



# Hezbollah's media empire

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## Overview<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **Hezbollah constructs a Shiite “mini-state” among the Shiite community in Lebanon, which caters to the needs of Shiite inhabitants in all spheres of life.** For this purpose, Hezbollah, with massive Iranian support, is engaged in establishing a civilian system, which operates alongside its military wing, in the spheres of education, culture, health, welfare, finance, sports, construction, agriculture, and more.
- ▶ The social institutions established by Hezbollah and the intensive civilian activity provide Shiite residents with a wide variety of services of the sort which is usually provided by the state, while taking advantage of the weakness of the Lebanese central government and years of neglect of the Shiite community. Hezbollah's extensive civilian activity **is designed to create among the Shiites in Lebanon a “resistance society” which supports Hezbollah in its struggle against Israel.**<sup>2</sup> In the background, there is a neglect suffered by the Shiite community in Lebanon for generations.
- ▶ The “resistance society,” created by Hezbollah **with massive Iranian support**, is based on three legs: **The first leg is Hezbollah's military system.** This system is designed to operate against Israel but also supports Hezbollah's hold of the Shiite population. The military system places Hezbollah in a political power position in the internal Lebanese scene and provides it with major influence on the decision-making process in Lebanon; **the second leg** is a large-scale network of institutions contributing to the improvement of the socioeconomic situation of the Shiite population and strengthening its support of Hezbollah; **and the third leg is a media empire** which plays an important role in disseminating the ideology and political messages of Iran and Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Middle East and throughout the rest of the world. **Such an extensive media empire in the possession of a**

<sup>1</sup> This document is an overview of the study. The rest of the document is currently under translation.

<sup>2</sup> Sheikh Naim Qassem, Hassan Nasrallah's deputy, described Hezbollah's social concept as follows: “Resistance, on our part, is a social worldview with all its aspects: military, cultural, political, and media-related resistance” (Naim Qassem, “Resistance Society: The Will of Shahada and the Creation of Victory,” Dar Al-Maaref al-Hikmiyah, 2008, p. 8).

**terrorist organization is unprecedented among terrorist organizations operating around the world.**

Hezbollah's media empire **is directed by the Media Relations Unit**, headed by **Hajj Muhammad Afif**, who is also Hassan Nasrallah's media advisor. **Hezbollah has an extensive infrastructure of traditional media outlets (a TV channel, radio station, and newspapers), websites, and social media. In addition, prominent media outlets in Lebanon consistently support Hezbollah's media strategy.** This media infrastructure **serves as an efficient instrument for the dissemination of propaganda messages to all the target audiences, based on a uniform media strategy serving Hezbollah and Iran.** In the ITIC's assessment, the operation of Hezbollah's extensive media infrastructure, with the Al-Manar TV Channel as the most important media outlet, **involves an annual expense of tens of millions of dollars.** In the ITIC's assessment, **most of the expenses of Hezbollah's media empire, including the Al-Manar TV Channel, are financed by Iran.** Indeed, the media layout has revenues of its own (obtained from advertising and donations). However, **the scope of advertising on the Al-Manar Channel is rather low**, and it is evident that this is not the channel's main funding source.

► Hezbollah's media system is directed at **large target audiences around the globe in four languages.** Hezbollah's main target audience is **the Lebanese population.** In second place, there are **audiences in the Arab / Muslim world**, mainly countries and organizations supporting the Iranian axis). In third place, **there are target audiences throughout the world** (mainly English and French speaking Western countries and Spanish speaking Latin American countries). All Hezbollah's media outlets **operate in Arabic. The two main media outlets, the Al-Manar TV Channel and Al-Ahed newspaper, also operate in English, French and Spanish.**



Right: “Now... the Al-Manar Channel comes to you wherever you are around the globe” (a promo which was broadcast on the Al-Manar Channel on June 10, 2004). Left: Logo of the Al-Manar Channel.

- ▶ Hezbollah’s **most important and highest quality** media outlet is the **Al-Manar TV Channel, broadcasting in four languages:** Arabic, English, French, and Spanish. It has also its own website. The channel broadcasts via **four satellites: three Russian and one Indonesian.** The most prominent topic in the content of the Al-Manar broadcasts is **Hezbollah** (“the resistance”). The channel also broadcasts **Iranian content** (the Islamic Revolution, tourist sites in Iran, Iranian films dubbed in Arabic or with Arabic subtitles) **and Shiite content** (prayers and ceremonies).
- ▶ The Al-Manar Channel is Hezbollah’s main media outlet, reporting on news items, cultivating the personality cult of Hassan Nasrallah, inculcating Hezbollah’s ideology, engaging in the glorification of shahids, preaching loyalty to the Islamic Revolution in Iran and its leaders, and engaging in propaganda and psychological warfare (which are mainly aimed at the State of Israel, the pro-Western Arab countries, the United States, and other Western countries). The Al-Manar Channel is a major instrument which supports Hezbollah’s fighting in times of tension or during war.



The Al-Manar TV Channel, Hezbollah's leading media outlet: screenshot of a report on a telegram sent by Nasrallah to Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif (Al-Manar TV Channel, August 15, 2019)

- The Al-Manar Channel has a correspondent in the Gaza Strip, Imad Eid, who is also the director of the Al-Manar office in the Gaza Strip. The channel also has **two correspondents in Judea and Samaria**, operating from Ramallah: **Khaled al-Faqih and Dib Horani**. In the ITIC's assessment, the media activity of the Al-Manar correspondents from Ramallah **could not take place without the Palestinian Authority's approval**.
- In January 2018, the US Department of the Treasury added the Al-Manar Channel and Radio Nour, two main Hezbollah media outlets, to the list of Hezbollah's sanctioned institutions. However, it appears that the rest of Hezbollah's media outlets, the Media Relations Unit and prominent figures in Hezbollah's media network **are not included in the US sanctions list**. Since 2004, France, Egypt and Saudi Arabia stopped providing satellite services to the Al-Manar Channel, and several countries (including Germany) **banned the channel's broadcasts on their territory**. However, measures against the Al-Manar Channel in the international and inter-Arab arena proved ineffective, as Hezbollah found alternatives – satellite services which it receives from Russia and Indonesia.
- Hezbollah maintains considerable presence on social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter. It has many hundreds of profiles, pages and accounts, inciting terrorism and disseminating the ideology of Hezbollah and Iran. In 2018, accounts of Hezbollah on Facebook and Twitter were blocked several times. However, Hezbollah continues using these networks while violating their terms of use. Thus, **in practice, Hezbollah's presence on Facebook and Twitter continues as usual without any significant damage**.

## Inciting terrorism against the United States on a Twitter account affiliated with Hezbollah



**Right:** Photo showing the devastation of the US Embassy in Lebanon after the detonation of a car bomb by Hezbollah (April 18, 1983). The following text was attached to the photo: “This is how embassies should be disciplined. This is what Imad [Mughniyeh] taught us.” (Twitter account of Amani Amar, August 8, 2019). **Left:** Map of Hezbollah’s targets in Israel, presented by Hezbollah’s Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in one of his interviews. The following text is attached to the photo: “It [i.e., the US Embassy in Lebanon] should be on the map of obliteration” (“The Eyes of the Axis of Resistance” Twitter account, August 7, 2019).

► **Has Hezbollah’s media empire sustained damage as a result of the economic crisis in Iran?** The Lebanese Al-Modon news website recently published a report entitled “Hezbollah’s economic crisis: cuts in the budget in order to carry on with the war mechanism” (August 19, 2019). According to the report, **one of the fields which sustained damage as a result of the economic crisis is Hezbollah’s media.** According to the same report, some Hezbollah media employees suffer from delays in the payment of their salaries, lack of permanent employment, and ad hoc employment methods. However, the reliability of this information is doubtful. According to the findings of an examination carried out by the ITIC (August 2019), **no impairment is evident in Hezbollah’s media layout.** The Al-Manar TV Channel and the Al-Nour Radio station continue their broadcasts without any significant changes. Hezbollah’s websites as well as the Al-Ahed news website are kept up-to-date on a regular basis (once every few minutes). The Baqiyyatullah magazine is also issued regularly, every month. **In the ITIC’s assessment, the reason for all this is the high priority of Hezbollah’s media layout in the eyes of Iran and Hezbollah.**

## Structure of the study<sup>3</sup>

► The study includes the following sections:

- ◆ Hezbollah's Media Relations Unit
- ◆ The leading media outlet: Al-Manar TV Channel
- ◆ The Al-Nour Radio station
- ◆ Newspapers and magazines: the Al-Ahed newspaper and Baqiyyatullah magazine
- ◆ Hezbollah's official websites
- ◆ Hezbollah's presence on social media
- ◆ Lebanese media outlets supporting Hezbollah
- ◆ The international and inter-Arab campaign against Hezbollah's media empire
- ◆ **Appendix:** The ITIC's publications on Hezbollah's civilian infrastructure

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