



# NONSTATE ACTORS AND ANTI-ACCESS/AREA DENIAL STRATEGIES: THE COMING CHALLENGE

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## SUMMARY

This monograph explores the emerging challenge of nonstate actors' anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategies and their implications for the United States and its allies. This monograph starts from one major development: the historical monopoly of states over precision-guided munitions has eroded, and this evolution eventually challenges the ability of the most advanced militaries to operate in certain environments. Questioning the type of strategy that nonstate actors may implement as they gain greater access to advanced military technology, the research argues some of these groups increasingly lean toward A2/AD strategies. The analysis focuses on two regions, the Middle East and Eastern Europe, where case studies include Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the Houthis in Yemen, and separatist groups in Ukraine. Three key parameters are underlined to assess emerging nonstate A2/AD strategies: a political shift toward the preservation of the status quo vis-à-vis opponents, a significant focus of military resources dedicated to A2/AD capabilities – primarily missiles and rockets, and finally, a consequential adaptation of the military units responsible for the implementation of this new strategy.

These postures are still in their infancy and should not be equated to those of major regional or world powers, such as Iran, Russia, or China. The development of nonstate A2/AD postures currently remains dependent on the ability of the nonstate actors to attract state sponsorship: Hezbollah was able to acquire its arsenal because of its support from Iran and Syria; the Houthis could not sustain their ongoing missile campaign against Saudi Arabia

without significant help from Tehran; and, likewise, the Ukrainian separatists only became a credible threat to Kiev thanks to the provision of military resources by Russia. Thus, without state sponsorship, these emerging nonstate A2/AD strategies would hardly constitute a major threat.

Bearing in mind this precondition, if a scenario of multiple nonstate A2/AD “bubbles” were to unfold, the United States and its allies could face unprecedented challenges, especially in the field of counterterrorism campaigns. For military planners considering scenarios in Europe and the Middle East, the new constraints would need to be factored in when assessing the option of using military force in regional interventions. In addition, this type of conflict would potentially raise the level of casualties and constitute a kind of life insurance for the terrorist organizations.



# NONSTATE ACTORS AND ANTI-ACCESS/ AREA DENIAL STRATEGIES: THE COMING CHALLENGE

## INTRODUCTION

On July 14, 2006, the third day of the Second Lebanon War, the Israeli corvette INS *Hanit* was patrolling Lebanese waters approximately 10 nautical miles off the coast of Beirut when it was suddenly hit by a C-802 anti-ship missile. Four soldiers were killed and the boat almost sank. Fired by Hezbollah, the missile had been supplied by Iran. After the conflict, government investigations in Israel revealed significant mistakes. Specifically, intelligence agencies had no information about an Iranian transfer of an anti-ship missile to Hezbollah. Although some military planners in Tel Aviv had warned such a scenario would call for an appropriate response from the Israeli Navy to protect its forces, the information failed to translate into operational orders at the level of the ship's commander.<sup>1</sup>

This almost-forgotten event of the 2006 conflict was a revealing episode of how modern armed forces urgently need to revise their assumptions about the sophistication of weaponry controlled by militias and terrorist organizations. For the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), this painful wake-up call illustrated the new vulnerabilities the proliferation of missiles and rockets had engendered. More broadly, the case of Hezbollah's anti-ship missile was a signal: the historical monopoly of states—primarily, the United States and its allies—over precision-guided munitions was eroding, and

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1. Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, "How the Navy Missed Its Boat," *Haaretz*, January 18, 2008.

this evolution would eventually challenge the ability of the most advanced militaries to operate in certain environments.<sup>2</sup>

This monograph explores the strategic significance of this phenomenon. Specifically, it questions the type of strategy that nonstate actors may implement as they gain greater access to advanced military technology. In that context, it argues some of these groups increasingly lean toward anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategies.

In some ways, this trend could be seen as a logical evolution; as armed groups acquire technologies previously controlled by states, they may also be tempted to emulate state strategies specifically designed to overcome a conventional inferiority. As a result, the following pages look at this emerging challenge of nonstate actors' A2/AD strategies and their implications for Western armed forces. Specifically, this monograph looks at how this threat is growing in the Middle East and Eastern European theaters. In both areas, this monograph looks at the capabilities and the ambition of groups such as Lebanese Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, and Ukrainian separatists to emulate traditional A2/AD postures.

The assessment emphasizes throughout that nonstate actors' A2/AD strategies eventually involve significant help from state patronage (in the cases mentioned, either Iran or Russia). Until recently, only states purchased these capabilities because of their cost and the level of training their use required, which is why scholarship on A2/AD strategies has

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2. Andrew Krepinevich, *Maritime Competition in a Mature Precision-Strike Regime* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2014).

mostly covered the policies of states such as Russia, China, or Iran.<sup>3</sup> But this monograph demonstrates that some elements of the military strategy of these nonstate actors resonate with those A2/AD postures. The underlying assumption here is that this emerging trend—these nascent strategies—could consolidate and become a major challenge.

To support this argument, this monograph first provides an analytical framework by putting the issue into perspective with regard to the basic principles of A2/AD strategies and the evolution of nonstate warfare. We identify and specify three key parameters to assess emerging nonstate A2/AD strategies: the adoption of a status quo political agenda, the presence of sufficient military capabilities to deny access to a state opponent, and a military strategy that evidences institutional adaptation to this new posture. We then look at the first case, the Lebanese Hezbollah. Emerging in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War around 1983, the group has grown to become the most powerful nonstate actor in the region in terms of military capabilities and political influence. The evolution of Hezbollah’s military strategy is intrinsically linked to the history of the Iranian regional strategy—or, more specifically, the strategy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. As we explore in the following pages, the evolution of Hezbollah’s military strategy evidences

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3. See Roger Cliff et al., *Entering the Dragon’s Lair, Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007); Stephan Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, “NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge,” *Survival* 58, no. 2 (April–May 2016): 95–116; Mark Gunzinger, *Outside-In: Defeating Iran’s Anti-Access and Area-Denial Threat* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2012); and Shahryar Pasandideh, “Iran Boosts Its A2AD Capabilities,” *Diplomat*, May 23, 2014.

clear Iranian influences in the field of A2/AD. Rockets and missiles have become a major component of Hezbollah's military posture. The third section looks at other cases in the Middle East where the Hezbollah experience could be a source of inspiration for other armed groups—in particular, Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Houthi insurgency in Yemen. The fourth section broadens the geographical scope of our case studies by looking at the separatist movements in Ukraine and by underlining the similar patterns at play in these regions. Finally, the fifth section draws major lessons learned regarding how these emerging trends could alter the regional security landscapes and eventually challenge the defense policies of the United States and its allies by constraining their future options for military intervention.

## **NONSTATE A2/AD STRATEGIES: DEFINING THE ISSUE**

This monograph endeavors to bring to light the emerging phenomenon of A2/AD strategies being implemented by nonstate actors. To that aim, the argument connects two topics—A2/AD strategies and nonstate actors—that may at first sight seem unconnected. In the strategic literature, both issues are usually discussed in separate chapters. In the 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, for instance, the authors clearly distinguish between the two ends of the spectrum of conflict: on the lower end is “hybrid contingencies against proxy groups using asymmetric approaches” and on the higher end is “conflict against a state power armed with [weapons of mass destruction] or technologically advanced anti-access

and area-denial capabilities.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, A2/AD scenarios would only involve states, and conversely, nonstate actors would rely on less ambitious strategies.

In this perspective, one needs to first define the relationship between the two elements of our proposition and identify how their combination is altering the strategic environment. The most appropriate starting point is the definition of A2/AD strategies: “Those actions and capabilities, usually long-range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area. Area denial refers to those actions and capabilities, usually of shorter range, designed not to keep an opposing force out, but to limit its freedom of action within the operational area.”<sup>5</sup> Released in the wake of the discussion on the American need to address the challenges posed by the maritime strategies of states like China in the South China Sea and Iran in the Persian Gulf, the document aimed to provide guidance for the military services. But the topic of A2/AD itself is much older: it emerged in the American strategic debate in the early nineties and was, to a certain extent, a by-product of the discussion on the emerging revolution in military affairs initiated within Andrew Marshall’s Office of Net Assessment within the US Department of Defense.<sup>6</sup> In 1993, Andrew Krepinevich—then a lieutenant colonel assigned to Marshall’s office—wrote

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4. US Department of Defense (DoD), *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: DoD, 2014), VII, [http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0314\\_sdr/qdr.aspx](http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0314_sdr/qdr.aspx).

5. DoD, *Joint Operational Access Concept* (Washington, DC: DoD, January 17, 2012), i, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/JOAC\\_Jan%202012\\_Signed.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/JOAC_Jan%202012_Signed.pdf).

6. Andrew Krepinevich and Barry Watts, *The Last Warrior: Andrew Marshall and the Shaping of Modern American Defense Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

in a policy brief that “as peer competitors [states with military potential comparable to that of the United States] become increasingly proficient in exploiting advanced technologies . . . and as many Third World states acquire more destructive, extended-range weaponry, the conduct of forcible-entry operations will change dramatically.”<sup>7</sup>

In essence, A2/AD defensive strategies aimed to protect one actor’s control over a territory were to be based on the combination of a wide array of weaponry, such as precision-guided missiles, anti-ship and anti-air defense systems, and armed drones. Because of the level of sophistication these military technologies required, only states were assumed to be able to build such A2/AD postures. China was the primary object of US speculation since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. But soon other countries were included on the list: Russia was believed to be building A2/AD strategies in Eastern Europe, particularly around the country’s Kaliningrad oblast, and Iran’s Revolutionary Guards engaged in similar activities in the Persian Gulf.

Which signals could warn us about the development of such military postures? In his book *Anti-Access Warfare*, Sam Tangredi designates five indicators to explain the inclination of a state toward A2/AD strategies: (1) the perception of conventional inferiority vis-à-vis a potential aggressor, (2) the use of geography as an element to facilitate the attrition of the opponent, (3) the primacy of the maritime domain – which, in Tangredi’s view, includes both the maritime and the air and space components, (4) the centrality of information and intelligence to support

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7. Andrew Krepinevich, *Why AirSea Battle?* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), 8.

the posture, and (5) the objective of the strategy, which is to neutralize the enemy – not destroy it – until it gets too exhausted and loses its determination.<sup>8</sup>

Historians of strategy may argue A2/AD is merely a buzzword and the principles behind it are nothing new. The concept relies on the idea of building defensive measures not to defeat an enemy – whose superiority is acknowledged – but simply to convince the latter that the cost of an invasion, at the human and technological levels, would be so prohibitive that the invasion would not be a conceivable option in the first place.<sup>9</sup> Simply put, A2/AD strategies work to deter a conventional attack, but the real innovation today is the combination of this old principle with a high degree of technological sophistication. The growth in the use of precision-guided munitions and long-range weapons and their exponential acquisition by countries that are not the most technologically advanced have had a dramatic impact on US national security: it accelerated the ability of these states to challenge America’s traditional military superiority by maximizing the potential damage inflicted on intervening forces. Applied effectively, the strategy could prevent an external intervention in a specific area – hence, the term “A2/AD bubbles.” But if the strategic literature has mostly discussed how states have been implementing this strategy, we are currently witnessing a new phase of development. The increasing ability of nonstate actors to emulate

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8. Sam J. Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare. Countering A2/AD Strategies* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013).

9. For a critical look at the A2/AD debate in the Chinese context, see Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, “Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, US AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia,” *International Security* 41, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 7–48.

this posture results from two parameters. First, the modern dissemination of military or dual technologies outside the sphere of state-controlled entities is impacting the distribution of power; criminal organizations or terrorist groups can use smartphones, 3D printing, robotic and autonomous systems, as well as indigenously-made rockets. For instance, it is estimated that a short-range Qassam rocket such as those Hamas controls in the Gaza Strip costs approximately \$1,000.<sup>10</sup> As a result, the progress made in rocket and missile technology (accuracy, throw weight, and penetration aids) acquired by extremist groups changes the way they can use, or threaten to use, violence on the battlefield.

Thus, technological progress relates more broadly to the implications of the growth of precision-guided munitions, as described by strategists since the early 1990s. Thomas Mahnken wrote the following:

Wars in a mature precision-strike regime will likely focus on coercion and limited political objectives. In this world, the ability to punish an adversary to force him to concede—what Thomas Schelling dubbed the “power to hurt”—is likely to become an increasingly popular theory of victory. One potential result of this strategic interaction would be conflicts that involve campaigns whereby each side uses precision-strike weapons to hold the other’s economic and industrial infrastructure at risk. In such a situation, stability would depend on each side possessing an assured survivable retaliatory capability.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Uzi Rubin, *The Missile Threat from Gaza: From Nuisance to Strategic Threat* (Tel Aviv: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2011), 15.

11. See the analysis of Thomas Mahnken, “Weapons: The Growth and Spread of the Precision-Strike Regime,” *Daedalus* 140, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 53.



Mahnken's reasoning applied to strategies among states. But the pace of this technological revolution and the diffusion of military power it engenders are such that the demarcation between states and nonstate actors in this domain is being eroded.

This change, however, is not simply a matter of technology. The proliferation of rockets and missiles eventually becomes a game changer if these new capabilities are integrated into a cohesive military organization that carries out a coherent strategy. One should not underestimate the level of knowledge and training required at the individual and collective level with regard to the efficient use of rockets and missiles. Scholarship in the field has emphasized the importance of not looking only at capabilities as an indicator of military power.<sup>12</sup> In his book *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, Stephen Biddle uses the variable of force employment – understood as “the doctrine and tactics by which armies use their materiel in the field” – to explain whether armed forces will be effective in battle.<sup>13</sup> In Biddle's view, the way militaries use their resources is as important as the resources themselves. Likewise, in *The Diffusion of Military Power*, Michael Horowitz argues military innovation succeeds when the actor invests significant efforts

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12. For more on the early debate on the revolution in military affairs, see William Odom, *America's Military Revolution: Strategy and Structure After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1993); Michael Mazarr, *The Military-Technical Revolution: A Structural Framework* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1993); Earl Tilford, *The Revolution in Military Affairs: Prospects and Cautions* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995); and Eliot Cohen, “A Revolution in Warfare,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 2 (March–April 1996): 37–54.

13. Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 2.

in terms of financial resources and organizational changes to adopt the new technology fully: “It is the employment of technologies by organizations, rather than the technologies themselves, that most often makes the difference.”<sup>14</sup>

Obviously small entities such as extremist groups may face lesser challenges than the huge bureaucracies needed by national armed forces to implement organizational changes. Smaller entities are less constrained by competing chains of command, bureaucratic battles, or political oversight that typically hinder the implementation of a reform in modern militaries.<sup>15</sup> This organization means the contemporary tendency of nonstate groups to adopt A2/AD postures cannot be solely understood by their access to the most advanced technologies; rather, it is understood by the combination of this access with an internal reformation of the group’s military structure and a new political agenda. A classic counterargument could indeed be that terrorist organizations obtaining weapons of mass destruction or ballistic missiles are likely to use them because their objective by design is to terrorize, not deter, which is why A2/AD postures will become attractive to these groups if they are combined with a shift in their political agendas. As explained earlier, the logic behind a credible A2/AD strategy requires a proponent that is rational and who can effectively convey the message that an attack on its area of influence will lead to major losses for the offender. By extension, this posture implies

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14. Michael Horowitz, *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 2.

15. John Arquilla, *Insurgents, Raiders and Bandits: How Masters of Irregular Warfare Have Shaped Our World* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011).

the nonstate actor does not try to change the current status quo. It suggests only those violent groups that abandon a revolutionary platform and instead accept the existing state of affairs as a tacit agreement will favor an A2/AD strategy.<sup>16</sup>

The embrace of this status quo is likely to occur when a group exercises its power in a specific area, both militarily as well as politically, socially, and economically. Usually, factions aiming for the status quo will try as much as possible not to lose their command over this territory. Defending the conditions on the ground enables them to protect themselves against external adversaries as well as internal competitors. Overall, for the nonstate actors operating as quasi-states, these territorial gains become vulnerabilities that need to be protected.<sup>17</sup>

Against this backdrop, this monograph posits that three parameters need to be met to signal the emergence of a nonstate A2/AD posture: the combination of a robust arsenal of sophisticated weapons, a political agenda accepting the status quo, and a revised military strategy that will favor the adoption of a nonstate A2/AD strategy.

1. **A credible military strength.** A2/AD postures rely on sophisticated capabilities on which states have the monopoly for the most part. Therefore, only a limited number of nonstate groups can access these technologies. As of today, the main, if not unique, component of nonstate A2/AD postures is artillery—specifically, the

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16. On the notion of tacit agreement in conflict, see Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960).

17. John Lea and Kevin Stenson, "Security, Sovereignty, and Non-State Governance 'From Below,'" *Canadian Journal of Law & Society* 22, no. 2 (2007): 9-27.

acquisition of missiles and rockets that will enable their owner to challenge the conventional superiority of its opponent. Because these resources are demanding in terms of both cost and manpower (requiring significant training for engineers and operators), groups that allocate their efforts toward these investments will progressively abandon—or decrease their reliance on—traditional terrorist tactics, such as suicide attacks and car bombings.

2. **A political preference for status quo.** Violent extremist groups are more likely to build an A2/AD posture if their political agenda moves away from a revolutionary model—whether driven by religion or ideology—and leans toward a status quo position. At the rhetorical level, actors may not explicitly reject all revolutionary aspirations. But a shift in terms of priorities should occur as the leadership of the group expresses the decision not to transform its security environment in an effort to preserve its presence in and its influence within the environment.
3. **A revised military strategy.** The combination of a shifting political agenda and sufficient military strength should translate at the strategic level into a new way of using force. Because the group becomes a status quo player, it will likely refocus its efforts on defense rather than offense, which does not exclude the potential for occasional aggression such as hit-and-run attacks. Overall, military operations are no longer about changing a situation; rather, they are about maintaining the current balance of power. It could be argued that by doing so,

the nonstate group shifts its strategy from compellence, supported by the terrorist tactic of constant harassment, to limited deterrence, relying on arsenals able to reach the territory or troops of the enemy.<sup>18</sup>

In the following pages, this analytical framework will enable us to better apprehend the emerging trends in nonstate military strategies. From this perspective, the monograph looks at two regions of the world where nascent nonstate A2/AD strategies can be identified: the Middle East and Eastern Europe—specifically, Ukraine. In both cases, we can observe the ability of militias or separatist movements to defy modern states and to impose, to a certain extent, their conditions, forcing the other side to halt its intervention or concede the status quo. In the Arab world, Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthi insurgency have been able to circumvent their fundamental inferiority vis-à-vis stronger states, such as Israel or Saudi Arabia. The nonstate actors have used their arsenals to constrain the ability of the states to intervene in their strongholds. Similarly, Ukrainian separatists have developed a strategy that, in practice, aims to freeze indefinitely the conflict by preventing the regular forces commanded by the authorities in

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18. We use the concepts of compellence and deterrence here as being both types of coercion, according to Thomas Schelling's definition in Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New York: Praeger, 1977). "Compellence" is understood as threatening an adversary to change his behavior vis-à-vis the conflict, and "deterrence" is a threat intended to keep the adversary from changing his position. In his seminal book, Schelling underlines the "difference between inducting inaction [deterrence] and making someone perform [compellence]."

Kiev to retake control of the disputed territories in the east of the country.

## **HEZBOLLAH: A MODEL OF NONSTATE A2/AD POSTURE**

Hezbollah, which was famously characterized by former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage as the “A-Team of Terrorists,” has for a long time been depicted as one of the most emblematic terrorist groups in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup> But this popular perception does not grasp the multifaceted reality of Hezbollah as it stands today or, more specifically, how it has evolved since the mid-1990s. Hezbollah—literally the “Party of God”—emerged in 1983 in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War. It was born from a combination of two factors: the growing discontent of the local Shia community feeling disenfranchised by the government in Beirut and suffering Israel’s invasion of the country and the Iranian strategy of spreading its model to the Middle East by supporting a proxy.<sup>20</sup> The group achieved notoriety by kidnapping Western hostages and by bombing the US embassy and the US and French military barracks in Beirut. For the first decade of its existence, Hezbollah behaved as a typical terrorist organization and promoted a revolutionary agenda: the establishment of an Iran-like Islamic regime in Lebanon and the destruction of Israel, which the group described as the “Zionist entity.” But the organization underwent a major revision in the early 1990s as Lebanon ended the civil

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19. Quoted in Rebecca Leung, “Hezbollah: ‘A-Team of Terrorists,’” CBS News, April 18, 2003, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/hezbollah-a-team-of-terrorists/>.

20. Augustus Norton, *Hezbollah. A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

war and a new political life emerged in Beirut. It is this reorganization we will now examine using our three parameters.

First, at the political level, the shift emerged in 1992 under the leadership of Hezbollah's newly appointed secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah. Under his leadership, Hezbollah started an internal process of "Lebanonization." In practice, the group adhered to the principles of the Lebanese political system and participated in national and local elections. The party no longer advocated for the import of an Islamic regime into the country. It embraced the balance of power among the various Lebanese sects. Hezbollah became so effective at this game that it became a full player in Lebanese politics—arguably, the strongest one today—and joined blocs and alliances.<sup>21</sup> As an illustration of this new reality, the group was instrumental in the election of Michel Aoun in 2016 as president of Lebanon.<sup>22</sup>

Alongside this process, the group consolidated its grip over vast parts of Lebanon, from the southern region to the Bekaa Valley. This consolidation implied both a strong military footprint and a significant involvement in the local economy, which eventually led Hezbollah to become an agent of the status quo within the Lebanese political system. References to the Iranian political system have become part of Hezbollah's folklore, but no more than that.<sup>23</sup> At the

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21. Judith Palmer Harik, *Hezbollah: The Changing Face of Terrorism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

22. Thanassis Cambanis, "Michel Aoun Rises to Lebanese Presidency, Ending Power Vacuum," *New York Times*, October 31, 2016.

23. Krista Wiegand, "Reformation of a Terrorist Group: Hezbollah as a Lebanese Political Party," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 8 (2009): 669-80.

same time, Hezbollah has been working hard not to let its opponents discuss or question its arsenal. Any attempt by its political rivals to challenge Hezbollah's military and economic power was systematically met with defiance and a strong show of force, as demonstrated by the clash in western Beirut in May 2008.<sup>24</sup>

This political position was supplemented by the spectacular development of Hezbollah's military power. The combination of indigenous, rudimentary rockets and Iranian-made ballistic missiles has enabled Hezbollah to build a military force to be reckoned with in southern Lebanon. Eventually, this weapons buildup allowed Hezbollah to deny Israel's access to the group's controlled territories. As in other places, Israel and its international allies have been unable to prevent the steady growth of Hezbollah's arsenal. By the start of the Second Lebanon War, the group had stored approximately 12,000 rockets, and Israeli officials estimated that, by 2017, Hezbollah possessed 150,000 rockets.<sup>25</sup> The exact size of this arsenal is withheld by Hezbollah, which maintains a calculated opacity. But the figures provide us with a fair idea of the group's change of scale over the last decade.

These weapons are not simply short-range projectiles of limited accuracy. Hezbollah's arsenal also includes short- to medium-range ballistic missiles provided by the Iranian and Syrian regimes. By 2010, Western intelligence sources believed the Bashar al-Assad regime had supplied the Lebanese group

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24. Robert Worth and Nada Bakri, "Hezbollah Seizes Swath of Beirut from US-Backed Lebanon Government," *New York Times*, May 10, 2008.

25. Avi Issacharoff, "Israel Raises Hezbollah Rocket Estimate to 150,000," *Times of Israel*, November 12, 2017.



with M-600 short-range ballistic missiles, a variant of the Fateh-110, able to carry a 1,100-pound warhead with a range of 210 kilometers (km). It is estimated the inertial guidance system of the M-600 allows the missile to strike its target within 460 meters. That same year, Syria reportedly transferred Scud-B ballistic missiles to Hezbollah, triggering a statement from the US Department of State: "The United States condemns in the strongest terms the transfer of any arms, and especially ballistic missile systems such as the Scud, from Syria to Hezbollah. . . . The transfer of these arms can only have a destabilizing effect on the region, and would pose an immediate threat to both the security of Israel and the sovereignty of Lebanon."<sup>26</sup> State patronage should not be underestimated; Hezbollah's inventory remains highly dependable on its connections with Syria and Iran. Brigadier General Yossi Baidatz, former intelligence research director for the IDF, has underlined the nature of this triangular relation: "Weapons are transferred to Hezbollah on a regular basis and this transfer is organized by the Syrian and Iranian regimes. Therefore, it should not be called smuggling of arms to Lebanon—it is organized and official transfer."<sup>27</sup>

If the start of the Syrian Civil War in March 2011 led observers to wonder about the ability of Hezbollah to sustain its arsenal without the gateway provided by the Assad regime, in practice, the group did not suffer from the conflict but actually grew bigger.<sup>28</sup> In

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26. Mark Landler, "US Speaks to Syrian Envoy of Arms Worries," *New York Times*, April 19, 2010.

27. Amnon Meranda, "Military Intelligence: Hezbollah Scuds Tip of Iceberg," *Ynetnews.com*, May 4, 2010, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3884753,00.html>.

28. Jean-Loup Samaan, *Hezbollah beyond the Syrian Conflict* (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Diplomatic Academy, February 2017).

September 2018, the former deputy chief of Israel's Mossad, Naftali Granot, argued publicly that despite frequent air raids on Syria, Israel had failed to prevent significant transfers to Hezbollah. Granot went on to say the group "recently received small numbers of GPS precision-guided systems that will help it to convert some heavy rockets into accurate missiles."<sup>29</sup> In fact, these latest developments have led observers to speculate Hezbollah was trying to change the status quo by creating new facts on the ground, whether in terms of its missile inventory or its territorial posture. Israeli forces have been very nervous about Hezbollah's and Iran's activities inside Syria near the Golan Heights. Over recent years, it has appeared both actors have not been solely fighting Syrian rebels near the armistice line of the Golan Heights, but rather, turning this area into a new forward operating base to target Israel. Various reports claim tunnels and bunkers are being built to prepare for the next conflict with the Israeli military.<sup>30</sup>

At the level of military organization and strategy, Hezbollah has grown into an ambitious nonstate actor that has mastered the use of rockets and ballistic missiles to support its political goals. The first record of Hezbollah firing rockets on Israel was in February 1992. Following the assassination by the IDF of Abbas al-Musawi, the secretary general of Hezbollah, it retaliated by launching rockets on Israel's northern cities. In the following years, this tit-for-tat tactic became a pattern: Hezbollah would use its rockets

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29. Yonah Jeremy Bob, "Ex-Deputy Mossad Chief: IDF Didn't Fully Stop New Hezbollah Rocket Tech," *Jerusalem Post*, September 7, 2018.

30. Jean-Loup Samaan, "In Golan, a Battle Looms between Iran and Israel," *National*, October 26, 2015.

to compel the IDF to withdraw its occupying forces from southern Lebanon. The military structure of Hezbollah adapted to this new technology. Artillery units were reorganized and militants went through intensive training.<sup>31</sup> As this significantly changed the effectiveness of the group on the battlefield, Israeli governments launched three major operations (in 1993, 1996, and 2006) to destroy Hezbollah's military power. But their efforts did not succeed and only resulted in temporary pauses.

At the historical level, it is important to distinguish between Hezbollah's missile strategy until the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and the missile strategy since that time. Between 1992 and 2000, Hezbollah used rockets as a means of compellence to force Israel out of the occupied area of Lebanon. Hassan Nasrallah made this logic of the use of rockets clear in an interview given to the Lebanese newspaper *As-Safir* on February 27, 1992: "We have to work . . . toward creating a situation in which the enemy is subject to our conditions. We should tell him: 'If you attack us, we will use our Katyushas; if you do not attack us, we will not use our Katyushas.'"<sup>32</sup>

The new logic was followed by a decreased reliance on terrorist tactics in the area. This strategic emphasis on rockets as means of compellence may have been influenced by the Iranian military advisors to Hezbollah and their own experience of missile warfare during the Iran-Iraq War of the previous decade. During that conflict, Iran suffered major losses

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31. Nicholas Blanford, *Warriors of God: Inside Hezbollah's Thirty-Year Struggle against Israel* (New York: Random House, 2011), 33.

32. Hassan Nasrallah, *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*, ed. Nicholas Noe (London: Verso, 2007), 62.

in the War of the Cities when the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein launched missiles on the major Iranian urban centers to break the morale of the country. As a result, the ballistic program of Tehran grew in earnest in the 1990s.<sup>33</sup>

Remarkably, as the political agenda of Hezbollah evolved in Lebanon's post-civil war period, so did its military strategy. In 2000, the decision of Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak to remove Israeli forces from Lebanon was in itself a major challenge for the party that had defined itself according to the Israeli occupation. It had to find a new *raison d'être* if it wanted to avoid becoming "a rebel without a cause," to use an expression of an International Crisis Group report at the time.<sup>34</sup> If Hezbollah initially rejected the new border circumscribed by UN Resolution 425 as the "blue line," it eventually respected the demarcation. Because Hezbollah wanted to maintain its political influence and military arsenal, it adopted a status quo posture that militarily translated into a deterrence strategy: the goal was no longer to push the IDF into retreat but to threaten Israel with painful retaliation if the IDF attacked Lebanon.<sup>35</sup> This logic only grew more extreme after the 2006 war; the feeling within Hezbollah circles was its missile force had successfully defied Israeli air power. In one major speech, Hassan

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33. Kevin Woods et al., *A Survey of Saddam's Audio Files, 1978-2001: Toward an Understanding of Authoritarian Regimes* (Alexandria, VA: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2010).

34. "Hizbollah: Rebel without a Cause?," International Crisis Group, July 30, 2003, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/lebanon/hizbollah-rebel-without-cause>.

35. Daniel Sobelman, *New Rules of the Game: Israel and Hizbollah after the Withdrawal from Lebanon* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, January 2004).

Nasrallah clarified the type of “force employment” he now conceived with regard to missiles and rockets.

They think they can demolish Dahiya’s buildings as we barely “puncture their walls.” But I tell them today: You destroy a Dahiya building and we will destroy buildings in Tel Aviv. . . . If you target Beirut’s Rafik Hariri International Airport, we will strike Tel Aviv’s Ben Gurion International Airport. If you target our electricity stations, we will target yours. If you target our plants, we will target yours.<sup>36</sup>

In another speech in 2010, Nasrallah repeated this reasoning: “If you blockade our coastline, shores and ports, all military and commercial ships heading toward Palestine throughout the Mediterranean Sea will be targeted by the rockets of the Islamic Resistance.”<sup>37</sup>

Deterrence is by design a strategy that enforces the status quo. Moreover, it could be added that this deterrence calculus vis-à-vis Israel reads as a convenient way for Hezbollah to sell the rationale for maintaining its hold on its arsenal and avoiding any disarmament inside Lebanon.

All in all, Hezbollah’s military strategy has matured. It now reflects a shift from past revolutionary aspirations to a focus on maintaining the current status quo – both vis-à-vis the Lebanese polity and the Israeli armed forces. Hezbollah’s strategy also evidences an effective adaptation of its apparatus to the new firepower obtained with its missile inventories. This

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36. Hassan Nasrallah, *Khitaab al radaa’* (Beirut: Al-Manar, 2010), DVD.

37. Nicholas Blanford and Bilal Saab, *The Next War: How another Conflict between Hizballah and Israel Could Look and How Both Sides are Preparing for It* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2011), 10.

adaptation is visible in the speeches of Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah, considered as a kind of declaratory policy, as well as in the training and force posture of Hezbollah combatants. As a result, it significantly constrains Israeli decisionmakers contemplating future interventions similar to the campaign of 2006. Planners of an Israeli campaign over Lebanon now have to factor in the firepower of Hezbollah and the level of damage it could cause for the IDF as well as the Israeli population. In other words, Hezbollah has turned southern Lebanon into a quasi-A2/AD bubble.

As of today, the Hezbollah experience might be the closest case to an emerging nonstate A2/AD strategy. Still, the transfer of new precision-guided munitions from Syria and the buildup of military positions near the Golan Heights may indicate Hezbollah is not entirely relying on a logic of maintaining the status quo, and is perhaps trying to establish new facts on the ground, even if that means risking an Israeli retaliation. But notwithstanding this issue, the ability of the group to significantly coerce Israel is one of the reasons why the group has become a reference for most of the other insurgents and terrorist organizations in the Middle East looking to turn their conquests into defensible gains. The next section looks at some other cases.

## **RISING NONSTATE A2/AD STRATEGIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Numerous nonstate actors have been tempted to emulate the Hezbollah model, but only a few have been able to reach a sufficient level of internal development as defined by our three parameters of political agenda, military strength, and military strategy. This section

aims to identify those groups that have embarked on a process of political-military reforms that could lead them to morph into a Hezbollah-like organization. It looks at two different cases: Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the Houthis in Yemen.<sup>38</sup> Although each is in a different phase of its development, both have grown into major nonstate organizations challenging modern armed forces.

Hamas was the first group that followed Hezbollah's path. Founded in 1987 as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories, Hamas—which stands for *Harakat al Muqawama al Islamiya*, or the “Movement of the Islamic Resistance”—was initially operating as a terrorist group that employed suicide attacks as its primary tactic.<sup>39</sup> Condemning the Oslo Accords of 1993, Hamas progressively outflanked Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority by becoming the vanguard of “resistance and revolution” against Israel, in particular during the second Intifada in the first part of the 2000s. In the aftermath of the second intifada, the leadership of the Palestinian Authority was seriously questioned in the light of numerous corruption cases and its inability to reach a deal with Israel that would benefit the Palestinian population. As a result, Hamas won the legislative election of 2006, leading to a major inter-Palestinian crisis: the Palestine Liberation Organization removed Hamas from the West Bank and Hamas responded by returning the favor in the

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38. For a detailed comparison between Hezbollah and Hamas, see Joshua Gleis and Benedetta Berti, *Hezbollah and Hamas: A Comparative Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).

39. Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2010).

Gaza Strip. Since then, Hamas has been the de facto ruling party in Gaza.

The transition of Hamas from revolutionary rhetoric to a status quo position has been rather similar to Hezbollah's. Following the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, Hamas focused on building its control over the territory by establishing its own government structures and controlling the economy, the health system, and the media networks.<sup>40</sup> As Hamas became the main political force in Gaza, it implicitly recognized the existence of Israel by accepting a state of deterrence similar to—but more fragile than—the one already prevailing with Hezbollah.

At the military level, Hamas began acquiring a vast amount of Qassam rockets. Its first use of a Qassam rocket in Gaza is said to have occurred in 2001 during the second intifada.<sup>41</sup> There exists today four models of these rockets: the Qassam I ranges 3 km and consequently can only reach urban places like Sderot, the western Negev city. The Qassam II, with a range of up to 7 km, can only modestly go beyond the first model. The Qassam III, with a maximum range of 10 km, puts Ashkelon in its reach. And, finally, the Qassam IV has a range of 15 km.

Hamas also benefited from Iran's support, though it remained more limited than in the case of Hezbollah. In 2012, Israeli media reported the Palestinian group had fired the Iran-made Fajr-5 rocket. With its 75-km range, the Fajr-5 was a significant breakthrough for Hamas that enabled it to aim deeper into Israeli territory. In total, Hamas is said to have accumulated approximately 10,000 rockets inside Gaza—a slightly

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40. Bjorn Brenner, *Gaza under Hamas: From Islamic Democracy to Islamist Governance* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

41. Rubin, *Missile Threat*.



lower number than Hezbollah's inventory before the 2006 war.<sup>42</sup>

At the level of strategic adaptation, Hamas has not advanced as far as Hezbollah in terms of military professionalization. Hamas remains at a crossroads: there are indications that, like Hezbollah, it favors a status quo position to secure its grip on Gaza—especially vis-à-vis other competing Palestinian groups—but it has not yet fully abandoned its past terrorist tactics. On the one hand, Hamas has made rockets the cornerstone of its military strategy, as evidenced by the lessons from Israeli Operation Pillar of Defense (2012) and Operation Protective Edge (2014).<sup>43</sup> The psychological effect achieved by rocket warfare and the inability of the IDF in both campaigns to decisively degrade the arsenal only reinforced Hamas's reliance on them.<sup>44</sup> More and more, its leaders have used the image of rockets in their speeches in the same way Hezbollah did. When Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided to withdraw the IDF from the Gaza Strip in 2005, the leader of Hamas and disputed Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh had already declared, "Sharon cannot evade the truth. The Qassam [rocket] is what forced the enemy out."<sup>45</sup>

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42. "IDF Official: Hamas Has Replenished Its Missile Capability since 2014 War," *Jerusalem Post*, January 31, 2017, <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/IDF-official-Hamas-has-replenished-its-missile-capability-since-2014-war-480175>.

43. Raphael Cohen et al., *From Cast Lead to Protective Edge: Lessons from Israel's Wars in Gaza* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017).

44. Yiftah S. Shafir, "Rocket Warfare in Operation Protective Edge," in *The Lessons of Protective Edge*, ed. Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security, 2014).

45. Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 177.

In terms of military structure, the artillery forces of Hamas's military wing have been the primary component of the movement since the second half of the 2000s. It has also been argued that operational orders such as the firing of a rocket are not taken at the level of battlefield command, but at a higher political level to ensure cohesion between military tactics and political objectives. Like Hezbollah, Hamas has invested in indigenous capabilities; by the end of the 2000s, it had built a rocket research and development center at the Islamic University of Gaza that directly supported the production of Qassam rockets.<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, Hamas has maintained ambiguity regarding some of its past revolutionary rhetoric. In 2017, the group revised its founding charter to soften its criticism of Israel. Specifically, it recognized the principle of a Palestinian state that would be established within the borders created by the 1967 Third Arab-Israeli War. But it refrained from recognizing the existence of Israel: "Hamas considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4th of June 1967 . . . to be a formula of national consensus." It also declares, "The establishment of the Zionist entity therein . . . [does] not annul the right of the Palestinian people to their entire land" and "there shall be no recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist entity."<sup>47</sup>

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46. Yoram Cohen and Jeffrey White, *Hamas in Combat: The Military Performance of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, October 2009).

47. "A Document of General Principles and Policies," Hamas, May 1, 2017, <http://hamas.ps/en/post/678/a-document-of-general-principles-and-policies>.

Likewise, the group did not fully abandon terrorist tactics. Starting in 2015, Hamas's propaganda machine renewed its call for a new wave of suicide attacks against Israel.<sup>48</sup> In April 2016, a Palestinian bomber targeting a bus in Jerusalem was identified by Israeli security services as a member of Hamas.<sup>49</sup> Among other cases, in October 2018, Israel's Shin Bet, the internal security agency, declared it had prevented multiple terrorist attacks planned by Hamas from the Gaza Strip.<sup>50</sup> As a result, the Israeli authorities have alerted their Western partners about the risk of misreading the evolution of Hamas. From a strategic point of view, this resurgence of terrorist tactics demonstrates an inability or unwillingness, as of yet, of the organization to transform itself into a status quo actor, as Hezbollah did. This approach has less to do with the military capabilities of the group than its political agenda. And the subsequent choice made for its prevailing military strategy might evolve in the near future, depending on Hamas's power plays within the Palestinian political arena vis-à-vis Fatah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other Salafi groups operating in Gaza.

A second group that might contemplate the Hezbollah model is the Houthi rebellion—otherwise known as Ansar Allah—in Yemen. Although the group is frequently depicted as the Yemeni version of Hezbollah, this analogy hides the complexities of

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48. "Hamas Call for Suicide Bombings in Israeli Buses," *Times of Israel*, February 7, 2016.

49. "Israel Says Jerusalem Bus Bombing Was Hamas Suicide Attack," BBC News, April 21, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36100485>.

50. Anna Ahronheim, "Shin Bet Thwarts Planned Hamas Terror Attacks against Israeli Targets," *Jerusalem Post*, October 3, 2018.

the group's local trajectory. The movement grew in earnest in 2004 as a Zaidi cleric, Hussein Badr Eddin al Houthi, called for a rebellion against the regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh in the northern province of Sa'da.<sup>51</sup> The upheaval built on the resentment of the Zaidi community—one of the branches of Shia Islam considered the closest to the Sunni tradition—toward the inability of the government in Sanaa to deliver on social and economic development. A first war erupted by the summer of 2004. Following the killing of Hussein Badr Eddin al Houthi later that same year, his father and brother assumed leadership and ramped up the confrontational rhetoric against the regime. In total, six wars between the Houthi forces and the government occurred between 2004 and 2010.

A year later, Saleh was overthrown by a popular revolt in the midst of the Arab Spring. As Saleh left the country, he was replaced by his vice president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. Hadi was elected president during the elections of 2012. His transitional government proved unable to establish a semblance of authority in the country, and by September 2014, the Houthis launched a new offensive that enabled them to quickly seize the capital Sanaa and expand their territory. In March 2015, the Battle of Aden saw the Houthis fighting in an odd coalition alongside the army units loyal to Ali Abdullah Saleh against the forces of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi. By the end of the month, the Houthi-Saleh coalition had taken control of Aden, and Hadi fled to Saudi Arabia. This event triggered the decision in Riyadh to launch the buildup of a Saudi-led coalition to intervene in Yemen.

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51. Uzi Rabi, *Yemen: Revolution, Civil War and Unification* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 154.

In the years since the Yemeni conflict started in 2015, Houthi conduct has been influenced by the Hezbollah experience in many ways. Both the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Hezbollah fighters have provided military support to the Houthi insurgents. Hezbollah's presence in the country started before the war, as military operatives such as Khalil Harb and Abu Ali Tabatabai had been reportedly traveling there in previous years.<sup>52</sup>

As the war against the Saudi-led coalition escalated, the Hezbollah model became an inspiration for the Houthis in two fields: guerrilla and missile warfare. More specifically, starting in 2016, the conflict turned into a kind of war of attrition that led to an intensification in the frequency and range of missiles being fired by the Houthis, either on Saudi territory or on ships crossing the Red Sea. Noticeably, in October 2016, the Houthis used an anti-ship missile in the Red Sea that struck a United Arab Emirates (UAE) vessel. The missile was later assessed by experts to be a Chinese-made C-802, the same type Hezbollah used against the Israeli Navy during the 2006 conflict.<sup>53</sup> Although it was undoubtedly delivered by Iran, Hezbollah may have played a role as trainer.<sup>54</sup> Some sources even go as far as to suggest Hezbollah combatants may have been the ones launching the missiles.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, a widely circulated video in the spring of 2016 showed Hezbollah commander Abu

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52. Matthew Levitt, "Hezbollah's Pivot toward the Gulf," *CTC Sentinel*, August 22, 2016.

53. Jeremy Binnie, "UAE's Swift Hit by Anti-Ship Missile," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 4, 2016.

54. Former US government analyst, interview by the author, December 2016.

55. Alexander Corbeil and Amarnah Amarsingam, "The Houthi Hezbollah," *Foreign Affairs*, March 31, 2016.

Saleh meeting with Houthi fighters and discussing the planning of operations inside Saudi Arabia.<sup>56</sup>

In the following months, Saudi Arabia became a frequent target of the Houthis' missiles. In October 2016, the King Abdul Aziz International Airport in Jeddah was attacked. In November 2017, the capital, Riyadh, was hit by a Burkan-2H missile that traveled about 900 km.

The other contributor to the Saudi-led coalition, the UAE, has also been the target of failed attempts by the Houthis to launch missiles on its territory. In December 2017, the Houthis declared they had launched a cruise missile on the Barakah nuclear reactor in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. No signs of destruction were reported, and Emirati authorities denied the claim. Similarly, the Houthis reported in August 2018 they had targeted Dubai International Airport with a drone but were unable to provide any evidence.<sup>57</sup> These failed attempts obviously call for a cautious assessment on the real capacities of the group.

As in the case of Hezbollah, the ability of the Houthis to use their arsenal was made possible thanks to state support, namely from Iran. Prior to the conflict, Yemen had not been known to build its own ballistic missiles. Saleh's regime had stored some Scud-B missiles and Hwasong-6 missiles, but the images of the missiles fired at Saudi Arabia suggested at least some of them were of Iranian origin.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, a few days after the presumed attack on the UAE in

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56. Corbeil and Amarsingam, "Houthi Hezbollah."

57. "UAE Denies Report of Houthi Drone Attack on Dubai Airport," Reuters, August 27, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-emirates-security/uae-denies-report-of-houthi-drone-attack-on-dubai-airport-idUSKCN1LC1YQ>.

58. IHS Markit, "Yemeni Rebels Enhance Ballistic Missile Campaign," IHS Jane's Intelligence Review, July 7, 2017.

December 2017, the US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, issued a strong statement accusing Iran of transferring these weapons to the rebels in Yemen.<sup>59</sup> Several public assessments from US intelligence agencies subsequently supported this claim.<sup>60</sup> In January 2018, the UN Panel of Experts on Yemen wrote in its report that Iran had “failed to take the necessary measures to prevent the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of such technology to the Houthi-Saleh forces.”<sup>61</sup> The UN Panel of Experts also confirmed the Houthis have been using drones such as Qasef-1 unmanned aerial vehicles, similar “in design, dimensions and capability” to the Iranian-made Ababil-T.<sup>62</sup>

In many instances, the Houthi way of war mirrors Hezbollah’s strategy that emerged in the 1990s. Contrary to Hamas, the Yemeni insurgents appear to favor guerrilla tactics—however gruesome they may be—over terrorist measures. Their political rhetoric has not had the revolutionary undertones of Hamas or Hezbollah from the early 1980s; they do not pretend to annihilate Saudi Arabia or to spread a new political model for the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. Rather, their main objective is to take full control of the state of Yemen. Shortly after their takeover of the state institutions, they issued a constitutional declaration

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59. John Ismay and Helene Cooper, “US Accuses Iran of UN Violation, but Evidence Falls Short,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2017.

60. Daniel Coats, *Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community* (Washington, DC: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, February 13, 2018, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/2018-ATA---Unclassified-SSCI.pdf>).

61. UN Security Council, *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Yemen*, United Nations, January 26, 2018, 30.

62. UN Security Council, *Final Report*, 32.

that was immediately rejected by most of the Arab and Western countries.

The current logic of the Houthi missile warfare campaign is to compel the Saudi-led coalition into withdrawing its forces from the country. Although it is doubtful that the Houthi combatants would be able to regain parts of the Yemeni territory or fully control it, they may find ways to maintain their grip on some areas and try to force the Gulf Cooperation Council countries into accepting a Houthi-controlled enclave as a *fait accompli*. In this scenario, it is likely the group would then turn its military strategy into one of A2/AD.

To assess this possible development, we would need to factor in the role of Iran and, more specifically, the Revolutionary Guards. The latter has already shored up its support to the Houthis since the war started and in a context of regional proxy wars, they could see an opportunity to enforce a Houthi-controlled A2/AD bubble by providing logistics and military training. At the same time, Iran's increased support to the Houthis is an exercise in brinkmanship; it enables the Yemeni insurgents to launch deadlier attacks on the Saudi-led coalition and eventually raises Western and Gulf pressures on Iran to cease it. The Revolutionary Guards may believe low-intensity proxy warfare in Yemen would not escalate into a regional confrontation. But if a missile attack from the Houthis killed a significant number of Saudi or Emirati citizens, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi would very likely retaliate.

As a result, the major concern for Saudi Arabia, and to a lesser extent the UAE, would be to see the protracted conflict in Yemen evolving in such a way that it leaves in place a security threat—a Houthi



enclave defended by a vast arsenal—that would increasingly look like the threat Hezbollah represents to northern Israel. In other words, the missile threat would become a fact of life for Gulf countries that would require significant adaptation at the defensive level. For Saudi Arabia, this circumstance has already changed the framing of the issue, which initially was one for commanders on the battlefield inside Yemen, into a domestic concern for the authorities responsible for the protection of their territory, infrastructure, and citizens.

Finally, as this section discusses Middle East case studies, one may wonder why a nonstate actor such as the Islamic State (IS) is not covered. As IS took control of military bases in Syria and Iraq, it had military capabilities that could have enabled it to build a rather strong A2/AD posture. But if we verify the two other parameters, it seems clear the group was not leaning toward this goal. First, at the political level, IS designed a revolutionary agenda that denied the modern international system and its Westphalian principles of state sovereignty in the Middle East. It claimed instead a return to the Caliphate era, an objective which would almost frame Hezbollah's call for a Lebanese Islamic republic in the 1980s as a more realistic goal, comparatively speaking. The Islamic State constantly looked at its territorial gains in Syria and Iraq as part of a broader momentum to conquer the entire Muslim world. Its project was a self-contrived utopia based on an eschatological vision: the belief in a final struggle between Muslims and their enemies, the armies of "Rome."<sup>63</sup> As a result, the military strategy of IS was

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63. Jean-Loup Samaan, *An End-of-Time Utopia: Understanding the Narrative of the Islamic State* (Rome: NATO Defense College, April 2015).

not one favoring any status quo. It favored guerilla tactics in the territories it controlled and terrorist campaigns in the countries opposing its rule. Given its revolutionary agenda and the scale of the international response it triggered, the IS experience can be seen more as an exception than a possible pattern for other armed militant groups. Ultimately, the reign of IS over some territories in Syria and Iraq did not last, in part because of this revolutionary posture, so militias may logically look at the Hezbollah case as a more relevant lesson on how to secure territorial gains.

In this perspective, Hamas and the Houthis demonstrate the increased tendency of nonstate groups in the Middle East to emulate state-inspired strategies of A2/AD. In both cases, there are signs in terms of political rhetoric, military capabilities, and strategy that these groups may try to build such a posture. Admittedly, these initiatives would be less sophisticated than in the case of Hezbollah, given the many limitations existing in terms of political agenda, armament, and organizations.

As discussed in previous sections, this overview does not suggest an automatic path toward nonstate A2/AD postures. On the one hand, the leadership of Hamas may have the capabilities in terms of rockets required to build a rather credible defense of Gaza. But the group remains ambivalent when it comes to its inclination toward political status quo and the rejection of terrorist tactics. On the other hand, the strategy of the Houthis might transition more effectively toward an A2/AD posture. For the last few years, the frontlines have been rather static in the ongoing conflict in Yemen, which could nurture the belief among the insurgents that the preservation of the status quo is achievable. Moreover, the Houthis'

resorting to missile warfare echoes Hezbollah's practice from the 1990s. An A2/AD posture in this case could imply stronger support from external actors – namely, Iran and Hezbollah.

More broadly, this reminds us that although the diffusion of military power to nonstate actors has increased significantly in the last few decades, the cases exposed here reveal how much militias have to rely on external patronage to access sophisticated weaponry and to conduct ambitious strategies. In this sense, these nonstate A2/AD postures can be understood as a by-product of proxy warfare. In the next section, the example of Ukrainian separatists reflects similar findings.

## **A2/AD BUBBLES IN UKRAINE'S CONTESTED TERRITORIES**

If the Middle East constitutes a revealing laboratory of emerging nonstate military strategies, it is worth looking at other regions of the world to assess whether the trend toward A2/AD postures is identifiable elsewhere. In this context, Eastern Europe, and more specifically the Ukrainian theater with its secessionist group tactics, resonates with the developments covered in the previous sections. As in the Gaza Strip, Yemen, and southern Lebanon, eastern Ukraine has become a battlefield where state authorities have been undermined and de facto replaced by local nonstate organizations that have aimed to contest the control of Kiev over these territories. As they toppled the regular forces of the state, separatists pursued a political-military strategy consisting of changing the facts on the ground and then forcing external actors to accept the new state of affairs. To implement this strategy,

Ukrainian separatists needed outside support—namely, Russia. If Iranian support was undoubtedly instrumental in the making of Hezbollah’s and the Houthis’ current military strategy, the Russian patronage of secessionist militias inside Ukraine was even more decisive.

To understand how the situation in eastern Ukraine unraveled, one needs to go back to 2014, when the collapse of Viktor Yanukovich’s presidency in Kiev triggered a national crisis that led to the Russian annexation of Crimea. Leaning toward a closer relation with Russia, Yanukovich had postponed the conclusion of an agreement that would have strengthened the ties between Kiev and the European Union. The move was followed by the Euromaidan protests and the ousting of Yanukovich in February 2014. A month later, Russian forces entered Crimea following an illegal referendum on secession of the region. Though Moscow argued its intervention was driven by the need to protect the Russian population in the area, it led to the de facto annexation of Crimea.<sup>64</sup>

Eastern and southern Ukraine started to unravel as separatist movements saw the Russian takeover of Crimea as evidence of potential Russian support to their own aspirations. By April 2014, movements calling themselves “people’s republics” burgeoned in Donetsk, Kharkov, Luhansk, and Odessa. Following the seizure of local state institutions by these groups, a protracted war ensued between the Ukrainian regular army and militiamen. Confronted with repeat accusations of interference by Kiev and Western countries, Moscow systematically denied its

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64. Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015).

involvement. But various assessments have shown these organizations were supported by the Russian Federation and that Moscow provided economic, logistic, and intelligence assistance.<sup>65</sup> By March 2015, it was estimated by the US Army Europe Commander, Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, that there were approximately 12,000 Russian troops in eastern Ukraine backing up the separatists.<sup>66</sup> The numbers went down in the following months, and two years later, the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pavlo Klimkin, stated about 4,200 Russian troops were still present.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Russian citizens acting as “volunteers” joined the ranks of the groups fighting Ukraine’s armed forces.

The common denominator of these local conflicts was the objective of separatists – and Russian forces – to swiftly take control of the regions and their institutions and then freeze the conflict to force the government in Kiev and the international community into accepting the *fait accompli*.<sup>68</sup> For instance, the Stanichno-Luhansk border guard division in Ukraine’s Luhansk province was captured by rebels after five

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65. “Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine,” International Crisis Group, February 5, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/russia-and-separatists-eastern-ukraine>.

66. “Some 12,000 Russian Soldiers in Ukraine Supporting Rebels: US Commander,” Reuters, March 3, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-russia-soldiers/some-12000-russian-soldiers-in-ukraine-supporting-rebels-u-s-commander-idUSKBN0LZ2FV20150303>.

67. *Hearing on Russian Policies and Intentions toward Specific European Countries Before the Senate Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs*, 115th Cong. (2017) (statement of Pavlo Klimkin, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ukraine).

68. Tor Bukkvoll, “Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas,” *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 14.

days of fighting. This ultimately led to a stalemate with the Ukrainian forces, which proved unable to regain these territories. Eventually, separatists were able to reach this prolonged deadlock because they received Russian funding vital to their war effort. In 2016, the nongovernmental organization International Crisis Group estimated Moscow was directly bankrolling the pensions, the social benefits, and the salaries of local officials and military forces. The estimate concludes the extent of this support was such that it could cost the Russian treasury more than \$1 billion annually to sustain this situation.<sup>69</sup>

To achieve their political goals, Ukrainian separatist groups needed credible military power to prevent or defeat a Ukrainian offensive on their positions. Therefore, they relied on capabilities similar to those acquired by Middle East nonstate actors as illicit arms flows dramatically increased following the start of the conflict.<sup>70</sup> There is limited knowledge with regard to the military organization of these separatist groups and the role they assign to missile warfare. But public statements and tactics employed on the battlefield provide significant information. Numerous incidents have evidenced the use of rockets by the separatists. On June 14, 2014, a Ukrainian military transport plane was shot down as it was approaching its descent into the eastern city of Luhansk. The following day, the commander of the Luhansk People's Republic confirmed in a YouTube video that "the IL-76 was hit by our militia, the air defense forces of the Luhansk

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69. "Ukraine: Military Deadlock, Political Crisis," International Crisis Group, December 19, 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/b85-ukraine-military-deadlock-political-crisis>.

70. Anton Martyniuk, *Measuring Illicit Arms Flows: Ukraine* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, April 2017).

People's Republic."<sup>71</sup> Separatists claimed later that the weapon used was an Igla-1 rocket launcher, a man-portable air-defense system.<sup>72</sup> Ukrainian authorities have repeatedly reported cases of Russian-made rockets being seized from separatists in the east of the country. Weaponry that has been said to flow between Russia and Ukrainian secessionist regions includes small arms, armored personnel carriers, tanks, and missile systems. These weapon supplies have understandably stirred the controversy behind the shooting down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 in July 2014 that killed about 300 people. According to Reuters, the attack was perpetrated by Ukrainian separatists using BUK rockets provided by Russia—a claim vigorously rejected by Moscow.<sup>73</sup>

In terms of force employment, statements are also revealing. In an interview with Western journalists, Alexander Gureyev, a militiaman from Luhansk, described the systematic tactics of targeting Ukrainian airplanes: "They simply flew above us, we were already fed up with it all and decided that we would start shooting at everything: we simply took anything out of the sky that flew above us."<sup>74</sup> Just like the Houthis in Yemen, the separatists in Ukraine have used their weapons arsenal to prevent any incursion

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71. Thomas Grove and Warren Strobel, "Special report: Where Ukraine's Separatists Get Their Weapons," Reuters, July 29, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-arms-specialreport/special-report-where-ukraines-separatists-get-their-weapons-idUSKBN0FY0UA20140729>.

72. Grove and Strobel, "Special report."

73. Toby Sterling and Anthony Deutsch, "Malaysian Flight MH17 Downed by Russian-Made Missile: Prosecutors," Reuters, September 28, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-mh17/malaysian-flight-mh17-downed-by-russian-made-missile-prosecutors-idUSKCN11Y0WN>.

74. Sterling and Deutsch, "Malaysian Flight MH17."

from the regular Ukrainian forces and to consolidate their territorial gains. Although they were able to seize arms and munitions from the Ukrainian armed forces after the state authorities collapsed in these regions, it is likely they also received Russian military support. Comparatively speaking, this Russian patronage was more significant than the Iranian patronage in Yemen; Russian forces both provided logistics and weaponry and probably trained separatists to turn the seized regions into sanctuaries. Events evidenced a strong similarity between the separatists' tactics and Russian military culture – in particular, the implementation of A2/AD bubbles.<sup>75</sup>

More broadly, the development in these Ukrainian regions needs to be put into perspective with the emergence of a Russian hybrid strategy. Although this strategy has no official character, Western defense analysts have speculated the Russian forces were conducting campaigns with the intent to blur the distinction between state and nonstate means. The speculation grew in earnest following the publication of an article written by Russia's Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov, in February 2013 in the newspaper *Voenno-Promyshlenni Kurier* (*Military-Industrial Courier*). In the text, Gerasimov expounded in great detail to speculate on the types of campaigns that could be launched in a hybrid-strategy context, such as “the use of special-operations forces and internal opposition to create a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state, as well as informational actions.”<sup>76</sup> The article logically took on a prophetic dimension a year later when

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75. Phillip Karber, *Lessons Learned from the Russo-Ukrainian War* (Vienna, VA: Potomac Foundation, July 8, 2015).

76. Phillip Karber, *Lessons Learned*.



Russia annexed Crimea. In particular, the appearance of so-called “little green men” stirred a heated discussion. These men, who were armed with Russian equipment but wearing uniforms without insignia, started occupying the international airport and the parliament of Simferopol and soon deployed to the military bases located in Crimea. Russian authorities denied Western accusations that these soldiers were actually Russian and called them “local self-defense units.”<sup>77</sup> The alleged use of the little green men allowed Moscow to achieve its strategic objectives, first in Crimea and later in the separatist regions, while providing the Russian authorities with plausible denial vis-à-vis the international community.<sup>78</sup>

Applying the three parameters of our nonstate A2/AD model to the case of the Ukrainian separatists enables us to see the similarities with the Middle East examples. Politically, these groups have quickly shifted their strategies from a revolutionary position, prior to 2014, to a status quo mode today. In other words, after challenging the boundaries of Ukrainian sovereignty and changing the facts on the ground in early 2014, the separatists then went on the defensive and held their positions along the 500-km de facto border acknowledged by the Minsk protocol of September 2014.

This status quo orientation, however, did not make these nonstate actors or quasi-states more stable internally. In November 2017, a coup within the Luhansk People’s Republic toppled Igor Plotnisky, and the leader of the Donetsk People’s Republic,

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77. Steven Pifer, “Watch Out for Little Green Men,” *Der Spiegel*, July 7, 2014.

78. Andras Racz, *Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine* (Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2017), 11.

Alexander Zakharchenko, was killed in August 2018.<sup>79</sup> These were two cases among a dozen of other assassinations and coups that have happened in these regions since 2014. These events did not change the military positions on both sides, but indicated the fragility of these Russian-backed entities.<sup>80</sup> Corruption, arbitrary detention, extortion, and major deficiencies in the delivery of basic services to the local population have prevented these players from being considered more than Russian proxies. This may be the most significant difference with the organizations covered in the previous sections: eastern Ukraine is more dependent on Moscow's patronage than Hezbollah, Hamas, or the Houthis are on Iran's. The self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic were set up in the context of the momentum brought about by the annexation of Crimea. They were in many ways a mere by-product of Russia's strategy in Ukraine. In contrast, Hamas, the Houthis, and Hezbollah built platforms in the Palestinian territories, Yemen, and Lebanon, respectively, that had a grassroots dimension and enabled the nonstate actors to mobilize support from a constituency. It is very likely in the case of the separatists of eastern Ukraine that their grip on the contested regions would collapse if Russia were to change its broader strategy vis-à-vis Kiev and Western countries. Some observers have even defended the theory that the killing of separatist leaders could be orchestrated by Russian services themselves to

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79. Mansur Mirovalev, "Russia-Backed Separatists in Ukraine in Disarray amid Infighting and Violence," *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 2018.

80. Maxim Vikhrov, "The Luhansk Coup: Why Armed Conflict Erupted in Russia's Puppet Regime," Carnegie Moscow Center, November 29, 2017, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/74864>.

maintain their control of the regions in preparation for a trade-off with Western countries.<sup>81</sup> In this context, the Ukrainian case underlines the importance of states in the growth of these nonstate A2/AD bubbles. It is only because of Russian proxy tactics that these separatist movements were effective in defeating the Ukrainian regular forces. This lesson also echoes the role of Iran in the growth of Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthi insurgents in this domain, though on a different scale. More broadly, the lesson calls for a new understanding of the interaction between states and nonstate actors on the battlefield, especially in the context of emerging A2/AD strategies.

## **CONCLUSION: FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES**

As demonstrated by the cases presented in this monograph, nonstate actors today have the ability to build nascent A2/AD strategies. The exponential progress in missile technologies, the expansion of proliferation networks, and the capacity of armed groups to assemble their own indigenous arsenals are trends that altogether change the security environment in regions such as the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Three intertwined parameters can help us identify a change in the military orientation of these nonstate organizations: a political shift toward the preservation of the status quo vis-à-vis opponents; a significant focus of military resources dedicated to A2/AD capabilities—primarily, missiles and rockets; and, finally, a consequential adaptation of the military units responsible for the implementation of this new strategy.

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81. Mirovalev, "Russia-Backed Separatists."

These postures, however, are still in their infancy, and should not be equated with those of major regional or world powers such as Iran, Russia, or China. The development of nonstate A2/AD postures currently remains dependent on the ability of the nonstate actors to attract state sponsorship. Hezbollah was able to acquire its arsenal because of its support from Iran and Syria. The Houthis could not sustain their ongoing missile campaign against Saudi Arabia without significant help from Tehran. Likewise, the Ukrainian separatists only became a credible threat to Kiev thanks to the provision of military resources by Russia.

This context means that without state sponsorship, these emerging nonstate A2/AD strategies would hardly constitute a major challenge. Although rudimentary weapons such as short-range rockets are easily accessible to militias, they would not cause enough damage to raise the costs of an opponent's retaliation to a threshold of deterrence. Eventually, all successful cases discussed in this monograph have involved state support. In other words, only if states such as Iran or Russia decide to spread their military technologies and strategies to regional proxies can the nonstate A2/AD phenomenon become a conceivable model.

Bearing in mind this precondition, if a scenario of multiple nonstate A2/AD bubbles were to unfold, the United States and its allies could face unprecedented challenges, especially in the field of counterterrorism campaigns. For military planners considering scenarios in Europe and the Middle East, such a scenario would create new constraints to factor in when assessing the option of using military force in regional interventions. It may raise the level of potential casualties, and

eventually, it could constitute a kind of life insurance for those terrorist organizations.

This trend could also have major implications for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Nonstate A2/AD strategies on the southern flank of Europe would pose various types of threats for populations, commercial ships crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and NATO troops if they were to operate in the area. The lasting collapse of Libyan central authorities and the enduring security vacuum in the Sinai Peninsula would fuel proliferation networks on the North African shores of the Mediterranean. In these areas, militias could then contemplate the implementation of a Hezbollah model and as a result target civilian ships as an effective way of gaining political influence.<sup>82</sup>

NATO should also consider the consequences of the Hezbollah model for its future operations in the Middle East region. Militias' increased access to rockets and missiles and their use as a way to deny foreign forces access to their strongholds could significantly complicate NATO interventions on its southern flank. Missions such as enforcing no-fly zones over an area could be challenged by the increased vulnerability of naval and air assets, which would be targeted by these arsenals. This would therefore raise the potential human cost of operations—and, by extension, the political cost. In other words, could a new intervention such as Operation Unified Protector in Libya be

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82. Jean-Loup Samaan, "The Missile Threat in the Mediterranean: Implications for European Security," Real Instituto Elcano, October 25, 2017, [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_en/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_es/zonas\\_es/defensa+y+seguridad/ari79-2017-samaan-missile-threat-mediterranean-implications-european-security](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/defensa+y+seguridad/ari79-2017-samaan-missile-threat-mediterranean-implications-european-security).

launched if NATO were facing potential resistance from a group such as Hezbollah?

The evolution of these nonstate strategies has immediate consequences for regional partners that the US government aims to strengthen. In countries with weak central authority, such as Lebanon, Ukraine, and Yemen, nonstate A2/AD strategies serve a strategy of *fait accompli* that forces governments to accept the status quo with separatist or terrorist entities. Because of the sophistication of these strategies and the operational limitations of regular armed forces in the countries mentioned, the current situation makes it extremely difficult to dislodge these groups.

In this context, the first priority should be to strengthen the situational awareness of the United States and its allies. Our understanding of the ways in which missile proliferation is changing the strategic behavior of extremist groups is incomplete and should be enhanced via intelligence cooperation and military research. For instance, a comprehensive look at nonstate actors, including those in other regions, such as the Horn of Africa and Southeast Asia, could enable us to refine the analytical parameters and build a more robust framework for assessment. Eventually, this information would allow military planners to appraise the extent to which asymmetric capabilities such as rockets and missiles are impacting the military structure of these organizations. Likewise, planners could evaluate whether these inventories should be considered as means of deterrence or coercion—or, alternatively, as bargaining chips to accumulate power on the ground or instruments of terror for attacks on civilian targets.

At the same time, the challenge of nonstate A2/AD strategies is another factor calling for the

reinforcement of local state capabilities. Enhancing the ability of regional partners to monitor the flow of arsenals means more resources and training dedicated to both conventional armed forces, coast guards, and police forces, which play a crucial role in the early phase in curbing the flows of armaments.

Finally, these developments stress the need for a broader discussion on the redefinition of deterrence vis-à-vis nonstate actors. This recommendation is likely to provoke a controversy as it implies accepting the conditions of the status quo as established by these groups. Deterring them today would not inevitably mean deterring them (and accepting them) forever. The United States and its allies could consider accepting a temporary standoff, which would not remove the threat, but would at least contain it while the measures that could erode the military power of these organizations are identified. This effort would, perhaps, involve intelligence operations and sanctions targeting specific financial assets or the state patronage of countries such as Russia and Iran.

All in all, the phenomenon of nonstate A2/AD strategies should be of concern for both scholars and practitioners as it broadens the array of strategic options for militias and other insurgents. It redefines the fault lines between conventional and nonconventional strategies—in particular, in the context of proxy warfare. Finally, it forces us to review future military scenarios involving the US armed forces and their allies.





# NONSTATE ACTORS AND ANTI-ACCESS/ AREA DENIAL STRATEGIES: THE COMING CHALLENGE

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Jean-Loup Samaan is an associate professor in strategic studies for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) National Defense College. His research focuses on Middle Eastern strategic affairs—in particular, the Israel-Hezbollah conflict and the evolution of the Gulf security system. His most recent book, *Israel's Foreign Policy beyond the Arab World* (2018), looks at Israel's periphery doctrine from the birth of the concept in the 1950s until its contemporary renaissance. Dr. Samaan has authored three other books and several articles for various international academic and policy journals, such as *Survival*, *Orbis*, *Comparative Strategy*, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, *Politique Etrangère*, and *Internationale Politik*. Prior to his position in the UAE, he was a researcher for the Middle East Faculty at the NATO Defense College in Rome, Italy, between 2011 and 2016. He was a policy advisor at the French Ministry of Defense from 2008 to 2011, where he conducted several net assessment studies covering transatlantic military affairs. Dr. Samaan is a former student of Arabic at the French Institute of Oriental Languages and the French Institute for the Near East in Beirut, Lebanon. He graduated from the Institute for Political Studies in Grenoble, and he holds a PhD in political science from the University of Paris, La Sorbonne.

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