

Axis of Resistance

Group Paper

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CONTENTS

Introduction: Defining Axis of Resistance	3
Historical Context and Origin	3
Key Actors	4
Significance of Axis of Resistance	5
Scope and Objectives of the Paper	6
Current Situation and Roles of Individual Actors	6
Critical Analysis of the Conflict	9
Glimpse of the Future	9
Policies	11
Conclusion	11
References	13

Introduction: Defining Axis of Resistance (Helin Su Kaygısız u o 543237)

The Axis of Resistance refers to a decentralized coalition of both state and non-state actors in the Middle East, united by their mutual opposition to Western dominance, particularly that of the United States and Israel, as well as the influence of regional powers like Saudi Arabia (Zeidan, 2024; Steinberg, 2021). At its core is Iran, which provides ideological direction, logistical support, and military coordination through the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) (Bagheri et al., 2021). This network includes pivotal members such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Assad regime in Syria, Palestinian groups like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen (Steinberg, 2021). Though informal, the Axis functions with remarkable coordination, largely facilitated by Iran's strategic planning and resource distribution (Bagheri et al., 2021).

Emerging as a response to Western influence and a means for Iran to expand its regional sway, the Axis serves dual purposes: military confrontation and ideological resistance (Steinberg, 2021). Its members employ asymmetric tactics, proxy engagements, and strategic communications to advance shared objectives. These efforts have allowed Iran to bolster its geopolitical leverage while maintaining plausible deniability in conflicts (Zeidan, 2024; Bagheri et al., 2021). Collectively, the Axis has reshaped the regional power balance, presenting a significant challenge to U.S. policies and Israel's security, while also countering Saudi-led initiatives in the Middle East (Steinberg, 2021; Zeidan, 2024).

Historical Context and Origins (Helin Su Kaygısız u o 543237)

The origins of the Axis of Resistance date back to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which established Iran as a Shiite Islamic Republic committed to countering Western and Israeli influence (Bagheri et al., 2021; Steinberg, 2021). During the 1980s, Iran's alliance with Syria became a cornerstone of this coalition, initially strengthened by their shared involvement in the Lebanese Civil War (Zeidan, 2024). Iran played a pivotal role in creating and supporting Hezbollah, a Shiite militia that arose to resist Israeli military presence in Lebanon (Bagheri et al., 2021). Over the years, Hezbollah grew into a dominant political and military force, deeply connected to Iran ideologically and operationally (Steinberg, 2021).

Subsequent events, such as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, allowed Iran to broaden its influence by fostering alliances with Iraqi Shiite militias, which became integral members of the Axis (Bagheri et al., 2021). Likewise, the Yemeni Civil War offered an opportunity for Iran to back the Houthi movement, expanding its sphere of influence into Saudi Arabia's

backyard (Steinberg, 2021). Over time, this coalition evolved into a wide-reaching network, united by a collective goal of diminishing U.S. and Israeli dominance in the region (Zeidan, 2024).

Key Actors (Helin Su Kaygısız uço 543237)

The Axis of Resistance is a coalition of various state and non-state actors, each contributing uniquely to the coalition's overarching strategic objectives. Central to this alliance is **Iran**, which functions as the ideological and logistical leader. Iran orchestrates operations through its Quds Force, a specialized unit of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) that focuses on external military operations and support for allied groups (Bagheri et al., 2021). This support includes substantial financial backing, advanced weaponry, and military training, which are crucial for maintaining the operational readiness of its allies. Iran's involvement allows it to project power throughout the region while mitigating the risks associated with direct military confrontation. The Iranian leadership views the Axis of Resistance as essential for enhancing its strategic depth and countering U.S. influence and Israeli actions in the Middle East (Steinberg, 2021; Burke, 2024).

Hezbollah, based in Lebanon, is regarded as Iran's most significant proxy and is often referred to as its “crown jewel.” This Shiite militant group has evolved into a formidable political and military force, equipped with a vast arsenal of rockets and missiles, estimated to number between 120,000 to 200,000 (Steinberg, 2021). Hezbollah's primary motivation is to resist Israeli military actions and protect Lebanon's sovereignty. In addition to its military capabilities, Hezbollah has established a comprehensive network of social services within Lebanon, which includes infrastructure development, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and youth programs. These efforts have garnered substantial support among both Shiite and non-Shiite populations in the country.

Syria, under the Assad regime, plays a crucial role within the Axis by acting as a land corridor for the transportation of supplies, funds, and armaments to Hezbollah in Lebanon. This route significantly enhances Hezbollah's capacity to deter Israeli actions. Syria's alignment with the Axis is motivated by its desire to secure support against external threats, particularly from Israel and various Western powers that have sought to destabilize the regime. The Assad government views its partnership with Iran and the Axis as vital for its survival amid ongoing civil conflict and external pressures.

The Axis also encompasses Palestinian groups, particularly **Hamas** and the **Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)**. Despite ideological differences, Hamas being a Sunni organization, both groups align themselves with the Axis due to their mutual opposition to Israel. Iranian support has been critical for these groups, particularly in enhancing their military capabilities to resist Israeli actions in Gaza and the West Bank (Burke, 2024). For Hamas, the partnership provides essential resources to sustain its operations against Israel, while the PIJ has received increased backing from Iran, especially following tensions between Hamas and the Assad regime during the Syrian Civil War.

In Iraq, **Iranian-backed militias**, including **Kata'ib Hezbollah** and the **Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)**, play a significant role in the Axis. These groups are primarily motivated by the desire to counter U.S. military presence in Iraq and to support the Assad regime in Syria. They receive logistical and military assistance from Iran, which enables them to conduct operations against perceived threats from both Sunni extremist factions and Israeli forces (Bagheri et al., 2021; Steinberg, 2021). The PMF, formed in response to the rise of ISIS, has evolved into a powerful political and military entity, serving both national interests and Iranian objectives in the region.

Lastly, the **Houthis** in Yemen represent a crucial element of the Axis. This Zaydi Shiite movement leverages Iranian support to challenge Saudi Arabian dominance and disrupt vital maritime routes in the Red Sea. Their motivation lies in resisting Saudi intervention in Yemen and opposing Western policies that they perceive as imperialistic (Burke, 2024). The Houthis' ability to conduct missile strikes and engage in asymmetric warfare has made them a significant destabilizing force in the region, further extending the reach of the Axis.

Significance of Axis of Resistance (Helin Su Kaygısız uço 543237)

The Axis has shifted the balance of power in the Middle East by enabling Iran to counter adversaries asymmetrically (Steinberg, 2021). By supporting local actors with distinct motivations but shared opposition to Western hegemony, the Axis reduces the risks of direct confrontation for Iran. This strategy has expanded Iran's "strategic depth," allowing it to exert influence far beyond its borders (Bagheri et al., 2021). The Axis also highlights the use of ideological alignment to consolidate power. Anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism serve as unifying themes, even for Sunni actors like Hamas, which align temporarily with the Shiite-dominated Axis to oppose Israel (Zeidan, 2024).

Scope and Objectives of the Paper(Helin Su Kaygısız uőo 543237)

This paper examines the Axis of Resistance, a coalition of state and non-state actors led by Iran, and its role in reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Axis's historical evolution, its current operations, and the roles of key members such as Iran, Hezbollah, Syria, Hamas, Iraqi militias, and the Houthis. By analyzing the coalition's strategies, this paper evaluates how it functions as both a military network and an ideological alliance, challenging Western influence in the region.

The paper's primary objective is to assess the Axis's impact on regional stability and its effectiveness in achieving its goals. Specific attention is given to the coalition's involvement in ongoing conflicts, including Hezbollah's military activities in Lebanon, Iran's strategic maneuvers in Gaza, and the Houthis' disruption of maritime routes in Yemen. Through this exploration, the study aims to highlight how the Axis coordinates its diverse actors while navigating the internal and external pressures that threaten its cohesion. Additionally, the paper seeks to analyze the broader implications of the Axis's actions on Middle Eastern geopolitics, including its influence on the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Syrian Civil War, and U.S. presence in Iraq. By evaluating these dynamics, the study aims to identify the strengths and vulnerabilities of the coalition and provide insights into its potential trajectory. This research contributes to understanding how alliances like the Axis of Resistance shape modern conflict and influence the balance of power in the Middle East.

Current Situation and Roles of Individual Actors (Seng Naw uőo 530082)

The Axis of Resistance, a coalition led by Iran, together with Hezbollah, Syria, Iraqi Shia Militias and Hamas and the Houthi forces has different roles, depending on their interests and location. However, one thing that they all have in common interests which is to oppose the western influence in the Middle East, in particular the United States of America and Israel and its policies toward Palestinians. Each member, in addition to this, has different interests that shape their role and the present in the member.

Iran is regarded as a pivotal player within the group, essential for its very existence. The absence of Iran would render the axis unviable, as it supplies the fundamental ideology, comprehensive framework, and strategic direction for the coalition. Despite facing economic challenges, Iran continues to extend significant financial, logistical, and military support to members of the Axis of Resistance. Through its elite Quds Force, a branch of the Islamic

Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iran delivers advanced weaponry, including drones and missiles, while also training and equipping militias and offering advisory assistance (Clarke, 2023).

Conversely, this may serve as a motivation for Iran, as the alliance enhances its ability to target adversaries beyond its own borders. Rather than directly engaging its opponents with its own military forces, Iran benefits from the defensive support of its allies, enabling them to counteract the aggression of their enemies (Asia Times Staff, 2024). For example, in an apparent effort to alleviate fears of escalating into a full-scale conflict following the recent attack on Israel, Asia Times reported the statement from Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman indicating that there were no plans to deploy Iranian forces or volunteers on the ground, as both Hamas and Hezbollah possess sufficient capacity and strength to defend themselves. Consequently, the resistance axis can be viewed as a subordinate military force of Iran, acting on its behalf beyond its national borders.

Hezbollah, a key player in the axis of resistance, stands as one of the most formidable entities, operating as a political organization in Lebanon and serving as Iran's most influential proxy against Israel. In Lebanon, the organization holds a significant presence within political parties, securing 13 seats in the national parliament (Wastnidge & Mabon, 2024). Beyond its involvement in the axis of resistance, Hezbollah has established a comprehensive network of social services within Lebanon, which includes infrastructure development, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and youth programs. These efforts have been instrumental in garnering substantial support for the organization among both Shiite and non-Shiite populations in the country (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.)

Hezbollah's role is well-documented by numerous scholars, who highlight its direct confrontations and military presence aimed at countering Israeli actions and Western influence in Lebanon. This organization functions as both an offensive and a deterrent force against Israel. Additionally, Hezbollah plays a crucial role in promoting Iranian interests in regional conflicts, particularly in Syria, where it has bolstered Iran's strategic foothold and supported the Assad regime. In the context of Syria, Hezbollah is vital as it provides training to the National Defense Force (NDF) in areas such as urban warfare, infiltration, and intelligence operations. Furthermore, Hezbollah not only contributes personnel but also takes charge of command and operational planning within Syrian units during significant offensives, such as the battle for al-Qusayr (Institute for the Study of War, n.d.). By leveraging its advanced military capabilities, Hezbollah adeptly navigates its dual identity as an armed resistance

movement and a political powerbroker, thereby sustaining its political influence in Lebanon (Institute for the Study of War, 2024).

Syria plays a crucial role within the Axis by acting as an essential land corridor for the transportation of supplies, funds, and armaments to Hezbollah in Lebanon. This route significantly enhances Hezbollah's capacity to deter Israeli actions (France 24, 2010). Like other members of the Axis, Syria stands in opposition to Western foreign policies and interference, as well as the existence of the state of Israel. The Assad regime views the Axis alliance as a source of security against external threats, including Israeli aggression and various Western efforts to destabilize the nation. Furthermore, Syria benefits from military, economic, and political backing from the Axis, particularly during internal strife such as the Syrian Civil War.

Iran also extends considerable financial and military assistance to Hamas, which is based in Gaza, thereby bolstering its ability to resist Israeli occupation and safeguard Palestinian interests. The Houthi movement in Yemen, supported by Iran, acts as a significant destabilizing force against the governments of Saudi Arabia and the West, positioning itself as a key player in the regional resistance. Additionally, Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, such as Kata'ib Hezbollah, engage in regional conflicts, particularly in Syria and Iraq, with the objective of expelling U.S. forces and confronting Sunni extremist and Israeli factions. Their actions are driven by a shared commitment to countering Western and Israeli influence in the region, defending Shiite interests, and opposing imperialism. Through this alliance, they receive financial, military, and ideological support, contributing to the broader struggle for regional security and influence against common adversaries.

In light of the current circumstances and current situation in the Middle East, Israel is actively conducting daily air and naval operations, alongside ground troop engagements, in both Gaza and Southern Lebanon, targeting Hezbollah. On October 1, Iran launched nearly 200 ballistic missiles in a strike against Israel. In retaliation, on October 26, Israel executed targeted operations against Iranian military installations. This action by Iran marked one of its direct confrontations with its adversaries, as it typically refrains from such overt aggression, relying instead on its allied forces to engage beyond its borders.

The conflict in Gaza, which commenced on October 7, 2023, remains complex, with ongoing hostilities between Israel and Hamas. However, after 14 months of conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, a ceasefire agreement has been established, facilitated by France and the United States, in response to the escalating humanitarian crisis and the significant displacement of people. This agreement has garnered support from various international communities

(France 24, 2010) , including a positive reception from Iran. Furthermore, a spokesperson for the Iranian government emphasized the need to exert pressure on Israel to conclude the ongoing conflict in Gaza (Reuters, 2024).

Critical Analysis of the Conflict (Martin Quam učo 522216)

The axis of resistance has become one of, if not the power, of a complex network of state and non-state actors. What will be difficult to resolve in this scenario will be to unify a differentiating view of the conflict.

The current state of the resistance has not evolved from what it once was, it might have changed in the way it is viewed. Iran as the leader of the ideology and movement has initiated some forms of plans (together with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)) in particular its Quds force to engage in operations across the region.

Hezbollah (A Lebanese Shia militant group) has transformed itself and more importantly became “stronger” *1 (from a more resistance movement to a more powerful military and political ability). Hezbollah has remained as a strong “protector” of the axis by cementing itself in Lebanese politics, gaining influence. In this case it is not a ground invasion that opponents need to fear but rather its military capabilities, specifically its missile arsenal with which it poses a considerable threat to any adversary.

Syria, which was under the Assad regime, has continued to crucially support its ally, Iran. Despite the effects of its internal or external threats and conflicts, it has still remained a strategic land bridge that connects several actors. For instance facilitating Hezbollah with necessary arms shipments.

1* This statement is meant more in the spirit of the theory realism.

Glimpse of the Future (Tevela Rerecich učo 542877)

Considering the above-mentioned importance of the Axis of Resistance one may reasonably be anxious for the future. Given that Iran, the leader of the Axis, is orchestrating attacks on Israel and Israel is currently occupying and breaking ceasefires with Lebanon(ABC News, 2024) it is not hard to see how the existence of the Axis further entrenches the hostilities between Israel and a big portion of the Middle East. Considering both Israel and the Axis have shown their willingness to escalate if deemed necessary, this conflict is not exclusively bipolar anymore.

However, nothing is certain with the new US election. Trump does not radically deviate from the standard US policy on Israel, as he seems to be an even stronger supporter of it (ERDOĞAN, A., & HABASH, L., 2020). Couple this tendency with the recent reactions of several American politicians to the recent ICC ruling regarding Benjamin Netanyahu and we can see that if push comes to shove, the US will come to Israel's help. Therefore if the Axis of Resistance will be determined to oppose Israel, it will be determined to oppose the US and a huge chunk of the West. Such a conflict can prove to be even more disastrous to Lebanon and Palestine, considering the unfortunate toll of civilian deaths, it will also most likely cripple Lebanon and Iran economically as Trump is gearing up to use tariffs as punitive measures against other, bigger players. This will not be an easy challenge to overcome for the simple fact that the reasons to the conflict are not economic but connected to security and ideology. While for the West Israel has remained one of the few allies in the Middle East that it does not want to lose, for the Axis this has long become a religious and historical dispute.

The danger is not solely regional. The Houthi rebels in Yemen have, as a result of the Israel-Palestine conflict, attacked the ships in the crucial strait that leads to the Red Sea. This is already a problem, not only for Yemen's relationship with the West, but also to global trade (Nandini, N., Ma'arif, S., Syamsunasir, S., & Widodo, P., 2024). This may be seen as a continuation of an old pattern: while the countries of the Middle East cannot hope to match the military power of the US due to geographic circumstances they have partial control over the worldwide economy. While it is not a sign that the West should bow to every demand, it is a sign that one cannot just hope the conflict to be resolved through brute force alone.

Now as we move from Yemen, Iran, and Palestine to Syria, arguably the less proactive member of the Axis, we should regard new developments with curiosity. As of the end of November, the rebels in Syria have begun rapidly advancing, taking Aleppo, Syria's 2nd largest city. These advancements show no sign of stopping (BBC, 2024). Syria, as has been mentioned in this paper, while not directly taking part in conflicts does act like a bridge between Iraq and Lebanon, connecting the countries for trading weapons and other activities. As the situation develops, it is unclear if the rebels will manage to unthroned Assad. However, the likelihood of this grows, if it does happen the Axis of Resistance will be significantly weakened. Iran supports Assad's regime, making the rebels in Syria actively hostile to Iran in return.

This may grow from an uprising inside the country to a conflict involving multiple states again. If Iraq and Lebanon decide that it is worth it to intervene due to not wanting to lose the land bridge in the middle of the Axis, Syria will face quite formidable enemies. It will

then be up to the West to provide or not provide adequate support for the potential new regime. The reasons for providing resources are the weakening of the Axis and also the dismantling of an ally of Russia.

Policies (Tevela Rerecich učo 542877)

All those changes leave us uncertain, however, that does not mean that recommendations cannot be made. The Middle East population is one of the most vulnerable during humanitarian crises; as such it is of utmost importance to try to prevent future conflict and improve existing ones. For starters, a ceasefire between Israel and Palestine may seem the most obvious option, but considering the current state of hostilities it may not last if organized by one side and not enforced by a third party. For the animosity to cool down, the ceasefire has to be observed and strongly enforced by someone. That applies only to the ceasefire as the final peace resolution cannot be forced or rushed, as that would inevitably bring to the reoccurrence of the conflict. It also may be the time to start holding Israel accountable for the broken ceasefires after the continuous support it has been given by its allies.

The Houthi rebel situation may benefit from the resolution of other conflicts to weaken ideological disputes. The weakening of Iran and the Axis as a whole would benefit global trade also, as most of Houthi weaponry seems to come from the Islamic State (Euronews, 2024). However, as of today, it may be more sensible to hold back from any rash actions and keep continuing to protect the ships with the military superiority America and Britain have.

As for Syria, I would recommend cautious support of the rebels. Providing arms to rebel groups can also misfire, that said the alternative may be worse. The Assad regime has been known to kill civilians for years now and it would be a good way to punish the regime that so consistently and carelessly violated human rights. It also makes sense from the geopolitical perspective, that a bridge between Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon could be broken making the weapons transfer much harder. Russia would also not be able to gain any benefits from one of its few allies in the Middle East making it harder for them to lead their invasion in Ukraine. This would tip the balance of power towards the West. Furthermore, although this has to be said with utmost caution, it could provide the people of Syria with a more humane regime lessening the immigrant crisis. If the West does provide such support, a more careful discernment between various rebel groups in Syria will be needed, as they are not a homogenous entity.

Conclusion (Tevela Rerecich učo 542877)

The Axis of Resistance has proven to be a curious alliance. It consists of both Shia and Sunni Muslims, spans across 5 countries, and fights different states, from Israel to Saudi Arabia. What unites them and makes them overlook their differences is their opposition to the West and its allies. The United States has had an arguably poor record of conduct when it comes to interventions in the Middle East, however, because of how many lives, both inside and outside of the Middle East, depend on the tensions staying below a certain level the issue cannot be left alone. Politics of diplomacy and accountability should rule over most decisions made regarding this region. It is not only the Axis that should be held accountable but also its allies. Given the diverse history each country has, a collective approach cannot be applied, calling for more dedicated people both from the West and from inside the countries themselves.

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