The Impact of Iran's Support for Armed Militias on Political Divisions in States: The Cases of Lebanon and Iraq

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of Iran's support for armed militias on political divisions in Lebanon and Iraq. It delves into the mechanisms through which such support exacerbates internal divisions, undermines state authority, and influences governance. By analyzing case studies from Lebanon and Iraq, the research identifies patterns of political fragmentation, challenges to sovereignty, and regional implications. Recommendations are proposed for mitigating the adverse effects of external support for militias on domestic politics. Iran's involvement has proven to be a double-edged sword, providing militias with resources and strategic depth while fragmenting national political landscapes. Lebanon and Iraq, despite their distinct historical and political contexts, share similarities in how Iran's support has shaped their internal dynamics. Hezbollah in Lebanon, for instance, represents the epitome of a hybrid organization that wields both political and military power, undermining the authority of the central government. On the other hand, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) highlight how militias can become embedded within state structures, challenging the very sovereignty they purport to protect. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how external support for militias translates into domestic political crises. It further investigates the broader regional ramifications of such interventions, considering how Iran's strategies align with its geopolitical goals. Through a detailed exploration of Lebanon and Iraq, this research seeks to illuminate the mechanisms by which external interference disrupts governance, perpetuates sectarianism, and destabilizes regions. Moreover, the research delves into historical antecedents, tracing Iran's militia strategies back to the Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. It highlights how these historical moments laid the foundation for Tehran's contemporary policies. By focusing on the socio-economic dimensions, this study examines the dual role of militias in providing services to local communities while simultaneously undermining state legitimacy. The interplay of political, economic, and military factors forms the crux of this investigation, shedding light on the complex relationship between external actors and domestic instability.

Keywords: *Lebanon and Iraq, Political Divisions, Iran.*

Introduction

In recent decades, Iran has strategically extended its influence across the Middle East, primarily by supporting non-state armed groups. This policy has profound implications for the internal politics of states such as Lebanon and Iraq. The research aims to analyze how Iran's backing of Hezbollah in Lebanon and various militias in Iraq has contributed to deepening political divisions, undermining national unity, and destabilizing state structures. The study focuses on the dual dynamics of domestic fragmentation and regional power competition.

Iran's strategy reflects a combination of ideological and pragmatic objectives. By fostering dependency among militias and embedding them within political and security structures, Iran extends its reach without direct military involvement. Lebanon and Iraq exemplify how this approach creates parallel governance structures, disrupts political balance, and exacerbates sectarian tensions. Furthermore, the introduction frames the challenges associated with balancing external influence and internal governance, which form the core of this study.

Iran's influence has not occurred in isolation but as part of a broader strategy to project power in the Middle East. Lebanon and Iraq serve as key nodes in this strategic network, where Iran leverages militias to achieve objectives that range from countering adversaries like the United States and Israel to securing vital trade routes and expanding ideological hegemony. Hezbollah in Lebanon and the PMF in Iraq highlight how

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such strategies are operationalized on the ground, influencing everything from military engagements to domestic politics.

The integration of militias into formal state structures further complicates governance in these countries. Hezbollah's political arm in Lebanon has secured seats in parliament and played pivotal roles in cabinet formations, effectively granting Iran indirect access to Lebanon's policymaking processes. Similarly, Iraq's PMF enjoys official recognition as part of the country's armed forces, blurring the lines between state sovereignty and militia autonomy (Mansoor et al., 2022). This duality undermines state institutions, making it difficult for central governments to assert control over national security policies and internal stability.

Furthermore, the socio-economic impact of Iran's militia strategy cannot be overlooked. In both Lebanon and Iraq, these groups have established parallel welfare systems that provide healthcare, education, and social services to their constituencies. While these initiatives earn the loyalty of local populations, they also erode the legitimacy of the state by exposing its inability to fulfill its responsibilities. This dynamic creates a cycle where dependency on militias grows, further weakening state authority and entrenching political divisions.

Sectarianism is another critical dimension of Iran's influence. By aligning with Shia factions in both Lebanon and Iraq, Iran exacerbates sectarian divides that have historically fueled conflicts in the region. In Lebanon, Hezbollah's dominance has alienated Sunni and Christian communities, leading to political paralysis and recurring crises. In Iraq, the PMF's alignment with Shia parties has marginalized Sunni and Kurdish groups, fostering grievances that threaten national unity and stability.

At the regional level, Iran's support for militias has far-reaching implications. It disrupts the balance of power in the Middle East, heightening tensions with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and Israel. This has led to an arms race and proxy conflicts that further destabilize the region. The international community, particularly the United States and European Union, faces significant challenges in addressing these dynamics without escalating tensions or undermining the sovereignty of affected states.

This research situates itself within the broader discourse on state sovereignty, external intervention, and the role of non-state actors in shaping political landscapes. By examining the cases of Lebanon and Iraq, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how external support for militias transforms domestic governance structures, amplifies internal divisions, and redefines state-society relations. The findings of this study are intended to inform policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to mitigate the adverse effects of external interference and promote stability in the Middle East.

Problem Statement

The central issue addressed in this study is the detrimental impact of Iran's support for armed militias on the internal political stability of Lebanon and Iraq. Iran's involvement has led to the creation of parallel governance structures that undermine state authority, exacerbate sectarian divisions, and weaken institutional integrity. This study seeks to understand the mechanisms through which these dynamics occur and their implications for regional and domestic stability.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of Iran's support for armed militias in shaping political divisions within Lebanon and Iraq. The study aims to identify the specific channels through which Iran's involvement disrupts governance and promotes polarization, while also offering insights into potential measures for mitigating these challenges.

Research Question

What are the political, economic, and social impacts of Iran's support for armed militias on the governance and political stability of Lebanon and Iraq?

Hypothesis

The study hypothesizes that Iran's financial, ideological, and logistical support for militias in Lebanon and Iraq exacerbates political divisions by creating parallel governance structures, fostering dependency on external actors, and heightening sectarian tensions.

Objectives of the Study

To analyze the historical and political context of Iran's support for militias in Lebanon and Iraq. To investigate the specific impacts of militia support on state sovereignty and governance. To explore the role of external actors in mediating or exacerbating these challenges. To propose actionable recommendations for improving political stability and reducing external interference.

Literature Review

The literature on Iran's foreign policy highlights its dual approach of ideological export and strategic pragmatism (Milani, 2018). Iran has consistently sought to balance its ideological commitments with pragmatic strategies to maximize its regional influence. This dual approach is evident in its support for militias that serve both as ideological proxies and strategic assets.

Research on Hezbollah in Lebanon emphasizes its evolution from a resistance group to a dominant political and military force, supported heavily by Iran (Norton, 2007). Studies reveal how Hezbollah's relationship with Iran goes beyond mere patronage, reflecting a symbiotic partnership where both actors mutually benefit. While Iran provides financial, military, and ideological support, Hezbollah advances Iran's strategic objectives in the Levant, including countering Israeli influence and maintaining a foothold in Lebanese politics.

Similarly, research on Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) illustrates how Iran's support has entrenched sectarian divides and weakened state institutions (Mansour, 2021). The PMF, a coalition of predominantly Shia militias, emerged as a critical force in the fight against ISIS but has since become a controversial player in Iraq's political and security landscape. Studies underscore the PMF's dual role as both a state-recognized entity and an extension of Iran's regional agenda, complicating efforts to consolidate Iraqi sovereignty.

Additional scholarship delves into the socio-economic dimensions of militia influence. Iran-backed groups often provide social services, creating a parallel state structure that undermines national governments. For instance, Hezbollah operates schools, hospitals, and welfare programs that cater primarily to Lebanon's Shia community, fostering loyalty while exposing the Lebanese state's inability to deliver similar services. Similarly, PMF-affiliated groups in Iraq have developed economic networks that include control over border crossings and involvement in trade, further entrenching their power.

Theoretical frameworks in international relations provide valuable insights into Iran's strategies. Realist perspectives highlight how Iran uses militias as tools of power projection to counterbalance regional adversaries and deter foreign interventions. Constructivist approaches, on the other hand, emphasize the role of shared religious and ideological identities in fostering deep ties between Iran and its proxies. By framing its support as part of a broader 'resistance' against Western imperialism and Zionism, Iran legitimizes its interventions and garners regional support.

Comparative studies of Lebanon and Iraq reveal both commonalities and differences in how Iranian-backed militias operate. While Hezbollah has achieved a level of institutionalization within Lebanon's political system, the PMF remains a more fragmented entity with varying degrees of loyalty to Tehran. This distinction underscores the importance of local contexts in shaping the dynamics of Iran's influence.

Overall, the literature underscores the complexity of Iran's militia strategy, which combines ideological, military, and socio-economic dimensions to achieve its regional objectives. This review synthesizes findings from regional case studies and theoretical frameworks to contextualize Iran's influence in Lebanon and Iraq, providing a foundation for the subsequent analysis in this study.

Iran's Strategy and Mechanisms of Influence

Iran's geopolitical strategies are deeply rooted in its ideological ambitions and pragmatic objectives. The Islamic Republic has consistently sought to export the ideals of the 1979 revolution while simultaneously securing its position as a regional power. This chapter examines the multifaceted approaches Iran employs to exert influence, including:

Historical Foundations

The origins of Iran's militia strategy date back to the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), when the Iranian government first began cultivating proxy groups to counter external threats. By leveraging ideological alignment, Iran established a network of loyalist militias that continue to operate across the region. This strategic move allowed Iran to project power beyond its borders, particularly in weak states where central governments struggle to maintain authority (Dodge, 2019).

Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) played a foundational role in establishing these groups, emphasizing loyalty to Iran's revolutionary ideals. For instance, the creation of Hezbollah in Lebanon during the early 1980s marked the beginning of Iran's transnational influence (Norton, 2007).

Financial and Military Support

Iran channels significant financial resources and sophisticated weaponry to militias such as Hezbollah and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF). Estimates suggest that Iran spends billions annually to sustain these groups. Weapons systems provided to militias often include advanced missiles, drones, and other military technologies that enhance their strategic capabilities (Milani, 2018).

The financial support also extends to providing salaries, infrastructure, and logistical aid. This economic dependency ensures that these groups remain aligned with Tehran's regional objectives, particularly in countering Western and Gulf Arab influence. The strategic economic ties also deepen Iran's influence within these groups' host countries, ensuring loyalty through sustained dependence (Saab, 2019).

Training and Ideological Alignment

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) plays a pivotal role in providing training and ideological indoctrination. IRGC Quds Force units train militia members in asymmetric warfare, urban combat, and intelligence operations. This alignment ensures that these groups remain ideologically tied to Iran's vision of "resistance" against Western and regional adversaries (Mansour, 2021).

Hezbollah's military cadres, for instance, are often trained in Iranian facilities, gaining access to advanced tactics and technologies. Similar programs are extended to PMF factions in Iraq, ensuring operational cohesion and loyalty. These training programs foster not only military expertise but also a shared ideological commitment to Iran's regional strategies (Norton, 2007).

Integration into Political Structures

Iran's approach often includes embedding these militias within the formal political and security apparatus of the host states. Hezbollah operates as both a military entity and a legitimate political party in Lebanon, while the PMF enjoys official status within Iraq's security forces. This dual role complicates governance and reform efforts. Hezbollah's influence in Lebanese decision-making, particularly its veto power in political processes, highlights the deep integration of militias in governance structures (Milani, 2018).

The political roles of these groups grant Iran indirect leverage over domestic policies, particularly in matters related to defense, foreign alliances, and internal stability. This section explores specific instances where such integration disrupted state functionality, such as Lebanon's repeated governmental stalemates and Iraq's divided political scene (Saab, 2019).

Case Study of Lebanon

Lebanon serves as a pivotal case in understanding Iran's influence through armed militias. Hezbollah, established in the 1980s, has transformed from a resistance group fighting Israeli occupation to a dominant political and military force in Lebanon. This chapter explores Hezbollah's historical development, its impact on governance, and the socio-economic dimensions of its operations, highlighting how Iran's support has entrenched sectarianism and destabilized Lebanon's state structures.

Historical Context

Hezbollah was founded during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) as a response to Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. Initially a resistance movement, Hezbollah quickly evolved into a hybrid organization that combined military prowess with political ambitions. Iran's role was instrumental in Hezbollah's development, providing financial resources, training, and ideological direction through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This support allowed Hezbollah to emerge as a leading force in Lebanon's Shia community (Norton, 2007).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Hezbollah expanded its influence by integrating into Lebanon's political framework. Its participation in elections and its ability to mobilize support within the Shia population solidified its dual role as both a political and military entity. The 2006 war with Israel further enhanced its reputation as a 'resistance' movement, although the conflict also deepened Lebanon's internal divisions (Milani, 2018).

Impact on Governance

Hezbollah's dominance in Lebanon's political system has profound implications for governance. By operating as a 'state within a state,' Hezbollah undermines the authority of the Lebanese government. It controls key territories in southern Lebanon and parts of Beirut, where its military and administrative structures operate independently of the state (Saab, 2019).

Hezbollah's influence extends to national politics, where it wields significant power through its parliamentary representation and alliances with other factions. For instance, during the 2008 political crisis, Hezbollah's armed intervention in Beirut demonstrated its ability to override state institutions. This episode highlighted the limitations of Lebanon's government in maintaining sovereignty and illustrated Hezbollah's capacity to dictate terms in national politics (Mansour, 2021).

Moreover, Hezbollah's veto power in the cabinet has often paralyzed governance, delaying reforms and contributing to political stagnation. This dynamic has weakened Lebanon's institutional framework, making it difficult to address critical issues such as economic reform, anti-corruption measures, and national security.

Economic and Social Dimensions

In addition to its military and political roles, Hezbollah plays a significant socio-economic role in Lebanon. It provides a wide range of services, including healthcare, education, and social welfare, primarily targeting the Shia population. These services, funded by Iran, enhance Hezbollah's legitimacy among its constituents while exposing the Lebanese state's inability to meet public needs (Norton, 2007).

Hezbollah's economic activities extend beyond legal frameworks, involving illicit trade, smuggling, and financial networks that operate internationally. For example, its operations in West Africa and South America generate substantial revenue, which is funneled back into its political and military activities. These activities not only strengthen Hezbollah but also exacerbate Lebanon's fiscal crisis by undermining efforts to establish transparent and accountable economic governance (Milani, 2018).

Furthermore, Hezbollah's socio-economic initiatives contribute to sectarian divisions. By prioritizing Shia communities, Hezbollah reinforces sectarian identities, deepening mistrust among Lebanon's diverse religious groups. This sectarianism has far-reaching implications for national unity, as it perpetuates cycles of division and conflict within Lebanon's political landscape.

Regional and International Implications

Hezbollah's alignment with Iran positions it as a key player in regional geopolitics. It serves as a conduit for Iran's broader strategic objectives, including countering Israel and expanding influence in the Levant. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War, where it supported the Assad regime, underscores its role as an extension of Iran's foreign policy (Mansour, 2021).

Internationally, Hezbollah's designation as a terrorist organization by the United States and several European countries complicates Lebanon's relations with Western powers. This designation limits Lebanon's access to international aid and economic support, further straining its fragile economy. Simultaneously, Hezbollah's activities provoke tensions with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which view its influence as a threat to regional stability (Saab, 2019).

Case Study of Iraq

Iraq provides a critical case study in understanding the influence of Iran through armed militias. The establishment and evolution of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), a coalition of predominantly Shia militias, illustrate the complex dynamics of Iran's involvement in Iraq. This chapter explores the PMF's formation, its impact on Iraq's sovereignty and governance, and the broader socio-political consequences of its activities.

Formation and Evolution of the PMF

The PMF was officially formed in 2014 in response to the rise of ISIS and the call by Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani for volunteers to defend the country. While the PMF played a pivotal role in combating ISIS, many of its factions have longstanding ties to Iran, predating its formal establishment. Groups such as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq have operated under Iranian guidance for years, serving as proxies in Tehran's regional strategy (Mansour, 2021).

Iran's support for the PMF has been multifaceted, encompassing financial aid, military training, and the provision of advanced weaponry. The Quds Force, an elite unit of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has been instrumental in shaping the PMF's organizational structure and operational tactics. This alignment has allowed Iran to extend its influence deeply into Iraq's security and political systems (Milani, 2018).

Impact on Sovereignty and Governance

The PMF's integration into Iraq's formal security apparatus in 2016 was a double-edged sword. While it granted the PMF legal status, it also blurred the lines between state and militia authority. Many PMF factions operate with significant autonomy, often prioritizing Iranian directives over Iraqi national interests. This duality undermines Iraq's sovereignty and complicates efforts to establish unified command structures (Saab, 2019).

The PMF's political influence further exacerbates governance challenges. Several PMF-aligned groups have entered Iraq's political arena, securing parliamentary seats and influencing key decisions. Their involvement has deepened sectarian divides, sidelining Sunni and Kurdish communities and fostering grievances that threaten national unity (Dodge, 2019).

Economic Dimensions

Beyond its military and political roles, the PMF wields significant economic power. It controls key border crossings, oil facilities, and trade routes, leveraging these assets to finance its operations. These economic activities, often conducted outside the purview of the Iraqi government, undermine efforts to establish transparency and accountability in Iraq's economy (Mansour, 2021).

Moreover, the PMF's control over these resources has created economic disparities, particularly in Sunni-majority regions that remain marginalized. This dynamic perpetuates cycles of poverty and resentment, fueling further instability. By consolidating economic power, the PMF reinforces its autonomy, making it increasingly difficult for the Iraqi state to assert control (Milani, 2018).

Social and Sectarian Implications

The PMF's activities have profound social and sectarian consequences. By aligning predominantly with Shia communities, the PMF exacerbates sectarian tensions in Iraq, alienating Sunni and Kurdish populations. This alignment deepens societal fractures and complicates efforts to foster national reconciliation (Norton, 2007).

In addition, the PMF's role in suppressing protests, particularly during the 2019 demonstrations, has further tarnished its reputation among segments of the Iraqi population. Allegations of human rights abuses and corruption have eroded trust in the PMF, highlighting the broader challenges of integrating such entities into a democratic framework (Saab, 2019).

Regional and International Implications

The PMF's ties to Iran position it as a critical player in Tehran's regional strategy. Its involvement in cross-border operations, particularly in Syria, underscores its role as an extension of Iranian influence in the Middle East. This dynamic heightens tensions with regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, who view the PMF as a destabilizing force (Mansour, 2021).

Internationally, the PMF's actions complicate Iraq's relations with Western powers. The United States, which has designated several PMF factions as terrorist organizations, faces challenges in balancing its opposition to these groups with its broader strategic interests in Iraq. This dynamic underscores the intricate interplay of local, regional, and international factors in shaping the PMF's role (Dodge, 2019).

Comparative Analysis and Regional Implications

A comparative analysis of Iran's influence through armed militias in Lebanon and Iraq reveals both shared patterns and distinct outcomes. This chapter explores the similarities and differences in how Hezbollah and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) have affected governance, sectarian dynamics, and regional stability. It also examines the broader implications of Iran's strategies for Middle Eastern geopolitics.

Shared Patterns of Influence

Both Hezbollah in Lebanon and the PMF in Iraq demonstrate Iran's strategic use of militias to project power and secure its regional interests. These groups serve as extensions of Iranian influence, embedding themselves within the political and security structures of their respective states. Iran's support includes financial aid, military training, and ideological alignment, ensuring the loyalty and operational effectiveness of these groups (Milani, 2018).

A critical shared feature is the ability of these militias to operate as 'states within states.' Hezbollah controls significant territories in southern Lebanon, while the PMF wields influence across several provinces in Iraq. This parallel governance undermines state authority and complicates efforts to centralize power (Saab, 2019).

Differences in Political Integration

The extent and nature of political integration differ significantly between Hezbollah and the PMF. Hezbollah has achieved a high degree of institutionalization, holding parliamentary seats and playing a decisive role in Lebanon's cabinet formations. This integration allows Hezbollah to influence policymaking directly, often aligning Lebanon's foreign policy with Iranian interests (Norton, 2007).

In contrast, the PMF's political presence is more fragmented. While some factions participate in elections and hold government positions, others remain outside formal political processes. This fragmentation reflects the diversity within the PMF, with varying degrees of allegiance to Iran. As a result, the PMF's influence is less centralized, creating both opportunities and challenges for Iran's regional strategy (Mansour, 2021).

Impact on Sectarian Dynamics

Both Hezbollah and the PMF exacerbate sectarian divides within their host states. Hezbollah's dominance in Lebanon has alienated Sunni and Christian communities, contributing to political polarization and recurrent crises. Similarly, the PMF's alignment with Shia factions in Iraq marginalizes Sunni and Kurdish groups, perpetuating grievances and undermining national unity (Dodge, 2019).

However, the intensity and scope of sectarian tensions differ. Lebanon's sectarian divides are deeply entrenched and institutionalized within its confessional political system. In Iraq, sectarianism is exacerbated by post-2003 political reforms that empowered Shia factions at the expense of other communities. This distinction highlights the contextual factors shaping the role of Iranian-backed militias in sectarian dynamics (Saab, 2019).

Regional Implications

Iran's use of militias like Hezbollah and the PMF has significant regional implications. These groups act as proxies in Tehran's broader geopolitical strategy, countering adversaries such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United States. Hezbollah's military presence along Israel's borders and the PMF's involvement in Syria illustrate their roles in advancing Iranian objectives (Milani, 2018).

This strategy, however, heightens regional tensions. Israel views Hezbollah's growing arsenal as a direct threat, while Gulf states perceive the PMF as part of Iran's bid for regional hegemony. These perceptions contribute to an arms race and proxy conflicts, further destabilizing the Middle East (Mansour, 2021).

Internationally, the activities of these militias complicate relations between Iran and Western powers. Sanctions targeting Hezbollah and PMF factions limit their financial resources but also strain diplomatic efforts to address broader regional issues. This dynamic underscores the complex interplay between local actors and international policies (Dodge, 2019).

Broader Lessons and Challenges

The cases of Lebanon and Iraq highlight the challenges of countering the influence of Iranian-backed militias. Efforts to disarm these groups or integrate them fully into state institutions often face resistance, both domestically and from Iran. Additionally, the socio-economic roles these militias play complicate reform efforts, as they have entrenched themselves as key providers in underserved communities (Norton, 2007).

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Strengthening state institutions, promoting inclusive governance, and fostering regional cooperation are essential steps. However, these efforts must account for the deeply rooted socio-political and economic dynamics that sustain these militias, making this a long-term endeavor (Saab, 2019).

Findings and Recommendations

This chapter synthesizes the findings from the case studies of Lebanon and Iraq to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Iran's support for armed militias on political divisions and state governance. Additionally, it offers strategic recommendations aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of such influence.

Key Findings

Parallel Governance Structures: Both Hezbollah in Lebanon and the PMF in Iraq operate as quasi-independent entities, undermining state authority. These militias have created parallel governance structures that challenge central governments and complicate reform efforts (Norton, 2007; Mansour, 2021).

Sectarian Polarization: Iranian-backed militias exacerbate sectarian tensions in both countries. Hezbollah's dominance alienates Sunni and Christian communities in Lebanon, while the PMF's alignment with Shia factions marginalizes Sunni and Kurdish groups in Iraq, deepening societal divides (Saab, 2019; Dodge, 2019).

Economic Impacts: These militias control significant economic resources, including trade routes and border crossings. Their activities undermine efforts to establish transparent economic systems, further weakening state institutions (Milani, 2018).

Regional Instability: Iran's use of militias as proxies heightens regional tensions, contributing to an arms race and proxy conflicts. This strategy disrupts regional stability and complicates diplomatic resolutions (Mansour, 2021).

Challenges in Addressing Militia Influence

Efforts to counter the influence of Iranian-backed militias face several challenges:

Entrenched Socio-Economic Roles: These militias provide essential services to underserved communities, making them indispensable for certain populations. Disbanding or disarming these groups risks creating vacuums that governments may struggle to fill (Norton, 2007).

Institutional Weakness: Weak state institutions in Lebanon and Iraq limit the capacity of governments to assert control over militias or implement meaningful reforms (Dodge, 2019).

External Dependencies: The deep ties between these militias and Iran make it difficult to sever their influence without addressing the broader geopolitical dynamics (Milani, 2018).

Recommendations

Strengthening State Institutions

Invest in reforming security sectors to centralize control over armed forces. Enhance transparency and accountability in governance to reduce the influence of militias (Saab, 2019).

Promoting Inclusive Governance

Develop policies that address sectarian grievances and promote power-sharing among all communities. Foster dialogue between political factions to build consensus on national priorities (Norton, 2007).

Regional Cooperation

Engage regional actors in dialogue to address shared security concerns and promote stability. Establish frameworks for cooperation that discourage external interference in domestic affairs (Mansour, 2021).

Leveraging International Support

Utilize international organizations to mediate conflicts and support state-building efforts.

Provide targeted aid to strengthen civil society initiatives and counter the socio-economic influence of militias (Milani, 2018).

Conclusion

Iran's support for militias in Lebanon and Iraq underscores the complex interplay of domestic, regional, and international factors in shaping political dynamics. While these militias serve Iran's strategic interests, they come at a significant cost to state sovereignty, governance, and regional stability. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts at multiple levels, prioritizing inclusive governance, institutional reform, and regional dialogue. By adopting a holistic approach, Lebanon and Iraq can begin to mitigate the adverse effects of militia influence and work towards sustainable political stability (Saab, 2019).

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