



Urban Warfare Analysis Center

Hezbollah's Use of Arab Media to Galvanize Support

Josh Lyons • 30 July 2008



Urban Warfare Analysis Center • 1821 Airport Rd. • Shawnee, OK 74804 • (405) 273-3035

Executive Summary

Hezbollah utilizes a multifaceted media campaign to garner support from the Arab world and bolster its ability to wage urban warfare. The flagship of this media campaign is Hezbollah's television station, al-Manar. Millions of viewers watch it everyday, and it has vehicle-borne transmitters to allow it to transmit despite missile attacks from the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). Hezbollah also has a newspaper (al-Intiqad) and radio station (an-Nour), which reach thousands more.

Flag of Hezbollah



The research for this report, conducted almost exclusively in Arabic, revealed three dominant themes from Hezbollah's media outlets: undermining Israel, criticizing the United States, and reinforcing Hezbollah's nationalist goals and credentials. The success of this media strategy was most evident during the 2006 war with Israel, when initial blame for starting the war was quickly replaced by widespread support for Hezbollah against Israel. Hezbollah's ability to win the media war gives it three primary advantages when waging urban warfare:

- **Shaping perceptions of the conflict.** This can prompt local and international observers to understand the cause of the conflict in terms that favor Hezbollah.
- **Gaining military and political support.** Perceiving Hezbollah as having the moral high ground often leads to tangible support for the war effort.
- **Enlisting assistance from local noncombatants.** Noncombatants who assist the war effort, regardless of the nature or extent of that aid, provide Hezbollah tremendous advantages in urban environments.

Scope Note

The author relied primarily on Arabic language sources for this report. In particular, primary sources included the websites of al-Manar, an-Nour, and al-Intiqad. It was impractical to review every press release, radio announcement, and television program produced by Hezbollah's various media outlets. Thus, the most carefully scrutinized source was the al-Manar website because of its extensive archive of speeches by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and other Hezbollah-related articles.

I. Hezbollah's Media Outlets

Hezbollah has created a media network that allows it to influence public opinion in most parts of the world. Not only does it contribute to Arab media powerhouses such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, but it also owns and operates its own news outlets. As a result, Hezbollah has the capability to reach everyone from Saudi sympathizers in Riyadh to college students in America via satellite and the Internet.

Al-Manar is Hezbollah's satellite television channel. Al-Manar, which means "The Beacon" in English, is broadcast via two major satellites: NileSat in Egypt and ArabSat in Saudi Arabia.¹ It operates 24 hours per day. During the 2006 war with Israel, al-Manar was the third most watched channel in the Arab world, just behind al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera. Since the conflict, its ratings have stabilized to between fifth and seventh on the list, garnering tens of millions of viewers everyday.²

- Due to its popularity, al-Manar's headquarters in southern Beirut is subject to periodic missile attacks by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The damage caused by these missiles has done little to deter al-Manar's capabilities, however. When interruptions in service occur, Hezbollah simply broadcasts its signal via a vehicle-borne transmitter, making it difficult to target.
- Al-Manar has a popular website as well. Almanar.com is produced in Arabic, English, and French. Like most Arabic news sites, its content often changes at its English language site. It is difficult to know the exact number of readers attracted to the website on a consistent basis. Its weekly poll, however, averages close to 20,000 participants.

Al-Intiqad ("The Objection") and an-Nour ("The Light") are Hezbollah's newspaper and radio station respectively. Transcripts of radio reports are also available in print and online, which attract between 500 and 800 readers weekly. The size of an-Nour's readership is unknown, but its weekly poll averages about 3,000 participants.

In addition to its media outlets, Hezbollah has taken additional, creative measures to spread its message. *Special Force* is an interactive video game released in 2003 designed to appeal to younger audiences. Recreating real Hezbollah and IDF battles, players are offered the chance to defend the homeland against the "Zionist Enemy," with the ultimate goal of becoming a martyr for Islam. The game costs only ten dollars, and it sold out its initial release of 8,000 copies in one week.

- Due to its immense popularity, a second game was developed four years later. *Special Force II: Tale of the Truthful Pledge* was so anticipated copies had to be pre-ordered. The popularity of these games spawned copycat versions by al-Qaeda, the government of Syria, and the IDF.

II. Hezbollah's Message

Hezbollah utilizes its vast media network to achieve three fundamental goals: undermine Israel, criticize the United States, and reinforce the nationalist credibility of the organization and its leadership.

A) Undermine Israel

The speeches of Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, are replete with threats and derogatory sentiments aimed at Israel's government, defense forces, and overall security. He often flaunts Hezbollah's ability to strike anywhere in Israel at anytime.

- For Example, in an interview aired on al-Jazeera in July 2007, Nasrallah claimed: "In July and August (2006), there was no place in occupied Palestine which was out of the reach of the resistance missiles. Tel Aviv or elsewhere, we were certain that we could reach any corner or spot in occupied Palestine and now we are certain that we can reach them [Israel]."³



Nasrallah also perpetuates the rhetoric that Israel must be expelled from "occupied Palestine" and even eliminated altogether as the only means for lasting peace in the region. He spoke of this in a speech in December 2007, saying:

"Resistance is the only way...with the spirit of self-sacrifice. We will not leave, but we will stay in our lands, in our villages and in our cities, even if our homes are destroyed. We will not tolerate the Israeli program, so with resistance, as I promised in the past, we will go from victory to victory, and it will come with the help of intelligence, of blood, and of will."⁴

Hezbollah also uses its media outlets to perpetuate propaganda against Israel. Al-Manar television is known for breaking stories of captured IDF soldiers long before any other media outlet. The station also distorts reports from Israeli newscasts that contain stories of political uncertainty in the country. It takes these stories, puts its own spin on them, and rebroadcasts the distorted story in Hebrew to the Israeli audience.

- For example, Nassim Nisr was a Lebanese detainee in Ramallah for six years. He was released by Israel in February 2008. Al-Manar claimed he was released "in exchange for the body parts of IDF soldiers."⁵ Israel, in contrast, claimed Nisr was released purely for legal reasons. Still, the Israeli government was bombarded with pleas from families of missing IDF soldiers for the release of other detainees in the hopes of possible reconciliation, as most of these families had no knowledge of the status of the missing soldiers.

- Hezbollah has even attempted to pin international terrorism on the Moussad and IDF. For example, Hezbollah has promoted the perception that these two forces were behind the attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001.

B) Criticize the United States

Nasrallah makes no qualms of his disdain for President Bush and his administration. He has said that he is honored to be an enemy of the President, as stated here in a speech given in January 2008:

“I won’t hide it, I felt honored when Bush spoke about Hezbollah and resistance movements because when Pharaoh [America] and the Great Satan [Israel] accuse us and consider us enemies, it is an honor for us.”⁶

It is Hezbollah’s intent to portray the U.S. as untrustworthy and hypocritical to the Lebanese populace. As a result, Nasrallah dismisses any foreign aid or support to Lebanon from the Bush Administration. He also rejects the U.S. position that Iran has had the greatest negative effect in the region. For example, Nasrallah said the following during an interview on Al-Manar television in January 2008:

“Do you really believe the Americans? What if they are lying to you? Are you sure of the consequences if Iran were attacked?”⁷ In an interview several days later, he added: “It is impossible to rely on assistance from the United States. They will fail you as they are failures. The Iraqis – Shia and Sunni – who took part in the political process (in Iraq) wanted to give it a chance. But now the real American goal in Iraq has been exposed. The Americans allowed the elections and the formation of a parliament and government so that they get an Iraqi legitimization of the occupation.”⁸

Hezbollah also works tirelessly to discredit the United States’ desired position as a unifying force in Lebanon. In many speeches and interviews, Nasrallah suggests the current Lebanese government is aligned too closely with America, thus serving to divide the region. Referring specifically to the Lebanese ruling bloc, Nasrallah said the following in January 2008:

“I know that some of them [ruling bloc members] if they were left alone and in peace by the U.S. and other foreign powers, they would agree to form a national unity government because they have interests in putting an end to the deadlock. However, the United States is preventing this from happening because Washington considers the formation of a national unity government or holding early elections a blow to the U.S. tutelage and interference in the political decision making process in Lebanon.”⁹

Nasrallah also exploits the commonly held belief in Lebanon that the United States’ only concern in Lebanon and Palestine is for the welfare of Israel and its fighters. He constantly makes references to President Bush’s visits to the families of captured Israeli soldiers, saying that Bush is more concerned with these few families than he is for the tens of thousands of Arabs who suffer daily. Nasrallah points out that Arab families are the ones “whose sons, fathers, and grandfathers are imprisoned under much harsher circumstances” in Israeli jails.¹⁰ Nasrallah also proclaims that the U.S. is dominated by Christian Zionists, who believe that supporting Israel and the rise of a Jewish state is a precondition for the return of Jesus Christ to earth.

C) Reinforce Nationalistic Credibility

Hezbollah's third primary media goal is the affirmation of the organization and its leadership as a nationalist entity. Hezbollah portrays the image that it is dedicated to the welfare of Lebanon as a whole and not just the betterment of the local Shia population. Nasrallah often contends in his public addresses that Hezbollah is not a proponent of the civil war and the continuous political unrest that plagues his country. Conversely, he says that Hezbollah strives to unify Lebanon, not divide it.

- For example, speaking at a commencement ceremony in Beirut in September 2007, Nasrallah said, "We [Hezbollah] don't want a civil war. If we are to choose between the continuation of the stalemate for a while until a solution is found and going to civil war, then let the stalemate continue."¹¹

Hezbollah's professed mantra is that it wants to give power to the people of Lebanon and then trust them to do what is best for the country, which further burnishes Hezbollah's nationalist credentials and reassures its political opponents. Hezbollah also advocates the use of elections and other democratic means to solve political disputes. Nasrallah maintains that Hezbollah is not attempting to insert itself as the new national government, often saying, "We [Hezbollah] don't want power or authority, we don't want to rule Lebanon."¹² Even though it has garnered many seats in the Lebanese parliament, Nasrallah frequently denounces accusations that his organization is trying to install an Iranian-style regime in Lebanon. He claims that Hezbollah is for a "Lebanon of diversity and pluralism," and that it will do its best to preserve this ideal.¹³

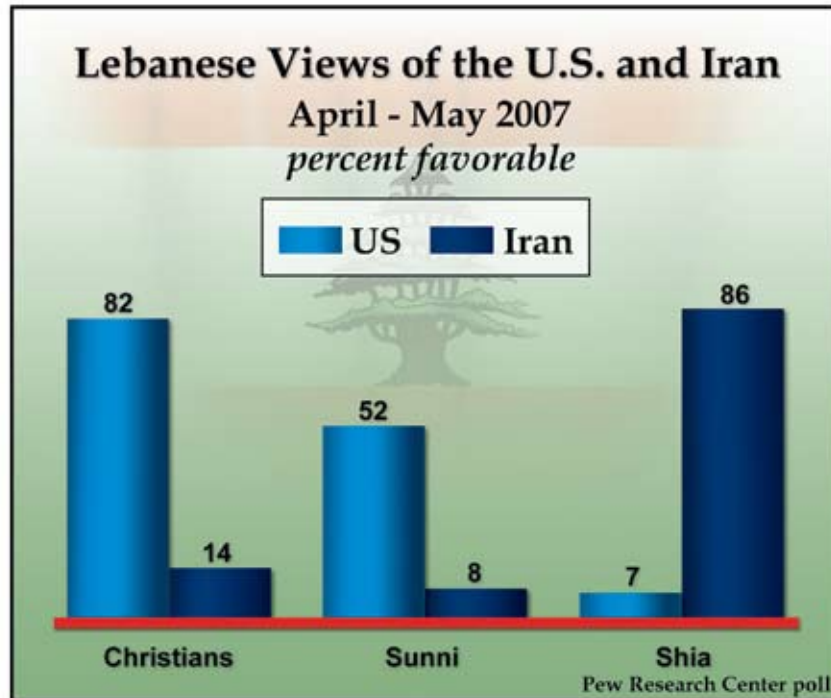
Hezbollah also reaffirms that it is ready to maintain its democratic course in the future with the goal of restoring Lebanon's political identity. "They [the ruling bloc] do not want a national army. They want a sectarian one they can manipulate," he says. "But the Army [Hezbollah] will not give in to the rule of these leaders."¹⁴ Lebanon's newly elected president, General Michel Suleiman, appears to be a potential source of support for Hezbollah, having said that he would like to "benefit from the lessons of the resistance [Hezbollah] to serve the nation."¹⁵

III. Success of Hezbollah's Media Strategy

The success of Hezbollah's multi-faceted media approach was most evident during the 2006 war with Israel. During this conflict, Hezbollah effectively united most of the Arab world against Israel via its media campaign, despite being blamed at first for starting the war. It portrayed the attacks perpetuated by Israel as disproportionate and indiscriminate, playing on the sympathies of all Arabs who oppose Israel. Nasrallah welcomed reporters and journalists to his country so they could see first hand the impact of the Israeli bombing. The photographs and images produced by these media outlets sparked a wave of support from all Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Somalia. It is estimated by the United Nations that Somalia alone contributed at least 700 fighters to the cause after seeing these images and reading reports.¹⁶

- By virtue of gaining the support of the media in the war, Hezbollah was able to galvanize the Shia and Sunni Muslim communities, a feat rarely achieved in the past. The 2006 war became more than just a war between Hezbollah and Israel, but a multinational Islamic assault by the "Zionist Entity."

- Various media outlets brought this war to the ravenous Arab consumer, who tuned in incessantly to view the latest developments from the front. Hezbollah's own al-Manar witnessed a significant jump in ratings, catapulting it from number 83 on the ratings list into the top ten of preferred Arab news channels.



Beyond the 2006 war, *Operation Sincere Promise* and *Jihad for Reconstruction* are two of Hezbollah's most successful initiatives in terms of media support. *Operation Sincere Promise* is Nasrallah's ongoing campaign to return all captured Lebanese soldiers to their homeland. It is used in part to portray Hezbollah's alleged dominance over Israel. When a phase of this program is completed, it occupies the top story on both al-Manar television and the website.

Jihad for Reconstruction is Hezbollah's civic outreach program. This effort has produced or rebuilt numerous schools, mosques, and houses in some of Lebanon's poorest neighborhoods, especially immediately after the 2006 war. Media reports often include local Lebanese residents praising Hezbollah for its support.

IV. Implications

Hezbollah's effective media strategy garners it many advantages when conducting urban warfare. In fact, its combined ability to wage war in urban areas and influence public opinion within and beyond Lebanon give it almost unquestioned authority in parts of Lebanon. For example, the Lebanese Army refused to fight when ordered to interdict Hezbollah's telecommunications system in West Beirut in May 2008.

Below are three ways that Hezbollah's media network enables it to wage urban warfare more effectively.

A) *Shaping Perceptions of Urban Battles*

Hezbollah is able to mold the public's perception of conflict in a manner that favors the organization. This was proven during the 2006 war. Hezbollah still has these same media outlets and capabilities in place. Due to the overwhelming success of these measures, it is highly probable that Hezbollah will utilize these same tools in future conflicts.

B) *Gaining Military and Political Support from the Arab World*

It was evident during the 2006 war with Israel that other Arab nations will respond to Hezbollah's media strategy and swiftly rally around Hezbollah when it is entangled with an enemy perceived as a threat to Islam. Foreign Arab fighters swelled Hezbollah's ranks during the conflict. Financial assistance flooded into the organization, most notably from Iran, whose government provided over \$500 million to aid the cause.¹⁷

- Historically, Iran and Syria have funneled financial resources to Hezbollah, preferring this method of support over the direct deployment of troops to the region.
- Eager for greater Sunni influence in the region, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia also contributed \$800 million to the relief fund, with an additional \$1.5 billion to the Bank of Lebanon intended to give the nation's currency a lift.¹⁸

C) *Enlisting Assistance from Local Noncombatants*

Hezbollah has the ability to influence the local populace through its media sources, an effective strategy utilized in the 2006 war. Lebanese citizens who were not necessarily pro-Hezbollah were swayed to join its efforts to expel the foreign "invaders" from the country. Thus, Hezbollah's media efforts give it a tremendous advantage in winning the hearts and minds of the local population.

- Thanks to the significant financial assistance from other Arab nations, Hezbollah paid between \$10,000 and \$12,000 to each displaced family affected by the war.¹⁹ It also marketed these efforts to maximum effect. This won significant support for Hezbollah from the local population, further bolstering its influence in the region.

Opinion Poll in Lebanon after 2006 War with Israel

		General Average	Sunni	Shiite	Druze	Christian	
First Question	Did you support the resistance's move to capture two Israeli soldiers for a prisoners swap?	Yes	70.1%	73.1%	96.3%	40.1%	54.7%
		No	29.9%	26.9%	3.7%	59.9%	45.3%
Second Question	Do you support the confrontations carried out by the resistance against the Israeli aggression against Lebanon ?	Yes	86.9%	88.9%	96.3%	79.5%	80.3%
		No	11.8%	11.1%	3.7%	13.7%	17.5%
		Don't Know	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	2.2%
Third Question	Do you believe that Israel will defeat the resistance?	Yes	28.4%	24.6%	6.5%	34.1%	44.7%
		No	63.3%	72.2%	93.5%	54.5%	38.15
		Don't Know	8.3%	3.2%	0.0%	11.4%	17.2%
Fourth Question	Do you believe that the United States and Israel will succeed in imposing their conditions to reach a cease-fire?	Yes	35.5%	27.8%	7.9%	48.5%	57.8%
		No	56.9%	69.0%	90.7%	40.1%	28.1%
		Don't Know	7.6%	3.2%	1.4%	11.4%	14.1%
Fifth Question	Do you believe that the United States plays the role of the honest mediator in this war?	Yes	7.8%	6.0%	3.7%	11.4%	11.2%
		No	89.5%	91.7%	94.4%	88.6%	85.0%
		Don't Know	2.7%	2.3%	1.9%	0.0%	3.8%
Sixth Question	Do you believe that the US adopted a positive stand regarding Lebanon in this war?	Yes	9.5%	7.9%	2.3%	13.6%	15.0%
		No	85.6%	87.0%	96.3%	81.8%	87.1%
		Don't Know	4.9%	5.1%	1.4%	4.6%	6.9%
Seventh Question	Do you believe that the Lebanese government's political and diplomatic movement is enough to face the assault?	Yes	33.5%	33.4%	17.2%	40.9%	43.7%
		No	64.3%	64.8%	82.8%	59.1%	51.9%
		Don't Know	2.2%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	4.4%
Eighth Question	Do you believe the government assumed its responsibility to relieve the displaced?	Yes	42.8%	38.5%	17.1%	50.1%	61.9%
		No	54.0%	58.3%	80.1%	45.5%	34.7%
		Don't Know	3.2%	3.2%	2.8%	4.5%	3.4%

The Daily Star 29/07/2006

End Notes

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