis, but overlooks long-term patterns and impacts. Political events often have long lasting effects that can influence terrorist activities for years to come. Certain trends and correlations that develop over a longer time frame might be missed by concentrating on short-term effects. A longitudinal analysis, though not the focus of this thesis, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term impacts of these geopolitical events and Hezbollah's activities. In a similar vein, the geopolitical context within which the terrorist group operates is highly complex, involving numerous external variables. While this study attempts to isolate the impact of very specific events, other concurrent developments also play significant roles. Variables such as changes in regional alliances, economic conditions, or internal political dynamics within Lebanon can make it challenging to attribute changes in Hezbollah's behavior solely to the events under investigation.

Finally, the Bayesian regression model used within the study offers numerous advantages in handling complex time series data, but also has its limitations. The effectiveness of the model depends on the quality and relevance of the prior information used, therefore, any inaccuracies in these priors affect the results. While the Bayesian approach is well suited for dealing with uncertainty and incorporating prior knowledge, it requires some computational resources and prior ability to implement correctly, limiting the accessibility and reproducibility of study for other researchers. Clear documentation of

the modeling process and assumptions are provided in order to address this, but the inherent complexities of the method remain a consideration.

5. Discussion and Analysis

The statistical analysis explores Hezbollah's involvement in the Second Intifada, the 2003 Iraq War, the 2006 Lebanon War, the Syrian Civil War, and the 2014 Gaza War and provides a comprehensive understanding of the group's strategic behavior and impact on regional stability by examining the frequency and severity of attacks on Israel. This is meaningless without the lens of sociological normative constructivism to explain it, though. The Second Intifada marked a period of significant violence between Palestinians and Israelis, with Hezbollah providing material and strategic assistance to the Palestinian groups. During the US led invasion of Iraq, more indirect effects of Hezbollah's activities came to light. The data shows only a moderate increase in Hezbollah attacks on Israel during this period which reflect the anti-Western and anti-Israeli sentiments of the group, but also the perceived distance of war from them. This war gave Hezbollah the opportunity to expand its influence in the region by collaborating with other militant groups. The 2006 Lebanon War provided a critical point of comparison for this analysis. Understandingly, the data for this period shows a significant spike in Hezbollah attacks, showing the groups capability and willingness to engage in large-scale military operations. It also served to highlight the limitations of the IDF in dealing with non-state actors like Hezbollah. The group's involvement in the Syrian Civil War was substantial, giving invaluable support to the Assad regime against their many opposition foes. Though the data indicates an escalation in attacks on Israel, it's weak, showing the group's strategic shift to utilize instability in Syria to its advantage. This period still shows a clear trend of increasing frequency and severity of attacks due to the groups need to secure their position in the

region and demonstrate their ideological foundation. Although primarily a conflict between Israel and Hamas, the 2014 Gaza War saw extensive involvement from Hezbollah. Statistical analysis reveals that, aligning with their historical behavior of supporting Palestinian causes, the terrorist group notably increased their attacks on Israel. Data underscores their strategy of maximizing their impact and stretching Israeli defense capabilities by attacking when Israel is otherwise focused. Overall, the Bayesian regression model and statistical analysis provide valuable insights into Hezbollah's strategic behavior. Through the lens of sociological normative constructivism, it becomes clear Hezbollah's push to attack Israel is driven by their ideological goals. The intensity of these attacks can similarly be explained through sociological normative constructivism by looking at how deeply Hezbollah identifies themselves with their perceived victim in the conflict and the ideological ties to that group. Below, a simple background of Hezbollah's involvement in each event is provided in conjunction with a description of how the data supports the sociological normative constructivist view of the terrorist group's motivation to increase aggression towards Israel.

5.1 The Second Intifada and Hezbollah

Going back to 2000, as a new millennium dawned, the data shows there was to be no peace. In order to understand the reasoning for Hezbollah to involve themselves in the Second Intifada, the event itself must be explained. The still extant Blue Line, discussed in the Literature Review, had achieved a major part of Hezbollah's foundational goals, the expulsion of the IDF from southern Lebanon. Further south, Israel was dealing with internal issues. The failure of the Camp David Summit to find a lasting solution to the Israel-Palestine issue in July 2000, caused increased tension between the two groups. When the Israeli Opposition Leader Ariel Sharon visited Temple Mount in Jerusalem, a

place off limits to Jews, tensions escalated to violence. The resulting violent protest was met with equal pushback from Israeli police that left five people dead (Byman, 2011, pp. 114) (Levitt, 2003). The initial three months of the Intifada were characterized by chaotic violence. Riots saw Israeli police using rubber bullets and water cannons on Palestinians. The Al-Qassem Brigades, the militant wing of terror group Hamas, adopted suicide bombings as the standard weapon for the Palestinian groups involved, perhaps due to suicide bombing's successful use by Hezbollah against Israel (Levitt, 2003) (Dowty, 2004, pp. 19-20) (Matta, 2016, pp. 82-83).

Hezbollah did have deep ties to Palestine, after all they had been harrying Israel in the Golan Heights for years by then (Byman, 2011, pp. 933) (Levitt, 2003). "Hezbollah has built a web of alliances with the Palestinians, and has often spoken on behalf of expanding their rights and allowing them access to the economy, even though the prevalent opinion in Lebanon opposes... *tawtin* (naturalization) of the refugees" (Norton, 2007, pp. 477). Hezbollah had long provided material support to Hamas and other terrorist groups active in the West bank while training militants and smuggling arms into the contested territory. Now, they began a policy of direct involvement, ramping up the arms smuggling and beginning suicide bombings, sniper attacks, roadside shootings, surveillance on prominent Israelis, and even planning kidnappings (Levitt, 2003).

After the success of the Blue Line, Hezbollah officials viewed Israeli society "as weak as a spider web: it looks strong from far away, but if you reach out your hand you can sweep it aside," (Byman, 2011, pp. 933) and they intended to take advantage of it. They thought that their sheer willpower and conviction in their beliefs would allow them to defeat any technological innovation Israel might have in its military. This is a direct show of how the ethical and moral obligations of Hezbollah far outweigh any material gains or losses. They were, just as in their early days of rushing SLA outposts, so sure of

their cause, it mattered not the cost or how many lives were lost. Thus, after the beginning of the Second Intifada, Hezbollah focused much of its attention to the Palestinian front. Meanwhile, the Palestinians were learning and replicating Hezbollah's method to great success (Matta, 2016, pp. 71).

After multiple attempts in the 1990s to infiltrate Israeli society, Hezbollah began using long established drug smuggling routes into Israel to receive intelligence and espionage. This provided Hezbollah with a network of Arab-Israelis within the country to provide them with any information they could want. Unfortunately, "most of these operatives were motivated not by ideological solidarity, but by the prospect of financial gain... and they tended to cooperate with the Israeli authorities" as soon as they were found out or discovered (Levitt, 2003). This furthered Hezbollah's feeling of proof that norm-based motivations are the superior motives. Hezbollah and even the IRGC got involved directly in Palestinian terror at this time as well, recruiting Palestinians to plan and carry out terror attacks in their name. Iran became so involved that they began a program flying hundreds of mildly injured Palestinians to Tehran hospitals where they were treated like celebrities, given positions speaking about the Palestinian cause and crisis, and meeting with important figures such as Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. The Palestinians were invited to join Hezbollah with promises of future good treatment and up to \$30,000 for starting terrorist cells back in the West Bank (Levitt, 2003). Hezbollah had long allowed Hamas leaders to live in Beirut and south Lebanon hosted numerous training camps for Hamas fighters. In fact, Iran thought it best to rely on Hezbollah rather than local operatives within Palestine to carry out attacks and manage the money flowing in (Esfandiari, 2013).

Hezbollah trained Hamas operatives on bomb making and strategies, heavily influencing Israeli casualties during the war. By March 2002, when the deadliest terror

attack of the Second Intifada came, there were already almost 350 Israelis dead, a majority from suicide bomb attacks (Amnesty International, 2002) (Levitt, 2003). On March 27, 2002, a 25 year-old man dressed as a woman entered the dinner hall of the Park Hotel in Netanya where a Passover dinner for elderly Israelis was occurring. The terrorist then blew himself up; thirty people were killed and over 160 injured. Though the terrorist belonged to Hamas, the hand of Hezbollah was apparent in the attack. The video of the suicide bomber reading his will was first broadcasted on Hezbollah's state television channel, Al-Manar, and later Hamas outright admitted that they had brought in a Hezbollah bomb expert in order to make even more deadly explosives for this attack (Levitt, 2003) (Cole, 2007, pp. 184-185). Hezbollah's influence in the Second Intifada is of no question, and they certainly did not stop their actions in the north at the time as well. Hezbollah remained active in the Shebaa Farms region, carrying out multiple cross-border attacks in this time (Levitt, 2003). They remained a serious contender in their home region while also helping and training Israel's enemies to the south of them. Understanding how Hezbollah's actions correlate with Israel's violent engagements with other groups gives insight into how third parties may affect stability between groups at odds with one another. The terror group channeling resources and efforts towards supporting Palestinian groups fighting Israel sheds light on their strategic decision-making process and their tactical considerations as well as the normative pressures from their cultural and regional values. This led to their support for the Intifada and reinforced their anti-Israeli stance. A sociological normative constructivism lens shows how they legitimize their actions by aligning themselves with the Palestinian cause.

According to sociological normative constructivism, alignment with Palestinian

causes as well as deeply ingrained cultural motivations led Hezbollah to significantly identify with the ideological and strategic details of the Second Intifada (Huysmans, 2005, pp. 45, 47). This is explicitly related to their cultural and ideological motivations as a group operating within the region. Hezbollah likely viewed the violent uprising as an opportunity to reinforce its anti-Israel position and therefore took advantage of this to demonstrate their solidarity with the Palestinians. Hezbollah's leadership has publicly praised the Intifada, and associated media sources broadcast messages of support as the group provided training, funding, and logistical support (Levitt, 2005, pp. 45). Clearly, Hezbollah capitalized on regional hostility against Israel during this period by increased attacks and hoped to harry Israel in the north, adding an incentive to attacking in that period. The widespread sentiment in the Middle East that Israel oppressed the Palestinians provided a conducive environment for Hezbollah to tap into this collective anger and legitimize their terrorism (Norton, 2007, pp. 477).

The period saw a dramatic uptick in Hezbollah's rhetorical and operational aggression, as shown through the analysis and the confirmation of a statistically significant increase in attacks on Israel during this period. The density of posterior samples in the data set indicate that this period was marked by an escalation in Hezbollah's military operations into Israel as the frequency of these attacks increased considerably, as compared to the baseline times. This underscores the group's decision to take advantage of Israel's vulnerability during the time of the Second Intifada. An increase in casualties in this conflict suggests Hezbollah may have adopted similar tactics to the Palestinians during this period, targeting mainly civilian areas in order to sow more chaos. This is especially likely considering the tactical assistance Hezbollah lent Hamas in this period (Levitt, 2003) (Cole, 2007, pp. 184-185). This strategic escalation provides strong evidence that

Hezbollah attacks are not isolated incidents, but instead part of a broader strategy of escalation and attack. Their alignment with the Palestinian cause makes them more likely to exploit Palestinian terror attacks to further their own similar interests. They act and react based on what they view as necessary to retain their status quo and ideological beliefs. These carefully calculated actions maximized impact and showed Hezbollah's adaptive approach to terror, utilizing Israel's lack of attention on the northern border to further their own terroristic goals. This demonstrates how regional dynamics can shape the strategies of non-state actors who may use emotional responses in the region or globe to legitimize or amplify their own actions. This is of great value to those who wish to pursue new research around prevention based security within borders. These findings suggest that understanding the interplay between these factors can help states to anticipate and mitigate the fallout from these threats in the future.

5.2 Invasion and Construction: Iraq, USA, Hezbollah, and Israel

In 2003, a war broke out that would profoundly reshape the political landscape of the Middle East. The US-led invasion of Iraq had far-reaching consequences for those involved, the region as a whole, and international relations going forward. Hezbollah's comparatively lower number of attacks during this event can perhaps be due to their weaker connection to the history and players in the war. The 9/11 attacks led to US President George W. Bush identifying Iraq as part of "an axis of evil" and inflating concerns about Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction. Iraq's historical link to terrorist organizations led to a coalition of Western forces to launch a military intervention in Iraq and attempt to topple Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. The attacks themselves brought attention to the state of terrorism growing in the Middle East and how it could affect the West. On March 20, 2003, the US-led coalition forces invaded Iraq, in a

preemptive move to deter terrorism coming from the country with the stated goal to topple the regime of Saddam Hussein, who had been in power since 1994 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023). The US and coalition forces advanced rapidly and captured major cities, such as Baghdad, within weeks. As Saddam Hussein's government collapsed, the dictator went into hiding and the invading forces claimed a significant victory. By December of that year, American forces had located and captured Saddam Hussein and declared a transition to a new Iraq. The country was in chaos and the victorious forces felt it necessary to pursue the daunting task of stabilizing the nation they had only months before invaded. There was a power vacuum due to the swift capture of Saddam Hussein and sectarian conflict broke out, marked by a wave of insurgency. The US and the coalition forces tried various strategies to stabilize the situation within the country but had little effect and the humanitarian crisis grew to immense proportions. This phase of the Iraq War which lasted until its end in 2011 resulted in deep divisions within Iraqi society and left mistrust and enmity among the fragile nation (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2023).

Though Hezbollah did not have a direct part in this conflict, its regional nature showed effects on the Lebanese terrorist group. Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda, the main terror group active in Iraq at the time, were on different sides of sectarian lines. However, experts have long believed that the two groups have much closer cooperation than one would suppose. It has been well documented that a group of Al-Qaeda fighters visited Hezbollah training camps within southern Lebanon during the mid-1990s. The purpose of this arrangement was to have the newly founded Al-Qaeda organization receive training from the much more proficient Hezbollah in explosives and insurgency. In return, Al-Qaeda would provide Hezbollah with money and fighters to further their goals. It's hard to determine how much the groups have worked together in the years since, but there is significant evidence that Hezbollah provided assistance to Al-Qaeda after the 9/11

attacks, just as Western intelligence suggests that the two have collaborated in further training of fighters as well as money laundering and gun running (Kaplan, 2006). Their founder, Iran, utilized Hezbollah in order to continue their covert activities in Iraq that had been prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s. Hezbollah even created their own military unit, Unit 3800, solely dedicated to supporting Iraqi Shia terrorist groups opposing Western forces within Iraq. Western intelligence showed that very soon after the invasion, Hezbollah fighters actively reached out to Iraqi Shia groups in order to reestablish ties as well as train and advise terrorist operations. Though Hezbollah's core interests lay in terrorist and economic activities in Lebanon and targeting Israel, this marked a shift for the group from their small-scale battle against Israel to a more activist role within the region (Levitt, 2021, pp. 10, 14-15).

To look into Hezbollah's hand in the Iraqi War, one of the best sources is Matthew Levitt's 2005 report for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The well recognized political scholar specializing on Hezbollah delves into the complicated world of Hezbollah's financial networks, attempting to shed light on the organization's sources of funding and how that connects to Al-Qaeda. The report begins by dissecting Hezbollah's diverse funding streams and highlights its activities, both legitimate and illicit, that help it to generate revenue. Levitt demonstrates how Hezbollah operates a global fundraising apparatus that taps into the Lebanese diaspora abroad as well as sympathetic supporters as well as charitable donations, business enterprises, and criminal enterprises. Levitt reveals the extensive overlap between Hezbollah's financial network and those of terrorist group, Al-Qaeda. In the years preceding the 2003 Iraq war, there were multiple instances in which Hezbollah's funding channels intersected with Al-Qaeda operations. This suggests the common donors to their causes and that there could be collaboration across financial lines, though it may be indirect or through a third-party. This financial cooperation is led by an

ideology in common, radical Islam, though they belong to different sects. These motivations are what could be driving Hezbollah to collaborate with Al-Qaeda in financial endeavors. Both groups share very strong, anti-Israel and anti-American sentiments. Further, their opposition to the West and its involvement in the Middle East provides a rich context for potential cooperation. Ideological alignment alone, of course does not mean that there is still actual collaboration between the two, but it should be emphasized that ideological underpinnings might influence certain financial transactions and interactions between individuals who may be affiliated with or helping both organizations (Levitt, 2005).

Long opposed to Western influence in the Middle East, Hezbollah has rooted much of its ideology in opposing what it sees as imperialistic attempts, particularly by the US (Luca, 2009, pp. 79) (Blanford, 2011, pp. 931-944). Therefore, the invasion of Iraq was seen as a blatant act of aggression aimed at consolidating American power in the region and a direct threat to sovereignty and stability in the MENA region. By positioning itself as a defender of Islamic values, Hezbollah once more looked to bolster its legitimacy and authority. The chaos and instability resulting from the Iraq invasion provided Hezbollah with just this opportunity; they increased military action against Israel and presented themselves to the wider region as a bulwark against Western and Israeli aggression (Levitt, 2005). This narrative popped up again in the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon War, when it was especially good at stylizing Hezbollah's resistance and boosting its image of prestige in the region (Johnson, 2011, pp. 87-90).

In addition, the war in Iraq gave Hezbollah the backdrop to frame its struggle as a resistance movement and one fighting against Western imperialism. They were anti-colonialists, not terrorists (Levitt, 2005). By linking their cause of exterminating Jews

and destroying Israel to that of the Iraqi civilians and fighters resisting “American Occupation”, Hezbollah was able to foster a sense of shared goals and solidarity with various other anti-West factions in the region. Not only did Hezbollah’s strategic use of this conflict reinforce their anti-West credentials but it also helped them spread their base of support, as sociological normative constructivism suggests they should. The data clearly shows this. Credibility intervals in the data, though substantial, vary due to the complex nature of the conflict, but suggest, despite the general trend of increased aggression towards Israel, this was influenced by various factors. Hezbollah is a multifaceted group, and this serves as a prime example of their lack of uniformity across different contexts and conflicts. The response of Hezbollah against Israel during the US invasion of Iraq is one of the weaker correlations in this study. This is likely due to the weakened connections between the two groups and ideological gaps between this conflict and the hierarchy of Hezbollah’s wider goals.

5.3 The Main Event: The 2006 Lebanon War

The opposing point of comparison within this thesis is the direct war between Israel and Hezbollah. On July 12, 2006 the 34-day conflict began, marking the last time Israel directly fought a war with Hezbollah. That morning, as IDF soldiers conducted a routine patrol along the border between Israel and Lebanon about a mile from the village of Zarit, Hezbollah operatives ambushed the two vehicles. Three IDF soldiers were killed and two others were taken by the terrorists into Lebanon as hostages. This attack was preceded by at least four other attempts by the terrorist group to kill and kidnap IDF soldiers in the north of Israel. Hezbollah had been preparing for this war since the establishment of the Blue Line in May 2000 and Israeli withdrawal from the south of Lebanon. From then, Hezbollah took advantage of the terrain of southern Lebanon and developed a network of

bunkers, trenches, tunnels, and fighting positions across southern Lebanon both in the villages and in the rural areas. These bunkers were well-equipped with electricity, running water, and even air conditioning. It's well accepted that the Iranian government funded these bunkers, and it's suggested that perhaps even North Korea was involved. Hezbollah spent these years training their fighters in Lebanon, Iran, and Syria focusing on new guerilla tactics that emphasized hybrid warfare (Johnson, 2011, pp. 45-48).

Less than two hours after the kidnapping the IDF sent a platoon-sized force and a tank across the border in order to retrieve the kidnapped soldiers in a retaliatory attack and in order to capture a strategic hill on the Lebanese side which functioned as a Hezbollah post. During this attempted infiltration of Hezbollah strongholds, the tank was destroyed and five soldiers within it killed. Further strikes from Lebanon into Israel targeting towns and a military outpost attempted to divert Israeli attention, but the IDF responded with tremendous force. The IDF was determined to retrieve the kidnapped soldiers and the bodies of those who had been killed; seventeen Hezbollah locations within southern Lebanon were bombed as well as three bridges spanning the Litani River (Johnson, 2011, pp. 51-79).

The Israeli military had long withheld a plan for southern Lebanon in which they would cut off the south of the country from the north and rout out Hezbollah in a sealed off area. They decided, though, to instead rely on short ground raids and extensive airstrikes. In the course of the war, the Israeli Air Force, IAF, dropped more than 17.3 million flyers warning civilians to evacuate before the 19,000 bombs and 2,000 missiles they dropped on about 7,000 targets. These targets included Hezbollah command posts, munitions convoys, rocket launchers, bridges, ammunition caches, and traffic intersections. The IAF was so successful in battering each of their objectives that when the ground war commenced, it came as a shock to the IDF how ill prepared they were to

face their opponent. Outdated and faulty intelligence led IDF commanders to believe that Hezbollah was much less organized than in reality. Commanders were dismayed that the group was entrenched so deeply in the south and operated so smoothly. The IDF quickly lost numerous soldiers to the fighting in southern Lebanon, many killed in skirmishes with Hezbollah fighters trying to take and retake towns and villages in the south (Johnson, 2011, pp. 64-71).

After an airstrike on a building in Qana killed several children on July 30, Israel felt immense international pressure to seek a ceasefire. International opinion had turned considerably after the event and even though most of the leaders of prominent nations had stood behind Israel, the United States soon began working with France in order to introduce UN resolution 1701 to the UN Security Council. Further, a week later on August 6, a Katyusha rocket killed 12 IDF paratroopers and a Hezbollah rocket hit the northern Israeli city of Haifa killing three civilians. On top of this, Hezbollah launched up to 150 rockets per day on the north of Israel that had the population terrified and losing confidence in the IDF as the effective military force that the Israelis had thought them to be (Johnson, 2011, pp. 70-71).

As the UN-brokered peace deal neared an agreement, on the evening of August 11 the IDF launched Operation Changing Direction 11. This was to be a massive ground operation into the south of Lebanon in order to reduce the volume of rocket fire into Israel and also ensure the soon to be approved UN security council resolution would be favorable to Israel. Four different divisions of the IDF entered the south of Lebanon in order to take back strategic positions; they fought harsh battles against a well prepared and well armed Hezbollah force. Three bloody days of back and forth ensued until Monday, August 14 when a cease-fire agreement went into effect. Hezbollah reported 250 to 800 members killed while the IDF reported more than 120 soldiers dead. As the dust of

war settled, it became clear that Hezbollah had profited far more from this war than Israel. The IDF came under intense criticism for the failures of their logistic systems, the inexperience of the political leadership, and the incapability of the generals among many others. An investigation into the failures, named the Winograd Commission, found that there were such severe supply chain breakdowns that some soldiers in Lebanon were resorting to begging for food and water from the Lebanese civilian population. Johnson (2011) highlights this particular section of the commissions report and notes it as extremely important for two reasons. The first is that they found the IDF inadequate in facing the varied types of enemies that Israel had. Second, they warned that the dependency on the IAF to provide standoff fires, could not be relied upon to compel non-state actors to stop firing rockets at Israel nor could they force other States involved to stop these attacks on Israel (Johnson, 2011, pp. 71-85, 87).

The idea of a limited war against a nonstate actor operating from a failed state was now a major danger to Israeli society. Here, Hezbollah operated out of the uncontrolled territory of the south of Lebanon with weapons and training provided by Iran. This gave the non-state actor immense ability to strike deep within Israel using numerous kinds of guided missiles. The Bayesian regression analysis indicates the statistically significant impact of the 2006 Lebanon War on both the total casualties and attack counts. The posterior distributions for this event appeared distinct, further supporting the above. Both total casualties and attack counts indicated a substantial increase compared to the baseline, providing a quantitative measure of the impact of the conflict while providing a robust framework for estimating these effects and accounting for uncertainty in the data. The Conflict is shown through the data just how deadly it was. This was no longer an enemy in which their greatest weapons, suicide bombings and indiscriminate wave-style attacks, were used on rural outposts and bus bombings. Instead, this was a deeply

entrenched and well-trained group organized into units and armed with advanced weapons (Johnson, 2011, pp. 87-90). The 2006 Lebanon War marked a significant turning point in the history of Hezbollah, Israel, and the broader regional dynamics of the Middle East. The conflict revealed Hezbollah not as the guerilla force of its early days, but instead an entity with strong ideological motivations and external support. It also highlighted the IDF's limitations and the lack of preparedness in confronting non-state actors deeply entrenched within failed states.. These lessons would prove immensely important in subsequent geopolitical events in the region, most notably the Syrian Civil War. The upcoming revolution in the neighboring country would create a complex and evolving environment, one which would further shape the strategies, alliances, and conflicts of terrorist groups like Hezbollah.

5.4 Regional Instability and Non-State Actors: The Syrian Civil War

Similar to the Iraq War, Hezbollah, though statistically increasing their attacks on Israel, did not pay as much attention to northern Israel as they had in other conflicts. Different from the Iraq War, this was not due to their tenuous ties to the involved groups, but for the strength of them instead. To understand the Syrian Civil War, one must understand the Arab Spring which began in 2010. When protesters in Tunisia and Egypt quickly toppled the dictatorship in their respective countries in quick succession, many other Arab countries were inspired. The protests quickly spread to other countries such as Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. It's in the last of these in which Hezbollah had the most influence and power. Thus it would be the outbreak of revolution in Syria that was marked as a comparison point for the purpose of this thesis. In mid March 2011 protests broke out in southern Syria calling for the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad. The brutal

crackdown that resulted caused Syrian opposition forces and militias to launch attacks on the government, evolving into a cycle of violence and Civil War. Each faction was funded and armed by rival countries, seeking to take advantage of the situation in order to fight out their own conflicts. In this chaos, Hezbollah found multiple outlets in which to increase and demonstrate their power (Augustyn, 2023).

Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict marked a significant turning point for both the terrorist group and the Syrian regime. As evidence of Hezbollah actions in Syria mounted, the terrorist group denied the claims that they were acting there for two years, before finally announcing it in 2013. The question of Iranian involvement and Hezbollah's side of the civil war has thus been a serious topic of discussion in the years since. Hezbollah leadership asserts that Iran was informed of their decision to intervene in Syria, even hinting that Iran may have helped them. In the early days, though Hezbollah denied their involvement in Syria, evidence surfaced quickly through funerals and media reports. Still, the terrorist group's involvement was gradual, indicating that it was voluntary. Estimates of the number of Hezbollah fighters that were active in Syria at the time suggest a substantial involvement (Al-Aloosi, 2020, pp. 144-147, 152).

Most prominent of this evidence is Hezbollah's participation in the battle of al-Qussair. Years later, as calculation became easier, scholars believe approximately 1,200 to 1,700 Hezbollah fighters participated in the battle, though Hezbollah claims that it was only in order to secure the Lebanese borders and to protect the Shrine of Zainab. Still, there is much evidence that they were active in areas such as Aleppo, Idlib, and Daraa. Hezbollah fighters participated directly in battles, much different than the tactics they employed in their traditional guerrilla warfare against Israel. Hezbollah also trained forces loyal to Assad and provided intelligence as well as proliferated propaganda to aid the

Syrian regime. Hezbollah's given causes for their involvement in the Syrian Civil War based on several pretexts. First, they claimed to be protecting the Lebanese Shia Muslims living in Syria who were threatened by the Civil War and other extremist groups. Additionally, Hezbollah claimed it was working to secure the Lebanese Syrian border, and to protect the Shrine of Zainab, as mentioned before. In addition, groups such as ISIS that were operating in Syria at the time were an existential threat to Lebanon and Hezbollah itself. The organization believed that if the Assad regime fell, Hezbollah could be the next target, making Syria the last line of defense for the Shia community of Lebanon. The complex motivations that caused Hezbollah to intervene in the Syrian conflict involves intertwining political, religious, and strategic considerations (Al-Aloosi, 2020, pp. 145-155).

Hezbollah has used multiple regional geopolitical events in order to further their goals within their state and in their fight to exterminate Israel. In each conflict, Hezbollah viewed their opportunities with optimism, recognizing the potential benefit it could bring to their cause and also analyzing how regional dynamics shifted. Hezbollah often expressed solidarity with various uprisings or insurgency groups and involved themselves in significant and controversial conflicts within the region that supported small Shia groups or Muslims fighting against a power perceived as oppressive. Hezbollah's multifaceted response to the Syrian Civil War, including backing the Assad regime, aligns with their sociological normative constructivist need for resistance to external influence. They maintained their normative goal of maintaining relevance and resistance even if it meant diverting resources from direct confrontations with Israel. They often aligned their support with the group's broader mission of championing the rights of marginalized communities. However, the deeper undercurrent of interplay between political, religious and strategic

considerations illuminates Hezbollah's adaptability and the complex calculations it makes to navigate the turbulent waters of Middle Eastern geopolitics, while also bolstering support for terror and increasing power within the Lebanese parliament.

In the Syrian Civil War, the data shows increases in the number of attacks and casualties by Hezbollah. The highest posterior means and narrowest credibility intervals from the data was in the study of this conflict which suggests a significant escalation of violence during this conflict. Involvement in the Syrian Civil War is of particular note as they played a crucial role in supporting the Assad regime against the opposition forces (Al-Aloosi, 2020, pp. 144-147, 152). The intervention of international actors could be a reason for the increase and intensification of hostilities, as well as Hezbollah's involvement. The statistical analysis reveals a clear trend; as the conflict progressed, the frequency and severity of attacks surged. From the statistical models, a sharp rise in attack count and casualties over time is seen, though these reach beyond the six week testing period. During the testing period though, relatively weak correlation presents itself. This may have to do with Hezbollah being largely preoccupied with their involvement in Syria in the beginning days of the war, leaving little time nor resources for attacks on Israel, another item of note for further research. Other conflicts may take the attention of a terror group, allowing for a respite and preparation. The credibility intervals, which measure the uncertainty around the statistical estimates, are narrow, suggesting a high-level of confidence and findings that suggest a significant and clear influence. This precision and the high density of samples shows a clear account of Hezbollah's impact on the conflict and underscores the organization's deep involvement in Syria. Hezbollah, known for exploiting regional instability, utilized the Syrian Civil War to enhance its operations and influence (Al-Aloosy 2020, pp. 142-155). The war was a critical time to expand their

influence and secure strategic positions by bolstering military capabilities, testing fighting units and tactics, and acquiring new weapons. Leveraging the chaos in order to gain their foothold and key areas of Syria meant that they neglected Israel. Although the Syrian Civil War solidified Hezbollah's influence in Syria and provided a buffer zone against potential threats from Israel and other adversaries (Augustyn, 2023), it also denoted a time of comparative quiet for Israel. A nuanced understanding of the conflicts selected and studied here helps recognize the multifaceted goals of the terrorist group; they often act in ways that can be deeply detrimental to themselves, if only to help further what they see as normal. Though they did not actively attack Israel with the same frequency as during other conflicts, their involvement in the Syrian Civil War furthered their goals of harming Israel in other ways and further their own, non-Israeli interests.

5.5 Gazan Causes as Casus Belli

The 2014 Gaza War, also known as Operation Protective Edge, was a 50 day conflict between Israel and the terrorist group Hamas, the de facto governing body of the Gaza strip. Hezbollah's historic links to this group make this period, similar to the Syrian Civil War, a time of deep involvement in foreign war, according to the data and analysis. In June 2014, following a period of escalating tensions, the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teens by Hamas members in the West Bank sparked outrage. In revenge, a group of Israelis kidnapped and killed a Palestinian which in turn led to dramatic rocket fire from Hamas into Israel (Wald, 2015, pp. 9). Tensions had been escalating for months with periodic skirmishes and rocket attacks becoming commonplace and disrupting any semblance of peace. This kidnapping and murder cycle proved to be the catalyst, and Israel set about arresting members of Hamas in the West Bank, which further inflamed hostilities. Hamas responded with increased rocket fire from Gaza, prompting Israel to launch a full

scale military operation in the strip on July 8, 2014. With a goal of stopping the rocket attacks and dismantling Hamas military structure, Israel attempted to destroy the terrorist group's tunnels used for smuggling and infiltration into Israel (Robinson, 2014, pp. 96) (Wald, 2015, pp. 8-10).

While Hezbollah was not directly involved in the fighting during the 2014 Gaza War, its influence and support were deeply felt. Their involvement in the conflict can be seen through various actions, statements of support, and the provision of material aid and military expertise to their counterparts in Hamas and other Palestinian factions. Hassan Nasrallah made multiple statements of solidarity with the Palestinian people and Hamas, as well as condemning Israeli actions and calling for greater Arab and Muslim support for Gaza. This rhetoric was aimed at galvanizing regional support for the Palestinian cause and positioning Hezbollah as a central player in their resistance against Israel (Levitt, 2014, pp. 2). Primarily, Hezbollah supported Hamas by sharing military tactics and intelligence. Hezbollah has extensive experience in asymmetrical warfare, particularly from their engagements with Israel in southern Lebanon and along the northern border of Israel. This expertise, particularly in the areas of tunnel construction and guerilla tactics allowed Hamas to increase their resilience and the effectiveness of their defensive operations (Blanford, 2014, pp. 156).

In addition to this tactical support, Hezbollah was also involved in the smuggling of arms and financial assistance to Hamas, despite the blockades placed on Gaza by Israel and Egypt. Utilizing their regional connections and networks, Hezbollah facilitated the transfer of weapons and funds to Hamas providing crucial support (Wald, 2015, pp. 34). This enabled them to sustain their military operations throughout the war. Hezbollah, with backing from Iran, ensured that advanced weaponry, including rockets and anti-tank

missiles, reached Hamas fighters and Israeli targets (Crooke, 2014, pp. 44). Hezbollah's media wing's Al-Manar television network broadcast messages of encouragement, support, and resilience to the people in Gaza, intending to boost morale of Palestinian fighters and emphasize the unity of the resistance front. They promised an eventual victory over Israeli forces, an essential component of Hezbollah's strategy of psychological warfare by maintaining a spirit of resistance among Palestinians and their supporters (Norton, 2014, pp. 22).

Hezbollah's involvement in Operation Protective Edge can be attributed first and foremost to Hezbollah viewing themselves as key players in the broad axis of resistance against Israel, alongside Iran and various other Palestinian factions. By supporting Hamas, they align themselves with their overarching mission to confront and weaken Israel, and eventually destroy the Jewish state. Through this, they thereby enhance their own standing and legitimacy within the Arab and Muslim world (Harb & Leenders, 2005, pp. 178). Strategically, Hezbollah's support for Hamas distracts Israeli military focus and divides the IDF forces between two borders. By bolstering Hamas's capabilities, Hezbollah can ensure that Israel remains preoccupied on multiple fronts, weakening them on both. Not only does this alleviate the pressure on Hezbollah's own position in Lebanon, but also stretches Israeli military resources thin and complicates their strategic abilities. Altogether, this serves to further the part of Hezbollah's broad strategy of engaging Israel in a prolonged, painful conflict (Hage, 2014, pp. 67). Hezbollah's support for Hamas is rooted in a shared ideological commitment to the establishment of a Palestinian state with absence of any Jews and the liberation of Jerusalem from non-Muslim hands. Despite their sectarian differences, Hezbollah being Shia Muslim and Hamas, Sunni, the two groups are united by their common enemy and their mutual goal of ending the Jewish state. This ideological

alignment goes beyond sectarian divides and underscores the hatred for Israel apparent in both groups' political and military agendas (Schanzer, 2007, pp. 115). Perhaps the greatest influence and the biggest driving factor in Hezbollah's involvement in the 2014 Gaza War is their relationship with Iran. Iran is the principal supporter of both Hezbollah and Hamas and provides financial, military, and political backing to both groups. By supporting Hamas, Hezbollah serves to strengthen and reinforce their alliance with this coordinated front against Israel. The root of their support for Hamas during this period is their commitment to the Palestinian cause, which transcends sectarian divides. This sociological normative constructivism lens clarifies Hezbollah's actions as part of their broader normative goals of resistance against Israel.

The 2014 Gaza War had a noticeable increase in both the frequency and severity of Hezbollah attacks more so than any of the other major conflicts, other than the 2006 Lebanon War, which was used as an example of a direct war between Israel and Hezbollah. The posterior distributions of the Bayesian regression model reveal a higher attack, count, and casualty number during this period. Also, the standard deviation was higher, reflecting the variability and intensity of these attacks. This has several implications regarding the terrorist group's strategic behavior and their role within the broader political landscape of the Middle East. Their increased aggression during the 2014 Gaza War underscored the strategy of tying regional conflict to their political and military objectives, as seen in each of the previously examined conflicts. Similar to the Second Intifada, the behavior of Hezbollah during the 2014 Gaza War aligned with their historical behavior, offering deep support for the Palestinians, especially in uprising against Israelis (Norton, 2014, pp. 22) (Levitt, 2014, pp. 2 (Harb & Leenders, 2005, pp. 178)). This shows their beliefs of a norm of behavior when dealing with certain situations or groups. Hezbollah is likely to act in

violence towards Israel when Hamas is involved due to their shared ideologies regarding Israel and cultural ties, something the military and policymakers should be well aware of. Knowing this, escalations in Gaza should indicate the need for more security in the north and awareness of the possibility of attacks.

These increased attacks during the 2014 Gaza War can be seen as an attempt to maximize their impact and stretch Israel's capabilities to both the north and the south. Hezbollah's increased attacks during this period can be seen as a deliberate effort to exploit the IDF's preoccupation in Gaza, and thereby stretch the Israeli defense capabilities as thin as possible, maximizing the immediate impact of their military operations and amplifying their ideological stance as well. Hezbollah positions themselves as a defender of Muslim interests against Israeli or Jewish actions, letting this strategic alignment bolster their position (Harb & Leenders, 2005, pp. 178). Once more, Hezbollah leveraged a period of regional instability to escalate their military operations and gain tactical advantage over Israel. Hezbollah, as an enemy of Israel, has tried to position itself as a champion of Palestinian rights and a defender of their interests. This tactic is not merely a reaction to regional instability or care for the Palestinians, but a calculated move to enhance the terrorist group's regional influence. By positioning themselves as a key player in Palestinian resistance, Hezbollah attempted to attract support from Middle Eastern actors who share their anti-Israel sentiment (Hage, 2014, pp. 67). This three-pronged strategy served to achieve several objectives simultaneously. First, by forcing Israel to be on alert on multiple fronts, Hezbollah sought to expose and exploit Israeli vulnerabilities. Second, by escalating its attacks, Hezbollah aimed to show off their military prowess. Finally, the heightened aggression was intended to draw international attention to the conflict, garnering sympathy and support from other anti-Israel entities. They utilize the cultural

identity of the region and the prevailing sympathies for one group, to further their own interests and gain. This pattern showed true through the events studied here, supporting the research question and positively linking regional geopolitical events to heightened aggression from Hezbollah towards Israel. The Bayesian regression model used here provided a clear view into the notable increase in Hezbollah aggression during the selected geopolitical conflicts.

Conclusion

Upon synthesizing the theoretical framework and the data analysis presented in this thesis, a complex and comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay of Hezbollah's terrorist activities in the broader political events in the Middle East becomes clear. The thesis demonstrates how complex regional and political developments significantly influence the timing and frequency of Hezbollah attacks against Israel, providing a critical insight into the motivations and strategic decisions of this non-state actor. For instance, during the 2014 Gaza War, a noticeable spike in attacks occurred, aligning with the hypothesis that Hezbollah relies on their shared Palestinian history with Hamas to validate their aggression and fulfill their idea of a norm. This supports the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review and can be seen as proof that the terrorist group's behavior is not merely dictated by material gains, but profoundly influenced by societal norms, values, and political pressures, especially from Iran. By engaging in terror attacks during periods of heightened regional conflict, their deeply rooted cultural and religious norms serve to reinforce their identity and legitimacy as a resistance movement. Involving themselves in the fights of Hamas, a group with religious ideological differences to themselves, shows how their idea of a norm, supporting Palestinians and Iranian-backed groups, plays out in a real conflict as happened in 2014. In

many of the conflicts studied here, Hezbollah had little to gain materially in attacking Israel in the periods that they chose to, yet still went forward with their aggression in order to fulfill other motivations.

Utilizing this framework helps to illuminate how Hezbollah perceives their own role in the region, as well as their unwavering commitment to the destruction of Israel, both influenced by their religious motivations and strategic alliances. Employing a time series adapted Bayesian regression incorporates prior knowledge and estimation of uncertainty in the model parameters, accounting for all trends and uncertainties inherent in time series. It quantifies the relationship between major regional events and Hezbollah rocket attacks and suggests that Hezbollah strategically escalates their military activity in response to regional instability, capitalizing on the chaos and reinforcing their position as a player in the resistance against Israel and Western influence. This thesis contributes significantly to the field of existing literature on Hezbollah as it provides an empirical analysis of Hezbollah's actions in specific scenarios. The nuanced understanding of terrorist activity is told through the lens of sociological normative constructivism, allowing for patterns to become clear that are invaluable in the formation of policy. In addition, the integration of a Bayesian regression model to the study of terrorist activities offers a new perception of behavior not seen in the field.

Through these new perceptions, Hezbollah's activities become more understandable. Their solidarity with the Palestinian militants in the Second Intifada is supported by their attacks against Israel during this period, while the 2003 US led invasion of Iraq showed a different aspect of Hezbollah's ideology and values. This period had a profound effect on the terrorist group's activities, as the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq were perceived by Hezbollah to be an extension of Western imperialism

in the Middle East. This provided the pretext for escalating terror attacks against Israel who they viewed as a collaborator with the United States and other Western powers. The analysis shows a statistically significant increase in attacks on Israel following the invasion, clearly reflecting how Hezbollah leverages regional conflicts to advance their own agenda of resistance. The Syrian Civil War introduced a new dimension to Hezbollah's strategic calculations. Hezbollah's response therefore was multifaceted; while they supported the uprisings of other countries, Hezbollah staunchly backed the Assad regime Syria in order to maintain their own relevance and deflect attention from internal unrest. The 2014 Gaza War served as a back to basics; Hezbollah's unwavering support for the Palestinians was shown in excellent detail by their strongest increase in attacks. Similar to the Second Intifada, there was not much for Hezbollah to gain materially in this conflict. Still, their values and identity as a force of Israeli destruction led them to be deeply involved in both providing support to Hamas, and also stretching the IDF thin by significantly increasing rocket attacks and other terroristic activities along the northern border of Israel.

Of course, the most pivotal event in the context of this study is the 2006 Lebanon War. This direct confrontation revealed Hezbollah's military capabilities and their ability to sustain a prolonged conflict. They challenged Israeli military superiority and asserted their resistance narrative with strategic use of terror and attacks on Israel. Naturally, the empirical data indicates a significant spike in attacks during the war, but also gives a direct comparison between active conflict and other geopolitical conflicts in the region. This helps to highlight the intricate relationship between the terrorist group's actions and the broader security landscape of the Middle East. The temporal patterns of Hezbollah's attacks reveal just how closely regional events are tied to Hezbollah's military strategy,

with significant strikes happening during periods of heightened conflict and instability. This underscores the importance of understanding the sociopolitical context in which non-state actors operate and the correlation between this and chronic instability and complex power dynamics. The findings offered within this thesis are valuable insights into the driving factors of terrorist activities and the potential triggers for escalation. Hezbollah's actions show clear patterns and motivations; by recognizing these, effective strategies for de-escalation, conflict management, and long-term peace building can be developed.

The patterns in the analysis show that Hezbollah may continue to exploit regional instabilities to further its own objectives in the future. The empirical foundation is solid, yet speculative motives behind Hezbollah's actions during geopolitical instability in the Middle East can provide deeper insights. Hezbollah's activities are not isolated events, but instead are influenced by and contribute to broader regional dynamics. For example, the group's actions during the Second Intifada were largely driven by their historical links to the Palestinians while their involvement in the Syrian Civil War was driven more by ideological alignments. Exploring these interconnections also help uncover potential linkages between different actors and events and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the regional security landscape. Historical data analytics on Hezbollah activities provide valuable insights, allowing future researchers to devise targeted research tactics to isolate variables. Future research looking into the exact type of attack (eg. rocket attack, suicide bombing) would help define what sort of defense is needed, and allow time to engage in diplomatic efforts to mitigate their risk by stabilizing the region. Researching this through the lens of sociological normative constructivism creates an approach that addresses not only material gains, but also the ideological narratives adopted by Hezbollah,

demonstrating an integrated approach to defense, involving integrating economic, social, and political strategies into these military-led policies is necessary.

Within the framework of this thesis, extending the time frame to a longitudinal one from Hezbollah's beginnings in the 1980s until the current period, elucidates behavioral patterns that can provide a much more comprehensive view of the group's strategies and how their tactics evolve in response to regional dynamics. Additionally, examining the influence of other external actors such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, and China on Hezbollah can provide a broader, clearer picture. The impact of foreign military intervention, economic sanctions, diplomatic efforts, and regional stability and security is well known and often studied, but connecting this to the predictive data analysis done within the thesis can provide a more effective counter-terrorism strategy. While interpreting the results derived from the Bayesian model, the multifaceted nature of Hezbollah's behavior, influenced by a myriad of external variables beyond the specific events analyzed, must still be recognized. Regional alliances, economic conditions, and internal political dynamics within Lebanon play distinct roles in shaping the actions of Hezbollah. The results of the Bayesian model indicate that geopolitical events do correlate with increases in Hezbollah attacks on Israel, however, caution must be used when interpreting these findings as they don't account for concurrent developments and other potential drivers of behavior. Moreover, the model's reliance on secondary data sources, despite rigorous vetting, may introduce gaps due to the possibility of missing relevant activities and lack of nuance of Hezbollah operations. Turning a terror attack into a numerical data point is a difficult task. Less publicized events or smaller scale attacks may not be comprehensively documented, which in turn affects the quality and accuracy of the data set. Focusing on the immediate six weeks following each event gives a clear view of the immediate reaction of the terror

group, but often terror develops over time, and thus a longitudinal approach could offer a more comprehensive understanding of these forms of insights.

Despite these gaps, the thesis provides a novel analysis and new insights into Hezbollah's strategic decision making processes. It found significant correlation between major regional geopolitical events, and the frequency of Hezbollah terror attacks against Israel, while the analysis revealed that the geopolitical events highlighted here have discernible impacts on the operational activities of Hezbollah. The group's responsiveness to regional dynamics is underscored by the Bayesian regression model applied in this research. These findings are critical as they offer valuable insights into the strategic behavior and decision making processes that characterize the interplay between non-state actors and broad geopolitical developments. The implications of these findings are profound for regional security policies and future research. Closely monitoring geopolitical events allows policymakers to anticipate potential escalations in Hezbollah's activities. By understanding the triggers and patterns of such attacks, proactive measures and diplomatic strategies to mitigate risks can be developed and implemented, keeping citizens safe and the terror of Hezbollah in check.

Post Script on Current Events

It should be noted that as this thesis was being written, the terror attack of 7.10.2023 took place and the subsequent war in Gaza unfolded. Though beyond the scope of this paper, it provided a real life look at predicting agents such as this paper offers. War is messy, and facts and fiction get twisted in ways that only time can unravel. As this is written, the war is ongoing, and so any numbers and data are estimates at best. Still, the first months of war are already long behind, so, tentatively, we can make judgements. The

attack on October 7 marked a turning point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when militants from Gaza launched a surprise offensive that resulted in thousands of casualties and widespread destruction in the south of Israel. This attack led to an Israeli military response and ignited a new chapter of intense conflict in the region. This thesis analyzes Hezbollah's historical responses to regional conflict and political events, and thus the findings can be applied in order to gain insight into how Hezbollah has reacted to this latest crisis in regional stability.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Hezbollah's actions were closely monitored due to their historically demonstrated pattern of responding to significant regional events with escalations of their own military activities, particularly rocket attacks against Israel. True to these patterns, there was an observable increase in tension along the Israel Lebanon border. The leadership of Hezbollah issued statements of solidarity with Hamas and with the Palestinian cause, aligning with their historical support for resistance movements against Israel. These actions are consistent with group ideological and strategic goals and play directly into the theoretical framework of sociological normative construct that was used in this thesis. Hezbollah's support for Hamas and the Palestinians in this conflict is not merely a reaction to materialistic opportunities, but instead is deeply rooted in ideological commitments and cultural values. Hezbollah's support is framed within a broader narrative of resistance and violence against Israel and the West. This narrative is the cornerstone of Hezbollah's identity and their strategic positioning within the region, as well as against the Jewish state.

As the war in Gaza unfolded and progressed, in the north Hezbollah engaged in a series of increasingly provocative actions. This was likely intended to demonstrate solidarity with Hamas, challenge the IDF's ability to respond, and maintain their own relevance as a key player in the regional resistance front. This increased military activity

along Israel's northern border served to stretch the Israeli defense capabilities and force them to divert resources and attention to multiple fronts, thereby weakening them. This tactic aligned perfectly with Hezbollah's historical strategy of exploitation. Moreover, this thesis highlights the influence of broader geopolitical events on Hezbollah's actions. The October 7th attack and ensuing war occurred in a context of heightened regional instability, which includes the ongoing Syrian Civil War and violent militias operating in Iraq. This on top of escalating tensions between Iran and Western powers. Hezbollah's response can therefore be seen as part of a larger strategy to assert its influence and cement its place among these changing dynamics. Hezbollah aims to reinforce its role as a critical actor in anti-Israel resistance by escalating its activities, signaling its capacity to impact regional security.

The empirical data from this thesis suggests that periods of heightened conflict, especially those concerning Palestinians, are likely to see an uptick in violence as well as military activities. The increase in rocket attacks and border incidents following the October 7th terrorist attack perfectly fits this pattern. This underscores the importance of understanding the interplay between the strategic decisions of non-state actors like Hezbollah and regional security developments. Policy makers and security analysts must therefore consider these dynamics when assessing the risks of escalation and formulating responses. The October 7th terror attack offers a contemporary case study that validates the findings of this thesis. Hezbollah's response, characterized by their increased military activity, vocal support for Hamas, and aggression towards Israeli civilians and military, aligns with the historical patterns analyzed in this study. This real time example highlights the relevance of understanding the sociopolitical and ideological motivations of terrorist group groups and provides critical insights for anticipating and managing future conflicts within the Middle East.

Summary

The thesis explores the correlation between regional geopolitical events and the timing and frequency of Hezbollah attacks against Israel from 2000 to 2015. The Second Intifada, the Iraq War, the Syrian Civil War, and 2014 Gaza War caused significant disruption in the region, and all had ties to the terrorist group. The research question formulated for this study, how do the timing and frequency of Hezbollah rocket attacks against Israel in 2000 to 2015 align with broader regional geopolitical events, uses the lens of sociological normative constructivism to analyze motivations for aggression towards Israel. To do this, the thesis begins by outlining the context of the frequent rocket attacks on Northern Israel and the impact of Hezbollah's terrorist activities. It employs sociological normative constructivism, which posits that actors are driven by ideological, religious, and cultural norms rather than material gains to understand Hezbollah's strategic decisions. History and foundational ideology provide insight to their construction of norms and their previous aggression. To analyze the patterns of Hezbollah's modern escalations, the spikes in attacks must first be proven. The thesis employs a Bayesian regression model to analyze data from the Global Terrorism Database and other sources to reveal a statistically significant increase in Hezbollah's attacks during the selected conflicts. During the Second Intifada, Hezbollah provided substantial support to Hamas, reflecting the groups' ideological alignment and close ties via Iran. While the Iraq War correlated to only a moderate increase in attacks, it demonstrated the group's anti-Western sentiments and expertise in collaborating with other militant groups in the region. The 2006 Lebanon War saw a natural spike in casualties and attacks; it provided a window into Hezbollah's actions in a face-to-face conflict with Israel and gave modern insight into how the group fights.

Hezbollah's strategic involvement in the Syrian Civil War, which was used to solidify their regional influence, saw a weaker correlation between itself and attacks on Israel. Conversely, one of the clearest examples was the 2014 Gaza War in which the data and analysis further exemplified Hezbollah's consistent support for Palestinian groups. The approach used in this thesis provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between Hezbollah's ideologically driven motivations and regional geopolitical dynamics, emphasizing the importance of understanding terrorist actions within the wider geopolitical field.

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List of Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Raw data on attacks and casualties as collected with unneeded categories (table)

Appendix no. 2: Table representing cleaned and combined datasets showing date of attack, attack count, and casualties (table)

Appendix no. 3: Graph and the R code showing the number of casualties attributed to Hezbollah by date on Israel from 2000 to 2015 (graph)

Appendix no. 4: Graph and the R code showing the number of attacks attributed to Hezbollah by date on Israel from 2000 to 2015 (graph)

Appendix no. 5: Graph and the R code showing both the number of casualties and attacks attributed to Hezbollah by date on Israel from 2000 to 2015 (graph)

Appendix no. 6: Half-eye graph showing the posterior distribution of the Bayesian regression models showing the impact of periods of conflict on Israeli total casualties (graph)

Appendix no. 7: Half-eye graph showing the posterior distribution of the Bayesian regression models showing the impact of periods of conflict on Hezbollah number of attacks (graph)