Hezbollah operates networks of private schools indoctrinating Shiite youth in Lebanon with the ideology of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and with loyalty to Hezbollah and the path of terrorism

June 20, 2019

Overview

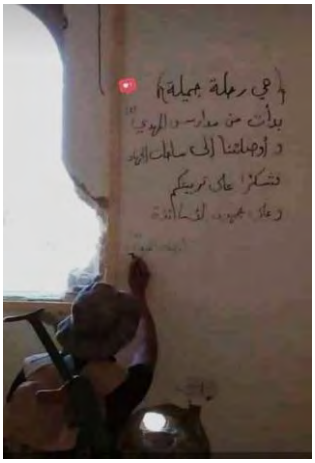
Hezbollah maintains an **extensive network of social institutions** in the Shiite community in Lebanon which deal with **healthcare, education, finance, welfare, and media.** They **support Hezbollah's military infrastructure and serve as a means of disseminating Hezbollah's ideology and strengthening its position among the Shiite community and in Lebanon in general.** These institutions provide the Shiite community with large-scale services that in other countries are 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 Shiite mini-state of sorts within the Lebanese state.** Hezbollah controls the residents of this Shiite mini-state, and its military infrastructure is placed among them.[1]

Hezbollah operates **two networks of private schools** among the Shiite population in Lebanon: **The Al-Mahdi School network**,[2] which is of a mainstream nature, **and the Al-Mustafa School network** ("Al-Mustafa" meaning "the chosen one," a title referring to the Prophet Muhammad), which is more elitist. **Children and youth from kindergarten until high school graduation** attend Hezbollah schools. At these schools, students are indoctrinated **with radical Shiite concepts based on the ideology of the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This indoctrination includes glorification of Khomeini and Khamenei, support for Hezbollah and the path of "resistance" (i.e., the struggle against Israel),**

[1] The ITIC is carrying out a research project which analyzes the modus operandi of Hezbollah's civilian foundations. So far, six foundations were examined as part of this project (see appendix).

[2] 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. Hezbollah's scouting movement and other Hezbollah institutions are also called "Al-Mahdi."

inculcation of the value of Shahada (self-sacrifice, the willingness to become a shahid), and veneration of shahids who were killed fighting in the ranks of Hezbollah. Studies in Hezbollah's education system are intended **to create a new generation of Shiite youth, inspired by the ideology of the Iranian Revolution, some of whom may join Hezbollah at the end of their studies**.



Right: Hezbollah operative in Syria writing graffiti on the wall of a ruined house: "This is a wonderful journey which started in the Al-Mahdi schools and brought us to the fields of jihad. Thank you for the education and for the teachers' efforts. Signed: Hezbollah" (Facebook). Left: Emblem of the Al-Mahdi schools (website of the Al-Mahdi schools)

The establishment of the infrastructure of education institutions among the Shiite community throughout Lebanon and the ongoing operation of kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools **involve high financial expenses.** In the ITIC's assessment, Hezbollah's schools (like other similar social foundations of Hezbollah) are financed **mainly by Iran**, as part of its financial assistance to Hezbollah. **Secondary sources of funding** are tuition, fundraising, and charitable projects. However, it is doubtful whether such funding sources cover the ongoing operation, let alone the construction of the infrastructure.

Seminar for the faculty of the Al-Mahdi school in the Shiite village of Mashghara. The seminar, on the Islamic Revolution in Iran, took place in collaboration with the Imam Khomeini Cultural Center.

To the best of the ITIC's knowledge, **the United States has not designated the Al-Mahdi and Al-Mustafa Schools as terrorist entities and has not imposed sanctions on them**, although these are Hezbollah institutions (the Americans do not distinguish between military and civilian institutions) inculcating radicalization of Shiite youth in Lebanon according to radical Iranian ideology, and their graduates enlist in the ranks of Hezbollah to become future operatives. On the other hand, **Sheikh Naim Qassem**, the dominant figure in the Al-Mustafa School network, is on the US sanctions list, being Hezbollah's deputy secretary-general.

Structure of the study

The study includes the following sections:

- **The Islamic Education Foundation (the Al-Mahdi Schools)**
  - The Al-Mahdi Schools: overview
  - The significance of establishing the Al-Mahdi school in the village of Al-Qatrani
  - Inculcation of Iranian radical Shiite ideology and support for Hezbollah
  - Photos demonstrating the indoctrination of the Al-Mahdi schoolchildren
- **The Islamic Religious Education Association (Al-Mustafa Schools)**
  - Al-Mustafa Schools: basic figures
  - The educational teachings of Sheikh Naim Qassem, the prominent figure in the operation of the Al-Mustafa Schools
- **The funding of Hezbollah's educational institutions**
- **Appendix**: List of the ITIC's publications as part of a research project examining Hezbollah's civilian infrastructure

The Islamic Education Foundation (the Al-Mahdi Schools)

The Al-Mahdi Schools: overview

Al-Mahdi school in Bint Jbeil
(Bint Jbeil website, July 2, 2010)

The Lebanese education system includes state as well as private schools. Hezbollah operates two networks of private schools, where it inculcates the Iranian ideology inspired by Imam Khomeini and educates the students to support Hezbollah and the path of struggle against Israel. **One of these networks is the Al-Mahdi School network, establishment in 1993** (i.e., about ten years after the establishment of Hezbollah, during the years in which Hezbollah fought against the IDF in the security zone). The first four schools of the network opened in Beirut and in the villages of Al-Sharqiya and Al-Majadel (southern Lebanon). Another school opened in the **city of Qom in Iran** and is intended for the Lebanese Shiites attending religious studies in Qom (website of the Al-Mahdi Schools). **Additional schools opened** later, and the network spread to regions where there is Shiite population (southern Lebanon, southern Beirut, and the Bekaa Valley).

Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem at the ceremony of the 26th anniversary of establishing the Al-Mahdi School network (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, April 18, 2019)

- **The Al-Mahdi School network is owned by Hezbollah and is actually subordinate to Hezbollah's Executive Council** (Al-Araby Al-Jadeed website, January 6, 2019; Janoubia, April 22, 2019). The school network is operated by the Islamic Education Foundation, headed by Dr. Hassan Yusuf, the director of the foundation (updated to February 2018). The director draws on professional departments: human resources, administration and finance, control and supervision, educational supervision, culture and religious education, advertising and public relations. **A total of 17 principals are subordinate to the director: three in Beirut's southern suburb (the Dahiyeh), four in the Bekaa Valley, and ten in southern Lebanon.** Each school has a religious instructor (website of the Al-Mahdi Schools).
- Students from **kindergarten until high school graduation attend the Al-Mahdi Schools.** The network includes at least **14 kindergartens** (3,650 students in the 2017-2018 school year), **five elementary schools** (3,347 students in the 2017-2018 school year), **15 junior high schools** (3,669 students in the 2017-2018 school year), and **six high schools** (1,338 students in the 2017-2018 school year) (Al-Mahdi Schools website; website of the Research and Development Center in the Lebanese Ministry of Education). **The Al-Mahdi Schools are considered as designated for the lower classes** more than the Al-Mustafa Schools. Tuition in the Al-Mahdi network is lower, and the network also grants scholarships (see below).

The significance of establishing the Al-Mahdi school in the village of Al-Qatrani

One of the schools established in recent years by the Al-Mahdi network is located in the village of Al-Qatrani in the western Bekaa (south of Mashghara), which is Christian in nature, situated in a strategic location, on the crossroads between southern Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley, and Mount Lebanon. According to Hezbollah's opponents, **the**

establishment of the school in the village is part of Hezbollah's efforts to change the demographic nature of the Christian area due to Hezbollah's strategic considerations (Al-Arab website, April 16, 2014).

Jihad al-Bina's planting campaign in the Al-Mahdi school in Al-Qatrani (Al-Ahed website, March 15, 2018)

At the time, it was reported that **Tajco LLC, which is on the United States' sanctions list**,[3] purchased about 2 million sq.m. of land in Al-Qatrani and built infrastructure and buildings there. **Among other things, it built a school which is a branch of the Al-Mahdi Schools there** (Janoubia, February 9, 2014). It was reported that **businessman Ali Taj al-Din**, the owner of Tajco, who is a known donor to Hezbollah, purchased many lands in the village and built residential projects **in order to promote movement of Shiite residents to the village** (Al-Khiyam website, October 10, 2010; Al-Arab, April 16, 2014; The Lebanese Forces website, November 8, 2018).

At any rate, **it seems that Hezbollah's efforts to make the village of Al-Qatrani Shiite in nature were successful. The activity of the Al-Mahdi Scouts in the village** is vivid evidence of that. Thus, for instance, **the funeral of Hassan Ismail, an operative killed in the fighting in Syria**, was attended by the Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts' orchestra (Al-Ahed, August 12, 2016). In November 2016, Shahid Day, one of Hezbollah's annual events, was marked in Al-Qatrani. During the day, **students of the Al-Mahdi elementary school went on a parade, holding photos of shahids and waving Hezbollah flags**. When the marchers arrived at the village cemetery, they held a ceremony, in which the Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts' orchestra played and speeches were made (Facebook page of Fatima Baalbaki, November 15, 2016).

[3] Tajco is included on the US sanctions list against Hezbollah (Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons List, SDN, website of the US Department of the Treasury). One of the company's owners is also on the American sanctions list for fundraising for Hezbollah (Treasury.gov, December 9, 2010).

Photos from the Shahid Day, in the participation of the students of the Al-Mahdi school in the village of Al-Qatrani. The students are shown holding Hezbollah flags and photos of shahids (Facebook page of Fatima Baalbaki, November 15, 2016).

Students of the Al-Mahdi school in Al-Qatrani waving Hezbollah flags and holding photos of shahids as part of the Shahid Day events (Facebook page of Fatima Baalbaki, November 15, 2016)

Inculcation of Shiite radical ideology and support for Hezbollah

The Al-Mahdi School network describes itself as an education association whose objective is to take care of the younger generation and create a new generation of people with a mission, awareness, and education. This is carried out by establishing schools, training teachers and writing curricula. In its schools, the Association inculcates **the values of Shiite Islam** (in its Iranian radical version) and provides its students with knowledge in practical and theoretical fields. During the school year, the students study the events of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and are inculcated with **the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih (the rule of the cleric expert on Islamic law) developed by Imam Khomeini**[4] (website of the Al-Mahdi Schools; Maat Group YouTube channel, May 1, 2019).

In order to examine the values which the Al-Mahdi School network seeks to instill in its students, the network branch in **the village of Mashghara** in the western Bekaa Valley was chosen as a test case (updated to the first half of 2019). **A total of 96 activities** were found in the Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara. These activities can be divided into the following topics (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, January-June 2019):

- **41 activities of courses studied in other schools.** Special emphasis is placed on **exact sciences and language learning.**
- **28 activities on Shiite Islam**. This includes various commemoration dates (mainly birthdays of the imams).

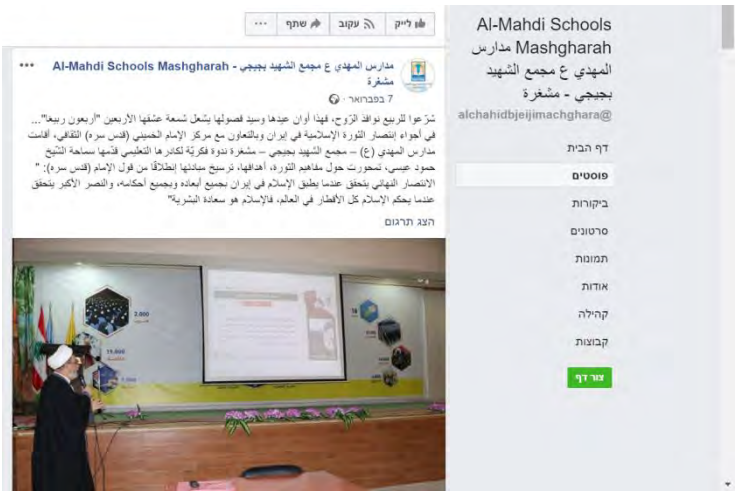
Nine activities were dedicated to Hezbollah and Iran: one to commemorate the date of the IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon; three activities **to commemorate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran**; and five dedicated to the **value of Shahada** (i.e., willingness to die for the sake of Allah and become a shahid). These activities included marking the Shahid Leaders Day; meeting a wounded Hezbollah operative; painting exhibition in memory of senior Hezbollah leader Imad Mughniyeh's mother; and a lecture on

[4] **Wilayat al-Faqih**, the rule of the cleric expert on Islamic law, is the type of regime developed by Imam Khomeini. The Islamic cleric is the head of the regime and the supreme arbiter on all state matters.

the functions of Hezbollah's Martyrs Foundation[5] (for examples of these activities, see photos below).

Activity on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, 2019, in the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara

Lecture and film on Imam Khomeini



Seminar on the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in collaboration with the Imam Khomeini Cultural Center; the seminar is intended for the faculty

[5] Similar indoctrination takes place among Hezbollah's youth movement the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts (see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from July 11, 2019, "The Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts Association: Hezbollah's youth movement which indoctrinates generations of youth with Iranian radical Shiite Islam; former members of the Association join Hezbollah and fight in its ranks against Israel"

Puppet show on events of the Islamic Revolution in Iran

- **Six activities were dedicated to social values**: among other things, Lebanese Teachers Day, instruction on safe use of the Internet, and setting oneself priorities in life. Four additional activities were intended to strengthen the bond between children and their parents and reinforce family values.
- **Five activities were recreational**, such as excursions. Some of those activities took place **in the youth village of the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts in southern Lebanon.**
- Two activities were intended for the faculty and dealt with the improvement of teaching skills.
- Two activities were about the importance of keeping the environment clean and environmental protection.

Thus, examining the studies and activities in the Al-Mahdi School network reveals that **the students are indoctrinated with radical Shiite education based on the ideology of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, while being loyal to Hezbollah and its values:** "resistance" (i.e., the struggle against Israel), self-sacrifice and the willingness to become a shahid (Shahada), and the glorification of shahids and the wounded operatives. Upon examining the school activities, it is evident that little time is devoted to leisure activities. Upon examining the contents of the studies, it is evident that **emphasis is placed on the exact sciences**, probably out of a pragmatic attitude regarding the need to provide students with desirable professions, and the effort to make the Al-Mahdi Schools attractive to the Shiite population.[6]

[6] Examining the academic studies and occupations of Hezbollah operatives who were killed in Syria, it was found that most of them studied **engineering,** bookkeeping, business administration and medical professions (for details, see the ITIC's Information Bulletin from March 11, 2019, "Estimate of

Indoctrination of the Al-Mahdi school students

Right: Paintings from an exhibition in memory of Imad Mughniyeh's mother, referred to as the "Mother of All Shahids" (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi School in Mashghara, January 11, 2019). Left: Girls' coming of age ceremony. The ceremony is held by the Al-Mahdi schools in Mashghara, Kfar Fila and Al-Ahmadiyah. A total of 88 girls from these schools took part in the ceremony. The girl on the left holds a photo of a shahid, her relative, who was killed near the border between Syria and Lebanon in 2014
(Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, February 20 and 24, 2019)

Right: Students watching a puppet show on the events of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, on the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution in 2019 (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, February 20, 2019). On their heads, there are placards with photos of Hezbollah's "Shahid Leaders" (Sheikh Ragheb Harb, Sayyid Abbas Mussawi, and Hajj Imad Mughniyeh). They are holding photos of Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Revolution. Left: Photo from the activity on the subject of Shahid Leaders' Day. The girl points to a map of Lebanon with the flags of Hezbollah and Lebanon, photo of the Shahid Leaders, and an inscription, "The entire homeland is resistance" (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, February 20, 2019).

Hezbollah's fatalities during the Syrian civil war and the conclusions arising from the analysis of their identity").

Right: Appreciation ceremony for the faculty on the occasion of Teachers Day (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, March 8, 2019). Flags of Lebanon and Hezbollah can be seen on the stage, along with a flag with the emblem of the Al-Mahdi school network. Left: Students meet with a wounded Hezbollah fighter on the anniversary of the birth of Imam Ali (Facebook page of the Al-Mahdi school in Mashghara, March 26, 2019).

The Islamic Religious Education Association (Al-Mustafa schools)

Al-Mustafa Schools: overview

Al-Mustafa school in Tyre
(website of the Al-Mustafa schools)

The Islamic Religious Education Association was established by Lebanese Shiite clerics in the late 1970s, before the establishment of Hezbollah. It set itself the goal of spreading Islamic (Shiite) education in state and private schools and training teachers for religious education. Subsequently, the Association established the network of the Al-Mustafa private schools. First, in 1984 (two years after the establishment of Hezbollah), Al-Mustafa High School was established in the Shiite neighborhood of Harat Hreik (in Beirut's southern suburb). Later on, further branches were established in the Bir Hassan neighborhood of the southern suburb (girls school), in Nabatieh, and in Tyre (in southern Lebanon) (Janoubia, August 22, 2017; Qantara.de, November 20, 2017). Thereafter, additional schools were established. **Sheikh Na'im Qassem, Hassan Nasrallah's deputy**, is prominent in the

operation of these schools. Qassem was among the founders of the Association and currently holds a senior position in the Association as well as in the Al-Mustafa School network (Janoubia, August 22, 2017; Qantara.de, November 20, 2017).

Emblem of the Al-Mustafa schools
(website of the Islamic Religious Education Association)

- The Al-Mustafa School network is probably headed by **Hajj Muhammad Samaha**, former director of the Religious Education Department in the Islamic Religious Education Association (Lebanese Forces website, September 10, 2017; Lubnan website, November 6, 2018). There are **education bureaus** which are subordinate to the Association, in Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the Bekaa Valley. These bureaus engage in guiding state and private schools on the subject of Islamic studies. Their "educational" activity takes place not only in schools belonging to the Al-Mustafa network, but also in other Shiite schools.
- Students from kindergarten until high school graduation attend the Al-Mustafa School network. In most cases, the same branch includes educational institutions for various age groups (for instance, the Al-Mustafa high school branch in Tyre includes a kindergarten, an elementary school, a junior high school and a high school). **The Al-Mustafa School network includes at least four kindergartens** (1,318 students in the 2017-2018 school year), **five elementary schools** (3,581 students in the 2017-2018 school year), **four junior high schools** (1,357 students in the 2017-2018 school year), and **four high schools** (892 students in the 2017-2018 school year) (Al-Mahdi Schools website; Al-Mustafa Schools website; website of the Research and Development Center in the Lebanese Ministry of Education).
- The values with which students in the Al-Mustafa Schools are indoctrinated are similar to those of the Al-Mahdi Schools. According to descriptions provided by two students of the network branch in Harat Hreik (in Beirut's southern suburb), **Hezbollah flags are waved in school and there are photos of Khomeini and Khamenei there**. The school holds many activities **designed to honor sons and daughters of shahids** (whose tuition is free) and **students are called upon to take part in political activities organized by Hezbollah**. Thus,

for instance, in 2007, the school management called on the students to participate in the demonstration of the March 8 Alliance (a camp of opposition parties and organizations) against the government of Fouad Seniora, and even arranged for transportation (Qantara.de, November 20, 2017).

The Al-Mustafa School network **is more elitist than the Al-Mahdi Schools and the standard of education there is high**. Tuition in these schools is considered relatively high. **These schools are attended by children of rich families close to Hezbollah as well as the sons and daughters of senior Hezbollah figures** (Al-Mahdi Schools' website; the website of the Islamic Religious Education Association; Ya Sour, June 29, 2014; Janoubia, August 22, 2017; Al-Akhbar, September 27, 2017).

As noted already, the values of the Islamic Revolution and loyalty to Hezbollah are instilled also in Shiite schools which do not belong to the Al-Mustafa network. They are instilled by the educational bureaus of the Islamic Religious Education Association. The Association published figures (updated to the 2016-2017 school year), according to which **52,878 students [of Shiite schools] in Beirut, 48,644 students in southern Lebanon, and 35,788 in the Bekaa Valley were exposed to its contents and influence** (website of the Islamic Religious Education Association).

The educational teachings of Sheikh Na'im Qassem, a prominent figure in the operation of the Al-Mustafa schools

Hezbollah's Deputy Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem
(Sheikh Naim Qassem's official website, February 9, 2017)

Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary-general, is the dominant figure in the Al-Mustafa School network. The sheikh preaches to establish a "Resistance Society" among the Shiite community, i.e., a Hezbollah-influenced society which will support Hezbollah's struggle against Israel. The "jihadi education" of the Shiite youngsters, according

to Sheikh Naim Qassem's teachings, is intended to support the "Resistance Society" and prepare the Shiite younger generation to join the ranks of Hezbollah.

In his book entitled "The Resistance Society," Sheikh Naim Qassem addresses **the "jihadi education" and the value of Shahada**, with which students in Hezbollah's schools are indoctrinated. **The "jihadi education,"** the sheikh writes, affects the youngsters' way of thinking, triggers enthusiasm and willingness for self-sacrifice among them, **and distinguishes Hezbollah from the rest of the Islamic movements. Shahada** (i.e., willingness to sacrifice oneself and become a shahid), the sheikh says, is an expression of respect to the family and inspires the youth to make the extra effort in order to win "divine success." The "jihadi education" and Shahada prove effective and enable carrying out [Hezbollah's] campaign with a great deal of sacrifice (p. 34). The education provided by Hezbollah creates self-confidence and belief in the immediate victory or in the future victory by Imam Al-Mahdi, "may Allah speed his revelation" (pp. 39-40).

The funding of Hezbollah's educational institutions

The ongoing activity of Hezbollah's educational institutions and the establishment of large-scale infrastructure among the Shiite community throughout Lebanon **involve high financial expenses.** In the ITIC's assessment, like other similar social foundations of Hezbollah, **so are the educational institutions financed by Iran**. Other funding sources are tuition in the schools, fundraising, and Islamic charitable projects (website of the Al-Mahdi schools; Janoubia, August 22, 2017).

The Al-Mahdi school network is considered one with reasonable tuition in comparison to other private schools in Lebanon with similar standards of education. **Therefore, the lower class among the Shiite community sends its children to study there**. Furthermore, it is the network's policy to grant scholarships to outstanding students (up to 50% of the tuition) and to the needy. On the other hand, **in the Al-Mustafa School network, tuition is relatively high** and the students there are children of Hezbollah's senior figures as well as children of businessmen financing Hezbollah's activity. In return for the tuition fee, students are also provided with medical insurance and medical treatments (website of the Al-Mahdi Schools; website of the Islamic Religious Education Association; Ya Sour, June 29, 2014; Janoubia, August 2, 2017; Al-Akhbar, September 27, 2017).

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)
- **"The Imam Al-Mahdi Scouts Association**: Hezbollah's youth movement which indoctrinates generations of youth with Iranian radical Shiite Islam; former members of the Association join Hezbollah and fight in its ranks against Israel" (July 11, 2019)