Expanding Role Theory: Analyzing US Responses to Hizb’allah and Iran

Alexandra Tyler Shewmake

Dr. W.A. Rivera, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor

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Abstract

There are many sociopolitical theories to help explain why governments and actors do what they do. Securitization Theory is a process-oriented theory in international relations that focuses on how an actor defines another actor as an “existential threat,” and the resulting responses that can be taken in order to address that threat. While Securitization Theory is an acceptable method to analyze the relationships between actors in the international system, this thesis contends that the proper examination is multi-factorial, focusing on the addition of Role Theory to the analysis. Consideration of Role Theory, which is another international relations theory that explains how an actor’s strategies, relationships, and perceptions by others is based on pre-conceptualized definitions of that actor’s identity, is essential in order to fully explain why an actor might respond to another in a particular way. Certain roles an actor may enact produce a rival relationship with other actors in the system, and it is those rival roles that elicit securitized responses. The possibility of a securitized response lessens when a role or a relationship between roles becomes ambiguous. There are clear points of role rivalry and role ambiguity between Hizb’allah and Iran, which has directly impacted, and continues to impact, how the United States (US) responds to these actors. Because of role ambiguity, the US has still not conceptualized an effective way to deal with Hizb’allah and Iran holistically across all its various areas of operation and in its various enacted roles. It would be overly simplistic to see Hizb’allah and Iran solely through one lens depending on which hemisphere or continent one is observing. The reality is likely more nuanced. Both Role Theory and Securitization theory can help to understand and articulate those nuances. By examining two case studies of Hizb’allah and Iran’s enactment of various roles in both the Middle East and Latin America, the situations where roles cause a securitized response and where the response is less securitized due to role ambiguity will become clear. Using this augmented approach of combining both theories, along with supplementing the manner in which an actor, action, or role is analyzed, will produce better methods for policy-making that will be able to address the more ambiguous activities of Hizb’allah and Iran in these two regions.

Keywords: Securitization theory, role theory, Hizb’allah, Iran, role rivalry, role ambiguity
Introduction

Hizb’allah’s recent military involvement alongside the Assad regime in the ongoing Syrian conflict raises questions for the United States (US) about Hizb’allah’s strategies and allegiances in the region and about the strategies they pursue to achieve those objectives. While the US defines them as a terrorist group, their actions lately have been more within the definition of a political group or a militia. For instance, Hizb’allah has been operating against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), aka “Da’ish”, a group that the US has named a threat to international peace and security. However, Hizb’allah has been seen as a terrorist threat themselves since the nineties. So how is the US to respond to their recent activity in various regions, specifically the Middle East and Latin America? Before now, Hizb’allah has been operating in the Middle East with the label of “terrorist” and in Latin America with the label of “criminal organization.” And the US has responded in each of these areas of operation in ways that address the threat of Hizb’allah in the Middle East as separate from the threat of Hizb’allah in Latin America. Yet, can you really allow those two distinct labels to distinguish the activities of the same organization in one area or the other? Are the labels the US has been imposing on Hizb’allah the most accurate ways to define, and therefore address them?

Stated another way, is the label of terrorist organization an accurate way to describe Hizb’allah’s activities? Since 1997, Hizb’allah has been labelled by the US as a terrorist organization for their terrorist activity, including a 1983 bombing of US barracks in Beirut, the 1992 bombing of the Israel embassy and the 1994 bombing of a Jewish cultural center in Argentina (CFR 2015). Another alleged terrorist attack was the 2012 bombing of an Israeli tour bus in Bulgaria. In 2013, Hizb’allah was implicated in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Since their inception, Hizb’allah has conducted operations against
Israel that the US defines as terrorist attacks. However, more recently their activities in the Middle East have been centered around supporting President Bashar al-Assad’s regime, both militarily and diplomatically in Syria, with no more recent overt terrorist attacks in either the Middle East or Latin America.

Some of their activities, particularly those in Latin America, more often than not fall outside of the label of terrorist. So can Hizb’allah be defined as a criminal organization? They have been involved in money laundering and drug trafficking operations in Latin America and North Africa since the 1990s. In early February of this year, the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) announced that they had arrested four members of an alleged money laundering cell that Hizb’allah was using to fund their operations in Syria and Lebanon. This was not the first incident of criminal activity that Hizb’allah has been implicated in within the Latin American region (Longmire 2016). Centered around the tri-border area (TBA) between Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil, Hizb’allah has capitalized on the entrenched drug trafficking networks as well as the lawlessness of the area to garner capital from the illegal trade of drugs and arms. Except for a 1992 suicide bombing of the Israeli embassy in Argentina and the 1994 bombing of the Jewish cultural center, also in Argentina, Hizb’allah’s Latin American activity has focused on the criminal-legal realm, rather than the security realm.

The US attempts to define Hizb’allah in the Middle East as a terrorist organization, while their activity in Latin America has allowed others, such as the US, to define Hizb’allah as a criminal organization. While both labels are addressing a problem, the problem not being addressed is the connection between the two types of activity. So what is the connection between these two labels? Hizb’allah’s activity in the Middle East is framed from a political-security viewpoint, while their activity in Latin America is framed from a criminal-legal one. This means
that their activity as a political militia causes the US problems in terms of responding to their conduct. It is important to note that somewhere between the label as a terrorist organization and a criminal one, lies their most recent label as a political militia. In Latin America, Hizb’allah uses the money they launder from drug trafficking operations to fund their terrorist activities, and more recently their military operations in nations like Lebanon, Israel, and Syria, so limiting Hizb’allah in Latin America as strictly a criminal organization operating in that region does not capture the entire effect of their activity in that region. These realms of operation are vital to US geopolitical interest. Consequently, the US treating Hizb’allah as solely a criminal organization in Latin America seems inadequate particularly because their criminal activity directly funds their more violent operations in the Middle East.

Equally as vital to US interest surrounding this question of Hizb’allah is how Iran’s support of Hizb’allah affects Iranian-US relations. Since Hizb’allah’s inception, Iran has been ideologically and materially supportive of their activities in both regions. The way that the US defines and responds to Hizb’allah in the Middle East versus Latin America has deep implications for Iranian-US relations. With the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Iran has been attempting to re-enter into the global financial and diplomatic world. They also have been trying to rise as the regional leader in addressing security threats, such as Da’ish in Syria. This would seem like a way forward for the US and Iran that would signal improved relations, because the US has been historically suspicious of Iran’s often militant anti-US agenda. Despite the anti-US rhetoric Iran, also, has been operating against the threat of Da’ish and also working with the larger global community to ensure global peace and stability, causing the labels given to Iran by the US to be called into question as well. The US designated Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism for their part in the suicide bombing of the US
embassy in Beirut. And even today, Iran continues to fund Hizb’allah’s operations in the region, as well as supporting Iraqi Shi’i militias who have been designated by the US as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) (State Department 2015). Even in the wake of the US lifting various trade sanctions from Iran, the US maintains other sanctions against Iran for their support of the groups Hizb’allah and Hamas, signaling that despite a united objective to defeat Da’ish, Iran’s objectives could threaten US geopolitical interests in the Middle East.

Labeling Hizb’allah as strictly a terrorist organization is a perspective based in the idea of securitizing a threat, which is the essential element of Securitization Theory. Dr. Ole Wæver, a political theorist, states that this theory offers “one of the most concise and attractive tools in critical studies today (Taurek 2006). Wæver’s theory of securitization centers around the idea of security being an illocutionary, or speech, act; simply by uttering “security” something is being done. To securitize something, one first labels a referent object as threatening one’s existence, claiming a right to extraordinary measures to ensure the referent object’s survival (Taurek 53-54). Since the act of securitizing an object or another actor is an act of speech, there is no pre-existing meaning to what is threatening and what is not, making security a social and intersubjective construction. Because of this, securitization theory is often associated with the “politics of security.” This makes securitizing an issue or a threat a political act. According to Securitization Theory, Hizb’allah’s acts that could be construed as terrorism in the Middle East have allowed for the US to respond in concordance with a high level of threat. And from that securitized standpoint, the US response to their criminal activity in the Latin American region is appropriate. But the problem still remains that their criminal activity in the Western Hemisphere, while not an overt securitized threat, funds their terrorist activity in the Middle East.

Securitization Theory addresses one way to label a threat, involving defining it and then acting
on that definition. But securitization of an object, without more context, often ignores the inherent definitions applied to a state in terms of a state’s belief, images and identities that develop for themselves.

As a complement to Securitization Theory, Role Theory examines how these inherent definitions, or roles, explain how actors operate in the system. Role Theory is a sociological branch of theory that explains how individuals or groups operate within social systems, performing “roles”, in order to function in specific ways within a system. K. J. Holsti is one of the first scholars to conceptualize how roles shape the way that a state acts in the international system. Holsti expands Role Theory from a sociological theory into a branch of international relations theory, specifically foreign policy analysis. He discusses how a nation’s role conception can define not only their actions within the international system, but how it can also define another’s reaction to the enactment of that role (Holsti 1970). The role an actor plays matters in how that actor’s activities elicit a response from another actor. According to Role Theory, how the actor is defined explains another actor’s reaction to a possible threat. So because Iran and Hizb’allah play different roles in Latin America than they do in the Middle East, the US responds differently to those various roles. The US categorizes Iran and Hizb’allah’s activities in the Middle East as a threat to its national security and interests, while their activities in Latin America are seen as an issue of law enforcement. Definitions matter; the roles Iran and Hizb’allah play in the Middle East differ from the ones they play in Latin America. It is these differences in roles that define how the US views each actor’s activity and then how the US responds to them.

Both theories offer valid ways to model complex issues of framing actors and how those frames affect other actors’ responses. Yet neither Securitization Theory nor Role Theory
completely explain why even though Hizb’allah conducts terrorist operations in the Middle East and only money launders in Latin America, the US does not see the illicit funding in Latin America as being directly tied to Hizb’allah’s identity as a terrorist organization in the Middle East. Rather than supporting one theory over another, this thesis will take elements from both Securitization and Role Theory to support a more complete picture of labeling. It would be overly simplistic to see Hizb’allah and Iran solely through one lens depending on which hemisphere or continent one is observing. The reality is likely more nuanced. Both Role Theory and Securitization theory can help to understand and articulate those nuances. By examining two case studies of Hizb’allah and Iran’s enactment of various roles in both the Middle East and Latin America, the instances where roles cause a securitized response and where the response is less securitized due to role ambiguity will become clear. This augmented approach in both theories and how one analyzes a case will produce better policy methods for addressing the more ambiguous activities of Hizb’allah and Iran in these two regions.

In order to do this, this thesis will combine elements of Securitization Theory with Role Theory to present a more complete framing of Hizb’allah as a whole across the two regions, rather than isolating their activities, and therefore their definitions, in one region from the other. Using elements pulled from both international relations theories, this thesis will then examine the two cases, first of Hizb’allah in the Middle East and Latin America and then Iran also in those two regions, to establish that while their strategies in each region may differ, their strategic goals and objectives remain the same in both areas of operation. To conclude, this thesis will provide insight as to how an improved framing of Hizb’allah and Iran will affect US-Iranian relations and how the US should frame Hizb’allah’s strategies in both regions taking into account their objectives as a whole.
Literature Review

Securitization Theory

From the Copenhagen school of thought, Securitization Theory is offered to explain how an actor securitizes an object and then responds to it based on that definition. This part of the literature review will examine what a state defines as a security threat, how and why it responds, and to whom it is responding. All of these are crucial when considering how a security threat is defined and then responded to. This definition and the ensuing response is one aspect of framing another actor in international relations that could offer some explanation as to why the US might respond to one actor and not another.

Traditional securitization theory explores how an actor responds to objective threats (Fierke 4). These objective threats rather than being independent of the "routines, procedures, discourses, and knowledge of security agencies" (Huysmans et al 44), are actually transformed into an issue of security through the intervention of security agencies. Social, cultural, and political processes shape the measurements of the "scope and seriousness of threats," which means some issues are securitized, while others are ignored. For Ole Waever, a leader in security studies, security is "a concept with a history and connotations, the core of which focuses on the defense of the state" (1995).

Typically, security is about survival and the existence of an existential threat to a particular object. The existence of an existential threat legitimizes the actions a state may take to address the threat. According to the Copenhagen School of Security Studies, fundamental security is synonymous with "harm" or the avoidance of whatever else might be deemed malignant or damaging (Williams 513). Security focuses on survival, on existential threats, situations of maximum danger, potentially unlimited struggle and sacrifice. The goal is to “retain
the specific quality characterizing security problems”: urgency; state power claiming the legitimate use of extraordinary means; a threat seen as potentially undercutting sovereignty, thereby preventing the political ‘we’ from dealing with any other question (Williams 513).

Securitization Theory is based in studies of international security. According to Buzan and Hansen, international security studies grew out of debates of how to protect the state against external and internal threats after WWII (10). Traditionally, security is discussed in realist terms with a focus on state actions and power. Buzan and Hansen move away from this viewpoint of security with four foundational viewpoints questioning a realist’s version of security. First they discuss whether to privilege the state as the referent object when discussing security (10).

Security is often thought of in terms of the state, because securing the state was seen as instrumentally the best way to protect other referent objects. Thus, the concept of national security was born (Buzan & Hansen 11). Buzan and Hensen also question whether or not security should be moved from beyond the military sector and the use of force (11). During the Cold War, this conception of security was unquestioned, as international studies from that period were overwhelmingly concerned with the military capabilities of foes, friends, and the Self. The fourth question of a traditionally realist point of view was looking at security as “inextricably tied to a dynamic of threats, dangers, and urgency” (Buzan and Hansen 12). In other words, security from the realist point of view is about the extreme and the exceptional (Williams 2003).

So based on these four questions concerned with traditional security, the crux of a more constructivist approach to security studies surrounds how a threat is defined, not just the power of a threatened or threatening state. According to the Copenhagen School, security is a speech act. A speech act is based in the idea from John Austin (1962; 1975) that “saying something is doing something.” Since the act of securitizing an object or another actor is an act of speech,
there is no pre-existing meaning or limitation to what is threatening and what is not, making “security” a social and intersubjective construction. Securitizing as a speech act is based in the idea that there are levels of definitions and that those levels define an actor’s response. By using a speech act to define something as a security issue, normal politics are then suspended and what Fierke refers to as the “state of the exception in the sovereign” becomes both the law and also goes outside of the law (2). Floyd refers to “objective existential threats” as threats that exist for an actor regardless of whether anyone has realized it (3). Objective existential threats, therefore, become matters of security, or security threats “only when a powerful actor frames and responds to them as such” (Floyd 430). According to Fierke, the concept of some objects being named as threats and others not highlights the significance that naming something as a threat constructs it (4).

There is a spectrum involved when considering the securitization of issues or objects. Speech acts do not always have to apply to security issues; one can speak on an issue and that discourse will affect no change, making that issue non-politicized. One can speak on an issue and make that issue salient to the political sector of society, politicizing it, or making it relevant to society at a certain level. Then at the final end of this spectrum, an actor can speak and securitize an issue, making it not just political but securitized. Politicization, according to Fierke makes an issue open and a matter of public choice, or something to be decided upon. This means that a non-politicized issue is something that the state does not have to address at all, and therefore it is not included in political debate. In contrast to politicization, securitization of an issue removes any of the “political haggling” that would normally occur in politics, and also justifies the prioritization of one issue over others (Fierke 5). This suspension of politics in order to securitize something, as Agamden argues, becomes a permanent state of exception (2005). In this constant
emergency state, the sovereign becomes the law and also exists outside of the law, since in theory when there is an emergency or a security threat, laws can be suspended. The suspension of conventional legislative and judicial powers and the concentration of power into the hands of a core executive constitute how the state acts in a state of exception (Fierke 5). Figure 1\(^1\) below illustrates this spectrum from non-politicized to securitized definitions.

![Figure 1](http://books.openedition.org/iheid/719?lang=en)

**Figure 1**

Waever summarizes the key point of Figure 1 when he says, “mobilization of securitization theory might clarify what a threat argument must perform to justify extraordinary measures” (1995). Meaning, there must be a threat, that threat is potentially existential, and then the possibilities and relative advantages of treating an issue as securitized compared to non-politicized or politicized, must be explored (Wæver 473). From the perspective of securitization, an actor makes a promise or threat that involves an exchange in relation to others. The threat, once named thus, must be addressed. To be meaningful, that exchange must be founded in certain shared understandings of what a threat is and how it must be addressed.

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Uttering the word “security” is an act that constitutes an act, person, state, or organization as existential, and therefore requires an emergency response and the suspension of normal politics. In acts between states or actors involving war or conflict, the issues of Michael Walzer’s Just War Theory can be a hindrance in response (Floyd 430). The issue of whether or not an actor’s response to another actor is appropriate can often be at the center of discussions of international relations. But securitization theory does not limit an actor to a set of normatively pre-considered “appropriate” responses. Securitizing an object is an act of political speech, and so the flexible framing of these existential threats is permitted (Wæver 1995). Therefore, it is possible to make any sector of the state the most important focus for “concerns about threats, vulnerabilities, and defense” (Wæver 1995). By claiming “security,” a state claims a special right to use any means necessary to protect itself.

Rather than the power of securitization existing by virtue of in the threat or the response to the threat, according to Der Darian and Shapiro (1989), power in securitization is more constructed; generated from the constructions of difference. This discourse deploys “identities for actors” and produces “the overall meaning frame from which they operate” (Der Darian and Shapiro 1989). What objects are focused on to name as security issues is also important to securitization studies. From the realist point of view, the state is the central focus of security and state power is the central way to address a threat to one’s security.

Additionally, thinking about security ultimately in terms of the survival of a state can be too simplistic. As an alternative to the trap of this kind of simplistic thinking, Wæver offers two sub-categories for the survival of the state, the “political” and the “social.” For political survival, a state must maintain its sovereignty. For social security, a state must maintain its identity. If a state loses sovereignty, it has not survived politically as a state; if a society loses its identity, the
state has not survived socially (Wæver 1995). This expansion of security from merely a political or military issue to also being a social or cultural issue allows for the state responding to a threat to not only perceive threats that might be considered more existential, but also to respond to them accordingly, i.e. with more force. This means that when a state threatens another state’s identity, not just its territory or control of resources, the state that feels threatened should respond. For example, when Iranian actions in Latin America involve encouraging anti-US sentiment in the region, this threatens America’s identity as an ally and helper of Latin American countries. This is an example of a threat to the social survival of the US.

Heng conceptualizes security in terms of identifying risk and then acting in terms of risk management. He notes that “if policy-makers can grasp the complex nature of elusive systemic risks”, then they could manage public expectations with “clearly decisive outcomes and endpoints” (157). Walker (1993) and Campbell (1998) discuss the role of identity security as it defines first the “inside” and then the threatening “outside” of a state. Issues that fall inside the realm of order, progress, democracy, ethics, etc. are “presumed to be possible only inside the state”, while outside of the state is defined by anarchy, war, and the primacy of power, which are root causes of insecurity. Later in the 1990s, human security, which builds on the idea that people’s rights are at least as important as those of states, shifts the attention towards an emphasis on human rights, safety from violence, and sustainable development. Human security is important in our discussion of security because it questions a realist set of assumptions in security studies (Buzan and Hansen 2010).

What is considered “threatening” is crucial when discussing security studies. What threatens a state are often not just other states, but also other “significant actors” as Wæver calls them. This is because securitizing an issue is largely based on power and the capability to
socially and politically construct a threat. Often times, the only actors who have this ability are states. For Wæver, a “significant actor (could) be a state important enough to trigger a…crisis by its behavior or demise.” But Wæver argues that this unit of significant actor is not necessarily limited to a state, but “any actor whose behavior or demise creates a system-wide ripple effect that travel through normal system channels” (1995). The field of security studies has challenged the “narrow rubric” of threats from solely state and military actors. There have been claims within security studies that the agenda of securitization theory must be broadened to include the security concerns of actors ranging from “individuals and sub-state groups” to “global concerns such as the environment, which according to Williams has been marginalized within the traditional state-centric and military conception of security (Williams 513). Now, with this expanded view of security from just states as threats and just states as referent objects, more abstract concepts like “the environment” or “human rights” can be securitized. Also, more universal concepts such as “global security” can likewise be addressed. This expansion of thinking about what security is comes inherently with the flexible framing of how one securitizes an object.

From a Securitization Theory standpoint, this case employs the idea that defining an object as a threat and then consequently acting on that statement in order to maintain one’s credibility combines with the idea that identifying an object as an existential threat. This allows not only for an actor to act exceptionally towards what is deemed a threat, but also allowing for that actor to employ whatever means necessary to address it. The label of terrorist is particularly salient to securitization. For instance, Fierke argues that before the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11), terrorism was a category of criminal activity for the US under the Bush administration (10). However, after 9/11, terrorism became an existential threat to the US as the
survival of America and the American identity was seen as directly threatened. This level of existential threat was given absolute priority, allowing the US to respond in a very urgent and direct manner to anything that it deemed part of this terrorist threat. When Hizb’allah was given the label of a terrorist organization, the US was able to respond in a securitized way to their activity in the region by supporting Israel’s activities against Hizb’allah’s attacks. Because the label of terrorist organization carried so much weight, relations with Iran, due to their close ties with and support of Hizb’allah, were also defined in a particular way, allowing for the US to respond to Iranian action also with exceptional means.

*Role Theory*

As stated before, originally a sociological theory later expanded into international relations, Role Theory examines how they an actor defines their actions based on particular conceptualization, then in turn it explains how others react to those actions. Walker argues that role theory has “descriptive, organization, and explanatory value for the study of foreign policy” (2). Roles allow international studies to categorize the beliefs, images, and identities that individuals and groups develop for themselves and others, as well as the types of processes and structures that govern their actions in particular situations. Biddle introduces role theory in its sociological context when he discusses how individuals in a social system perform roles based on their conceptions of self (ego), their conceptions of the others in that social system (alter), and the expectations and reactions to that enacted role (1986). So the three elements of Role Theory that this examines is how an actor enacts its role performance, how that performance defines their national role conception, and finally how the audience frames both a role and its complement.
First, a definition of what a role means is necessary. The term role, as Biddle discusses, is borrowed from theater. Roles are conduct that “adheres to certain parts rather than to the players that read or recite them” (Sarbin and Allen 489). These repertoires of behavior are inferred from others’ expectations and one’s own conceptions, selected, according to Walker, at least partly in response to “cues and demands” (Walker 23). This idea of a role applied to an actor from a theater setting can also be applied to an actor in the international system. This is because for foreign policy analysis, role refers to both “positions” in an organized group and to any socially recognized category of actors that can exist in society (Stryker and Statham 1985).

Holsti identifies four concepts from Role Theory that are useful when analyzing foreign policy. The first is role performance, “which encompasses the attitudes, decisions and actions that {actors} take to implement” the second element which is their self-defined national role conception (Holsti 240) or their role prescription, the third concept which emanates “under varying circumstances from the external environment” (Holsti 240). And finally, the fourth

![Figure 2](image-url)
concept is the position, that is the system of role prescriptions that an actor can exist within (Holsti 240). Figure 2 below describes how Holsti has conceptualized how an actor’s role performance, their role prescription, and their own role conception are all elements of a role that inform how an actor behaves (240).

The first element, an actor’s “role performance,” is influenced by role expectations. Sarbin and Allen define role expectations as the norms, beliefs, and preferences concerning the performance of any individual’s role relative to others (Sarbin and Allen 1968). Role expectations have also been defined as “the expectations of peer groups, organizational rules, social mores, cultural values and traditions, and laws,” as well as by one’s “self-conceptions of role” (Holsti 243). Biddle argues that expectations are the major generators of roles, that these expectations are learned through experience, and that actors are aware of the expectations they hold (69). Role expectations vary on several dimensions, including their degree of generality versus specificity, their scope, their clarity versus uncertainty, their degree of consensus among actors, and whether or not their roles are formal or informal (Thies 2010; Sarbin and Allen 1968).

Backman argues that the concept of a role has helped to integrate three levels of abstraction, culture, social structure and personality in terms of how those three abstractions affect an actor’s decision-making. He also agrees that Holsti’s roles can be useful when explaining the interactions and relations between states, in terms of patterns of interaction that persist beyond the tenure of those occupying the decision-making positions in the system (Backman 311). So when a state expects another to fulfill a certain role, i.e. perform that role, the state is more likely to continue doing so. In keeping with that idea, Wendt argues that that an actor’s role identities are learned and reinforced in interaction with significant others through a
process of cultural selection (327). This constructivist approach to foreign policy and role theory dictates that a state either selects a role identity from the available distribution of roles that comprise the system’s structure, or it may have one chosen for it by other significant actors. Thies goes on to discuss that then a state attempts to enact this role identity, or its role conception, with other significant actors in a role relationship (233).

In foreign policy, an actor’s role is secondly conceptualized in how they perceive what they wish their own role to be. An actor’s “national role conception” involves examinations of whether their actions, attitudes, decisions, etc. are suitable to their state, and of the functions their state should perform on a continuing basis either in an international system or a regional one (Holsti 246). Different national role conceptions are defined by location, topography, traditional policies, socio-economic demands, history, and needs expressed through various interest groups and parties, national values, doctrines, or ideologies, public opinion, and the personality and political needs of key policymakers. But these role conceptions are not created in some kind of domestic vacuum. National role conceptions also relate to various role prescriptions assigned to that nation from the external environment, such as the structure of the international system, system-wide values, general legal principles that command universal support, and the rules, traditions, and expectations of states as expressed in the charters of international and regional organizations (Holsti 246). So a nation’s role conception is both internally self-imposed and also externally imposed by others.

Sarbin and Allen identify three key dimensions, of an individual’s role conception. The first is the number of roles. The more an actor has in its repertoire the more prepared that actor is to meet the demands of its system. The second dimension is the effort an actor expends to enact a particular role. This paper will also refer to this dimension as one’s “role performance.” The
third dimension is the amount of time that an individual spends in one role relative to others, measured with the function of whether or not that role is achieved. This paper will refer to this as the audience’s “perspective” of a role (Thies 2).

Enacting multiple roles links an actor to many other roles in various areas, more closely integrating it with that system’s norms (Thies 2). And Holsti discusses that because of the fact that actors enact multiple roles at any given time, one should not think “of a national role conception as a fixed attitudinal attribute of each government which invariably leads to the same types of actions in all issue areas or sets of relationships” (Holsti 254). Circumstances and capabilities of an actor can change; the international system in which an actor exists can change as well. Rosenau suggests, according to Thies that actors develop what he calls role scenarios, which essentially are action scripts that help them determine which of their roles, among several, to enact. These scenarios adapt and change over time. When they become elaborate is when it becomes difficult to predict how actors will resolve their own role conflicts (Thies 3).

Role conflicts occur when one role of an actor contradicts or goes against another role that it often enacts or has enacted in the past. Backman poses that sometimes certain circumstances force a state to enact a role that is counterintuitive or even contradictory to a previously enacted role. Backman discusses that a nation’s conception of itself changes as a consequence of engaging in a role inconsistent with its national self-conception (312). Holsti discusses how when a nation’s own national role conception contradicts with norms of behavior established by treaties or international orders that its own national role conceptions will take precedence (243). But national roles can also be contradicted by the nation enacting the role itself. Backman terms when a nation’s actions coincide with its self-conception as role consensus (Biddle 76; Backman 313), and when a nation strays from this self-conception as role strain.
(Backman 312) or role conflict (Biddle 82; 318 Backman 318). An actor can also take on the role of another actor; this role taking suggests that adequate development of the actor and participation in the international system requires this “role taking” (Biddle 84). This ties into the idea of the way an audience reinforces a role only if that role is perceived by the audience, which will be discussed next.

A third aspect of Role Theory is how an actor performs its role, or as this paper mentioned before, an actor’s “role performance.” Holsti defines role performance as “the general foreign policy behavior of governments,” including attitudes, decisions, responses, functions, and commitments toward other states (Holsti 245). Holsti argues that the term role, or role performance, refers to behavior in the form of decisions and actions that interact with particular role prescriptions, “which are the norms and expectations, cultures, societies, institutions, or groups attached to particular positions” (239). Holsti furthers this distinction when he delineates between the role prescription of the alter and the role performance of the ego, what he calls an actor’s role conception. So via role performance, an actor is “framed” in two parts, first by their own conception of role then by a complement’s view of their role, which in turn defines how an audience views their role performance.

Another crucial aspect of role is the role’s audience, which defines their position. According to Thies, roles are enacted by a role performer. There is also another party complementing that enacted role, and finally a third member observing the process of interaction, i.e. the audience (11). The audience not only establishes the consensual reality of the role (Sarbin and Allen 527-534), but the audience provides cues to guide the performer’s role enactment (Walker 177). Based on an audience’s reactions, an actor confirms whether or not it is performing the role that it wants to be playing since each role comes with its own set of
objectives and desired reactions. Additionally, the audience engages in the social reinforcement, either through positive or negative reactions to the role of the performer. So every time the audience verifies that an actor is playing the role it expects with a “correct” response, that role is further ingrained as a part of that actor’s perception of its identity. Thus, the audience contributes to the maintenance of the role behavior over time (Thies 11).

Holsti bases his roles partly off of Kautilya’s six “types” of foreign policy action, accommodation, hostility, indifference, attack, protection, and double policy (247), saying that Kautilya was suggesting something akin to the notions of role performance and function (248). He goes on to discuss how other scholars suggested in their discussion of international relations some dichotomous relationships that can be used to formulate some role conceptions. For example, Holsti suggests that literature on balance of power theory implied the roles of “bloc leader”, “bloc follower”, and “balancer.” He argues that Schuman’s text on configurations of activity and passivity of states suggested the roles of “satiated” and “unsatiated” states. Weber discussed “isolationist” and “expansive” states (Holsti 249). Morgenthau suggested that all states seek one of three policy objectives, to keep power, increase power, or demonstrate power (Holsti 251).

Holsti, after introducing a number of these implied roles, lists nine major roles that a state can enact. These include revolutionary leaders or imperialists, bloc leaders and balancers, bloc members or allies, mediators, non-aligned states, buffer states, isolationist states, and protectee states. Holsti argues that those roles listed first imply the greatest degree of international activity and involvement and towards the end of the list, the foreign behavior of the states gets more passive (255). Holsti goes on to list more than seventeen different national role conceptions based on case studies of countries’ objectives and their statements on their objectives (See
Appendix I). It is from these seventeen roles that this paper will use to define Iran and Hizb’allah’s actions in both the Middle East and Latin America.

For the purposes of this paper, when discussing the national role conceptions of Iran or the non-state role conceptions of Hizb’allah, those two actors will be the role performers, acting as rivals to the US. And finally, the US, as the main respondent to the actions of either Iran or Hizb’allah will be their complement—as it is their reaction that sets the tone for the roles, encourages the maintenance of those roles, and respond to those roles in various ways through policy.

From Role Theory, this paper employs the idea that a state’s beliefs or values define their relation to others in a way that if those beliefs or values do not match up, i.e. do not complement each other, the role the other actor plays comes in conflict with the other. This conflict can be a threat that an actor can adjust its own actions to address. This combined with the idea that an actor playing multiple roles in order to operate within a complex system, allows that actor to employ a variety of strategies to address what is considered a threatening role to itself. But in as almost an opposite element, role ambiguity causes a non-response from an actor. For example, if an actor, in this case the US, is unsure of what role Hizb’allah or Iran are enacting, then it will be less likely to respond to that activity. There are clear points of role rivalry and role ambiguity between Hizb’allah and Iran and the US responses to them. It is through this lens that the two cases of Hizb’allah and Iranian activity in both the Middle East and Latin American will be examined.

Using the Literature

Both Securitization Theory and Role Theory interact in the analysis of how the US labels and responds to both Hizb’allah and Iran. A more complex definition is necessary for
understanding and responding to the two actor’s operations. Figure 3 shows where the fundamental aspects of Securitization Theory and Role Theory merge for a fuller way of defining these two actor’s actions.

It is important to note that these two theories complement each other in some ways, but in other ways there is overlap. Considering Role Theory and Securitization Theory in concert is useful when evaluating the actions of Hizb’allah and Iran in these two areas of operation. For example, the act of defining a security threat and then acting based on that definition is similar to the idea that once an actor conceptualizes either its own role or another’s role, it then structures its foreign policy towards that alter in a way that is specific to the role defined. Also, the existence of a threatening actor and a threatened actor is similar to the way that in a role rivalry relationship, there are two states who complement each other in terms of their responses to the other. These specific elements as well as the overlaps between them makes the use of both

Figure 3
Securitization Theory and Role Theory important when analyzing the relationship between Iran and the US and US responses to Hizb’allah.

There is another point where Securitization Theory and Role Theory overlap. Wendt introduces the very simple role binary of either the *faithful ally* (Holsti 1970) or the *rival role* (Thies 6) as a basic relationship within the international system based in the “Lockeian” idea that the state system is anarchic and states either work with each other or against each other for their own self interest (Wendt 1999). Not all states in a system are either active enemies towards each other or complete friends. Wendt also offers an in-between category of “rivalry” as being between those of amity and enmity that would explain this phenomenon. Thies introduces the rival role relationship, which lies somewhere between the enemy and friend relationship. Rival roles demonstrate a “curious mix of quasi-amity and enmity, with periods of hostility and open conflict, as well as periods of relative peace” (Thies 234). Essentially, the rivalry role defines how an actor takes securitized action against the rival.

Vasquez defines rivalry as “a relationship characterized by extreme competition, usually psychological hostility, in which the issue positions of contenders are governed primarily by their attitude toward each other rather than by the stakes at hand” (532). Diehl and Goertz take that definition one step further and conceptualize an enduring rivalry as “a relationship between two states in which both use, with some regularity, military threats and force as well as one in which both sides formulate foreign policy in terms of military terms” (155). Competition over an intangible good (i.e. preside, influence) or over a tangible good (e.g. territory, resources) underlies the conflict in a rivalry (Thies 694). Bennett also gives a definition of rivalry as a dyad in which two actors “disagree over the resolution of some issues between them for an extended period of time, leading them to commit substantial resources toward opposing each other, and in
which relatively frequent diplomatic or military challenges to the disputed status quo are made by one or both of the” actors (160). Thompson distinguishes two subcategories of inter-actor rivalry, where one kind of rivalry concerns territory and another that concerns position in the international system (205).

Another way that rival roles have been described is in relation to the term “role complements,” where the action of one actor complements that of the other, in terms of one making foreign policy decisions and the other making decisions in response to the original actor’s move. However, role rivalry is a much tenser relationship between two roles, with both actors enacting strategy against the other to directly counter their power or influence in a situation or a landscape. In other words, role rivals are competitors, or two actors that have either similar goals that only allow for one to accomplish it or they have contrasting goals that often bring one into conflict with the other. Once that rivalry role has been established, both actors will shape their policy in general and towards each other toward fulfilling that role relationship. This idea of roles allowing for actors to measure others’ decision making begs the question, what happens when a role or a relationship between two roles is uncertain?

Rival roles have been discussed fairly extensively in literature in role theory, and the idea of rival actors is very relevant to how actors securitize against others as well. This thesis intervenes in the literature conducted on Role Theory in the way that it shall use “role ambiguity”, a term already present in sociological studies on Role Theory to describe what happens when one actor in a system is unsure of its own or another’s role. While role ambiguity has been used to discuss sociological phenomena or studies conducted on workplace relationships, it has not been discussed in relation to international politics or foreign policy. Though not elaborately conceptualized in the foreign policy literature on Role Theory, the term
role ambiguity will be defined as the degree to which clear information is lacking regarding “(a) the expectations associated with a role, (b) methods for fulfilling known role expectations, and (c) the consequences of role performance (McGrath 1976; Sarbin & Allen 1968; Graen 1976; Kahn et al. 1964). To further this idea, if an actor is unsure of either what role they are enacting (or supposed to be enacting) or they are unsure what role another actor is playing, then the ambiguity leads to a certain inability to address or respond to another’s enactment of a particular role. Not only will the actor and the other actor being responded to be unsure of the consequences of interaction between one or more unknown roles, the audience perceiving the roles will also be unsure.

In this way, role ambiguity is directly related to the securitized response of one actor towards another. As mentioned previously, the securitization of an object depends on how an actor defines that object, or in this case another actor, and then how that actor is responded to. So if a direct or overt rival role relationship exists, an actor will respond to that actor as a threat, securitizing them or issues related to them. Ambiguity, in terms of what role an actor is playing or the relationship of one actor’s role to another, signifies that the definition of that actor is unclear. Therefore, the response of an actor to an ambiguous role or to an actor where there is ambiguity in the relationship cannot be securitized because the threat of that actor or its role is unclear.

In other words, when an actor actively enacts the role of rival against another state, the targeted state can perceive, define and respond to those actions in a securitized manner. Active enactments of the rival role include overt acts of aggression in the form of conventional warfare or nonconventional tactics such as guerilla or terrorist attacks or proxy warfare. When the actions of one rival state towards another become less overt, or less easily defined and securitized, such
as rhetoric against that state or indirect, criminal action in a system that will eventually lead to the lessening of power of another state, the rival role becomes more ambiguous. Additionally, roles that complement each other in a direct fashion are seen to rival each other. However, when the roles do not directly complement or affect another actor, that role relationship of rival can also become ambiguous.

Methods

The next two sections will be case studies that examine Hizb’allah and Iran’s relationship with the US and whether various roles each actor has enacted elicits a securitized response or not. The first lays out the the case of Hizb’allah in the Middle East and in Latin America. The second case examines Iran and the US historically tense and more recently ambiguous rival relationship. From these cases, elements of Securitization Theory and Role Theory will be extracted in order to explain the US response to Hizb’allah in some areas and their lack of response in others. The way that the two theories frame Hizb’allah and Iran’s roles combining the idea of securitization and the idea of their multiple roles, some which rival the US and some which are more ambiguous, will prove useful for analyzing the activities of both actors in terms of how the US should respond to those activities.

For these cases, news articles and reports, analysis reports, and statements by US policy makers and security officials as well as statements by members of Iranian political structures and Hizb’allah’s organization were used to analyze how each actor perceived and responded its own roles and objectives. For example, to gauge US responses to anti-US rhetoric from Iran and Hizb’allah or conducts attacked on US and its allies by Hizb’allah, Congressional testimonies and interviews with US political analysts and policy makers were analyzed. To analyze how Iran and Hizb’allah perceive their objectives and ideology in relation to, and in reaction towards, the
US, statements given by the Iranian political elite or the leaders of Hizb’allah were measured. From those analyses, how Iran and Hizb’allah’s view their roles and how the US responds to those roles, either in a securitized or non-securitized way.

When the actions of Hizb’allah or Iran directly challenge US security or interests in the region, or when Hizb’allah and Iran’s role conceptions involve an ideological or political clash with the US or the presence of the US in a region, is when Iran and Hizb’allah’s roles rival that of the US. When Hizb’allah or Iran’s roles do not directly struggle with the presence or roles of the US in a region, that rival role relationship is more ambiguous and therefore more difficult to respond to in a securitized way.

**Case Study 1: Hizb’allah and the US’s Rival and Threatening Relationship**

*Hizb’allah as a Rival of the US*

At various points in its history, Hizb’allah has played different roles to suit their strategies in multiple areas of operation. Because of that, the US has been stymied in having a clear conception of Hizb’allah’s roles and instead has tried to enact various policies to address one particular role that Hizb’allah plays in a particular place. What this case study does is show the various areas of operation and the various roles they play which ultimately force a particular response from the US, with only some of those roles eliciting a securitized response. Yet the US has still not conceptualized a way to deal with Hizb’allah holistically across all its various areas of operation and in its various enacted roles. From the elements that this case study highlights of what roles elicit what particular securitized response, there will be a clearer idea of analysis for how the US has responded to Hizb’allah and some light will be shed on how the US should respond to all their strategies.
In an open letter read by Ibrahim Al-Amin in a press conference in Beirut, Lebanon in 1985, Hizb’allah’s platform, ideology, and goals were revealed. Hizb’allah, literally translated as “Party of God,” in the first few sentences of their public statement, stated their obedience to the Supreme Leader of Iran at the time, Ruhollah Khomeni. Later in the same speech, Al-Amini assured his audience that not only did the group view the US an “arrogant superpower” but that Hizb’allah would not be driven down or beaten by them as they continue to accomplish their primary objective of laying down the bases of a Muslim state that will play a central role in the world (1988). With this ideology-revealing statement, Hizb’allah positioned themselves as a rival role to that of the US. Having positioned themselves ideologically against the US in all ways, all their activity, despite various strategies enacted through multiple roles, should be viewed as a threat to US security and interests. According to Hajjar’s synopsis of Hizb’allah activity for the past decades, they are a guerilla force opposing Israel, a political party acting within Lebanon’s parliamentary democracy, a social movement supporting the Shia community in Lebanon, and a terrorist group conducting operations against Israeli and Western targets (2002). It is with this diversity of identities that Hizb’allah enacts its multiple roles, allowing for role ambiguity that the US is unable to respond to even though Hizb’allah has declared themselves the US rival, both in action and in role. For this first case study, this thesis will elaborate on how Hizb’allah rivals the US and where there is role ambiguity by looking at Hizb’allah’s activity at the Middle East and Latin America—both regions where the group either enacts roles that overtly rival the US and its security interests and also roles that are more ambiguous towards the US.
The Role Hizb’allah Enacts in the Middle East

While Hizb’allah began as a political organization, created in response to a political vacuum left by Israel’s attack on Lebanon, has publically stated that they are not a closed political-militant organization limited to activity in Lebanon. They claim to be an umma, “linked to the whole of the Muslim world by the solid doctrinal and religious connections of Islam” (Al-Amin 1988). Hizb’allah used the two pillars of da’wa, or social welfare, and jihad, which is the fundamental struggle of Muslims against non-believers, as springboards to real political power. They evolved first from leading the resistance in Lebanon against Israel to heading Lebanon’s governing coalition (Azani 902).

Hizb’allah was formed in Lebanon in 1985 within the context of a persecuted Shi’i minority within a Sunni- and Christian-dominated Lebanon (Crooke 168). They represent the exportation of Iran’s ideology of resistance, yet they themselves organize and take action to promote this revolutionary thinking. They use their social and community activities to re-politicize Shi’i culture in Lebanon (Crooke 170). With their social, cultural, and educational programs they seek to free Shi’i Muslims in Lebanon from the bonds of marginalization and oppression. By educating and providing for these communities as well as representing them in Lebanese parliament, Hizb’allah enacts the role of a bastion of revolution-liberator for the Shi’i in Lebanon as they resist the US and other Western powers along lines of Shi’i resistance from Iran’s Islamic Revolution. This role involves liberating others or to act as the “bastion” of revolutionary movements by providing an area which foreign revolutionary leaders can regard as a source of physical and moral support, in addition to being an ideological inspiration (Holsti 260). Hizb’allah enacts this role through their activities in Lebanon and the Middle East more
generally, encouraging Islamicized governments that maintain resistance towards Western influence and activity in the region.

Hizb’allah’s political success in Lebanon lies in their use of both social and military tactics to ensure their lasting political power in the country. On the one hand, they employ four socially minded strategies by providing financial aid, medical care, education, and media channels to spread their ideology to the people of Lebanon (Azani 904-905). On the other hand, they also use their hybrid militia branches to accomplish many operational successes, including innovating terrorist tactics and providing a framework to other smaller groups, as they extended their military activities from Beirut through Bekaa Valley all the way south advancing not only their social but also their military and political interests along the way (Azani 907-908). In Lebanon, Hizb’allah advances Iran’s “Islamic Resistance” by building a resilient and resistant society in order to secure the state’s support for families that had lost much of their power and credibility in the fight against Israel (Azani 911). So in light of their complex structure (Appendix II) and various objectives, how has the US responded to Hizb’allah’s role as a bastion of revolution-liberator?

While political unrest within the Shi’i in Lebanon existed before the 1980s, Israel’s attack of Southern Lebanon crystallized their political resistance into armed defiance. An early, less formal version of Hizb’allah was originally formed in response to Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon. They operated mainly in southern Lebanon, using guerilla tactics and fought in the Lebanese Civil War against both the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and the South Lebanon Army (SLA), conducting ground attacks, bombings, and kidnappings against the IDF (Byman 921). When they were officially chartered in 1985, one of their organizational tenets involved armed and ideological opposition to the alleged Zionist regime of Israel. There is no doubt that against
Israel, Hizb’allah tactics are defined as guerilla. Even today they are “the only factional militia allowed to retain its arms” in Lebanon, despite a UNSC resolution for them to disarm (International Affairs, 2006). According to Early, they were given this privilege in the 1989 Taif Accords after the Lebanese Civil War for their “military campaign to end the Israeli occupation” (115).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, Hizb’allah maintained its militancy towards Israel. By crossing over the border into Israel and kidnapping two Israeli soldiers they incited a five-week war with Israel. Additionally, former Lebanese PM Rafik al-Hariri was killed in the bombing of a motorcade travelling through Beirut. A UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon indicted four senior members of Hizb’allah for this assassination. Yet Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizb’allah told the authorities that they were not able to find them, and the suspects still remain at large. In 2012, Bulgaria accused Hizb’allah of blowing up an Israeli tourist bus, killing six people and the suicide bomber. Also in 2012, a Lebanese man “with links to Hizb’allah was detained by police in Cyprus” and was suspected of planning attacks against Israeli tourists. In his confession, he revealed photographs of Israeli tourists along with plans to kill them (Reuters 2013).

Thus Hizb’allah’s victories against Israel, first in 1989 and then in 2006, demonstrated to the Muslim world that the strategy employed by pro-Western Arabs, that of appeasing US interests, is not the only way to exist. Their armed defiance of Israel was a part of a wider resistance of the West, mounted asymmetrically against the overwhelming conventional Western military power (Crooke 180). Not only was Hizb’allah militarily successful against Israel, they gained political legitimacy with their acceptance of the Taif Accords of 1989 and then later when
they were voted into Lebanese parliament in 1992. With the political acceptance, their role of “bastion of revolution-liberator”, which rivals the US role in the region was further legitimized.

Even with political success in Lebanon, Hizb’allah continues its anti-Israel operations. As they expand their political presence in Lebanese parliament or continue their social works within the Lebanese Shi’i diaspora, they maintain their armed resistance along the southern border of Lebanon and Israel, in what is called the security zone. Hizb’allah leader Hassan Nasrallah has repeatedly stated that the group is willing to disarm when presented with “a viable alternative to resistance.” “But as long as Israel remains a threat to Lebanon, we have the right to bear arms,” Nasrallah maintains (Daily Star 2006).

The US labeled Hizb’allah as a terrorist organization in 1997 for, among other reasons, their continued attacks on Israel and their alleged attack on a Marine base in Beirut. Since then, the US continues to condemn alleged Hizb’allah terrorist activity both in the Middle East and in Latin America. Acting within strategies clearly applied to that securitized label of terrorist allows the US to categorize and respond to Hizb’allah’s activity in a strong way. Not only has the US taken steps to strengthen states in the region that Hizb’allah conducts attacks against, but it, along with the UN, has placed resolutions against the continued acts of terrorism that Hizb’allah employs. Thus further undermining their role as a bastion of revolution-liberator which uses political-military organization and emphasizing their bastion of revolution-liberator which uses terrorist tactics. The most recent statements made by the State Department concerning Hizb’allah have been to condone their recent activity against the IDF in Lebanon (State Department 2015).

In addition to their maintenance of a front against Israel and occasional terrorist activity, Hizb’allah’s presence has been recently felt in Yemen and Syria. In the Middle East, fighting alongside Syrian government forces and Yemeni rebels, Hizb’allah enacts the role of a regional-
subsystem collaborator, or a role when an actor indicates far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities, or to cross-cut subsystems (265 Holsti, 1970). In 2013, Hizb’allah fighters moved into Syria to aid President Assad’s army against Sunni rebels. Hizb’allah is still militarily involved in Syria, bolstering Assad’s regime and also fighting in Iraq against Sunni extremists (The Tribune, 2015). In March 2015, evidence emerged that showed Hizb’allah fighting in Yemen with Shi’i Houthi rebels (Arab News, 2015). This evidence was based on the report of a Hizb’allah fighter found dead in a conflict zone in Yemen. While Hizb’allah denied the death of one of their fighters, they did not deny their activity in the civil war (Israeli National News 2015).

With this second role, Hizb’allah’s role in the Middle East is more ambiguous and therefore more difficult to respond to in a securitized way. They maintain their operations against Israel, which for the US is a clearly defined issue of security. Yet, their actions in Syria and Yemen, as a regional-subsystem collaborator, are more difficult to address. Though their involvement in these two areas is in line with Iran’s involvement in these conflicts, Hizb’allah’s status as a non-state group allows it more access to and freedoms of action in conflict. Their ambiguity as an organization that is somewhat political and somewhat military, as well as their status as a non-state group not as beholden to international conflict norms, Hizb’allah’s lack of constraints that typically affect a state actor could pose a problem if Hizb’allah forces and US-supported forces were to ever come into contact in Yemen or Syria. Not only does Hizb’allah’s lack of constraints in conflict pose a problem for US security, but their support of Assad’s regime and the Yemeni rebels further threatens the stability of the Middle East region and therefore threaten the stability of US security and interests in the region.
The Roles Hizb’allah Enacts in Latin America

In line with this idea of conducting clear terrorist activities that the US can respond to in a securitized way, in March 1992, a pick up truck driven by a suicide bomber crashed through the gates of the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina. An investigation by the Argentine Supreme Court concluded that Hizb’allah was responsible for this attack. With 29 killed and more than 200 wounded, Latin America had experienced its first terrorist attack by the Lebanese organization, Hizb’allah. Hizb’allah was also allegedly involved in the 1994 bombing of a Jewish cultural center, also in Argentina. Since then, there have been no reported terrorist activities by Hizb’allah in Latin America. Instead of operating as a terrorist organization, they have instead been operating in conjunction with criminal organizations and drug trafficking cartels since the 1970s, laundering money to fund their terrorist operations elsewhere.

Hizb’allah has access to the growing Lebanese populations located widely throughout Latin America as well as a growing community of converts to Islam in the region, through cultural centers and mosques growing in countries like Chile, Peru, and Bolivia (See Appendix III) (Kesharvarz 2015). Also, through education and training, Hizb’allah is attempting to recruit more numbers encourage the conversion of anti-US, Latin Americans to Islam who are loyal to Iran and its ideology. In this way, Hizb’allah enacts its second role in Latin America of the liberation supporter, or an actor who holds unstructured and vague attitudes in supporting liberation movements, rather than organizing, leading, or physically supporting the movement (Holsti 263). Yet for this case, Holsti’s definition is re-contextualized slightly as they enact the role of a liberation supporter more actively, or directly, than Holsti’s definition would first suggest. Hizb’allah actively recruits in the new TBA (tri-border area) of Chile, Peru, and Bolivia and all accounts indicate that they are still laundering money and engaging in criminal activity
primarily in the old TBA of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil and also more generally throughout the region (Kesharvarz 2015). Yet, even then, Hizb’allah’s activities while enacting their role of liberation supporter do not involve overt acts of terrorism, only covert acts of fomenting anti-US rhetoric. So with this role, too, there is ambiguity in terms of how the US can respond to an organization who is not directly attacking them, their allies, or their interests in the region.

Hizb’allah also enacts the role of *regional-subsystem collaborator* in Latin America as they do in the Middle East. However rather than coordinating activity between states as Holsti’s definition would suggest, Hizb’allah coordinates between non-state, criminal organizations like drug trafficking organizations and paramilitarized outlaw groups. Hizb’allah operates in Latin America within this role of regional sub-system collaborator for several reasons. First, as mentioned before, there is a large population of Syrian, Lebanese and other Muslim ethnic groups in the region. Second, also mentioned before, countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua share strong, anti-American, anti-imperialist sentiments, encouraged by Iran. Thirdly, Hizb’allah is in the region primarily because the illicit drug trade is an easy way to amass large amounts of funding through the extensive networks of the cartels. According to Lt. Gen. Tovo, “there is a good amount of profit that Lebanese Hezbollah makes off of illicit trafficking writ large on at least the order of tens of millions and much of it is funneled through the money laundering system and fuels their operations back in the Middle East” (2015). The Monroe Doctrine states “that the United States would consider any nation’s attempt to extend “their system to any portion of this hemisphere as dangerous to our peace and safety” (Monroe 1823). So even though Hizb’allah is not militantly fulfilling a role of bastion of revolution-liberator in Latin America, it is still conducting operations as a regional-subsystem collaborator that threatens the stability of a region so closely tied and located so near to the US.
This role of regional-subsystem collaborator is where Hizb’allah’s position in Latin American becomes ambiguous. There is no open military resistance against the US or its Latin American allies. Hizb’allah has not been involved in any terrorist activity since the two attacks in Argentina in the nineties. Yet, they exist within already-existent criminal organization structures that take advantage of weak, often complicit or corrupt Latin American governments. Even if governments in Mexico, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and other countries are not explicitly sympathetic to or cooperative with Hizb’allah, they often have a weak, central structure that limits their capacity to address the threat of Hizb’allah within their own regions. For example, Paraguay has been cooperative with US efforts to curb terrorist activities in the country, but its politicized institutions and corrupt judicial and police systems as well as a lack of legislation for financing counterterrorism activities makes them susceptible to the activities of terrorist groups like Hizb’allah (Kesharvarz 2015).

The same is true for other Latin American countries. Often the criminal and/or terrorist networks in the country are so strong as sub-state actors that states do not have the money or manpower to effectively dismantle them or even curb the continued expansion of these organizations. Corruption in many of these economically developed, but democratically under-developed countries is rampant, contributing to the power and pervasiveness of cartels, terrorist groups, and other criminal organizations (Shewmake, “Metaphor of War”). There are many areas in the Bolivarian states that provide corridors for Hizb’allah and other Iranian proxies to move funds, personnel, and arms through the region. The Colombia-Venezuela, Ecuador-Venezuela, and Colombia-Panama borders are controlled by the FARC, a paramilitary group in Colombia, who often work in conjunction with cartels and other criminal networks in the region to further their own terrorist-oriented goals against Colombia, the US and others in the region.
Additionally, other major border regions in Central America, such as the Costa Rica-Nicaragua and Guatemala-Mexico borders are controlled by the Zetas, a paramilitary-type, narcotrafficking organization, sympathetic to both the FARC and other terrorist groups in the region, such as the IRGC and Hizb’allah (Farah 15-16).

The TBA, formed between Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, Foz de Iguaçu, Brazil, and Puerto Iguázu, Argentina is a historic center for drug and human trafficking. This tri-bordered region is an ungovernable area where law enforcement authorities have been unable to counter the activities of numerous criminal and terrorist organizations (Meehan 3). In the mid-1980s, the TBA was a starting point for Hizb’allah’s activities in the Latin American region (Knott 2014). It is estimated that Hizb’allah nets around $20 million from the TBA annually. The area is the organization’s most significant source of independent funding (Berman 2). The TBA is also the traditional continental home of a large, active Arab and Muslim community that consists of a Shi’a majority, a Sunni minority, and a small population of Christians who emigrated from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and the Palestinian territories starting 50 years ago (Neumann 3).

Also of growing alarm is a relationship between Hizb’allah and the Mexican cartels. The US has made one of its primary security policies in the Latin American region to curb the drug trade coming out of Mexico and work with the Mexican state to arrest and imprison cartel leaders. So a growing relationship with Hizb’allah should cause alarm to the US. A Homeland Security Committee staff report noted that, “Members of Hizb’allah…have already entered the United States across our Southwest border” (Noriega and Cárdenas 2). But it is not just easy access to our borders that Hizb’allah seeks in Mexico. With connections to the cartels, Hizb’allah can establish a presence in the lawless environment that is Mexico and also access its border with the United States. This symbiosis benefits the cartels and Hizb’allah as the cartels receive
product and training from Hizb’allah, and Hizb’allah, in turn, can expand their networks and access to the US in these regions. Since 2005, Hizb’allah has opened seventeen cultural centers in Mexico and formed relationships with the country’s most prominent cartels such as the Sinaloa cartel and Los Zetas. Hizb’allah has training bases and sleeper cells in Mexico, as well.

There are 200,000 Lebanese and Syrian immigrants living in Mexico. There are increased Islamic missionary attempts in Mexico, as Islamists sympathetic to Iran and Hizb’allah try and “win the hearts and minds of the Mexican people.” This conversionary tactic makes sense because those already involved with the illicit drug trade in some way and who are also sympathetic to the anti-western extremist movements make perfect recruits for Hizb’allah and other organizations who take advantage of the extensive Latin American criminal networks to weaken the power of the United States (Los Zetas and Hizb’allah 2014). This relationship is not one-sided either. According to Noriega and Cárdenas, “evidence indicates that Hizb’allah is sharing its terrorist experiences and techniques with Mexican drug cartels along the US border” (1).

Another dangerous relationship that Hizb’allah has is within Colombia, more specifically, with the paramilitary organization known as the FARC. There is growing evidence of joint Hizb’allah and FARC transnational drug and transcontinental trafficking activity (Farah 26). During a two-year drug trafficking investigation known as Operation Titan conducted by Colombian and US officials between 2006 and 2008, a DTO, or drug trafficking organization extending from Colombia, to Panama, Mexico, the US, Europe and the Middle East was dismantled. Over 100 suspects were arrested worldwide, 21 of which were arrested in Colombia. One of those arrested was Chekry Harb, also known as “Taliban”, a world-class money launderer who had laundered millions of dollars a year for Hizb’allah. This connection is an example of
how narco-trafficking has connected paramilitary groups such as the FARC to the cartels and to terrorist groups such as Hizb’allah (Constanza 200). The Colombian government and the FARC brokered an official peace in November 2015, but there are still reports of branches of the FARC conducting drug-related activity within the country. So those avenues for smuggling and laundering are still open to Hizb’allah.

**Case Study 2: Iran as a Subtler Rival of the US: Redefining the Threat**

*Resistance as the Roots of Iranian Rivalry Towards the US*

Iran and the US operate within what can be characterized as a rival role relationship. This is because United States’ relationship with Iran and its activity in the Middle East has been characterized at various times by economic partnership as well as political tension. During Nixon’s presidency, Iran had not only increased its own regional power but had become, in the words of Sir Anthony Parsons, the British ambassador, “a weighty regional buttress to overall Western, not simply American, geopolitical interests.” Nixon embraced the idea of Realpolitik as he celebrated the Shah as the “force multiplier” of US foreign policy in the region (Murray 6). To the Nixon administration Iran’s development was the key to mitigate all of its instabilities, so the US continued to try and help Iran develop, serving its own interests in the oil market that Iran had such access to (Murray 6).

However, starting in the late seventies, the gains from a relationship with Iran significantly deteriorated. The Shah’s regime in Iran was being called into question, with critics saying that US continued support in terms of economic development and military aid, was the only thing keeping the fragile regime afloat (Murray 7). Polk posits that in the seventies, Iran was suffering a major identity crisis. On the one hand, the Iranian economy was growing. Yet the wealth was only being distributed to a limited elite. On the other hand, there was serious concern among
Iranian elite and religious leaders about the state of Islam in Iran. Too many of Iran’s religious leadership or even political leadership were living decadent, Westernized lives, seemingly moving away from what they believed were the truer tenants of Islam.

It is from these tensions that Iran’s idea of resistance was born. The idea was that Iran, as a purveyor of the “true tenets” of Islam should resist corrupting Western influences. Starting with the White Revolution, student protests, clerics taking refuge in a shrine protesting the actions of their government and combined with the Iranian army brutally repressing these popular protests, wavering support from religious-political leaders, and an indecisive, weak Shah, the Islamic Revolution sparked in 1979 (Polk 2009). The rise of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini brought that contrast into sharp focus and helped bring about the Islamic Revolution. Also in 1979, a group of Iranian revolutionaries took hostages at the US embassy, a direct act of confrontation with the US, and in a securitized fashion, the US declared Iran an enemy of the state (Murray 2010). It is the birth of the Islamic Revolution, defined by Iranian resistance to Western, mainly US influence, that defined Iran’s foreign policy against that of the US. Iran declaring itself as a rival to any exploitative, imperial actors, primarily the US, allowed it to define its foreign policy as combating the influence of the US in the region.

Again, in 1978 strikes and riots had besieged Iran. The political, social and economic problems, which were never truly addressed by the Shah or previous American presidents, finally led to uprisings and massive instability in the country. One year later in November of 1979, the American embassy was invaded as retaliation for the US refusing to return the Shah, who had sought refuge and cancer treatment in America, to the regime. In response, President Carter froze sales to the Iranian military, and imposed economic sanctions. By this time, the Shah had abdicated and Ruhollah Khomeini became the Supreme Leader of Iran. In April of
1980, Carter broke all diplomatic relations with Iran, stopping all economic interactions except for the provision of food and medicine. The former Shah died in July of that year, and Carter lost that year’s presidential election to Reagan in November (Polk 14). With the passing of the Shah and the act of aggression against the US embassy in Tehran, Iran under Supreme Ayatollah Khomeini had become the US main rival in the Middle East. To enact its role as rival to the US, Iran has supported terrorism in the region as well as sought nuclear weaponry in order to truly rival the power and reach of the US. Both parts of this enactment as the rival role of the US allow Iran to threaten US interests and allies in the region, engendering a securitized response when Iran acts either through terrorist groups or as it seeks nuclear arms. For the rest of this case study this thesis will elaborate on this role rivalry and role ambiguity by looking at Iran’s activity at the Middle East and Latin America—both regions where Iran either plays roles that overtly rival the US and its security interests or enacts roles that are more ambiguous towards the US.

*The Role Iran Enacts in the Middle East as Rival to the US*

The Islamic Revolution is based on an ideology of Shi’i resistance, deeply rooted in the historical marginalization and oppression of the often minority status of Shi’i in the Middle East. So, Iranian resistance is more abstractly a resistance against abusive power and oppression. Crooke goes on to explain how their resistance today, rather than against a Sunni caliphate, is more opposed to the Arab acceptance of Western ideology and power in the Middle East—which historically Iranian Shi’i feel that many Arab Sunni Muslims have acquiesced to. Crooke mentions how the seeds of the Iranian resistance, which was fueled by this idea of Shi’i resistance, were germinated by the execution of the cleric Mohammed Baqir Sadr by Saddam Hussein in 1980. The martyrdom of Sadr is the common call to arms by Shi’i resistance movements; its symbol. But there was more brewing in the heart of Shi’i than just that one event.
Shi’i resistance is based in the radical activism and the fighting against tyranny in a struggle for social justice that were the origins and ethos of what Crooke calls political Shi’ism (Crooke 2009).

It is from this Revolution that Iran enacts its most defining role, the role of bastion of revolution-liberator, or a government that holds that they have the duty to organize or lead various types of revolutionary movements abroad (Holsti 260). Their very Constitution is based on a regime of resistance. There has been much discussion in foreign policy analysis on how this ideology of resistance defines and justifies Iranian activity. Not only do they seek domestic liberation of their own country from oppression by the West, they also seek to extend their resistance outwards to other countries in the region, such as in Lebanon or Syria.

According to Polk, the US overthowing Mossadegh and catering to the Shah’s desire for more arms “set in motion and…carried along the events leading up to the 1979 Revolution” (Polk 2009). Since then, the US has never accepted the legitimacy of the Iranian Islamic Revolution. Iran wants the US to treat it with “respect and equality” (Amin 2011). However, Iran accuses the US and, more generally the West, of interference in its internal affairs and inciting opposition to the regime. Against the US specifically Iran plays the anti-imperialist bastion of revolution-liberator, seeing themselves as “agents” of the struggle against the evils of imperialism (Holsti 264). They reject Western, primarily US, control of the Middle East, and in rejecting Western control, they assert that they wish to determine their own destiny and take control of regional affairs.

Iran’s role as a bastion of revolution elicits a securitized response from the US when they use terrorist tactics or support terrorist tactics to further their revolution by supporting the formation of Hizb’allah in 1982. In September of that year, Reagan instrumented a peace plan
that committed the United States to engagement with the region, in particular the Arab-Israeli conflict. Then the US embassy in Beirut was bombed April 1983, and the bombing was later linked to Iran via Hizb’allah. Five months later, US Marine barracks in Beirut were bombed by Hizb’allah, linking Iran yet again to an attack on the US in that region. In January of 1984, Iran was put on the sponsors of terrorism list for the continued support of an organization conducting attacks on the US. Their actions had caused not only worsened relations with the US but also a direct, securitized response of the US declaring Iran as a threat to its security and interests.

In December of 1988, the year that George H.W. Bush won the US presidency, and later in March of the next year, the US Department of Energy (DOE) and later the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) warned of weapon of mass destruction (WMD) programs in Iraq and Iran. The CIA further concluded in March of 1989 that Iran was the main threat in the region, because of channels between Hizb’allah and Iranian government as well as continued economic, social and political instability in the country. After Khomeini’s death in June of 1989, Iran went through a rapid transition (Murray 2010).

In October of 1992, the Iran-Iraq Non-Proliferation Act passed, assuaging some of the United State’s immediate concern of Iran owning nuclear weapons (Murray 63-64). Still, under Clinton’s administration, relations with Iran continued to worsen as Iran was defined more and more as a threat to the US. Already declared an enemy of the state from the Iran Hostage Crisis in 1979, the Secretary of State at the time, Warren Christopher, branded Iran an outlaw nation in March of 1993. In December of 1995, Congress passed a bill allowing for $20 million dollars to be used for CIA operations against Iran. Even as diplomatic relations continued to worsen, the United States allowed deals between American oil companies and Iran. In February of 1999, Iran held its first municipal elections, a step in the mind of the United States towards a government
structure that looked more like true democracy. Yet in December of that same year, the U.S. and Europe both agreed that the Iranian terrorist threat was growing. (Murray 90-91).

In August of 2002 secret Iranian nuclear facilities were revealed, solidifying the threat of a nuclear Iran. In 2003, US intelligence was of the opinion that Iran had suspended the major parts of its weaponization efforts (Sanger 2). In June of 2005, Ahmadinejad was elected as President of Iran, and for the US the threat of Iran continued to grow. For example, the Iran Sanctions Act was re-authorized because of intelligence that their civilian nuclear research program was growing in August of 2006. The US’ largest foreign policy concern during this time was trying to either multilaterally or unilaterally prevent states like Iran or North Korea from getting WMDs (Murray 2010).

This policy of nuclear containment continued into Barak Obama’s administration as president. Obama’s first move to curb Iran’s development of nuclear weapons was the continuation of a cyber attack that began at the end of the Bush administration, which was focused on “sophisticated attacks on the computer systems that run Iran’s nuclear enrichment facilities” (Sanger 1). By all accounts, this computer attack, known as the “Stuxnet” computer worm temporarily disrupted Iran’s nuclear enrichment effort (Kroenig 2012).

Throughout both of President Obama’s terms, sanctions against Iran have been maintained, as Iran had remained unwilling to curb its nuclear program. Despite this, Iran has been able to weather sanctions and sabotage. In October of 2011, the US accused Iran of attempting to assassinate Saudi Arabia’s ambassador to the United States on American soil. Despite Iran’s official denial, this episode only increased the growing tensions between these rivals (Kroenig 2012). In the past year, talks between Iran and the US have been seriously held on the possibility of limiting Iran’s nuclear programs and capabilities as well as the lifting of US
sanctions, which have crippled Iran’s economy for decades. With the passing and implementation of the JCPOA, the US and the rest of the world have been assured that Iran’s objectives to obtain WMDs are no longer in the realm of possibility. Iran has been making efforts to expand their diplomatic and economic efforts with European, African, and Middle Eastern nations, while maintaining a politer, albeit tense, dialogue with the US. Iran also continues its relationships with Latin American countries that Ahmadinejad expanded in 2006.

*Iran’s Rival Role Extends into the Western Hemisphere*

It is not only in the Middle East that Iran enacts the role as a rival to the US. In the early- and mid-2000s, Iran expanded its political alliances, diplomatic presence, trade initiatives, and military and intelligence programs in the Bolivarian axis in Latin America (8 Farah, 2012). In 2006 Iran’s leader at the time, Ahmadinejad, toured Latin America in an attempt to emerge as a leader of anti-Americanism, visiting Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. With the deepening of Iran’s relationships with these Latin American states, Iran has sought to align other nations with its own rival role relationship against the US. And many Latin American states have responded positively to Iran’s anti-US stance and policies in the region.

Iran’s views that the way the US has oppressed them and tried to control the region of the Middle East is analogous to the way that many Latin American leaders feel about US activity in their own neighborhoods. Yet Iran cannot directly oppose the US from Latin America; they have to tread carefully, by acting sympathetically towards nations like Venezuela and Bolivia, and never directly opposing the US with any kind of large shows of military or economic support. Hizb’allah’s activities in Latin America and their connection with Iran are key here. The role that Iran performs is that of an *encourager of revolution*. This role is a reconceptualization of two of Holsti’s roles, bastion of revolution-liberator and supporter of revolution. Rather than starting the
revolution in Latin America or passively supporting a revolution, Iran feeds off of anti-US, revolutionary sentiment, sometimes shaping the rhetoric to their advantage. In the past decade or so, there have been large, growing populism movements with strong anti-US tendencies (Farah 15). These populism movements, almost radical in their ascendancy, take issue with the weak and often corrupt neoliberal governments in Latin America and wish to address the mass amounts of poverty in the region. Iran sees increased relations with these Latin American regimes as part of their larger anti-imperialist, anti-US movements. So, Iran has been able to use these populist movements to their advantage, mainly through diplomatic ties with Venezuela, by promising future economic aid to these impoverished countries in return for their loyalty and continued anti-US sentiments (Farah 21).

Farah discusses how the populist movements that focus on economic equality, democracy, and workers’ and women’s rights would almost be in direct opposition to Iran’s idea of revolution that revolves around a theocratic state. But it is not their theology but their common anti-US sentiment that most strongly unites Iran to Latin America. For Farah it is “this common desire to build an alternative power structure free of the dominance of the United States is one of the few reasons that populist and self-described revolutionary, staunchly secular governments in Latin America (many who have been directly at odds with the Catholic church, the main religious force in their countries) would make common cause with a reactionary, theocratic Islamist regime” (Farah 15).

Venezuela under the Chavez regime served as one of Iran’s closest allies due to their complementing anti-US agendas. Venezuela has helped their Iranian ally launder almost $30 billion to evade international sanctions by the US and other Western nations (Noriega 2). They not only cooperated to evade financial sanctions, but they also shared nuclear technology and
help each other with exploration for uranium, even in the face of UN sanctions (Levitt 4). After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, ideology became an important factor that united Venezuela and Iran. Venezuela embraced rhetoric of South-South ties, pledging to help developing nations like Iran who have been excluded from the global system by powerful nations like the US (Brun 37). This pledge to help develop excluded nations like Iran is Venezuela’s way of fostering anti-US and anti-imperialist sentiments in Latin America.

Brun categorizes the relationship of Venezuela to Iran in Latin America as patron-proxy relationship, with Iran helping Venezuela build ties in the region (Brun 38). Iran, for its part, continues to export its ideology of resisting imperialist or colonialist powers by fostering anti-US sentiment in Latin America. In a statement to Chavez during his 2004 visit to Tehran, President Ahmadinejad said, “Iran and the nations of Latin America are fighting for liberty and encouraging anti-colonialist revolts in other countries” (Brun 38). This statement alone signals how Iran views its fight against the US as vital to the Latin American region as well. In 2007, Chavez expressed similar statements when he said, “Cooperation among independent countries, in particular between Iran and Venezuela, will be an important factor in the defeat of imperialism and in the victory of the people” (Brun 38). Even with the death of Chavez, the current regime in power in Venezuela echoes Chavez’s pro-Iran, anti-US sentiments.

There also has been increasing diplomatic ties between Iran and Nicaragua. While President Ortega stated he wished to maintain respectful relations with the US, he has never stated that he has viewed a strategic relationship to the US as important to Nicaragua’s foreign policy (Maradiaga & Meléndez 67). During his election, President Ortega’s platform was founded upon the call for a democratization of the international system to combat the US’s global hegemony. He has urged the Latin American region to unite in their efforts and capacities
to fight poverty and underdevelopment (Maradiaga & Meléndez 68). And Iran has offered its support to Nicaragua to accomplish these goals, attempting to replace the US influence in Nicaragua and the Latin American region more largely. According to a US report, Nicaragua “cultivating relations with a nation that has been sanctioned by the United Nations for an ideologically motivated lack of transparency in respect to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty—and to do so within the framework of an antiestablishment foreign policy—provokes concern…” (Maradiaga & Meléndez 66).

For Ortega, these ties with Iran are due to a shared ideological foundation of the Iranian Republic and Nicaragua. Ortega has said that the Iranian and Nicaraguan revolutions—both of which both occurred in 1979—were “twin revolutions, with the same objectives of justice, freedom, sovereignty and peace”—a reaction to “aggressive, imperialistic policies” (Brun). Since that time, he has continued to express resounding, almost solidary support for Ahmadinejad (Maradiaga & Meléndez 78). Three days after his election, Ortega welcomed Ahmadinejad into the country at Managua’s international airport. This visit signaled what would become two main tenets of Nicaraguan foreign policy, “profoundly anti-American rhetoric, and subordination to President Hugo Chávez’s ideology and oil policies” (Maradiaga & Meléndez 71). This second component of Nicaragua’s foreign policy strategy is vital to understanding Nicaragua’s link to Iran. Nicaragua under Ortega has been quick to re-foster ties with neighbors in the region like Venezuela. Not only are the two nations allies and have increased trading partnerships and oil cooperation, but “they also have a nearly identical roster of friends, both within the Hemisphere and beyond, including Cuba, Bolivia, Ecuador, Iran, Libya, North Korea, etc.” (Maradiaga and Meléndez 70). This “roster of friends” all share a very public anti-US sentiment.
According to Farhi, the attention Iran has been giving Latin America is part of their aggressive foreign policy to counter policies by the US to isolate the country (25, 2011). Iran has three main motivations for operations in Latin America. The first is to create a base of operations close to US territory. The second is to launder money through the corrupt systems and cartel networks in order to increase their financial base in the wake of international and US sanctions. The third is to further their exportation of resistance against the US (Neumann 2). So while Role Theory’s idea of rival roles is clearly present in Iranian attempts to align Latin American states against the US, the fact that they are so actively anti-US in a region so close to the US makes their activity an existential threat to the US and its interests. In his posture statement to before the 114th Congress, General John F. Kelly of Southern Command stated that, “Over the last 15 years Iran has periodically sought closer ties with regional governments, albeit with mixed results…Iran’s outreach is predicated on circumventing sanctions and countering US influence…As the foremost state sponsor of terrorism, Iran’s involvement in the region and these cultural centers is a matter for concern, and its diplomatic, economic, and political engagement is closely monitored” (Tovo 7). Iran has been identified by successive US administrations as a state sponsor of terrorism; they have already been identified as a threat to the US. And yet the US has reacted to Iranian activity in Latin America with surprising neutrality.

One of the reasons that Iran had been so involved in Latin America, both through official state channels and supposedly through more illicit channels, was to find other sources of revenue since their economy was suffering so much from sanctions imposed by the US, EU, and the UN. One could theorize that now that Iran has opened up some of its economic channels, it will no longer need a foothold in the illicit markets of Latin America. Yet Rep. Robert Pittenger (R-NC), the vice chairman of the Financial Services Committee’s task force on terrorism financing, when
asked about the effects that the Iranian Nuclear Deal will have on Iran’s financing of its regional and global objectives, offers a differing opinion in a Washington Examiner article saying that, “So I think what we're going to find out is we're enabling Iran to have substantially more resources to support Hezbollah and other forces” (Hoskinson 2015). This would indicate that while Iran’s activities in Iran are not directly or overtly supporting security threats against the US, their activity elsewhere ultimately contributes to their ability to threaten the US in other ways in the Middle East, through proxy terrorism and support of regimes that are not friendly towards the US.

*Iran’s New Global Role and Ambiguous Rivalry Towards the US*

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was first introduced in July 2015, and it outlines a way for the US and Iran, along with China, and the EU to move forward with the issue of Iran’s nuclear program. The US saw the deal as the best option to curb Iran’s nuclear aspirations. In an Op-Ed, John Kerry is quoted as saying, “President Obama has said clearly that Iran will not get a nuclear weapon. Neither sanctions nor military action can guarantee that outcome. The solution is the comprehensive diplomatic deal reached in Vienna” (2015). Under the JCPOA, Iran “reaffirms that under no circumstance will Iran seek, develop, or acquire nuclear weapons” (JCPOA 3). It also establishes a Joint Commission of the signatory countries to monitor Iran’s now legal nuclear program. As long as Iran pursues nuclear energy only in certain amounts, with no indication that they are also attempting to develop or operationalize weapons, many of the sanctions imposed by the US and EU have been lifted off of Iran.

The JCPOA resulted in several changes to Iran’s role in the international arena. The first, and most notable of these to this thesis, is that Iran has gained legitimacy in the eyes of the rest of the world. Previous US State Department reports stated that Iran’s pursuance of nuclear
weapons is a threat not only to Iran’s immediate enemy Israel, but also to other US interests in the region. Supposedly with the deal, Iran has abandoned those aspirations. They are now seeking to join the global political and economic order, increasing their diplomatic relations with BRIC countries like Russia, India, and China as well as more “Western powers” like the EU and other Eastern European and Scandinavian nations. With this newly gained legitimacy, Iran cannot as militantly oppose Western powers, however rhetoric from its elite confirms that many in the Iranian leadership still feel that Iran is the US’s rival. In this way the JCPOA has removed a direct threat to the US from Iran. So Iran’s rivalry with the US no longer carries a securitized connotation. However, Iran’s rhetoric remains strongly anti-US, even as it integrates more with the rest of the Western world.

For example, Ayatollah Khamenei, a leader of the Islamic Revolution, in saying how they supported elections in Syria and the Syrian people’s right to choose their leader, at the same time criticized states who believe they can decide the fate of another state. He then went on to criticize the US role in the region directly, saying that there was no place for the US to decide the affairs of the Middle East (Mehr News 2015). In this Mehr News article, Khamenei cited Islamic Revolution rhetoric, calling on Iran to remember its constitutional tenets of following Islam and protecting true Islam in the region. For him, protecting Islam in this case means not only ensuring that the Syrian people have the right to choose their leader, but also refuting the role in the Middle East of the US, whom Iran has traditionally termed as its oppressor (2015).

While the US may no longer feel threatened by Iran’s seeking nuclear weapons, there is still evidence that Iran will oppose the US in many other ways. The United Nations and the US have lifted many economic sanctions and oil embargoes that had been placed on Iran for the past few decades. Since Iran possesses one of the largest supplies of oils the removal of sanctions
means that Iran can now enter the global economy. Chinese and European Union businesses are even discussing opening up branches in Iran. Iran will now have access to revenue from its oil and natural gas trading endeavors with neighbors like Turkey and with powers outside of the region, like the EU. With this increase in revenue, Iran will be able to enact its role as the US’s rival, but just in more economic or diplomatic ways, rather than starkly military or political. However, the non-militarized strategies that Iran could use to rival the US are not a direct threat to US security or interests in the region. So Iran’s rivalry becomes not necessarily more subdued, but more ambiguous in terms of how much of a security that role poses.

Recently, rather than outward resistance of the US or the West more generally, Iran’s focus has turned inward toward its own region, embroiled in the ongoing Syrian and Yemeni conflicts. Since 2013, the Takfiri extremist group Da’ish (or the Islamic State) has been occupying territory in Syria and Iraq, destabilizing the Middle East, and attempting to not only strike fear in the hearts of its opponents but take advantage of the chaos of a war-torn Syria. Iran has positioned itself to be one of the major opposing powers to the group’s destabilizing activities in Syria and Iraq (Shewmake 2, “Ideology or Pragmatism?”). While the Houthi rebels in Yemen deny allegations that Iran is backing their activity, Iranian officials such as Ali Shirazi, a representative of Supreme Leader Khamenei in the Qods force, have expressed their support for the Yemeni militiamen, equating their activity in Yemen to Hizb’allah’s activity in Lebanon (Hamid 2015). While these involvements in conflicts are regional, Iran’s attempts to centralize its power in the region has serious implications for the US and its allies in the Middle East. In addition to gained confidence in opposing Israel, progress against Da’ish has given Iran more confidence in opposing the US role in the region. Iran has been making a lot of statements against US involvement in the region, especially in issues like Syria. Iran has been criticizing US
for supporting Takfiri terrorist groups like Da’ish. Now Iran is taking that one step further and criticizing the US role in the region as a whole (Shewmake 19, “Ideology or Pragmatism?”). This, as well as the US uncertainty of how its allies in the region will fare if Iran gains the upper hand in these two conflicts, should the US wary of Iran’s role in Yemen and Syria and their continuing of a rival role relationship with the US.

Conclusion

In the Middle East, Hizb’allah is an active liberation supporter for Iran’s Shi’i ideology of resistance. This role has been securitized by the US because enacting it involved overt, violent acts of terrorism against US allies or interests in the Middle East. In Latin America, Hizb’allah enacts a subdued role of a supporter of revolution, but since they have not been involved in any violent or terrorism-related actions in Latin America since the 1990s, so the US has not securitized that role in Latin America, even though their role. As either a bastion of revolution or supporter of revolution, Hizb’allah has positioned itself as the rival role to that of the US in the region. They have clearly defined both their founding ideologies as well as their strategies and objectives contrary to those of the US. Because they enact the rival role with violence in the Middle East, the US responds. However, though Hizb’allah has positioned itself as the rival role to the US in Latin America, their role of supporter of revolution does not involve them violently opposing the US.

In both the Middle East and Latin America, Hizb’allah plays the regional-subsystem collaborator. In the Middle East they support the Syrian government and Yemeni rebels, fighting for Iranian-controlled stability in the region. In Latin America they enact this role by bringing many countries together encouraging anti-US and pro-Iran sentiment through cultural centers, media channels and outlets within the Lebanese and Muslim diasporas in the Latin American
region. Even though Hizb’allah clearly enacts this role in both regions, the US does not respond with a securitized response. A regional-subsystem collaborator’s role is a more subdued role, accomplishing objectives through the direct action of other actors. This makes this role that Hizb’allah plays more ambiguous towards the US. Due to the ambiguity, there is no clear definition of a threat, and therefore no clear path for the US to respond in a securitized way.

In order to understand how much of a threat each of Hizb’allah’s roles pose to the US and its interests, one must view the context behind the emergence of Hizb’allah as a global force, rather than just a force in the Middle East. Its original objective of the “Islamization” of Lebanon was once their main priority. Once that process was under way, they turned their attention to other developing forces in the Middle East, through supporting Iran’s new, the growing strength of the Global Sunni Jihad movement, the still-emerging Sunni-Shia conflict, the still-present Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and a deteriorated situation in Iraq. The US has great interests in all of these conflicts. Furthermore, Iran and Hizb’allah perceive America and Israel as deteriorating states in the face of a more powerful Iran (Hamilton 3). Hizb’allah is a disciplined, competently managed organization with global aspirations. These aspirations run contrary to the interests and security of the United States.

In the Middle East, with Lebanon mostly under the control of Hizb’allah and their continued military action against Israel, they have expanded their regional activity outwards into the conflict zones of Syria and Yemen. There they attempt to aid Iran accomplishing its objective of becoming a regional power that controls the stability in the region. In Syria this means supporting the Assad regime and in Yemen this means supporting the Houthi rebels. These objectives run counter to US security interests in the region, and therefore the US should respond more strongly to Hizb’allah’s activity in these conflict zones.
In Latin America, rather than the overt existential threat that would cause a direct, securitized response, Hizb’allah’s poses a threat in its regional-subsystem collaborator role, fundraising and recruitment activity through illicit networks. Because of the criminal-terrorist nexus that exists in the region between so many anti-US factions, Hizb’allah is an important security concern for the United States. The challenge with identifying Hizb’allah in the region and the amount of threat they pose to the US lies in the fact that their transactions are often intertwined with or obscured by large volumes of the illicit activity conducted by drug traffickers and other criminal organizations. More research should be done mapping out the transactions, interactions, and activities of Hizb’allah and its associated networks and organizations in the Latin America.

In the Middle East, Iran actively enacted the roles of bastion of revolution by supporting terrorism and seeking nuclear weapons. Because of that the US responded to Iran’s roles in the Middle East with condemnation and sometimes aggression. By contrast, in Latin America Iran performs the more subdued, subtle role of a supporter of a revolution. Iran’s opposition to the US and its revolutionary ideology is not solely based on its own Shi’i resistance ideology or disdain for the US’s role in its own region. Iran is responding to anti-US sentiment and revolutionary ideas already present in the region. The US does not perceive this as a direct threat because Iran is not exporting its own revolution in Latin America, but encouraging revolution that has existed in Latin America for the past few decades.

Much of US public attention and policy is focused in the Middle East, specifically Iran, as the primary concern of national security. Iran’s level of threat has been reduced due to a recent increase in diplomatic credibility following the signing and implementation of the JCPOA. Yet, the relatively low profile in our national security policy concerning Latin America seems almost
counterintuitive, given the region’s proximity to the United States’ homeland. America should not ignore or discount the threat that Hizb’allah, and other Iranian proxies or terrorist groups present to American interests and security in the Latin American region. In addition, with the brokering of the nuclear deal, Iran might attempt to portray its strategy as regionally-focused, in areas of conflict like Yemen and Syria. However, in addition to monitoring Iran’s compliance with the nuclear deal, Iran’s financial support to Latin American countries should continue to be monitored. With more access to funding from the deal, Iran’s funds to Hizb’allah should also be monitored to see how much of that increased amount winds up in the hands of Latin American Hizb’allah operatives or cells. Even though Iran will not openly claim involvement with illicit or terrorist groups in the Latin American region for fear of losing their recently gained credibility, they might still be able to benefit from the covert relationships with those groups as well as the ambiguous response that Iran-supported groups such as Hizb’allah receive from the US.

This paper primarily focused on Hizb’allah, their relationship to Iran, and their activities in the Latin American region. But as Fulton states, “the IRGC, or Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, is responsible for Iran’s global force projection” (2013). Their mission is regime preservation and they are responsible for every related internal and external security task required to accomplish this. The IRGC directs Hizb’allah’s global terror campaign (Levitt 2013). More work should be done researching the IRGC’s involvement in Latin America and their interactions (or direction of) Hizb’allah in the region. This is an important part of the security threat that Hizb’allah and Iran pose in the Latin American region, and it should be researched and discussed for its own policy implications.

The US should not only continue to monitor the threat of Hizb’allah in Latin America, but start working with governments in the region that are sympathetic to our interests to help
monitor and address the growing influence and networks of Hizb’allah who has an expanding, threatening network of anti-American, Iran sympathizers. America should also view the activities of Hizb’allah, whether they are illicit trafficking, the existence of training and recruitment camps, or direct attacks on targets related to America and its interest as direct actions against the security of the US. Although Iran and Hizb’allah are not overtly or violently enacting their roles that rival the US in Latin America, their presence and activities are destabilizing and contextualized by anti-US rhetoric. The US should respond with securitized actions even to their ambiguous roles in that region in order to maintain a stable presence in Latin America.

A final policy recommendation would be to continue to work in order to dismantle illicit narcotrafficking routes and operations in the region. They provide an important and vital source of revenue for Iran and its terrorist proxies such as the IRGC and Hizb’allah. Dismantling those networks would be a huge step towards weakening both Iran and Hizb’allah’s influence in the Latin American region.

These policy recommendations will require a greater understanding of networks and interactions between Iran, Venezuela, and the Tri-Border area and also interactions between Iran, Cuba, and other countries opposed to US interests such as China and Russia. There is a connection between all these entities, illicit activities in the region, and terrorist networks such as Hizb’allah, the IRGC, and other Iranian proxies. In order to understand these interactions and implement effective policy, the United States must ensure that our officials and intelligence bodies have a complete grasp of the complex interplay between criminal networks, the movement of arms, drugs, money and personnel between the Middle East, Latin America and other areas of Iranian activity, such as North Africa. Addressing the illicit networks in Latin America as criminal activity is a start, but is a limited, almost ineffective way to deal with these
pervasive, powerful networks that have been in place for decades. Their pervasiveness and influence is, in part, what allows terrorist networks such as Hizb’allah such great success in fundraising and recruitment in Latin America. It will be quite the task for the United States and its allies to rout these networks in such a way that actually harms not only terrorist activity but also illicit drug trafficking activity in a permanent, lasting way.
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Appendix

Appendix I: List of Holsti’s National Role Conceptions

Bastion of revolution-liberator: The task of the state is to liberate others or to act as the “bastion” or revolutionary movements by providing an area which foreign revolutionary leaders can regard as a source of physical and moral support, in addition to being an ideological inspiration.

Regional leader: A state perceives itself as having duties or special responsibilities to states in a particular region with which it identifies.

Regional protector: This role places emphasis on the function of a state providing protection for adjacent regions.

Active independent: States affirm an independent foreign policy, free of military commitments to any major powers.

Liberation supporter: States hold unstructured and vague attitudes in supporting liberation movements, rather than organizing, leading, or physically supporting the movement.

Anti-imperialist agent: Role performed when a state perceives itself as an agent of struggle against the evil, or serious threat, of imperialism.

Defender of the faith: When a state views its foreign policy objectives and commitments in terms of defending value systems from attack.

Mediator-integrator: When a state perceives itself capable of, or responsible for, fulfilling or undertaking special tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states or groups of states.

Regional-subsystem collaborator: When states indicate far-reaching commitments to cooperative efforts with other states to build wider communities, or to cross-cutting subsystems.

Developer: When a state feels a special duty or obligation to assist underdeveloped countries.

Bridge: An ephemeral role implying a communicative function, or acting as a translator or conveyer of messages and information between peoples of different cultures.

Faithful ally: Where a government makes a specific commitment to support the policies of another government.

Independent: Emphasis on the policy of self-determination with no other particular continuing task or function in the system.

Example: National role conception emphasizing the importance of promoting prestige and gaining prestige internationally by successfully pursuing certain domestic policies.
Internal development: Most of the efforts of the state are directed toward problems of internal development.

Isolate: This role demands a minimum of external contacts of whatever variety.

Protectee: Some governments allude to the responsibility of other states to defend them, without performing other functions or tasks toward the external environment.

Defender of the peace: Universal commitment to defend against any aggression or threat to peace, no matter what the locale.

Anti-revisionist agent: States who mention or feel they have special responsibilities and tasks for fighting against revisionism

Anti-Zionist or anti-Communist: Roles where an actor is opposing a particular kind of ideology.
Appendix II: Organizational Structure of Hizb’ullah

Created with information gathered from an Israel Non-Governmental Organization focusing on intelligence and terrorism. (Cohler)
### Appendix III: Muslim Population in Latin America

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<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>24,822</td>
<td>312,035</td>
<td>380,076</td>
<td>701,946</td>
<td>797,877</td>
<td>658,785</td>
<td>725,254</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>7,274</td>
<td>9,599</td>
<td>12,162</td>
<td>29,914</td>
<td>34,835</td>
<td>39,085</td>
<td>43,853</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>1,280</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>1,292</td>
<td>1,560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1,529</td>
<td>1,915</td>
<td>2,236</td>
<td>2,638</td>
<td>3,084</td>
<td>3,427</td>
<td>3,808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>667</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>1,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>993</td>
<td>1,319</td>
<td>1,733</td>
<td>2,178</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>2,950</td>
<td>3,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (in thousands)</strong></td>
<td><strong>35,716</strong></td>
<td><strong>326,283</strong></td>
<td><strong>398,023</strong></td>
<td><strong>739,043</strong></td>
<td><strong>840,298</strong></td>
<td><strong>706,542</strong></td>
<td><strong>779,031</strong></td>
</tr>
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(Kettani 129)