

Militias' Rule In Fourth Generation Warfare In Middle East Region: Dangerous Trend - Analysis



Iran's IRGC's Naval special forces, S.N.S.F. Photo Credit: sayyed shahab-o- din vajedi, Wikipedia Commons.

Militias sharing power with weak central governments has become a growing phenomenon in the Middle East, causing widespread alarm of state structure collapsing and chaos spreading across borders. This new trend has common features on many levels, but most important of all the strong ties between the militias and some regional powers, in particular Iran. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) is the main source of arming and funding to major non-state actors that have strongly established themselves as decision makers in their respective countries: The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq, the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon and several pro-regime militias in Syria. The PMF, the Houthis and Hezbollah not only have well-armed forces, but also have strong

political representation within their respective states in the form of members of parliament or the government.

Militias, by definition are armed groups involved in insurgency warfare against the central government or a foreign force or other militias within a country that might be under occupation or has either become a failed state or on the verge of becoming one. Militia members are often ideologues that form an ultra-nationalist group or a sectarian group in a quest to weaken an occupation force or the central government and force it to adhere to their demands and comply with their ideology. Militias in general do not respect the state's law or international laws. Some countries undergo internal political power struggle that could lead to a civil war. This is not the case being discussed in this article. It is about extensive efforts by a foreign power to create armed non-state actors in sovereign states to control them. Militias are the favorite tools used by regional or super powers in fighting proxy wars against one another. Such militias thrived during the Cold War era, and in other periods of global conflicts. They have now made a strong comeback at an unprecedented scale in the Middle East region.

The current situation in the Middle East could be regarded by military scientists as Fourth Generation warfare, which is simply defined as the loss of the central government's monopoly on the use of force due to the rise of an armed non-state actor. In modern states, only security agencies and regular armed forces have the right to use arms and resort to violent means to enforce law and order and defend the country's borders. However, in a Fourth Generation Warfare environment militias or armed non-state actors are often the tools of foreign powers in a quest to establish control over a state and subsequently enhance regional influence through an indirect and less costly approach. Under this scenario, the hostile powers do not need to send their own troops to defeat the other nation or take it over. They simply arm and fund non-state actors in the targeted countries and get them to do their dirty work. Iran fought an eight-year-long war against Iraq in the eighties costing it hundreds of thousands of lives without a victory. But now it has made a great deal of progress in controlling Iraq via the PMF militias and without sacrificing any of its troops. Also, through Hezbollah and Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Syria, Tehran has now virtual control over all the territory from its southwestern borders all the way to the Mediterranean.

Therefore militias are now a major component of the so-called Fourth Generation Warfare. Their presence is often aimed at weakening the central government and

spreading chaos to facilitate their hostile takeover of state institutions. The situation becomes more complex when there are multiple militias in one state and each militia is serving a different foreign power, which is what is taking place today in countries like Syria and Libya. Regional and global powers are supporting warring factions in these two countries that have become infested with radical terrorist groups while the process to broker a political settlement to re-establish a strong central government there remains deadlocked.

One phenomenon endangering global stability and international law is that the militias are gaining recognitions by members of the international community and are treated as legitimate entities. The U.S.-led Alliance combating terrorists in Iraq and up until late 2016, coordinated with the PMF and provided them with air support in the war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Russia has been working closely with Hezbollah and pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Syria to drive back rebel forces and save the regime there. The political leadership of Hezbollah is recognized by the European Union and Russia and formal lines of communications exist between the two powers with Hezbollah officials, even though the group's military branch is integrated with its political leadership. Hezbollah is regarded a terrorist group by the U.S. and some Arab Gulf States.

So the PMF and Hezbollah are treated as acceptable entities co-existing with the state's security agencies and armed forces. The non-state actors have created parallel institutions to that of the state dealing with welfare, religious affairs, education, communications and media. As a result countries like Lebanon and Iraq are now politically vulnerable at all times and actions of their political leaderships are often questionable by the international community. Normalizing this abnormal situation has only encouraged regional powers to create more militias, and the phenomenon is spreading.

The presence of a militia in a multi-ethnic or multi-sectarian country will increase the possibility of a civil war, because when one non-state actor possesses arms other communities in the country will feel an existential threat and subsequently seek ways to form their own armed militias to protect themselves. This will ultimately lead to a civil war as is the case in Libya and other regional countries. Moreover, ungoverned territories and fragile states have proven very attractive to extremist groups like Al Qaeda and ISIS to establish themselves there and spread terror worldwide. This is evident today in places like Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya.

Even if a country's population is not made up of multi-ethnic or sectarian communities, a militia cannot permanently coexist peacefully with a state because it will always compete with the central government for the monopoly on the use of force and the drafting of foreign policy and managing state institutions. The conflict between the two sides could be postponed but never avoided. It is a matter of time before the country goes through a gradual meltdown of its institutions leading to a civil war and possible breakup.

Hence, global powers should concentrate on reviving and strengthening central governments in the Middle East and deny militias affiliated with foreign powers any legitimacy. Moreover, the international community must set new tough rules regarding armed non-state actors that are backed and funded by a foreign power to take over an internationally-recognized state that is a member of the United Nations. Such an act amounts to a foreign invasion of a sovereign state and must be treated as such.

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