Doctor of Political Science

Hezbollah's Legitimization of its Use of Force

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ABSTRACT

How does Hezbollah legitimize its use of force? This is the driving research question of my doctoral dissertation. The main reason for choosing this topic for a doctoral project pertains to the group’s success in justifying its conflicts within different settings for nearly four decades. The study focuses on Hezbollah’s moral discourse on war and aims at defining and describing the principles of a justified war in view of the group. In the analysis, the rules of the Just War Tradition (JWT) and the doctrine of Islamic Jihad are primarily used. The objective is to shed light on Hezbollah’s legitimization of its use of force rather than to judge the justness of its decisions to engage in armed conflicts. This is achieved by utilizing the jus ad bellum principles of the JWT and Islam.

Hezbollah belongs to the Shi’a branch of Islam and the jihad concept in this sect is underresearched compared to the Sunni and Salafist views on war which have attracted significant scholarly attention after the attacks on 9/11 in the United States. Moreover, this Islamic movement has been in the Lebanese parliament since 1992, it has allied with different religious communities in Lebanon and has paid significant attention to legitimize its thoughts and behaviors also with non-religious messages. Therefore, the group provides a good model for understanding how religious and secular messages are effectively combined in justifying decisions on war, a practice that has become increasingly common in the Middle East in the last couple of decades.

The research consists of four separate papers that look at different aspects of Hezbollah’s legitimization of its use of force. The focus is on the group’s moral discourse to justify its armed conflicts against Israel and its military involvement in the Syrian civil war. Paper 1 and 2 have similar research questions: “How did Hezbollah justify its use of force against Israel?” (Paper 1) and “What were Hezbollah’s legitimization strategy and the corresponding discourse regarding its military intervention in Syria (Paper 2). Paper 3 adds the “identity” aspect to the research, defines five distinct identities for Hezbollah, explores their role in the group’s justification of its war decisions, focuses on the just cause principle and compares the discourse used within the context of the conflicts against Israel with the one used to explain the involvement in the Syrian civil war. Paper 4 centers on the legitimate authority principle which is particularly relevant when non-state armed
groups are concerned. This paper also includes “identity” and differentiates between the group’s religious and national sources of authority claims. Finally, the concluding chapter identifies and defines Hezbollah’s principles of a justified war, with a special focus on the peculiarities in the group’s conceptions of the ad bellum principles of right intentions, last resort, likelihood of success and proportionality.