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**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
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## **Hezbollah as a case study of the battle for hearts and minds in the confrontation between Israel and the terrorist organizations**

**Anti-American propaganda**

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# Hezbollah as a case study of the battle for hearts and minds in the confrontation between Israel and the terrorist organizations

Dr. Reuven Erlich and Dr. Yoram Kahati

## Overview

1. Hezbollah, “the party of Allah,” is a Lebanese Muslim terrorist organization, established with Syrian support in 1982 during the first Lebanon war (Operation Peace for the Galilee). Hezbollah’s ideology is radical Shi’ite Islam, and the organization serves as a tool to promote the goals of Iran and Syria, while at the same time it is an integral part of the Lebanon’s political and social fabric.

2. During the 25 years of its existence Hezbollah, with massive support from Iran, established an **extensive military infrastructure** in Lebanon. Equipped with advanced weapons, it was activated against Israel in the second Lebanon war. In addition to its military infrastructure, Hezbollah also established a **civilian framework** which supports Lebanese Shi’ites in the fields of education, health care, religion and provides various social services. Operated together, the two systems turned Hezbollah from a local Lebanese terrorist organization, with limited guerilla and terrorist capabilities, into an organization with military and civilian capabilities which go far beyond those of the other terrorist organizations both in the Middle East and the rest of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is one in a series of Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center articles dealing with various aspects of the battle for hearts and minds and a continuation of Dr. Reuven Erlich’s February 14, 2006 article entitled “The battle for hearts and minds: The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian confrontation as a case study,” [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/i\\_p\\_conflict\\_e.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/i_p_conflict_e.pdf).

**Dr. Erlich** is the director of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center; **Dr. Kahati** is deputy director and the Center’s head researcher. **Other researchers of the ITIC also participated in writing this study.**

3. Hezbollah, like other terrorist organizations, is fully aware of the importance of the battle for hearts and minds, whose objective is to influence the insights and perceptions of various target audiences in Lebanon and abroad. The battle is waged in many different ways, from information and propaganda to “education” and indoctrination. Alongside its **vast network of educational and cultural institutions**, the organization, with massive financing from Iran, built a media empire and learned (as did the other terrorist organizations) how to exploit the possibilities presented by the communications and information revolution.

4. The flagship of Hezbollah’s **media empire** is its TV satellite channel, **Al-Manar**, which was set up in 1991 with aid from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. The channel’s broadcasts are slanted toward propaganda and reflect Hezbollah’s Iranian-inspired ideology and political agenda. From the very beginning Hezbollah specialized in mixing propaganda with factual information, including **visual material from the battlefield**. To that end, it established a body called “**battle information**,” which embedded professional photographers in the squads attacking the IDF and the South Lebanese Army. Al-Manar is professional and effective, and it is extremely popular not only in Lebanon but throughout the entire Arab-Muslim world, the Middle East (including the Palestinian Authority) and abroad.

5. In addition to Al-Manar, Hezbollah owns a radio station (Radio Nur), newspapers, Internet sites in several languages (including English, French, Spanish and even Hebrew) and publishing houses (the most notable of which is Dar al-Hadi, named for Hassan Nasrallah’s son Hadi, killed in south Lebanon). All of the above, in addition to the organization’s extensive network of religious, “educational” and cultural institutions, and its internal indoctrination system, have a uniform strategic propaganda base determined by Hassan Nasrallah, with neither internal criticism nor leaks to the media.

6. Hezbollah’s battle for hearts and minds employs terminology expressing Iran’s extremist Shi’ite Islamic worldview. Special emphasis is put on fostering the values of **jihad** (holy war) and **shahadah** (death as a martyr for the sake

of Allah) to justify the campaign of terrorism and guerilla warfare waged by Hezbollah (and the Palestinian terrorist organizations) against Israel. At the same time, Hezbollah does not hesitate to use Western terminology unrelated to Islam, such as *muqawamah*, a modern secular Arabic term meaning “active resistance,” or to adopt anti-Semitic European Christian motifs to encourage hatred for Israel and the Jewish people.

7. The **principal messages** sent by Hezbollah to its target audiences at home, in the Arab-Muslim world and the Western world are the following: the organization is Lebanese-nationalist in character and non-sectarian; it plays a role as Lebanon’s “defender,” which legitimizes its military infrastructure; hatred for Israel and denying its right to exist, which justify the terrorist campaign waged by Hezbollah and the Palestinians against it, and it uses its communications empire to encourage anti-Semitism and hatred for the Jewish people; hatred for the United States, by representing it as the source of evil and terrorism; Hezbollah’s image of might, its “glorious successes” against Israel and Hassan Nasrallah as a role model; radical Shi’ite Islamic ideology and Iranian “leader Ali Khamenei” as a role model.

8. However, all of the above messages are rife with **internal contradictions and weaknesses**. Hezbollah’s complete dependence on Iran (and Syria) and its regarding Khamenei as the source of authority contradict the image of “Lebanese nationalism” the organization tries to create; its clearly Shi’ite identity contradicts its non-ethnic stance; the radical Islamic Iranian ideology it represents contradicts the basic pragmatism which is characteristic of most of the Lebanese population, regardless of ethnic affiliation; its militant jihadist character contradicts Lebanon’s national interests and even the interests of the Shi’ites themselves, who bear the burden of the results of Hezbollah’s terrorism and guerilla tactics against Israel.

9. During the second Lebanon war Hezbollah waged a shrewd, successful propaganda campaign against Israel by using the media empire it had built over the years. The campaign was aimed primarily at Lebanese and Arab-Muslim audiences, but was also intended to influence Western and Israeli

public opinion. **Hezbollah strove to delegitimize the IDF's actions in Lebanon** by inculcating the message that Israel was harming innocent Lebanese civilians, while ignoring the fact that it had established its military infrastructure within the midst of Lebanon's dense civilian population and was using them as human shields. At the same time, the organization waged a propaganda campaign and used psychological warfare to attack its Israeli target audience to lower morale, cause panic, increase fear of its rocket fire and strengthen Hezbollah's image as a strong organization possessing impressive operational capabilities.

10. The battle for hearts and minds in the second Lebanon war was spearheaded by Al-Manar TV, which survived and remained on the air, even after the Israeli air force bombed its building in a southern suburb of Beirut. It regularly broadcast factual information mixed with propaganda about its rocket fire and the successes it achieved in battle, and its broadcasts served as a source for many other media. Hassan Nasrallah was interviewed six times during the war (four times by Al-Manar) and his statements were often quoted, especially in Lebanon, other Middle Eastern countries and around the world. To a great extent, during the war he succeeded in taking over TV screens (even in Israel), thus achieving an enormous advantage.

11. Hezbollah's propaganda achievements were also the result of **its ability to prevent foreign journalists, Arab and Western alike**, from accessing combat zones and to keep information away from them, making it impossible for them to cover topics which were incompatible with the organization's propaganda strategy. In general, foreign correspondents in Lebanon could not visit military sites (weapons' depots, bases, facilities) or interview organization operatives in the field. They were channeled into covering Lebanese civilians harmed by Israeli attacks and the damage done to Lebanon's civilian infrastructure. Reports by foreign correspondents show that only a few of them succeeded in evading supervision and the limitations placed on them by Hezbollah, and in operating in ways other than those dictated by the organization.

12. After the war Hezbollah launched another extensive propaganda campaign, whose objective was to inculcate its target audiences with the myth of the “divine victory.” The campaign was based on three main elements:

- A. The IDF’s failure to stop or significantly reduce Hezbollah rocket fire throughout the war;
- B. The harsh internal criticism expressed for the IDF and the government when the war ended: the many failures and mistakes exposed were used and are still being used by Hezbollah as grist for its propaganda mill.
- C. Israel’s achievements and Hezbollah’s failures in the war were not sufficiently emphasized within Israel itself because of internal criticism. Therefore, they were not always picked in Lebanon and the Arab world, with the result that they did not succeed in undermining Hezbollah’s victory myth.

13. However, as the dust settled in the months following the war, and as the Lebanese internalized the destruction wrought upon their country, the myth of the “divine victory” began to crack, and internal criticism increased because of the high price Lebanon was forced to pay for Hezbollah’s military escapade. Therefore the organization was forced to switch to defensive tactics and must now face the accusations of its opponents in Lebanon for having dragged the country into an unnecessary war, and to fend off demands to disarm and implement UN Security Council Resolution 1701. The fierce dispute between Hezbollah and the opposition camp created an on-going political crisis in Lebanon, which is apparently far from being resolved.

**Note: [The full Hebrew version of the study can be found at the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center Website.](#) **The English translation will appear shortly.****

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