Overview

Hezbollah maintains an **extensive network of social foundations** in the Shiite community in Lebanon. These foundations deal with healthcare, education, finance, welfare, and media. They support Hezbollah’s military infrastructure. They also serve as a means of disseminating Hezbollah’s ideology and strengthening its position among the Shiite community and in Lebanon in general. They provide the Shiite community with large-scale social services that are generally provided by the state while exploiting the weakness of the Lebanese administration and its long-standing neglect of the Shiite community. Thus, Hezbollah’s civilian infrastructure enables it to maintain a sort of “Shiite mini-state” within the Lebanese state. The residents of this “Shiite mini-state” enjoy large-scale Iranian financial support and Hezbollah’s military infrastructure is located among them.

The ITIC is carrying out a research project aimed at mapping Hezbollah’s civilian foundations and examining the nature of their conduct and their contribution to Hezbollah’s military wing. The aim of the project is also to expose their sources of financing and examine the Iranian assistance for their establishment and their ongoing activity (for a list of publications which were issued so far by the ITIC, see appendix).
The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association is Hezbollah’s youth movement. It was established in May 1985, after the IDF’s withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards were involved with the establishment of the movement with the objective of providing Hezbollah with youth inculcated with radical Shiite Islam in accordance with the Iranian concept of Wilayat al-Faqih, the rule of the Muslim cleric, as developed by Imam Khomeini. All this was intended to create a new generation of operatives inculcated with Khomeini’s ideology, who would join Hezbollah’s ranks, take part in the violent struggle against Israel, and at the same time assist in establishing Hezbollah among the Shiite community in Lebanon. The branches of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association are located among Shiite population centers in Lebanon, currently numbering tens of thousands of youth (in mid-2015, the number of members in the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association was estimated at about 50,000-60,000).

Hezbollah considers members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts an important pool to be recruited to Hezbollah’s military as well as civilian infrastructure. For this purpose, youngsters undergo physical training as well as ideological indoctrination. At the age of 16-17, some of the youth enlist in Hezbollah’s military wing or serve in its civilian foundations. According to Bilal Naim, former director of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, after the age of 16, most of the adolescents join Hezbollah and the military activities of the organization (2008). According to a news item in the Lebanese Janoubia website (2015), the overwhelming majority of the members join “jihadi activity,” i.e., the military activity of Hezbollah (for further details, see below). So far, over 200 former members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts died in fighting against Israel and in the Syrian civil war. The shahids of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts who died in the ranks of Hezbollah are commemorated with honor and appreciation and become role models for the Al-Mahdi Scouts members.

1 According to Shiite tradition, the Imam al-Mahdi is the “hidden imam” who is supposed to reappear as the Shiite Messiah and redeem the world. Belief in the imam as super-human, omnipotent and infallible is one of the unique central beliefs of Shiite Islam. The first imam was Ali, “the emir of the faithful,” Muhammad’s son-in-law and the fourth Caliph, according to the Sunni Muslims. From his death in 661 A.D. until 874 A.D., when the 12th imam disappeared, there were 11 Shiite imams. The hidden imam, according to Shiite belief, will return to the world as the “Mahdi,” a term meaning “the one guided by Allah to take the straight path.” The Mahdi will bring the message of redemption, take revenge on the enemies of the Shiites, and bring justice to the world.

2 Wilayat al-Faqih is Khomeini’s concept of putting rule in the hands of a Muslim cleric. The Muslim cleric, according to this concept, has the authority to decide every issue in the Islamic state.
The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association is one of 32 scouting organizations operating in Lebanon as part of the Lebanese Scouts Federation. The various scouting organizations are distinguished from each other in their sectarian and geographic nature and ties with the various powers in Lebanon. Among the Shiite community in Lebanon, Hezbollah’s Scouts organization is the biggest, overshadowing that of the Amal Movement.  

Ideologically speaking, Hezbollah’s scouting movement is totally distinguished from other scouts organizations in Lebanon and worldwide. The worldwide scouting movement has embraced the values of freedom, equality, and brotherhood among religions and nations in order for the scouts to be more productive members of society. Conversely, the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts are handled by Hezbollah, which is designated as an international terrorist and criminal organization, and by Iran, which supports it. During their training, the scouts are inculcated with narratives of religious fanaticism, belligerency, intolerance, and hatred for Israel. However, in spite of that, the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts do collaborate with the Lebanese scouting federation and the World Organization of the Scout Movement.

The scouts’ organization of the Shiite Amal Movement is called Al-Risalah al-Islamiyah (“the Islamic Mission”).
Previous and new emblems of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts

Right: The previous emblem of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts movement (Hezbollah website, February 6, 2012). The fleur-de-lis is the international scout emblem. However, every scouting organization adds its own elements. In this case, the additions are two swords (taken from Shiite tradition), and a hand raised as if taking an oath. The inscription under the emblem reads, “Obey!” The clearly implied messages were militarism, belligerence, obedience, and commitment. Around 2013, the emblem was replaced and the belligerent messages were downplayed. Left: The modified emblem of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. The two swords were removed and the Lebanese cedar tree was added, with the objective of downplaying the radical nature of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and trying to present the scouts as “Lebanese” (Facebook page of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts).

The Iranian aspect

Iran played a significant role in establishing the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts movement. By the second half of the 1980s, the Iranians had already organized camps for schoolchildren who were brought to the Bekaa Valley from southern Lebanon and Beirut and received military training and cultural and religious instruction during the summer vacation. Twenty years later, during the Second Lebanon War, a great deal of Imam al-Mahdi Scouts material was found, illustrating how members of Hezbollah’s youth movement had been indoctrinated with the principles of the Iranian Islamic Revolution and hatred for Israel. At the same time, Hezbollah’s youth movement nurture a personality cult of Ali Khamenei, and the Shiite community in Lebanon is being indoctrinated through them.

In the ITIC’s assessment, Iran finances most of the expenses involved in the extensive ongoing activity of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and most of the infrastructure built among

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4 Al-Haqiq, Beirut, May 16, 1987; Al-Ahed, Beirut, August 30, 1987; Shimon Shapira, “Hezbollah between Iran and Lebanon” (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv University, 2006), p. 144.
the Shiite population for the scouts’ activity (among other things, youth compounds in southern Lebanon, in the Bekaa Valley, and in the western Bekaa).

The personality cult of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei

The cover of the booklet entitled “My Leader,” with a picture of Ali Khamenei (right) and the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini in profile (upper left). The upper text reads, “The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts” and the lower, “Selected passages from the biography of the commander, the highest source of [Shiite Islamic] authority, Imam Khamenei, may Allah grant him long life.” The (previous) emblem of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts appears in the lower right corner (the booklet was seized by the IDF in the Second Lebanon War in 2006).

Inculcation with hatred of the State of Israel

Right: Inculcating the vision of “the liberation of Jerusalem.” Wearing a flak jacket and carrying a rifle, a child has a headband reading, “O Jerusalem, I am coming” (material seized in the Second Lebanon War in 2006). Left: The cover page of the booklet “Sharon [i.e., Ariel Sharon, Israel’s former prime minister] the Evil One,” issued by the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. The following words appear on the next to last page: “Dedicated to our shahids, to our prisoners, to our wounded, to our children. You are surrounded by an enemy who robs you of the innocence of youth. The name [of this enemy] is Israel” (this is part of a series of booklets for children and adolescents)
Imam al-Mahdi Scouts not included in the USA’s sanctions list

As far as the ITIC knows, the United States has not designated the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts as a terrorist organization and has not imposed any sanctions on it, although this is a Hezbollah organization preparing adolescents to enlist in its ranks. Interim findings of the examination of Hezbollah’s civilian foundations reveal that the list of Hezbollah’s institutions which were sanctioned by the United States includes the Islamic Resistance Support Association (IRSA); the Al-Qard al-Hasan Association; and the Jihad al-Bina Association (three Hezbollah foundations included in the ITIC’s study, see appendix). On the other hand, Hezbollah’s Al-Jarha Foundation (the Foundation for the Wounded)5 and also, as stated, the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association were not included on the sanctions list, although these are two Hezbollah foundations supporting the organization’s military wing.

Structure of the study

The study includes the following sections:

- The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association: an overview
- Organizational structure and geographic deployment
- Preparing the youngsters in advance of their recruitment to Hezbollah
- Field training as preparation for recruitment to Hezbollah
- Adolescents’ indoctrination
- Funding sources
- Replicating the Lebanese model to other Iranian proxies in the Middle East

5 See the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from May 6, 2019, “Hezbollah’s Foundation for the Wounded: Purpose, modus operandi and funding methods”
The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association: an overview

Hezbollah’s Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association was established in May 1985, after the IDF withdrew from the security zone in Lebanon. It has branches in the Shiite communities of Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, and southern Lebanon. It received a permit for its activities from the Lebanese Ministry of Education in September 1992. They associated with the Federation of Lebanese Scouts in early 1997 (Nabatieh municipality website). At the end of 2006, there were approximately 42,000 male and female Imam al-Mahdi scouts between the ages of 8-16 organized into 499 troops (fawj, afwaj in Arabic). In mid-2015, the number of scouts in the movement was estimated at 50,000-60,000, organized in more than 500 troops (Janoubia, April 22, 2015, and June 28, 2019).

Organizational structure and geographic deployment

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association is subordinate to the General Leader (i.e., Hassan Nasrallah). The Association is headed by a First Deputy (also referred to as the General Commissioner), who is actually the Association director. Under him, there are a second deputy, secretary, treasurer, public relations secretary, information secretary, accountant, secretary of assets, comptroller, and three consultants (Nabatieh Municipality website).

The General Commissioner heads the General Commission, which is the body that actually runs the Association’s activity. The current general commissioner of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association is Sheikh Nazih Fayad, from the southern Lebanon village of Ansar. Sheikh Fayad is the brother of the shahid Ali Ahmad Fayad, Hezbollah’s Special Forces commander who was killed in the Aleppo region in February 2016 (Radio Nour website, March 5, 2016; Al-Mumahidun website, March 18, 2018).

See the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from September 12, 2006, “Hezbollah’s Shiite youth movement, “The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts,” has tens of thousands of members”
Sheikh Nazih Fayad, the general commissioner of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association (website of the scouts’ news agency, October 2017)

The general commission of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts includes the following posts: assistant general commissioner, commissioner for general programs, commissioner for arts and talents, commissioner for information, commissioner for international relations, commissioner for public relations, commissioner for social development, commissioner for equipment and assets, commissioner for the adolescent group, commissioner for instruction, commissioner for the secretariat, commissioner for music, commissioner for cultural activities, manager of the Mahdi magazine, commissioner for human resources, and finance manager.

Five regional commissions are subordinate to the general commission: the commission of Jabal Amel 1 (southern Lebanon until the Litani River), headed by Sayyid Hossein Qassem (Ya Qana website, April 23, 2019); the commission of Jabal Amel 2 (the rest of southern Lebanon); the Beirut commission, headed by Haidar Baddah (website of the Beirut commission of Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, May 1, 2019); the Bekaa commission; and the commission of the north and Mount Lebanon. Every regional commission has subordinate sectors, and every sector has subordinate troops, separate for boys and girls (website of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts; “Imam al-Mahdi Scouts” in the Arabic Wikipedia; website of the Nabatieh municipality). The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts have several offices in the various regional commissions (at least one office in every regional commission).

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts have at least three permanent compounds, with facilities for their activities:

- The Sayyid Abbas al-Mussawi Youth and Scouts Village (Mussawi, Hezbollah leader before Nasrallah, met his death in a targeted killing): The site was established in 2000 on the Baalbek-Riyaq Road in the Bekaa Valley. The village was
intended to serve as a recreation, culture and education center for the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. Spanning 8,600 sq.m., the site can accommodate up to 540 people. **Every year, the site is frequented by about 40,000 people** who take part in the various activities: camps, excursions, meetings, seminars, and workshops of the scouts (the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts website; website of the Sayyid Abbas Mussawi Youth and Scouts Village, October 1, 2018).

**Overview of the Abbas al-Mussawi Youth and Scouts Village in the Bekaa Valley**  
(Facebook page of the Sayyid Abbas al-Mussawi Youth and Scouts Village, October 1, 2018)

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**The Imam Khomeini Youth and Scouts Village:** The site was established in 2010 in the Nabatieh region in southern Lebanon, with purposes identical to those of its predecessor in the Bekaa Valley. The size of the area is about 150 dunams and it can accommodate up to 800 people (Bint Jbeil website, March 24, 2010). In July 2010, Nabatieh al-Fawqa municipality member Hossein Tawfiq Ghandour demanded from the Iranian Association for the Reconstruction of the South to widen the road leading to the site, add a sidewalk and plant trees along the road (Janoubiyat, July 7, 2010). In view of this demand, it can be estimated that the site **was built by the Iranian Association for the Reconstruction of Lebanon.** This Iranian entity operated in Lebanon following the Second Lebanon War. It built infrastructure, schools, hospitals, mosques, homes, bridges, roads etc. (Al-Ahed, October 13, 2010).
Overview of the Imam Khomeini Youth and Scouts Village in southern Lebanon
(Facebook page of the Imam Khomeini Youth and Scouts Village, June 12, 2019)

◆ Al-Nabi Noun Youth Village, in Mashghara, in the western Bekaa Valley: The site is similar to the other two, with a swimming pool, halls, gardens and a playground. Yet, it seems that activity in this site is less intense (Al-Nabi Noun Youth Village website).

Other facilities and activities of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts

▶ The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts owns the Al-Mahdi Bookmobile, which is a bus with a library inside, helping to spread propaganda books through which boys and girls are indoctrinated with the Hezbollah messages. The library has over 3,000 books, a huge 3D screen, 10 laptop computers including a fast internet connection, and over 40 brain games. The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts owns several such buses, each of them circulating in the villages, allowing the village children (not only scouts) to use their services. Most of the library activities are not co-educational (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi Mobile Library). The library was established in collaboration with the Center for Developing Thought among Children and the Younger Generation in Iran (Middle East Online, June 25, 2015).
The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts also have other activities supporting their indoctrination:

◆ **The Al-Mahdi Scouts Exhibition**, which is actually a store for selling medals and decorations, uniforms, badges, books and booklets, souvenirs, certificates etc. (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi Scouts Exhibition);

◆ **The Al-Mahdi Culture Forum**, which writes educational material on various topics: Quran, prayer, the Imam al-Mahdi, arts, information, social development, various skills, and scouting tradition (Mahdi Culture Forum website);

◆ **The main orchestra**, established in 1986 and intended to attract youth talented in this field and prepare it to perform in appropriate musical frameworks. The orchestra holds about 30 events per year (Nabatieh Municipality website).

Preparing the youngsters in advance of their recruitment to Hezbollah

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association focuses its activity among children and adolescents aged 8-16. The first age group (8-10) is referred to as *Ashbal* (lion cubs). Its members attend basic religion classes such as how to pray and purify oneself, in addition to culture and sports activities. The middle age group (11-13) is referred to as *Barriyah* (the pure of heart), and its
members attend higher-level religion classes, a weekly culture class and monthly sports activity. The members of the adolescent group (14-16), referred to as Jawalah (trackers), attend religion and culture classes, along with sports activity. Scouts over the age of 16 can volunteer to serve as commanders in the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts ("The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts," Arabic Wikipedia).

Imam al-Mahdi Scouts members are indoctrinated with Hezbollah’s ideology and are familiarized with Hezbollah’s military and civilian foundations and the various events held by Hezbollah. Upon reaching the age of 16-17, the youngsters are ready to enlist in the ranks of Hezbollah and are perceived by it as an important source providing the next generation of Hezbollah’s operatives.

Operatives for Hezbollah’s military infrastructure are recruited from within the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. The recruited youngsters fight in the ranks of Hezbollah and many of them met their death in Hezbollah battles in Lebanon and Syria: over 120 former members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts had been killed in the ranks of Hezbollah from its establishment until 2006 (the Second Lebanon War), and since then, at least 88 others were killed in the war in Syria ("Imam al-Mahdi Scouts," Arabic Wikipedia; ITIC’s study on the Hezbollah fatalities in Syria).

Evidence of the major role played by this pool can be found in a statement by Bilal Naim, former director of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts: “After age 16, the boys mostly go to resistance or military activities” (Arabic Wikipedia, quoted from a report in Scotland on Sunday, November 23, 2008). The Janoubia Lebanese website (opposed to Hezbollah) wrote on April 26, 2015: “The [Imam] al-Mahdi Scouts constitute the main source of personnel for Hezbollah’s military entity since the overwhelming majority of the members join jihadi activity after the age of 16.”

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7 See the ITIC’s Information Bulletin from March 11, 2019, “Estimate of Hezbollah fatalities during the Syrian civil war and the conclusions arising from the analysis of their identity”
Janoubia website (April 26, 2015):
“The [Imam] al-Mahdi Scouts constitute the main source of personnel for Hezbollah’s military entity […]”

Report from the newspaper Scotland on Sunday (November 23, 2008):
“After age 16, the boys mostly go to resistance or military activities”

Visiting Hezbollah facilities, meeting Hezbollah operatives, and carrying out political activity in the ranks of Hezbollah

Right: Member of the adolescent group in the Imam Rida Troop (from the village of Al-Bas) visiting an arms exhibition held by Hezbollah in the village of Toura in southern Lebanon, on the anniversary of the death of the Shahid Commanders in 2017. As part of the visit, the members met with a wounded Hezbollah fighter (Facebook page of the Tyre sector of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, February 18, 2017). Left: Girl scouts of the Sayyida Sakina Troop visiting an arms exhibition held by Hezbollah, apparently in the village of Ayta al-Sha’ab, in southern Lebanon, on the anniversary of the birth of Imam Ali, in 2017. The photo shows a military operative meeting with the girl scouts (Facebook page of the Tyre sector of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, April 21, 2017)
Right: Girl scouts of the Al-Ghreibeh Troop (from the village of Kounin) visiting a Hezbollah position. The trip to the site was held on the anniversary of the Second Lebanon War in 2016, as part an Imam al-Mahdi Scouts day camp (Facebook page of the Bint Jbeil sector in the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, August 12, 2016). Left: Members of the Ma’aroub Troop in southern Lebanon meeting with an “officer in the Islamic Resistance” (i.e., Hezbollah officer), April 2018 (Facebook page Ma’aroub Baldat al-Ibaa, April 4, 2018)

Members of the Zabaqin Troop, in southern Lebanon, visiting a Hezbollah position. The upper photo on the right shows Hezbollah military operatives during a meeting with the scouts (Facebook page of the Zabaqin Troop, May 27, 2018)
Member of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts shooting a paintball rifle
(Facebook)

Former Imam al-Mahdi scouts who died as shahids in the ranks of Hezbollah

Certificates of participation in activity and certificates of appreciation awarded to members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts who died as shahids during their activity in the ranks of Hezbollah. The certificates are displayed in their homes, along with their other belongings (Instagram account in memory of the shahid Ali Aashur; Facebook page in memory of the shahid Mohammad Fawaz)

Right: Certificate of appreciation of an Imam al-Mahdi Scouts troop in the village of Al-Taybeh in southern Lebanon, awarded to the family of the shahid Hassan Ali Abbas (Facebook page in memory of the Shahid Hassan Ali Abbas). Left: Members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts planting a tree in memory of the shahid Ahmad Farijah (Instagram account in memory of the shahids of the village of Arab Salim)
Operatives of the Hezbollah military wing visiting the grave of a shahid of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. A wreath with the inscription “Imam al-Mahdi Scouts” is seen on the grave (Facebook)

**Field training in preparation for the recruitment to Hezbollah**

Similarly to other youth movements, members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts undergo various types of field training. Hezbollah, for which the scouting members represent a source of future personnel, regards these types of training as a preparatory stage in which they can acquire military skills. This field training includes setting up tents, using ropes, cooking in field conditions, navigation, principles of guarding the camp, following tracks, signaling, water storage and purification, drilling, etc. (Mahdi Culture Forum website).
Members of the Imam Zayn al-Abedin Troop (from the village of Aytit) going on a hike and sleeping on the ground, on the anniversary of the birth of Sayyida Fatima in 2018 (Wadi Press website, March 17, 2018)

Members of the Imam Hossein Troop (from the village of Al-Shehabiya) during a hike along the Litani River (Shehabiya News website, undated)
The indoctrination of the boy scouts

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts indoctrinate their members with the values of Shiite Islam and the Iranian ideology as perceived by Khomeini; they nurture the admiration of the leader Khamenei, maintain close ties with the operatives of the Hezbollah military wing, preach hatred to Israel, and call on their members to be prepared to die for Allah and become shahids. Hezbollah customarily includes the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in its ceremonies and various events, on Shiite holidays and festival dates or those related to Iran and the Palestinians (such as days commemorating the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada or Iranian-initiated Jerusalem Day).

In order to examine what values the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts wish to indoctrinate, the ITIC examined the activity of two troops (boys and girls) in the village of Mashghara in the western Bekaa Valley (in the first half of 2019). Out of 49 activities carried out by the troops, most of the activities (27) dealt with Shiite Islamic events (anniversaries of imams’ birthdays, the Ramadan fast, and Eid al-Fitr); five events were dedicated to recreational activity (hiking in the snow, practicing playing music etc.); four events included meetings with operatives of the Hezbollah military wing and dealt with the value of Shahada (i.e., being prepared to die for Allah and become a shahid); four events were dedicated to Iran (support rally for victims of the floods in Iran; the World Jerusalem Day organized by Iran); four were dedicated to general social activities (paying a condolence call, visiting a sick person, encouragement to read books); three were dedicated to vocational activity (photography and painting); and two to “external relations” (for instance, participation in a funeral of one of the Christian dignitaries of the village).
Fundraising, political activity, and military signs

Right: A girl scout in the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts donating money for the campaign “You support [therefore] you resist”, which was held in the summer of 2017 in the Arsal area in the northern Bekaa Valley (Facebook). It is a familiar slogan of the Islamic Resistance Support Association (IRSA), a Hezbollah foundation engaged in raising funds to finance Hezbollah’s military activity.

Left: Imam al-Mahdi Scouts members at a rally of solidarity with Shiites executed in Saudi Arabia (Ramsey Twitter account)

Boys’ activities in events initiated by Hezbollah and Iran. Right: Members of Hezbollah’s scouting movement wearing uniforms and carrying plastic rifles on the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second (Al-Aqsa) Intifada (Mohamed Azaqir/Reuters, September 27, 2002). Left: Imam al-Mahdi Scouts members during a parade in Beirut on Jerusalem Day, an event initiated by Iran. Alongside them, there is an instructor dressed in a camouflage suit, presumably a Hezbollah operative (Jamal Sa’idi/Reuters, November 21, 2003)

Members of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts wearing uniforms and carrying rifles (probably made of plastic) trampling on the flags of Israel and the USA during a Jerusalem Day parade (Middle East Online, August 2006)
Indoctrination

A selection of booklets issued by the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, from left to right: “Sayyid Abbas Mussawi, the Greatest Shahid of the Islamic Resistance,” “The Jihad Youths,” and “Sharon the Evil One” (the booklets were seized by the IDF during the Second Lebanon War)

Imam al-Mahdi scout acting out a familiar scene of passing under a Quran before setting out on a mission, taken from films of Hezbollah fighting against Israel (Wadi Press website, March 17, 2018)

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts displayed at an exhibition (2019) a poster showing the order and placement of the various badges of the commanders. Some of the instructors’ badges are taken from Shiite terminology and demonstrate the values with which the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts wish to indoctrinate their members. The ranks on the right (on the right side of the poster) are Baqiyatullah (the title of the Twelfth Imam), Hossein’s Servant (the title of the Third Imam) and Quranic badges (Reader, Quran Instructor, Reciter) (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi Exhibition, March 26, 2019):
Personality cult around the image of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts nurture a personality cult around the image of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei. This is evident from material seized by the IDF during the Second Lebanon War. During the war, a booklet entitled “My Leader” was seized by the IDF in the village of Yarun (August 15, 2006) and in other Shiite villages. It was distributed by the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and contained biographical information about the Iranian leader Ali Khamenei. In the booklet, Khamenei is depicted as a model worthy of emulation and as an example of a devoted “jihad” fighter who contributed much to the Islamic Revolution.

Cover page of the booklet “My leader”

The cover of the booklet entitled “My Leader,” dedicated to Ali Khamenei. The upper text reads, “The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts” and the lower, “Selected passages from the biography of the commander, the highest source of [Shiite Islamic] authority, the imam Khamenei, may Allah grant him long life.” The booklet was seized by the IDF during the Second Lebanon War (there is no mention of the author’s name and the place and date of publication).
The booklet’s introduction reads, “These are the words of the succinct summary and glorious milestones in the life of the leader Khamenei, which the ITIC has quoted from the book “The Authority of the Commander-Imam” […] [in order] to present them to you, our brother jihad warrior who holds fast to the path of Allah. For jihad warriors are the most worthy of having [the qualities of] their leader and master [i.e., Khamenei] revealed to them. Therefore, we invite you, dear reader, **to examine this booklet, and to keep it so that you may reread it and study its message whenever you choose.**”

**Cover page of the booklet “My Leader”**


**Calendars distributed by the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts to convey their propaganda messages**

Among the material seized by the IDF in southern Lebanon during the Second Lebanon War were **calendars** (for the year 2006) **distributed by the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts.** They were aimed at inculcating the Shiite population, especially the younger generation, with Hezbollah and radical Iranian Shiite messages. Especially prominent are messages calling for a violent campaign against Israel and praising suicide bombers, alongside messages glorifying the images of Iranian leader Ali Khamenei and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Every month, certain dates are singled out for special mention. They relate to events from the history and legacy of Hezbollah and to the violent campaign waged against Israel by Hezbollah and the Palestinian terrorist organizations. There are also messages related to Iran
and the Islamic Revolution. For example, Jerusalem Day, initiated by Iran; Resistance and Liberation Day, which commemorates the IDF’s withdrawal from the security zone in southern Lebanon (May 2000); the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000; Hezbollah’s fighting against the IDF during Operation Accountability in 1993; and the anniversary of the death of Hadi Nasrallah, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s son, in southern Lebanon.

In the calendar and other material seized during the Second Lebanon War, the **Lebanese identity of Hezbollah is conspicuously minimized**. In the calendar, events and symbols relating to Lebanon and its history are infrequent. Exceptions are Lebanon’s Independence Day and rather inconspicuous pictures of the Lebanese flag.

### Examples of calendar pages

On the right, the calendar page of April: The main events of April are Islamic Solidarity Week and The Leader’s Day (i.e., Khamenei, whose picture is in the upper left-hand corner). Other events in this month are “the Qana massacre,” a suicide bombing attack against an IDF-SLA post in the village of Bint Jbeil, and Shiite Islamic holidays. On the left, the calendar’s front cover: Hassan Nasrallah reviewing various Imam al-Mahdi Scouts activities. To Nasrallah’s right is the organization’s emblem and the inscription “Imam al-Mahdi Scouts.” In the lower right, there is a very small Lebanese flag (much smaller than Hassan Nasrallah’s photo).
The extensive activity of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and the large-scale infrastructure built among the Shiite population in Lebanon involve high expenses. In the ITIC’s assessment, like Hezbollah’s other civilian foundations, the activity of the Scouts Association is mostly funded by Iran, in terms of both infrastructure and day-to-day activity. Apparently, the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts received support from the Iranian Association for the Reconstruction of Lebanon, an Iranian entity which operated in Lebanon after the Second Lebanon War and established many infrastructure facilities for the Shiite population (also including, in the ITIC’s assessment, facilities for the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts). To complement the Iranian funding, the scouts Association tries to develop funding sources of its own, but they are secondary in nature.

In December 2015, a booklet entitled “Funding the Scouts’ Activity” was distributed among instructors and commanders of the Association. The booklet called for finding independent sources of funding for the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. A workshop on this subject was held in southern Lebanon in December 2016 (website of the Mahdi Culture Forum, December 7, 2015;
According to information obtained by the ITIC, the Association has several sources of aid and funding of its own, secondary in importance:

- **Municipalities controlled by Hezbollah**: Thus, for instance, in 2015, a council member in one of the municipalities headed by a Hezbollah figure said that “the expenses on activities of the women's organizations, Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and the other organizations belonging to Hezbollah are covered by the municipality” (Janoubia, June 28, 2015).

- **Leasing services and assets**: Each of the central camps of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in the south, in the Bekaa Valley and the western Bekaa, offers services in return for payment: convention hall, hosting camps of other youth movements, swimming pools, suites, restaurant, sports facilities etc. (website of the Sayyid Abbas Mussawi Youth and Scouts Village; website of the Imam Khomeini Youth and Scouts Village).

- **Participation fees collected from the members for activity described as “unusual”**: Examples for such activities are “My First Fast,” “Jerusalem Day” and an invitation to handicraft activity on the Jerusalem Day (website of the Al-Sayyida al-Zahra Troop, May 31, 2019).

### Collaboration between the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and scouting federations from Lebanon, other Arab countries and the World organization of the Scout Movement

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts Association belongs to Hezbollah and represents an important source of personnel for its military wing. Its militant values inculcated by Hezbollah are in blatant contradiction to the values of the scouting movement. In spite of that, the Lebanese scouting federation, the Arab scouting federation and the World Organization of the Scout Movement collaborate with it and sometimes even support it.
Following are two examples of the ties between the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and the Lebanese scouting federation, the Arab scouting federation and the world scout movement:

◆ The commission of Jabal Amel 2 (southern Lebanon) of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts launched an aid campaign for the displaced Syrian residents who fled to Lebanon, under the slogan “My tent is your tent.” The project was funded by the World Organization of the Scout Movement, in collaboration with the Lebanese scouting federation. On the occasion, a ceremony was held at the Nabatieh municipality garden. The ceremony was attended by a delegation of the World Scout Foundation, headed by Secretary Siegfried Weiser (ya Sour website, January 14, 2014).

Photos from the opening of the aid campaign for the Syrian displaced persons. The general commissioner of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, Sheikh Nazih Fayad, is marked with a red circle. The blue circle marks Siegfried Weiser, of the World Scout Foundation. The chairman of the Lebanese scouting federation, Nabil Baidun, is marked with a white circle (ya Sour website, January 14, 2014)

◆ The Lebanese scouting federation hosted a seminar of the Arab scouting organization, with the participation of scouting delegations from 12 Arab countries. The seminar was held to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Arab scouting movement. It was held in the Imam Khomeini Village of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in southern Lebanon. Among the countries sending their representatives to attend the event were “Palestine,” the Sultanate of Oman, and Jordan (the Voice of the Palestinian Scouts website, March 24, 2011; Hezbollah website, March 25, 2011). The chairman of the seminar was Mohammad Sa’ad, the program commissioner in the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts. He praised the Lebanese scouting federation for choosing the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts to host the seminar. As he said in his speech, a unique nature of the region where the seminar was held is that jihad fighters went through that region and its land is soaked with the blood of shahids. The participants of the seminar visited tourist sites and “points of
interest” of the Resistance (i.e., Hezbollah) in southern Lebanon. Among the sites visited were the Beaufort and Maroun al-Ras (scenes of fierce battles between the IDF, the Palestinians and Hezbollah) (Hezbollah website, March 25, 2011).

Replicating the Lebanese model to other Iranian proxies in the Middle East

The Imam al-Mahdi Scouts movement was established with Iranian assistance and involvement and it is financed by Iran. Like other Hezbollah civilian foundations (Jihad al-Bina Association, for instance), the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, which acquired major experience in its years of activity, also serve for Iran as a model which it replicates in other countries. This model is disseminated among Iranian proxies operating in the countries of the Axis of Resistance where there is a Shiite population (Syria, Iraq, and Yemen).

Following are several scouting organizations whose establishment was inspired by the Lebanese model:

- **Iraq:**
  - Imam al-Hossein Scouts Association, which belongs to Hezbollah Battalions, a Shiite militia handled by Iran. The Association operates in the Baghdad area, the Iraq-Iran border, southern Iraq, and in holy Shiite sites (Najaf and Karbala). The Association maintains relations with the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in Lebanon (website of the Imam al-Hossein Scouts Association).

Right: Emblem of the Imam al-Hossein Scouts (Facebook page of the Imam al-Hossein Scouts). Left: The emblem of the Imam al-Hossein Scouts as appears on badges on the scouts’ uniforms and flags of the movement (Facebook page of the Najaf commission)
Imam al-Hossein scouts raising their hands in a Nazi salute during a weekly activity. In the background, on the tree, a poster of the Hezbollah Battalions militia (Facebook page of the Diyala Commission of Imam al-Hossein Scouts, April 27, 2019)

- The Al-Rasul al-A’azam Scouts Association, which belongs to Asaib Ahl al-Haqq, a Shiite militia handled by Iran.

Emblem of the Al-Rasul al-A’azam Scouts Association of the Asaib Ahl al-Haqq militia (Facebook page of the Al-Rasul al-A’azam Scouts Association)

Right: Instructors of the Al-Rasul al-A’azam in the World Jerusalem Day procession initiated by Iran (Facebook page of the Al-Rasul al-A’azam Scouts Association, August 2, 2013). Left: The scouts at a Quran lesson on the anniversary of the death of Imam Ali (Facebook page of the Al-Rasul al-A’azam Scouts Association, July 30, 2013)
**Syria:**

- **The Al-Wilaya Scouts movement**, which is active in the region of the Set Zaynab Tomb which is a holy site for the Shiites, south of Damascus (Facebook page of the movement).

![Emblem of the Al-Wilaya Scouts](image1)

**Emblem of the Al-Wilaya Scouts**
(Facebook page of the Al-Wilaya Scouts)

- **The Al-Mahdi Scouts in Syria**: This is a branch of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in Lebanon, **operating in the Aleppo region**. Its activity is concentrated in Shiite villages such as Nubl (which were hit by the rebel organizations during the civil war) (Facebook page of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in the Nubl-Aleppo sector). According to Syrian opposition sources, the **Syrian branch of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts** organizes activities and exhibitions, takes part in rallies supporting the Assad regime, and recently even issued a new magazine called “Tawasul,” intended for Syrian readership. According to these sources, the Syrian branch of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts engages in military training of boys and girls, in addition to religious indoctrination through lessons in **hassaniyas** (Shiite religious and social institutions) (Janoubia, June 28, 2015)
**Yemen:**

- **Al-Massira Scouts:** This scouting association **belongs to the Houthi rebels** (Ansar Allah). The youth undergo semi-military training with Houthi commanders (Al-Youm, November 14, 2013; YouTube channel of Mohammad Hadi al-Baraki, October 20, 2014; Yemeni News Agency website, August 1, 2018).
Appendix

ITIC's publications on Hezbollah’s civilian infrastructure

The ITIC is engaged in a research project whose aim is to map and elaborate on Hezbollah’s civilian infrastructure. The following publications have been issued as part of this project:

– “Hezbollah launched a campaign to raise money for military purposes using the Islamic Resistance Support Association” (February 12, 2019).
– “Hezbollah’s Martyrs Foundation: purpose, mode of operation and funding methods” (April 11, 2019)
– “Hezbollah’s Foundation for the Wounded: purpose, modus operandi and funding methods” (May 6, 2019)
– “Hezbollah’s socioeconomic foundations: Al-Qard al-Hasan, a quasi-bank that provides interest-free loans, mainly to members of the Shiite community” (June 3, 2019)
– “Jihad al-Bina Association in Lebanon: A Hezbollah social foundation engaged in construction and social projects among the Shiite community, being a major component in Hezbollah’s civilian infrastructure” (June 23, 2019)