

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

USAID AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO HEZBOLLAH
IN THE SOUTH OF LEBANON

by
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AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

USAID AS A COUNTERWEIGHT TO HEZBOLLAH
IN TOWNS IN THE SOUTH OF LEBANON

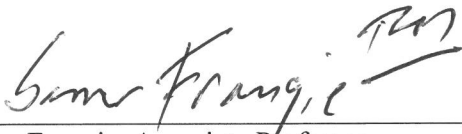
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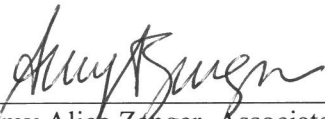
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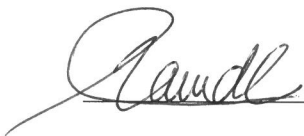
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The United States has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid to Lebanon since the establishment of the United States Agency of International Development (USAID) in the country in 1961. The various projects USAID implemented in Lebanon include investing in infrastructure such as water and sanitation and other essential areas such as education and economic development. However, foreign aid can hardly be seen as a form of bilateral partnership. Instead, foreign aid is mainly used by rich countries as a tool for gaining influence and popular support in recipient countries. Foreign aid can, therefore, be seen a means to ensure donors' geopolitical interests, to establish hegemony, or attain a specific foreign policy goal. The American foreign aid strategy for Lebanon in the twenty-first century is not different. Its aim is to diminish the influence of Hezbollah, particularly in South Lebanon, by using its powerful aid program.

Hezbollah, a widely known South Lebanon-based Shi'ite Islamic organization and Lebanese political party, was founded in the 1980's during the occupation of Lebanon by Israeli forces. Since its inception, the organization has been involved in multiple military operations and acts of violence. However, its role in fighting Israeli aggression, in addition to the positive impact its social services have had on the life of its supporters, granted Hezbollah an important position in Lebanon's political system. Hezbollah's reputation has, however, been marred by controversy. The party does not hide the fact that it is funded by Iran's notorious Islamic regime, and is allegedly involved in criminal activities such as drug trafficking and diamond smuggling, to finance its activities. However, Hezbollah is a force to be reckoned with, and its effective social aid programs have only increased its influence and popular support. The United States, however, has designated Hezbollah a terrorist organization and is heavily invested in undermining the party's power and influence. Hence, the US is increasing USAID's funding to Lebanon in order to offer aid programs that can compete with Hezbollah's social services network.

In this study I will analyze Hezbollah's role in three municipalities in Southern Lebanon, Qaileh, Bazouryeh, and Sur (Tyre). These towns are administered by Hezbollah's ally, the Amal Movement, and are recipients of aid from USAID. I will analyze the results of the 2004, 2010 and 2016 municipal elections in these municipalities to find out how electoral results have changed over time and how they have affected Hezbollah. I will also investigate why and how these municipalities became eligible to receive USAID assistance.

America's strategy to diminish Hezbollah influence by using aid, prior to the implementation of the new USAID Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 plan, failed to accomplish the US goal. Instead, Hezbollah's support continues to grow in Southern Lebanon and elsewhere in the country. Finally, I will also discuss the USAID FY 2019 strategy of withholding aid from areas affiliated with Hezbollah as means to penalize their population for their party loyalty.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	V
ABSTARCT.....	VI
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THEROTICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTS.....	4
2. 1. Hegemony and Soft Power.....	4
2. 2. The Soft and Symbolic Power of Aid.....	7
2. 3. USAID: The Gift-Giving Arm of a Hegemon.....	14
2. 3. 1. An Overview	14
2. 3. 2. Influence and Initiatives in Lebanon.....	16
3. HEZBOLLAH AND USAID’S PROGRAMS: A TUG OF WAR.....	20
3. 1. Hezbollah: A Brief History of a Long Trajectory.....	20
3. 2. Hezbollah as a Hegemon.....	25
3. 2. 1. Territorial and Religious Hegemony.....	25
3. 3. 3. Hezbollah as a Local Aid Agency.....	25
3. 3. How to Weaken Hezbollah.....	27
4. USAID, U.S. CONGRESS AND LEBANON AS A RECIPIENT COUNTRY.....	33
4. 1. USAID Fiscal Year (FY) 2019.....	33

4. 2. Obstacles to USAID in the South.....	35
5.CONCLUSION.....	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	51

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Like other countries, the United States of America has a clear set of policies and interests in the Middle East. One of them is among the priorities of the Trump administration foreign policy for the Middle East, to diminish and undermine Hezbollah's influence in the region. Hezbollah, which was designated a terrorist organization by the United States in 1995, was established in the early 1980s during Lebanon's Civil War and, some analysts claim, was supported by Iran to strengthen its geopolitical position in the region.

The party has long been chastised by critics and opponents who maintain that Hezbollah uses the pretense of fighting foreign occupiers in Lebanon to perpetrate murderous terror attacks against Israeli, American, and Jewish targets around the globe (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). Other analysts accuse Hezbollah of using false claims that they have liberated and now protect Lebanon from foreign occupation, while making no secret of its political and financial connections to foreign powers, namely Iran's Islamic regime. Therefore, for some scholars Hezbollah is simply a tool for Iranian interests since the party follows Iran and considers the United States and Israel its chief enemies, an ideology that has resulted in a global terrorist campaign against the two nations (Blandford, 2017).

Hezbollah also has a long history of conducting bold military operations against the United States. Before September 11, 2001, Hezbollah's military wing was responsible for killing more Americans than any other terrorist organization that had targeted the country. Among other deadly operations, Hezbollah has been linked to the 1983 attack on U.S. Marine barracks in

Lebanon during the civil war, the 1992 suicide bombing of the Israeli embassy in Argentina in Buenos Aires, the 1994 suicide bombing of the Argentine Jewish Mutual Association also in Buenos Aires, and the 2012 bombing of an Israeli tourist bus in Bulgaria. But one of the most damaging cases against Hezbollah is domestic. The organization is suspected of involvement in the spectacular and traumatic February 2005 suicide bombing in Beirut that killed 23 people, including former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, a popular politician, albeit a controversial figure for some groups. (Blandford, 2017).

Hezbollah's political wing, however, is savvy and uses more palatable, effective and persuasive tactics that have helped the party establish itself as a powerful force in Lebanese society and politics. Hence, Hezbollah is widely known, both locally and abroad, for setting up well-run charities and providing services in the southern part of Lebanon where the government presence is lacking. Its social services have boosted Hezbollah's popularity and opened the way to its becoming an important part of the Lebanese political structure. Since 1992, Hezbollah has had an active role and notable influence on Lebanon's parliament and its elected body (Flanigad & Abdel-Samad, 2009). In response to Hezbollah's effective, reliable and popular aid network, the United States promptly created its own, well-structured and well-funded alternative.

In order to counter the threat posed by Hezbollah to its foreign policy in the Middle East, the United States set out to diminish Hezbollah's influence by using soft power strategies. In addition to traditional diplomacy, the United States also has a powerful foreign policy tool, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The United States had been providing aid to Lebanon since the 1950s before establishing its aid agency in the country in 1961. Since then, according to the agency's records, the aid provided by USAID has been crucial to the development of the nation (USAID, 2018).

USAID provides aid to different infrastructure and social service projects as water and sanitation, education, governance, social activism, and agriculture. By means of the aid USAID provides, the U.S seeks to win the support and trust of the Lebanese people. The U.S. strategy is to weaken the power and influence of Hezbollah by showing the Lebanese, particularly the Lebanese in the south of the country, that the United States is a generous and reliable partner that has a lot to offer to its allies. However, the United States has abandoned this somewhat romantic strategy in its plan for USAID Fiscal Year 2019 and has since to follow a different approach. Instead of distributing aid relatively equally throughout the country, the US, as shown in the list of upcoming projects on the USAID's website, has substantially cut the amount of aid it provides to the Baalbek and Hermel region where Hezbollah has a strong following and maintains its operational offices. According to the mayor of Qlaileh, Abdelkarim Hassan in South Lebanon, municipalities were informed that the municipalities that has a mayor who is a member of Hezbollah will no longer be eligible to receive aid.

In this study I will investigate all the relevant aspects of this new American strategy of playing "tug of war" with Hezbollah to weaken the party's political power by disrupting its efficient and respected aid system. The aim of this study is to shed light on the current American stance on Hezbollah, which it considers a tool for Iranian geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East, while trying to point to the possible impact of this new American push for hegemony on Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance and unstable political order.

CHAPTER 2

THEORITICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTS

2. 1 Hegemony and Soft Power

The term hegemony, an essential concept in Marxist political theory, was introduced to the study of international relations by Keohane's theory of hegemonic stability (1984). In it, Keohane rejects the prevailing neoliberalism idea of the supremacy of nation-states, and observes that non-state actors, such as multinational corporations, have a dominant role in the international system. Among other things, he observes that dominance depends on the amount of international resources an actor has in order to exert influence and assert power. And although an actor's power is not limited by its international resources, they are essential to secure its interests (Keohane, 1984).

Hence, hegemonic power is also the power of an actor to establish some type of international rule which should be followed by others, and which was created precisely for that effect (Keohane, 1989). Although Keohane's views are integral to his study, other scholars who apparently shun Keohane's focus on the role of the state, describe hegemony as the "preponderance of military and economic capabilities" (Ikenberry & Kupchan, 1990), and as the "predominance of one state over its peers" (Stiles, 2009). Their definitions are also helpful to illustrate some points about USAID in Southern Lebanon.

Russett's perspective (1985) offers insights that are important to understand how foreign aid is connected to hegemony. For Russett (1985), the hegemony of an actor depends on two factors, the actor's ability to hold sufficient power, and its willingness to exercise it. He also

notes that hegemony is not necessarily a form of leadership, and that in order for a hegemonic rule to succeed and last, a hegemon should not play a direct role in asserting its established power. Hence, Russett argues that cultural hegemony has a critical role in implementing hegemonic power, whereas cultural leadership constitutes an abstract form of soft power characterized by the hegemon's ability to spread an ideology that appeals to and is accepted by other states.

In international relations the notion of indirect and direct power describes the ability of the hegemon to affect different actors in order to achieve the outcomes it desires, as in the case of the United States in Lebanon. How indirect and direct power are manifested depends on the type of behavior of a dominant country and of the tangibility of its resources. The direct power of a hegemon is measured by its palpable assets such as using its own military or funding the acquisition of a country's military supplies. Conversely, indirect power cannot be measured precisely because it relies on the use of intangible assets such as the capacity to entice actors by using the influence of the hegemon's ideas. Thus, expanding on Russett, neo-Gramscian scholars such as Brown and Ainley (2005) observe that indirect power is asserted when the ideas of a hegemon eventually become common sense. For example, Anglo-American neo-liberal economic ideas are now common sense and prevalent, thus the international system, the goal has a its cooperation and integration to promote economic development and growth.

Neo-Gramscians, like their predecessor, see the state as the primary actor in the international system (Gramsci, 1971) and see the state as not only identified with the political society, but also civil society. However, Gramsci notices that the dominance of a group is granted through moral leadership and other forms of control. In addition, some thinkers claim that persuasion and consensus are needed in order for an actor to effectively wield power. For

example, while Konrad (2012) believes that in order to persuade, an actor needs to display the necessary level of force, others point out that consent to actor-state dominance may be attained by using persuasion, reaching a compromise, and by integrating the diverse interests of the subordinate state's society (Engel, 2008).

Neo-Gramscians see cultural leadership as the most crucial form of power which surpasses both economic and military leadership. They believe that using coercive power without pretext and the approval of other actors diminishes the chances of a state becoming hegemonic. Others state that the economic power of an actor is more important than other forms of power because of the interconnectedness of international actors. Despite the fact that military might is obviously a critical element in asserting hegemony, political and economic power play a far more important part on the hegemonic process since they require the consent of the subordinate state (Konrad, 2012).

Neo-Gramscians maintain that only when consensus is achieved and material or economic conditions have been satisfied, an actor can emerge as a hegemon by presenting itself as an educator and spreading its intellectual and moral values. A state that has an established culture and ideology will remain a hegemonic actor for a longer period of time (Konrad, 2012). Neo-Gramscian scholars believe that the compliance of subordinate actors established by a solid ideological and political authority is more linked to hegemony than a power-based form of dominion. For example, for Cox, in order for a state to establish a hegemonic presence its military, economic, and cultural power must work together simultaneously. To become a hegemon, the beliefs and ideology of an actor also must be adopted by the minor actors (Cox, 1996).

Institutions have a critical role in the neo-Gramscian interpretation of hegemony. In order for a hegemon to maintain its dominance, international institutions such as the UN and USAID need to be established. The hegemonic actors establish international institutions in order to create some form of validity for their authority at the international level. These international institutions can also be used as a form of hard power to assert control (Konrad, 2012).

2. 2 The Soft and Symbolic Power of Aid

A concept tied to the neo-Gramscian approach to international relations, soft power is a diplomatic tactic used by influential countries to attract and co-opt potential partner states, rather than using force to coerce these states into complying with their demands or interests. In this study, analyzing soft power is especially important since one of its most effective and commonly used instruments is foreign aid.

Soft power manifests a country's ability to shape the preferences of individuals and nations by using means that appeal to and attract the interest of different communities worldwide. The defining feature of soft power, as the term suggests, is that it is non-coercive and non-aggressive. Soft power draws on culture, political values, and foreign policy strategies, such as the recognition that the country which uses it is a reliable broker, and has moral authority (Yukaruç, 2017). These strategies, however, do not indicate that countries which use soft power will not make use of hard power at specific times. But, as some scholars suggest, the effects of using soft, non-coercive power are just as effective as using the intimidating tactics of hard power.

Soft power is a multilevel strategy and has various complex aspects. For example, it not merely a way to exert "influence," it is also a way to gain influence. It is not simply the ability

to persuade or influence others through dialogue, it also presupposes a country's ability to entice and attract. In behavioral terms, soft power is defined as a type of attractive power that uses certain resources as assets to produce such attraction. Hence, polls and/or focus groups are often used to measure whether a particular asset is an attractive soft power resource. In contrast, a case by case approach is used to verify whether a specific asset that produces attraction can produce the desired policy outcomes. Measuring the impact on behavior change of assets and evaluating their effectiveness in terms of outcomes is not a strategy unique to soft power. In fact, it is characteristic of all forms of power (Nye, 2008). In addition, in most cases, it is more beneficial to use the soft power of diplomacy rather than the hard power of coercive diplomacy, since resorting to hard power can create unnecessary conflicts and possibly damage future prospects of positive bilateral relations.

A state that can make its power appear legitimate to others, will find less resistance to its demands. If its culture and ideology are attractive, other cultures will be more willing to embrace it. In addition, if a country can establish international norms that are endorsed by its own society, it will be less likely to have to change them. Most importantly, if a dominant country supports institutions that can make other states limit activities that are detrimental to its interests, it may be spared the costly and usually violent exercise of coercive or hard power (Nye, 1990). For example, the United States has a respected and solid constitution and is seen as a beacon of freedom by many. The fact that Americans are granted individual freedoms and that their country ostensibly respects human rights encourages other states and societies to try to adopt a similar model.

Moreover, by resorting to international and domestic institutions such as the United Nations and USAID, the United States has been able to pressure other countries into following a

course of action that benefits its own institutions. Hence agencies that facilitate foreign aid are central to induce recipient countries to limit undesirable activities. For example, in 2018 the Lebanese government was pressured by the United States to decline a Russian aid package intended to boost Lebanon's U.S.-backed military. Yielding to American pressure, the Lebanese government diverted the aid package to its internal security services (Borshchevskaya & Ghaddar, 2018). This instance highlights the efficiency of American pressure, possibly a result of the prevalence of its foreign aid program in Lebanon, and indicates an attempt by the United States to establish and maintain hegemony in the region.

Foreign aid can also be understood as a strategy of what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic power. For Bourdieu, giving is an effective mode of domination because it involves the allocation of material goods that are needed or desired by recipients (Hattori, 2001). The act of giving a gift changes the donor's status in its relationship to the recipient from dominant to generous. In accepting such a gift, the recipient embraces the social order that produced it. In other words, the recipient becomes grateful. Bourdieu notices that, as the term suggests, symbolic power is an imperceptible form of power relation that both actors do not wish to recognize they maintain (Bourdieu, 1994). It is also a modified and approved form of power which draws on social, cultural and economic capital which Bourdieu calls assets of authority. Symbolic power can thus be acquired, accumulated, and lost (Bourdieu, 1994).

As a form of hegemony, symbolic power involves the control of one group by another. In addition, various groups are engaged in symbolic conflict and each group attempts to define the social world according to its interests (Bourdieu, 1994). Bourdieu's views are particularly significant in this study since American scientific, technological, and societal advancements have created shockwaves around the world. From spatial and digital technologies, to progressive

social reforms, the United States has shaped the world, wielding a form of power that Bourdieu refers to as symbolic systems (Geèienë, 2002).

As described above, soft and symbolic power are ways in which hegemony is asserted by means that resemble the ones used in traditional diplomacy, trade and politics. In this study, U.S. foreign aid is seen as a function of hegemony and as a strategy and a foreign policy tool to preserve and expand American influence. Thus, in spite of its army, one of the best trained and the most powerfully equipped in the world, the United States has complex interests abroad that can neither be secured by military means alone nor guaranteed by traditional methods of diplomacy, which are only in part appropriate. However, the US reliance on foreign aid as a means to gain the support of regional partners has been, according to various analysts, “increasingly associated with national security policy” (as cited in Apodaca, 2017, p. 2).

A clear example of the links between America’s foreign aid, its geopolitical strategies in the Middle East and US national security is the country’s stance on Hezbollah. Hezbollah was among the first groups designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, (FTO) by the State Department in 1997. Since then, US allies in the Arab World, Europe and elsewhere felt compelled to follow suit and outlawed both Hezbollah and its political wing.

However, some studies have shown that a large number of people in Southern Lebanon are dependent on the social services and medical assistance offered by Hezbollah which, in turn, maintains its “domestic” aid agency with Iranian funds. With a structure not different from that of the many NGOs operating in Lebanon, Hezbollah helps the disadvantaged population in the South to find job, and access healthcare, sanitation, and electricity (Harik, 2005). In this way,

Hezbollah puts in practice social and educational policies the Lebanese government fails to address, although further investigation is needed to support these claims.

Hezbollah's pragmatic aid program, and its controversial claims of being the only resistance movement capable of staving off Israeli aggression have helped the group gain the respect and trust of many Lebanese in the South and other regions of the country (Harik, 2005). Aware of Hezbollah's resilience, efficient public relations, and of its ability to "fill in" the gaps left by the Lebanese state, the United States has continuously implemented strategies designed to weakening Hezbollah's influence. One of such strategies is the form foreign aid it offers.

Donor countries maintain that the foreign aid process is designed to encourage recipient countries to decrease poverty and increase development. Therefore, most nations give foreign aid in order to promote economic prosperity, mitigate poverty, and improve people's lives (Apodaca, 2017). This type of aid also helps to ensure that recipient countries remain secure by tackling issues that are hazardous to the security of individuals and communities, such as human rights abuses, epidemics, increase in population, threats to the environment, violence, and the ever-growing gap between rich and poor (Apodaca, 2017). Poverty, unfair treatment of individuals and groups, and inequality are usually the reasons for the rise in civil disobedience, which, in turn, encourages terrorism and mass migration. Hence, foreign aid is seen as crucial for establishing a more secure, prosperous and rules-based international order.

Foreign aid is mostly allocated to poorer countries that possess economic, natural and strategic resources which fulfill the needs and express the priorities of the global community and/or of donor countries. Conversely, the type of aid offered by the United Nations, which is

referred to as multilateral foreign aid, is offered on the basis of humanitarianism and a sense of moral responsibility (Lumsdaine, 1993).

Interestingly, a number of scholars argue that the UN multilateral aid system mentioned above has become an international norm (Lancaster, as cited in Apodaca 2017, p. 5) since wealthy countries have also started to offer assistance to less-developed countries in order to relieve humanitarian crises. However, to provide humanitarian aid, donors are expected to adhere to the norms the international community has created. As a result, foreign aid has become an initiative characteristic of developed nations. According to Apodaca (2017), providing aid is a practice that has also been increasingly adopted by a larger number of developing countries.

The majority of developed nations implement their own foreign aid agencies, as is the case of USAID, which creates its own aid strategies, and establishes specific processes of aid allocation. Typically, as mentioned above, foreign aid is offered in order to combat poverty and encourage development in poor countries. However, due to the high demand for aid in developing countries due to factors such as natural disasters and economic instability, donors may opportunistically use their aid programs to promote their own political interests. For example, they may use aid as a political tool to reward a country's approved behavior, as a means to change its behavior, or to form strategic alliances with recipient countries (Lancaster, 2007).

Hence, foreign aid is mainly provided in order to advance the geopolitical interests of donors. It is used, for example, to induce recipient countries to agree to host military bases, to develop new networks of military alliances, and/or to support allied regimes. Foreign aid is also a tool to help preserve or strengthen existing alliances (Apodaca, 2017). Thus, by providing

economic and military assistance, donors can prevent the recipient country from allying itself with the donor's political and economic rivals. Finally, foreign aid can also be used as a tool to gain the support of the population of recipient countries (Apodaca, 2017).

Savun and Tirone (2017) maintain that by alleviating poverty, famine, and illiteracy, foreign aid can potentially prevent terrorism since poverty and inequality are the main reasons individuals, young men in particular, are drawn to terrorist organizations (Bush, 2002). Hence, assisting the underprivileged and offering chances to improve their living conditions can reduce the chances of their being manipulated by fundamentalist propaganda. (Bush, 2002)

The ways in which foreign assistance is influenced by geopolitical interests, in addition to the strategies used to provide aid, have evolved over time. During the Cold War era, the United States used foreign aid as part of its containment policy (Apodaca, 2017). Aid was used to ensure that communism did not spread internationally and thus widen the influence of the Soviet Union. Years later, after the September attacks (9/11), foreign aid was used as a crucial tool to prevent and stop terrorist attacks on U.S. assets locally and abroad. Hence, as Apodaca (2017) suggests, the distribution of aid is a function of both national security strategies and foreign policy interests.

Kilby and Dreher (2010) indicate that the ways recipient countries use the aid they receive would not be of much importance if foreign assistance were strictly used as a tool to promote the interests of donors. However, since countries provide aid in order to attain a number of objectives, they expect recipients to fulfil commitments such as fighting terrorism, maintaining strategic and economic ties with donors, respecting human rights, and promoting democracy, and equality (Apodaca, 2017). Obviously, these objectives are only partially, if at all,

achieved, and donors and recipients often renegotiate the conditions and obligations required to maintain aid programs.

2. 3. USAID: The Gift-Giving Arm of a Hegemon

2. 3. 1 An Overview

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is an international development organization managed by the United States government. It describes itself as the world's leading development organization. USAID's explicit goal is to create better opportunities for peoples abroad. However, its unstated mission is to advance American interests globally, as has been suggested in the previous discussion about soft and symbolic power.

As a tool of soft and symbolic power, particularly through its investment in culture, education and infrastructure, theoretically it improves American national security and economic growth while showing the rest of the world, especially areas that are resistant to American influence, U.S. kindness and generosity. Another stated mission of USAID is to help other nations advance and lead them down the path of self-reliance (USAID, 2018).

The organization was created in 1961, the year the Berlin Wall was built, by President John F. Kennedy, through an executive order, a presidential directive that is often issued in case of war, crisis or emergencies (Mannings, 2014). Twenty years after the end of World War II, and during the height of the Cold War, the world economy was still in a critical state and fragile condition, Therefore, bolstering economic development in poor countries was crucial for U.S. security and geopolitical and economic advantage. Helping countries preserve freedom and independence was also part of the organization's mission (DoD, 2009), a mission that clearly

reflected the political situation during the Cold War, when the United States and the USSR were vying for global influence.

Although as critics correctly point out, American political ambitions and interests always come first, U.S. aid programs demonstrate a legitimate inclination of the country to help bolster global prosperity and support responsible development (Carothers, 2009). This point is well-illustrated in terms of American and Lebanese relations. Although one of the United States' main political objectives in Lebanon is to contain and possibly eliminate the influence of Hezbollah in the region, the U.S. is also interested in the development and prosperity of Lebanon, as evidenced by USAID's multiple projects around the country.

USAID characterizes itself as an organization that assists in implementing U.S. foreign policy by, in the agency's own words, "promoting broad-scale human progress at the same time that it expands stable, free societies, creates markets and trade partners for the United States, and fosters good will abroad" (USAID, 2018). At a more fundamental level, USAID advances American economic growth through investments that broaden financial markets for American exports, in addition to providing a platform for U.S. corporations abroad.

USAID does not distribute aid for the sake of development alone, rather it attempts to foster a culture of self-reliance by creating developmental programs and assistance. Supposed its objectives are to encourage global stability, enhance global health, administer humanitarian aid, bolster innovation, and enable women in society (OXFAM, 2014). According to USAID, some of the support and aid they offer to order to attain these goals include: "helping to prevent the dissemination of pandemic disease, technical assistance, small-enterprise loans, food and disaster relief, and training and scholarships" (USAID, 2018). While improving development and curtailing poverty is an objective, USAID claims to pushes for a democratic system of

government in recipient countries, and assists in preventing instability, violence, and other security issues. According to USAID, the agency is presently active in 100 developing countries all around the world in places such as “sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Near East, Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe and Eurasia” (USAID, 2018).

In the mid 1970’s, USAID started to shift its resources away from capital and technical developmental initiatives in order to focus on “basic human needs” which, according to its statement, stressed on “population planning, education, food and nutrition, health, and human resources and development” (Kenton, 2018). Today, the agency still carries on with it the same strategic objectives President Kennedy defined over 50 years ago, i.e., to further America's foreign policy interests by promoting the idea of democracy and free market while also assisting individuals who are facing challenges make a better life for themselves (Finkel, Liñán & Seligson, 2007).

USAID’s goal, as the agency stated more recently, is to assist nations to become self-sustainable and capable of taking control of their own development. According to the agency, it strives to attain this objective by: “avoiding the dissemination of pandemic disease, diminishing the possibility conflict, and thwarting the drivers of violence, transnational crime, instability, and other security threats” (USAID, 2018). Finally, USAID has established itself as the world leading agency in providing humanitarian aid to disaster-prone countries and nations experiencing emergency due to catastrophic events.

2. 3. 2 Influence and Initiatives in Lebanon

As suggested earlier in this chapter, USAID is the most conspicuous organization through which the United States maintains its position as a global hegemon by implementing its soft

power strategies. In the case of Lebanon, according to the agency's country website, the agency's successful projects include helping to build infrastructure and health care facilities and develop education projects.

According to the agency's websites, although USAID was established in Lebanon in the 1960s, a decade earlier starting in 1951, the United States was already present in the country supporting similar projects. It is interesting to notice that US presence as a soft power in Lebanon began at yet another time of instability in the country (in the 1950s while Lebanon had a booming service economy, it was struggling with a major influx of Palestinians and the possibility of disappearing as a political entity and falling under Syrian control).

Today, instances of soft power are particularly evident in Southern Lebanon where USAID's presence is widespread and where the organization distributes much-needed aid and supports projects designed to provide and implement essential services. Thus, USAID's presence in Southern Lebanon is clearly geopolitically strategic because it asserts the dominance of the United States, expressly to counter and hinder Hezbollah's influence in its so-called stronghold.

USAID is keen to describe its initiatives to win hearts and minds in Southern Lebanon and elsewhere in the country. It is interesting to notice that the agency's initiatives in Lebanon seem to fulfil the role of the country's absent and dysfunctional government. For example, the agency works to enhance deficient sanitation services and control pollution. In the South, in order to reduce the pollution of the Litani River, a main water resource in Lebanon coveted by Israel, and boost resource management, USAID established three community-based wastewater treatment plants on the Upper Litani River basin that benefit tens of thousands of people (USAID, n.d.).

Some of its programs are pragmatic and designed to implement economic opportunities that can benefit all Lebanese, especially those who live in rural areas. For example, USAID assists agricultural workers in upgrading their greenhouse production and by building initiatives that are financially sustainable and help bolster the competitiveness of Lebanon's agricultural products globally. USAID also contributes resources to municipalities so they can establish their own so they could establish their own local development programs.

More indirect strategies of political and ideological influence are seen in the agency's citizens-centered Democratic Governance Programs (DGPs). These programs are an example of how soft and symbolic powers can be effectively deployed to counter rival political practices. Hence, DGPs are designed to help citizens access public services, strengthen community initiatives, and promote a society based on the notions of responsible citizenship and activism. USAID's "Promoting Active Citizen Engagement" initiative addresses pressing concerns of citizens. It offers grants to civil society organizations so they can implement advocacy, media, and action to tackle community problems. Projects focused on promoting citizens participation have benefited over 397,000 Lebanese citizens (the equivalent to one in ten people). These efforts have also provided more than 20,000 youth with skills in civic activism. USAID's assistance to municipalities and civil organizations, especially in places where sectarian or political tensions are high, helps to support democratic spaces (USAID, n.d.).

An instance of using soft power and symbolic power through gift-giving is the partnership USAID forms with local organizations and communities to sponsor or suggest initiatives. The agency expands access to education, enhances learning environments, and facilitates student achievement.

The agency's democratic governance programs are designed to help citizens access public services, to strengthen civil and community initiatives, and to promote a society based on citizens, elsewhere in the country, it deploys American symbolic power by focusing on education and professional training. The agency partners with local organizations and communities to expand access to education, enhance learning environments, and facilitate student achievement. It also contributes to improve Lebanon's public schools by repairing and upgrading infrastructure, supplying material resources, advancing community engagement, and training educators through its Developing Rehabilitation Assistance to Schools and Teacher Improvement Program. Its scholarship programs offer four-year scholarships to 218 Lebanese public school graduates from all parts of the country so they may attend well-established Lebanese universities.

Finally, the agency's programs listed above are examples of how soft power is established through aid. They also show how USAID deploys symbolic power at the political and ideological levels by implementing a gift-giving and gift-taking relationship that, according to Bourdieu, is potentially harmful since it creates dependency and co-dependency.

CHAPTER 3

HEZBOLLAH'S AND USAID'S PROGRAMS: A TUG OF WAR

3. 1 Hezbollah: A Brief History of a Long Trajectory

Hezbollah was created in Southern Lebanon during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in the 1980s. The organization's ideological principles go back to the resurgence of Shia Islam in Southern Iraq in the 19th century. Initially, the organization brought together an array of local Shiite factions in the South. These factions were emboldened and guided by revivalist clerics and students who were educated in Najaf (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). After leaving Iraq in the 1970s, they returned to Lebanon in order to effect the political mobilization of the country's historically marginalized Shia community (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). Major events contributed to shape the ideology, views, and politics of the various Shiite factions during this time such as the onset of the Lebanese civil war in 1976, the disappearance of the influential Lebanese-Iranian philosopher and cleric, Imam Musa Sadr in Libya in 1978, the 1978 Israeli invasion of Lebanon to root out Palestinian guerillas active in the country, and the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Rabasa et al., 2006).

Shiite leaders in Lebanon were divided over how to respond to the second Israeli invasion and subsequent occupation of Lebanon in 1982. The leaders who supported a military response to Israeli aggression and favored the establishment in Lebanon of an Islamic republic similar to Iran's, broke away from Amal, then the leading Shia movement, and created Al-Amal al-Islamiya, commonly known as Islamic Amal (Rabasa et al., 2006). Taking advantage of the direct assistance they received from Iran's Revolutionary Guard, in addition to enlisting other

revolutionary Shia groups, Islamic Amal became the forefront of the various politically active religious groups which were later unified under Hezbollah.

Financial support and military training offered by Iran helped Islamic Amal and Hezbollah expand its operational capabilities from its headquarters in eastern Lebanon's Bekaa Valley to the southern suburbs of Beirut, and the occupied Shia villages of the South (Masters & Laub, 2014). In addition, its bold operations against the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and U.S. military and diplomatic posts gave Islamic Amal and other Shiite groups the pretext of characterize in as the resistance against the American-supported Zionist occupation of Lebanon, while their social and charitable initiatives in impoverished Shiite communities gained them popular support (Addis & Blanchard, 2011).

Hezbollah continued to be relatively well organized, operating covertly until 1985, when it issued a manifesto describing its military and religiously orthodox basis, and its anti-American stance (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). Mirroring the ideology of the Iranian leader, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the 1985 manifesto described the United States and the Soviet Union as Islam's main enemies and called for the destruction of Israel.

The 1985 manifesto also emphasized Hezbollah's utmost support for the "adoption of the Islamic system on the basis of free and direct selection by the people, not the basis of forceful imposition, as some people imagine" (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). However, a series of violent attacks against members of the Lebanese Communist Party by Shia Islamists, and Hezbollah's strict enforcement of conservative Islamic codes of conduct in the areas they controlled suggested otherwise. In spite of the concerns it provoked in the rest of Lebanon's population, the 1985 manifesto, continued to define Hezbollah's ideological stance until November 2009, when

its secretary general, Hassan Nasrallah, issued a new political manifesto to reassure the public and affirm the organization's recognition of Lebanon's cultural diversity (Blandford, 2017).

Persisting disagreement between Hezbollah and Amal over strategies and political goals added to the continuous tension and sporadic armed confrontation between the two groups, particularly at the end of the civil war. By the end of the war in 1989, Hezbollah and its Amal rivals continued their dispute for the leadership of a now well-organized Lebanese Shia community, each taking credit for having forced the Israeli army to withdraw to the southern border of Lebanon (Britannica, 2018).

The Taif Accord which marked the end of Lebanon Civil War stipulated dismantled and disarmament. Hezbollah responded by refashion in its armed wing as the "Islamic Resistance" whose sole purpose was to counter Israeli aggression and end the occupation of Lebanon and Palestine. (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). Meanwhile, Hezbollah's military actions increased in frequency and capability such as its daring offensive against the IDF and its ally, the Southern Lebanese Army, in the 1990s (Rabasa et al., 2006). Large-scale Israeli military campaigns in retaliation to Hezbollah's attacks in 1993 and 1996 did not succeed in eliminating Hezbollah's armed wing or dislodging its bases from Shia majority towns in the south and east of the country (Rabasa et al., 2006). Ultimately, Hezbollah alone took the credit for forcing the Israeli withdraw from southern Lebanon, which was completed in June 2000. Since then, the dilemma over the future, function, and responsibilities of this self-proclaimed "Resistance" has remained central to Lebanon's politics.

Ironically, the Taif Accord itself is perhaps the reason Hezbollah was able to evolve and became a part of Lebanon's body politic. At the political level, the agreement stipulated that parliamentary seats and the parliament leadership should be proportionally distributed along

sectarian lines. As a result, Amal and Hezbollah came together to represent Lebanon's sizeable Shia population in parliament.

As supporters of an "Islamic system" of clerical governance, and as long-established critics of what they described as the corruption of Lebanon's confessional political system. Hezbollah member in the early 1990s, took part in the national dialogue about the terms of electoral participation and made its own recommendations (Husseini, 2010). Hezbollah's decision to take part in the 1992 national elections marks the beginning of its formal entrance into Lebanese politics as an official party with a loyal base (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). With political support from Iran, Hezbollah gained eight seats in parliament (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). Since then, the party's candidates continue to run for national and municipal elections, and Hezbollah has had a good deal of success in parliament.

Thus, limiting Hezbollah's role to that of the reliable and constructive institution it has the potential to become and rejecting its culture of a "state within a state" entity depends on the eventual loss of its popular support, which, as many observers have noticed, is still strong among the Lebanese Shia, and in the areas the party has historically controlled. But it is important to notice that, regardless of its shortcomings, Hezbollah's popularity derives from its historical victories against the IDF, its impact on Lebanon's modern history, its position as an advocate for the historically marginalized Shia, its recent pledge to respect religious freedom and diversity in Lebanon, and its effective and reliable network of social services (Addis & Blanchard, 2011).

Moreover, a large number of Lebanese supporters of Hezbollah find its military wing irrelevant and support the organization primarily as a political party, especially because of its ability to effectively provide and manage social services, and because of its position as a reliable religious arbiter (Addis & Blanchard, 2011). The large amount of support it has in

Lebanon gives Hezbollah a kind of legitimacy that makes it difficult to limit its influence, particularly at the military level, by consensus.

Ironically, USAID which, as discussed earlier, can be seen as tool for American soft power in Lebanon, and which, like Hezbollah, has gained the admiration of many Lebanese due to its successful social and infrastructure projects, is the institution that has the potential to counter Hezbollah's political and military influence by taking over its leadership role in various disadvantaged communities in Lebanon.

As mentioned above, Hezbollah remains politically relevant due to its pragmatic social assistance programs, military strength, and because of its reputation as the resistance to Israeli expansionist ambitions. Hence, in the 2018 parliamentary elections, at least 8 pro-Hezbollah candidates gained seats to represent a number of districts, thus securing a majority for Hezbollah and its allies for the first time since 2009 (Azar, 2018). Together, former rivals Hezbollah and Amal were able to secure twenty-six of the parliament's twenty-seven Shiite-allotted seats, easily defeating their powerful opponents in the south and the Baalbek-Hermel region (Ghaddar, 2018). In addition, Hezbollah gained three ministries in Lebanon has newly formed government on February 1, 2019.

Interestingly, Hezbollah's parliamentary victory prompted an immediate response from the US. The United States forcefully warned the party not to use the ministries it now holds in the Lebanese cabinet to launder and funnel money to its armed wing. The American warning was delivered by the deputy spokesman of the U.S. State Department, Robert Palladino, who said that: "We call on the new government to ensure the resources and services of these ministries do not provide support to Hezbollah" (Perry & Bassam, 2019). Domestically, however, Hezbollah operates like all other Lebanese confessional parties, i.e., it retains its base voters by catering to

the basic needs of Shia communities. For example, the party manages a large network of clinics, educational facilities, youth programs, private business, in addition to providing local security.

As mentioned earlier, these actions that paradoxically fulfill a role the Lebanese government has neglected, are seen by many Lebanese as actions of “a state within the state” (Early, 2006).

Finally, in ideological terms, although Hezbollah’s policies reflect an unmistakable Shiite religious identity, Hezbollah, as stated in its 2009 Manifesto, has had to tone down its fundamentalist beliefs and adapt to Lebanon heterogeneous culture in which religiosity and modernity exist side-by-side. This shift required a progressive turn from the group’s Khomeinist tradition towards a more modern Islamist-nationalist approach (Ghaddar, 2018).

3. 2 Hezbollah as a Hegemon

3. 2. 1 Territorial and Religious Hegemony

Hezbollah’s hegemony over Southern Lebanon is inevitable since the South is its center of power and the party is viewed by Arabs as central for the struggle against Israel (Mawla, 2010). In addition, Hezbollah’s control of Beirut’s southern suburb, which is its most important human reservoir, was crucial to monopolizing the resistance. After 2000, the resistance became a well-organized and disciplined armed militia supplied with a significant arsenal of modern armaments. However, its control over the southern suburbs also resembles a form of territorial control in which public land such as common properties, endowments, mosques, and Shiite religious centers are tied to the party (Mawla, 2010).

In addition, Hezbollah instituted and reinforces a religious code among its supporters, which eventually became a symbol of Shia identity in Lebanon. Examples of such codes include the adoption of Iranian-style chadors by its female members as a symbol of commitment to

Islam, a unique bearded style for males, speaking with Iranian-inflected Arabic. The introduction of Shia rituals practiced in Iraq and Iran such as the dramatic Ashura festival, and pilgrimages to the tombs of Shia saints and Imams in Syria and Iran (Shalabi, 2015). Curiously, these regular Shia pilgrimages now have a commercial, economic, and ideological relevance similar to the Sunni pilgrimages to Saudi Arabia.

Through its schools' effective education programs, and media-savvy communications, Hezbollah has centralized the religious education of Shiites, in addition to influencing education in other public and private schools in the areas it controls. However, after a fierce conflict between the Shiite Council and Hezbollah in 1997, the Lebanese government was tasked with regulating academic religious education (Mawla, 2010). In response to these regulations, Hezbollah brought its own teachers to public schools and offered to pay their salaries. The party also began to supply these teachers with religious textbooks, although it did not interfere with other subjects.

This strategy allowed Hezbollah to manage the religious education of the majority of the Shia, particularly those in private schools, making it more feasible for the party to publicize its own ideology and interpretation of Islam (Mawla, 2010). Hence, the above-mentioned initiatives were taken in opposition to Lebanon's Supreme Shiite Council's, which sought to create a single system of religious education that required the same textbooks. Hezbollah's own initiative in managing religious education was also in direct opposition to official laws that granted the right to regulate religious education and run missions to the Supreme Shiite Council. According to the Lebanese government, the Supreme Shiite Council is the legitimate legal representative of the Shiite religious Marja, the Shia supreme authority (Bianchi, 2018).

In addition, Hezbollah has complete control of most mosques and Shiite centers in Lebanon, another role it took over from the Shiite Council. The party also selects a number of talented youth to study at Shiite religious institutions in Iran and establishes schools, which they run without any religious, academic, or governmental oversight (Bianchi, 2018).

In 1997, governmental media regulations left Hezbollah free to dominate Shiite religious media. Hezbollah then held considerable influence in the media through its newspapers *Al-Ahd* and *Al-Wahda*, and its radio The Voice of Mustad'afeen. As a result, Hezbollah was able to legitimately and legally become a Shiite media giant through its radios A-Noor and Al-Iman, and its controversial TV station Al-Manar (CEP, 2017).

Thus USAID's investment in the educational sector and its DGPs that, as shown earlier, educate and prepare citizens to engage in responsible social activism, and implement pragmatic political action to help communities develop advocacy groups, media and community centers can be seen as an attempt by the agency to introduce Western-style principles of governance to try to counter Hezbollah's efforts and achievements in education and, consequently, its resulting ideological dominance.

3. 3. 3 Hezbollah as a Local Aid Agency

Hezbollah runs an extremely well-organized and efficient system of health and social-service organizations. Its service system consists of its Social Unit, Education Unit and Islamic Health Unit (Flanigad & Abdel-Samad). Together, these units form an intricate network of service providers that mostly cater to Lebanon's Shiites. A number of Hezbollah's service organizations are registered with the Lebanese government as NGOs. This system allows them legal protection, making it easier for organizations to function since they do not refer to

Hezbollah in their names and rules. In addition, the NGOs associated with Hezbollah actively collaborate with other local and international organizations in order to improve the welfare of Shiite communities (Love, 2010).

Hezbollah's Social Unit is in charge of four other organizations: The Foundation Khomeini Support Committee, the Martyrs' Foundation, the Foundation for the Wounded, and the Jihad Construction (Hamzeh, 2006). The Jihad Construction Foundation is possibly the most important NGO in Lebanon. It is in charge of infrastructure projects and provided water to nearly 45% of the residents of Beirut's southern suburb in the early 2000s (Hamzeh, 2006). After the Israeli aggression during the so-called 2006 Lebanon War, the Jihad Construction Foundation played a crucial role in evaluating damage and providing reconstruction compensation to the residents of heavily bombed areas of Beirut's southern suburb and towns in Southern Lebanon (Love, 2010).

Hezbollah's Martyrs Foundation administers assistance to individuals who are casualties of Hezbollah's continuing armed conflict with Israel. The organization provides them with financial aid, health care and social services to support the families of "martyrs" who die in battle. Furthermore, the Foundation for the Wounded provides assistance to Lebanese citizens who have been wounded during Israeli attacks (Harik, 2005). The help these organizations provide is the reason why both Hezbollah members and the Shiite population as a whole truly believe that Hezbollah will meet their needs if they become victims of conflict.

Hezbollah's Islamic Health Unit also has an important role in providing public health for people who have little or no government health insurance. It runs three hospitals, ten defense departments, twelve health centers, twenty dental clinics, and twenty infirmaries (Flanigad & Abdel-Samad). This unit has been so beneficial and is so well-organized that the Lebanese

government has asked their staff to take control of several poorly-managed government hospitals in Southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley (Hamzeh, 2006). The Islamic Health Unit also administers free health care to low-income Shiites and other low-income individuals, while simultaneously providing prescription-drug coverage and free health insurance (Harik, 2005)

Hezbollah's Education Unit offers essential services to the underprivileged people of Southern Lebanon. As mentioned earlier, Lebanon's public school system has a reputation for the very low quality of its education. It is considered to be the last resort of underprivileged families who cannot afford to put their children in private schools. Hezbollah manages multiple primary and secondary schools with extremely low tuition rates. The schools run by Hezbollah have approximately 15,000 students (Love, 2010). In addition to education, Hezbollah provides low-income students with scholarships, financial assistance and books, buying in bulk and selling at reduced prices and also runs lending libraries for students (Flanigad & Abdel-Samad). In a nation where public education is inadequate, Hezbollah's crucial educational services place the party at the center of many citizen's daily lives. The enormous sums of money Hezbollah spends on social assistance reveals how important social services are for bolstering Hezbollah's reputation and how much the Lebanese state has neglected its duties towards the country's citizens.

Ironically, Hezbollah's most powerful weapon is its efficient network of social services. Its aid and programs have won the hearts and minds of many Lebanese, in addition to making Hezbollah perhaps the most successful welfare agency in the country. Its hegemony over the Shiite community is a result of the programs offered by its four aid units, and of the organizations that are under their umbrella.

Finally, Hezbollah's capacity to fund and run its programs far exceeded the investments and assistance provided by the United States through USAID. Thus, if the United State strategy is to counter Hezbollah's influence in South and assert its own, USAID will have to provide a variety of essential and well-managed services in the region to be able to show the Shiite community the drawbacks of siding with Hezbollah or, conversely, simply pull its aid from the South.

3.3 How to Weaken Hezbollah

The United States has increased its economic assistance to Lebanon since Syria withdrew its occupation force from the country in 2005. This policy, which is an instance of soft power, can be seen as a geopolitical move to guarantee the stability of the country by preventing its economy and the country's social fabric from disintegrating after the withdraw. By securing the relative stability of the country's economy, the US sought to ease one of the Lebanese government's main concerns so it could focus on the country's complex political issues, especially on sensitive matters like building a strategy for national defense (Harik, 2005).

Even though in recent years the amount of American economic aid allocated to Lebanon has matched that of the military aid the US provides to the country, some analysts wonder whether American aid is exclusively focused on national security (Addis & Blanchard, 2011).

Although American military aid is justified due to the fact that the US sees Hezbollah as a threat to its interests in the region, investing in economic aid that can provide much needed improvement in infrastructure, and creating social programs that directly benefit the population, particularly the youth, are more effective actions since they can show that the US can be a partner in peace, rather than yet another source of conflict in battle-scarred Lebanon.

For example, encouraging local governance in towns and areas historically controlled by Hezbollah can allow Lebanon's Shiite community to become politically independent and active, eventually boosting the confidence of this community in the Lebanese government's ability to provide services and security (Realuyo, 2014). Conditional aid provided by the international community can also help create partnerships between NGOs and the Lebanese government to offer concrete alternatives and reduce the risk of extremism by providing communities and youth with good quality education, social services, and economic development programs (Addis & Blanchard, 2011).

In addition, USAID programs designed to offer an alternative to Hezbollah's successful investments in infrastructure in the South be replicated in other areas of Lebanon to avoid the perception that the United States and the international community are discriminating against other segments of the Lebanese population. On the interactive map on USAID Lebanon's website colorful dots represent projects that USAID has done in all the regions.

Political initiatives have also been taken by the current US administration in spite of its decreased involvement in Middle Eastern politics. For example, during his visit to Lebanon on March 23, 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo emphasized that the United States is willing to use all peaceful means at its disposal to put pressure on Hezbollah. He added that the United States is ready to work with its partners in order to reach this goal. The U.S. is also willing to impose more sanctions on Hezbollah while simultaneously increasing diplomatic actions and initiatives. Pompeo stressed that these efforts will only target Hezbollah, and will not constitute danger to Lebanon's security and economy (Gargham, 2019). So far, the Trump administration has been working to cut Hezbollah's funding and has imposed more sanctions on Hezbollah in a single year than any previous administration before his (White House, 2019).

Finally, pressure was adding to Hezbollah after the United Kingdom, following America's lead, recently declared Hezbollah a terrorist organization, claiming that there is no distinction between Hezbollah's political and military wing. According to the British government, the reason for this decision was the fact that Hezbollah allegedly continues to increase its stockpile of illegal weapons, an action that defies UN Security Council resolution. In addition, Hezbollah continues to give military support to Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, which is considered by many to be fiercely authoritarian (Holden, 2019).

CHAPTER 4

USAID, U.S CONGRESS AND LEBANON AS A RECIPIENT OF AID

4. 1. USAID Fiscal Year (FY) 2019

According to recent data, the United States has directed significant amounts of its foreign aid resources to Lebanon. For example, the US has spent has spent \$505 million on Lebanon since USAID started operating in the country (USAID, 2018). In addition to offering aid for economic and social projects, the US has also supplied the Lebanese army with \$2.3 billion worth of armaments and other forms of assistance (Perry, 2019).

According to an interview I conducted with an official from USAID Lebanon, in addition to being in constant contact with the agency's headquarters in Washington, DC, the Lebanon office sends regular reports directly to the U.S. Congress, which include, among other data, information on the type of work other foreign aid agencies operating in Lebanon are doing. These reports, which are labor-intensive and detailed, are conducted so that USAID and the Congress can develop strategies that support their interests in the region. After reviewing these materials, the Congress determines how much funding should go to the agency's mission in Lebanon.

Fig.1 shows that the US is taking a different approach to combatting Hezbollah

In order to determine which areas of Lebanon should receive aid, USAID creates a five-year working plan that it follows, except in special circumstances. Mostly, the agency relies on statistics to determine which parts of Lebanon are in need of aid, focusing generally on population size. However, as described earlier, in spite of being especially active in Lebanon where it has successfully improved infrastructure, education and the welfare of the population of various disadvantaged areas since the 1960s, USAID has achieved little in terms of widening the U.S. sphere of influence in the country. Hence, the agency's ability to extend power is apparently limited, the agency's impact is apparently limited, especially since for the U.S. stakes are high in the shifting geopolitical landscape of Lebanon.

In addition, and in spite of its efforts to do just that, USAID seems not to have been able to counter Hezbollah's influence in the region. Instead, Hezbollah's political and administrative influence have been growing, as shown after the new government was formed in January 2019, in which the party secured three ministries. Moreover, the party was put in charge of the ministry of Public Health a decision that was not underived since, as shown in the previous chapter Hezbollah is widely acknowledged for its expertise in health services management. The outcome, however, has infuriated and unsettled the party's opponents who rushed to point out that Public Health is one of the country's cabinets with the largest budget. Moreover, the various and tough sanctions the US continues to impose on Hezbollah seem to have not been effective in discouraging the party's credibility among its followers or deterring its ability to exert political influence.

As shown on the map, the Baalbek/Hermel and Bekaa areas, which the party controls, will receive less foreign aid than the other parts of Lebanon. The Baalbek/Hermel region has received even less assistance than the Bekaa because it is the area where most of Hezbollah's

activities take place. In addition, the United States government realized that its efforts to appeal to the population of the South have not had any significant effect in reducing Hezbollah's influence and popularity. As mentioned before, the enduring appeal of Hezbollah as a result of its sophisticated network of well-run health and social services which includes the party's Social Unit, Education Unit and the Islamic Health Unit (Flanigad & Abdel-Samad).

Finally, USAID's new strategy of using aid as a bargaining chip, by cutting, reducing and upholding aid in different parts of the country, may be an attempt to make it clear to Hezbollah's followers in the South that their loyalty will be detrimental to their region, in comparison to the rest of Lebanon.

4. 2 Obstacles to USAID in the South

In order to understand why people in South Lebanon are no longer responding to USAID's strategy of using aid to gain influence, I will examine the political trends in three municipalities in South Lebanon: Qlaileh, Bazouryeh, and Tyre as a case study. These municipalities are controlled by the Amal Movement, which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is a close Hezbollah political ally. I chose to use municipal voting patterns to analyze the issue of loyalty to Hezbollah versus indifference to USAID's actions because voters in Lebanon tend to change their votes more often in the municipal elections, while more or less maintaining their choices in the parliamentary elections.

The voting patterns in these three municipalities have consistently benefited Amal and have not changed because of the impact of USAID's services in their communities. This phenomenon

is partly explained by the political alliances agreed to between Hezbollah and Amal. Therefore, before the municipal elections take place, Hezbollah and Amal officials meet to deliberate about which political party (Hezbollah or Amal Movement) should take control of which municipality. This system guarantees that both Hezbollah and Amal run for office virtually unopposed and take turns administering multiple municipalities (زعيتو, 2016).

According to USAID's website, they funded six economic growth project and four educational programs in the village of Qlaileh. In an interview with the mayor of Qlaileh, Abdelkarim Hassan, said that one of the projects implemented by USAID was very minor and the municipality was expecting a continuity to it. The project included distributing 52 recycling bins which each cost around \$28 dollars. This project was due to a report done by BAU and USAID that found that there was a high cancer rate in the village due to a waste problem. The village was expecting some sort of waste management facility, but instead received 52 bins. This was apparently not fruitful in gaining the favor of the village officials and its inhabitants.

According to the mayor of Bazouryeh, Bahij Housseini, their village council is diverse in terms of political parties. Six of the officials in the council belong to Hezbollah, four belong to the Amal Movement, three belong to the civil society, one belongs to the Baath party, and one belongs to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). This diversification is not due to the democratic process, but rather is planned and organized so that the village can receive aid from all sectors of the ministries. Their council used to consist of a socialist even though there are only three socialists in Bazouryeh, but the municipality was able to receive funding for the village from the minister of education Akram Shyyaeb, who is a member of the Socialist Party. Even though Bazouryeh receives all the aid it needs from the government, the USAID website claims it funds some programs in the village. These programs consist of nine educational, three

economic growth projects, and two water projects. However, when the mayor was asked whether or not Bazouryeh receives aid from USAID, he stated that they do not. Tyre receives the most aid out of the three villages, with 28 educational programs and 2 water projects.

Usually, in a municipality where they have political control, after the elections take place, Hezbollah and Amal agree on which party should remain in office. The officials of that party will then stay in office until the next elections (زعيترو, 2016). For example, if Amal has won an election in a given municipality in 1998, that municipality will most probably still be administered by Amal officials until 2022. One such example is Bazouryeh, which has been administered by Amal since 1998 and will most likely remain under solid Amal control in the future.

Amal and Hezbollah's political deals have become a norm that is followed by leaders and supporters of both parties. One should consider Bazouryeh. Although the majority of its residents of the town are Hezbollah supporters, they vote for Amal and support its officials to abide by the decisions made by the two allied parties.

Moreover, influential families in these municipalities play a major role in the electoral process since they are the ones that decide which candidate will run for which office. Voters will vote for the candidates these families endorse, and will shun any individual who is not part of the *aqidah* or "creed" (زعيترو, 2016). Therefore, a large number of candidates who run for office in these municipalities do not belong to other political parties, in fact they represent these "kingmaker" families. In addition, people are willing to vote for individuals they do not support simply because they attended a funeral of a relative, are part of the *aqidah* and are Shi'ite (زعيترو, 2016).

Furthermore, the municipalities in the South do not need or request aid provided by USAID because the aid they receive comes from the Lebanese government in which Hezbollah and Amal hold important positions (زعيتر, 2016). The Council of the South is a very powerful organization headed by a high ranking official from the Amal Movement and was created to give assistance to the Southern municipalities by lobbying the Lebanese government, and by constantly requesting funds (زعيتر, 2016). For example, if the municipality of Sur (Tyre) needs to install street-lights in neighborhoods, they will not ask assistance from USAID or from any other international aid organization. Instead, the Council of the South will request funds directly from the Ministry of Energy and Water. As a result, since the Ministry of Energy and Water is currently under the control of the Free Patriotic Movement, which is an ally of Hezbollah and Amal, Sur will receive the funds it needs. Likewise, if a Southern municipality needs a medical laboratory, the Council of the South will receive funds from the Ministry of Public Health, which is currently under Hezbollah's control.

The same pattern applies to education. According to the mayor of Qlaileh, one of the largest public schools in the South, which is located in Qlaileh, was funded by the Council of the South. Nabih Berry, the speaker of parliament, and Amal leader, attended the ceremony of inauguration of the school, a gesture that illustrates how closely the political elite involved in the decisions of the Council of the South. The Council also built two schools in Bazouryeh without asking for any political favor or proof of party loyalty in return, while USAID requested the ID of the mayor of Bazouryeh to check whether he was affiliated with Hezbollah before offering aid to his town.

The above mentioned examples suggested why Hezbollah has a major influence in the South. Residents do not feel they depend on USAID programs, but they rely on Hezbollah for support.

Another factor that explains why the population of the South Lebanon do not rely on USAID is that the agency's projects in the region are inconsistent, for example, USAID may implement a project in Sur, but may not start any new project in the following fiscal year. Hezbollah, on the other hand, has a solid development program, and is committed to support the people in the region. In addition, the local parties, Hezbollah and Amal, are powerful players in the Lebanese government. People in the South are also politicized and believe that the reason USAID provides aid to Lebanon is not humanitarian, but a clear strategy to gain more influence in the region (زعيترو, 2016).

Such realities and popular perceptions make it nearly impossible for the United States to entice the Lebanese in the South, and, consequently weaken Hezbollah as a political force, and reduce its influence and credibility. In addition, because they are generally politically savvy and practical, people in the South are very interested in the alliances and relationship local mayors, members of parliament, and ministers maintain with one another. For example, if a mayor has good connections with officials in high positions, it will be easier for the municipality to receive aid from the government through the Council of the South (زعيترو, 2016).

As mentioned in Chapter I, the United States is not the only actor that provides foreign aid to Lebanon. Other countries such as China, Russia, Iran, and even Japan have interests in Lebanon and maintain foreign aid agencies in the country. Therefore, even if USAID were not present in the region, other actors would be ready to take its place. However, people in Southern Lebanon are weary and skeptical of the work foreign aid agencies provide, and their views are another reason they shun the work of USAID.

Moreover, the Islamic community has its own system of social assistance and support, the *zakat*. *Zakat* is one of the five pillars of Islam, and is the most important duty of Muslims after

daily prayers. Zakat is a form of aid regarded as a religious duty or tax in Islam. Zakat involves a compulsory charitable donation and is a religious obligation of all Muslims who meet the necessary criteria of wealth (Global Sadaqah, 2018). One common example of zakat in the South can be seen in donations by wealthy Lebanese Shi'ite. He contacts, for instance, the mayor or *sheikh* of Bazouryeh to ask which village needs assistance. The wealthy Shi'ite will then donate the necessary funds to this municipality. Once his donation has been made, he will have fulfilled his zakat obligation for the year.

Another instance of the disadvantaged position of USAID in the South can be seen by analyzing the voting patterns of three Shia majority towns, Sur, Qlaileh and Bazourieh which have been receiving American foreign aid for more than 30 years. The results of their municipal elections in 2004, 2010 and 2016 point to the growing influence of Amal and Hezbollah in the region. The two parties have never lost an election to a pro-American party, or parties that represent local civil movements. In addition to showing Hezbollah's strong position in the region, these voting patterns also explain why the party is so powerful today while the funds spent by the US government have not generated income to the citizens of these municipalities. It should be also noticed that the voting patterns in the villages where Amal has popularity and is the majority are different from those of the pro-Hezbollah villages. In the latter, numbers in four of Hezbollah candidates are consistently much higher, as well as voter turnout.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The United States has recognized that its only reasonable means to weaken Hezbollah's influence in the South of Lebanon is to use soft power strategies. If the current Trump administration, following its close ally, Israel, decided to use hard power as a strategy, its action would have dire consequences for Lebanon, the rest of the Middle East, and, more importantly for America's geopolitical and military interests in the region. Since the strategies of using aid previously adopted by the US have not been successful, the US has shifted its approach and drafted a new USAID FY2019 plan designed to target areas unaffiliated with Hezbollah. The rationale for this newly adopted strategy is to attempt to show the population of Southern Lebanon the economic and political drawbacks of being affiliated with a U.S. designated terrorist organization.

Failed strategies used by the US has used involved implementing various USAID projects and programs in areas historically affiliated with Hezbollah. The agency believed that if the U.S. provided aid to Southern Lebanon, the country would be perceived as a generous and friendly nation. According this rationale, the people in Southern Lebanon would eventually realize that by siding with the US they would no longer need the assistance of Hezbollah, and would become more independent and self-reliant by adapting to their region the American model of civic engagement and responsibility. For the US, implementing the American style of democracy based on individual freedoms and responsibilities would make Hezbollah less relevant to the country's population. However, as mentioned above, this plan failed entirely.

Despite the lack of success of USAID in South Lebanon, the agency has increased funding for its programs in the region while simultaneously decreasing funding for Hezbollah's centers of operation and political base in the Baalbek/Hermel area (USAID, 2018). One could argue that it would be far more efficient for USAID to implement one large project in Lebanon instead of developing a number of projects scattered throughout the country. This strategy, however, would be extremely counterproductive since it has the potential to alienate other regions in Lebanon that would not benefit from this project. It could also be a cause of grievances against the United States, in addition to strongly suggesting that the U.S discriminates against religious minorities that have been historically part of the region where this hypothetical project would be developed.

Furthermore, a USAID national program would not gain the popularity, even in the long run, of the services Hezbollah as historically provided. As shown in Chapter II, the party has a large, long-established and effective network of social services programs run by its Social Unit, Education Unit, and Islamic Health Unit, which are funded both by the Iranian regime and the Lebanese government. Under the umbrella of this network, various other organizations and institutions efficiently offer aid and services for the Shi'ite community and other individuals in Lebanon. Among the principal benefits offered by Hezbollah's aid program are free health care, free education, employment opportunities, financial aid, and housing— these are benefits that clearly contribute to improving the wellbeing of various communities, and empower individuals who eventually become professionals and contribute to the life of other members of their communities.

Lebanon's political order has historically been based on a sectarian system, and the Lebanese people rely on clientelism to have their basic needs provided to them. In addition, the

Lebanese government is marred by chronic sectarian divisions and corruption, and the Lebanese are notoriously deprived of basic services governments provide elsewhere such as access to water, electricity and garbage collection. As a result, the country's population is at once despairing of, frustrated with, and infuriated by their government's inaction. When Hezbollah first emerged as a movement, it took over the administrative role the Lebanese government has long neglected. And because it has not disarmed since the withdrawal of Israel, many segments of the country's population fear Hezbollah, which they regard as a state-within-a-state.

However, in spite of its controversial position, Hezbollah remains trusted and respected by the population of South Lebanon which has had direct experience of the administrative competence of the party. Their loyalty and trust in a party that has demonstrated long-term commitment to their communities makes it nearly impossible for the South to accept perks such as temporary aid from foreign powers. As mentioned previously, the South has political rules and a political system its population recognizes. Moreover, the Southern population is sufficiently politicized that it is aware that foreign aid agencies would spend their money in their region only to gain influence and demobilize their local parties.

Moreover, the perceived incompetence and bad decisions made by agencies that operate in the region such as the UNHCR have harmed the reputation of other foreign aid agencies which are seen as ineffective and merely strategic, in particular USAID. For example, according to the mayor of Qlaileh, when his village informed USAID of its most immediate needs, the agency offered to develop projects that had no use for the community. In addition, people listen and pay attention to Hassan Nasrallah's addresses to the nation and their towns, and are aware of how the US and USAID see the Shia community.

It is worth noticing that Iran, a Shia-majority country that is seen as friendly and which is often praised by Nasrallah, has funded the Sur-Saida highway, which connects the region to its borders. This project was welcomed by the region's population because it was extremely useful to them. However, one can easily argue that the Sur-Saida highway is an instance of Iranian soft power, and clearly favors Iran's geopolitical interests by strengthening Hezbollah's position in the region.

Hezbollah's supporters also share ideological and religious beliefs. Initially, Hezbollah followed the radical form of Shiism manifested by the *wilayat al-faqih* doctrine of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This doctrine advocated installing an Islamic state in Lebanon, opposition to Israel's existence, and U.S. hegemony in the region. However, as elaborated in Chapter II, the Iranian policy was relaxed by the party, if not entirely abandoned, as a result of Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance, which Nasrallah understands and recognizes.

Hezbollah's resistance to dismantling its armed wing, by claiming to be the only movement in Lebanon prepared to face Israeli aggression, has simultaneously tightened its grip on Lebanese politics and increased its support in the country. Hezbollah's supporters perceive the party members and activists as disciplined, incorruptible and capable of great self-sacrifice. In addition, some Lebanese who are not affiliated with Hezbollah are sympathizers and believe that the organization is fundamental to the security of Lebanon. For its many critics, as noticed in Chapter I, their responses from the Lebanese are a result of Hezbollah propaganda, which feeds the people the illusion of resistance.

In addition to its reputation as a resistance movement, which greatly contributed to Hezbollah's political hegemony, the party has authority over the Shia religious order, as seen in its clerical-based leadership. This religious element is another reason why the US has been

unable to weaken popular support for Hezbollah. A Shi'ite, who strictly follow the *aqidah* of Shiism, would not betray the most significant movement associated with their faith. Obviously, the social services USAID provides and its purportedly secular position would not have any influence over the mostly devout and disciplined Shi'ite community.

Politically, as also discussed in Chapter 2, Hezbollah's influence has increased. Hezbollah and its allies won 70 of the 128 seats in the Lebanese Parliament last year, taking seats from pro-American parties. Foreign Minister Bassil Gibran countered Pompeo's aggressive instance on the party during his recent visit to Beirut by asserting that "from our side, for sure, we reiterated that Hezbollah is a Lebanese party, not a terrorist organization." Standing next to Pompeo, Basil added that "its deputies are elected by the Lebanese people with great popular support." Although Basil is the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, a Hezbollah ally, it should be noticed that his firm stance was essential in helping to defuse the consequences of the belligerent policy of the current U.S. administration. The local elections of Qlaileh, Bazouryeh, and Tyre have also shown the tight grip Hezbollah and its allies have on municipal elections despite multiple projects being implemented by USAID in the region. However, election results are not the only factors that determine USAID's effectiveness. As mentioned before, the creed is a powerful determining factor of who the Shiite community will vote for, and the candidate parties are determined beforehand. It is difficult to accurately calculate USAID's effectiveness due to these strict codes. On an individual basis, USAID may be having some sort of affect, but on a communal basis, it is obvious that these programs are ineffective.

Moreover, it must be emphasized that despite the hardline measures the US has taken against Hezbollah such as encouraging the hawkish rhetoric and actions of Israeli prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu, withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear deal and threatening its allies that buy Iranian oil; and tightening its sanctions against Hezbollah; it has failed, in spite of using USAID as soft power, to win the hearts and minds of the party's supporters.

Finally, it remains to be seen whether the current U.S. administration's hardline stance on foreign policy will succeed in undermining Hezbollah. But perhaps the most troubling aspect of the American political campaign against Hezbollah, is the possible effect that weakening the party, by, for example, alienating its supporters and stopping Hezbollah's contributions to their communities, might have on Lebanon's volatile political order and fragile sectarian balance.

However, election results are not the only factor that demonstrate Hezbollah's political hegemony in the South. As mentioned before, religious beliefs are an important factor in determining the vote of the Shiite community, especially since the candidates are previously selected according to the local rules. Thus, it is difficult to accurately estimate the overall effects of USAID's programs since established local practices and policies play such a significant role in the region. Although at the individual level, USAID's programs may be perceived as positive, at the community level it is obvious that they are often seen as a form of political interference or as an attempt to assert American soft power.

Moreover, it should be emphasized that the hardline measures the US has taken against Hezbollah such as encouraging the hawkish rhetoric and actions of Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, withdrawing from the Iranian nuclear deal, threatening allies that buy Iranian oil, and imposing further sanctions against Hezbollah, make the attempt to simultaneously employ soft power via projects funded by USAID to win the hearts and minds of the party's supporters and others in the south of Lebanon far less likely to achieve its desired

goal. It remains to be seen whether the hardline foreign policy approach of the current U.S. administration will succeed in undermining Hezbollah, but it will almost certainly make persuading people to change their opinion about the U.S. because of its aid projects more difficult. One of the most troubling aspects of the new hardline American policy against Hezbollah is the fact that if it succeeds in weakening the party by alienating its supporters and reducing Hezbollah's contribution to their communities it may also undermine Lebanon's volatile political order and fragile sectarian balance.

Despite the fact that using USAID's programs as a foreign policy tool have had no significant effect on hindering Hezbollah's influence, the agency remains a crucial tool of soft power. Although the agency is not the only strategy the US has been using to dismantle Hezbollah, it is certainly a potential supplement to achieving that goal. As described in Chapter I, some studies in international relations maintain that foreign aid can be effective in establishing positive relationships between the population of the receiver country and the government and citizens of donor countries.

Although it may not be immediately obvious, USAID has provided clear benefits to certain areas in Lebanon, including areas that support Hezbollah. And since Lebanon's complex geopolitical position and notorious political instability have created conditions for its being under different spheres of influence, one could argue that by remaining active in the country USAID provides a deterrent to entities that have heretofore not been present in Lebanon, such as the Chinese government's agency China Aid. Moreover, in spite of the dubious political goals of the US in the region and its tarnished reputation in the region, its positive impact on Lebanon's education and health systems, for example, in addition to its role as political mediator, should be

further analyzed to determine the extent to which the US is likely to become a reliable party in Lebanon and the region.

However, it is becoming more difficult for the US to attempt to gain credibility among the Lebanese, particularly the ones who live in Southern Lebanon, while the Trump Administration blatantly and increasingly supports controversial and internationally condemned actions recently taken by Israel. The Trump's administration relocation of the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and its recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights have diminished US credibility and its claim to be a neutrality among people and political actors in the Arab world, especially among Hezbollah's supporters who see these actions as confirmation of their deep-seated suspicions concerning U.S. motives.

Given the impact of these new controversial policies, USAID will have to rethink its role and evaluate the ways in which it is perceived not only by the Lebanese and the Arabs, but also by citizens of receiver countries who have long suspected that the U.S. acts primarily in its own interest (an argument used by former US president Bill Clinton to justify the American inaction during the Rwanda genocide). To reverse this perception, American and Lebanese researchers and practitioners in the fields of public administration and international relations should take action during this period of hostile foreign policy toward the Middle East and work together to create a plan in which USAID in its role as donor could act less as a tool for US hegemonic interests and more as a medium for empowering citizens from underprivileged areas of the country by allowing them to make their own decisions, including whether to maintain their allegiance to Hezbollah. One should recall that Hezbollah, like Sinn Féin in Ireland, represents only a segment of the Lebanese population, even in the South.

As has been shown in this study, USAID will not be able to achieve credibility and create partnerships with communities in Lebanon by simply implementing social services and other projects without understanding the cultural values and the real needs of the communities in which it operates. Although making donations to local mosques that administer charities and are run by moderate Islamic organizations can be a means to change minds and gain acceptance, the communities in the South have a long history of mistrust of the United States, which they see as an imperial force rather than a possible partner. The US invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, its role in Libya, Syria, and other parts of the Middle East and Arab world, only confirm the perception the people of Southern Lebanon have long had of the U.S. As a result of their harsh experience during the 2006 Israeli invasion, which was supported militarily by George W. Bush's administration, the population of the South Lebanon came to believe that they are exposed to Israeli aggression and will eventually suffer the same fate Iraqis suffered during the U.S. invasion and occupation.

Nevertheless, the devastation of many parts of the South by Israel in 2006 happened in some measure as a result of Hezbollah's miscalculation, which Hassan Nasrallah later acknowledged. In spite of this strategic blunder, Hezbollah has remained the pillar of Shiite cultural representation in Southern Lebanon. It can thus be said that its religious and territorial hegemony and the effectiveness and positive impact of its social services have legitimized its role as the representative and leader of the Shiite community. Thus, the party can be seen as having achieved what was described earlier in this study as symbolic dominance, in the Gramscian sense, in Southern Lebanon and in the Shiite community as a result of its organic connections with that segment of the Lebanese population. Consequently, one of the principal challenges for USAID and for a more moderate American administration in the future will be to find ways to at

once acknowledge Hezbollah's role in Lebanon and at the same time gain the confidence of many more members of the Shiite community as it has successfully been able to do among other religious groups in the country.

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