



## New Media and Information Effects During the 33 Day War

*This case study was developed for a workshop on “New Media and the War Fighter” organised by The SecDev Group for Centre for Strategic Leadership, United States Army War College (January 15-17, 2008). The case study considers Israeli and Hezbollah attempts to “leverage” new media to produce and control “information effects” in order to score symbolic, moral or “morale” wins. A full workshop report will be available from The SecDev Group in July 2007. Please contact [info@secdev.ca](mailto:info@secdev.ca) if you wish to be put on the distribution list. The case study was prepared by Rafal Rohozinski.*

### Case Study # 2: Leveraging New Media Effects

During the 33 day war, Hezbollah demonstrated a refined capability to leverage new media to create positive informational effects. New media using digital photography, videos, cellular networks and the Internet were used by all parties: the press, Israeli and Lebanese civilians, IDF soldiers, the IDF, and Hezbollah. As one analyst notes, “The ease and speed of transmission (not to mention the ease of “touching up” photos) of these images provide another aspect of the war. Israeli soldiers sending MMS messages home, Hezbollah and the IDF distributing videos of the fighting, civilians<sup>1</sup> posting photos on blogs and websites, most notably YouTube. Satiric flash movies, humiliating Hezbollah and Nasrallah were posted on YouTube<sup>2</sup>. Computer games, primarily flash based, were produced by Israeli civilians during the war. It thus seems that these media tools are becoming a permanent fixture in violent conflict; they are ubiquitous and almost impossible to control.”<sup>3</sup>

However, on this playing field, Hezbollah clearly outpaced the IDF. Hezbollah’s information strategy formed an integral and integrated component of its overall military strategy. Hezbollah’s information “wins” reflected its heavy investment in a robust (because redundant), flexible and professional broadcast and Internet capability. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://news.nana10.co.il/Category/?CategoryID=10654&sid=126> provides a sample of civilian video

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llp1iob9fEA>

<sup>3</sup> DAHAN, D. M. (2007) The “Infosphere” during the second Lebanon Israel War (Summary of research). IN ROHOZINSKI, R. (Ed.) Cambridge, The SecDev Group.

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent analysis of new media and its implications for confronting asymmetrical actors, see, RID, D. T. (2007) War 2.0. *Policy Review*. Stanford, Hoover Institution.

## A. Hezbollah's Information War

While Hezbollah may be best known internationally for its military wing, the movement has deep national roots, strongly grounded in the Shia communities of South Lebanon. Hezbollah's mantle of resistance to Israel's occupation of the south formed part of a broader "patriotic" Lebanese agenda, while also serving to strengthen Shia political claims within Lebanon's confessional system of government. While Hezbollah is an Islamic Shia organization, it is also highly pragmatic, and does not seek to impose Islamic mores on the broader Lebanese society. This restraint has won Hezbollah considerable support from a broad cross-section of moderate Lebanese patriots including, significantly, from within the Christian community.<sup>5</sup>

Hezbollah's emphasis on communications goes to the core political objectives of the organization. Hezbollah leverages new media in all aspects of its work as a political, military and social organization. Hezbollah's military strategy, generally, has been to make up for its military limitations by generating strategic informational effects. Recognizing the enormous popular appeal of being an "underdog" in relation to the Israeli army, Hezbollah has popularized a "narrative of resistance" against perceived Israeli aggression against Lebanon/Palestinians. War objectives focus on "winning by not losing," and scoring "political" triumphs.

Hezbollah possesses the largest media organization of any political party the Middle East region and has the capacity to directly reach a population of 200 million viewers via satellite broadcast, with a further unlimited number via its many affiliated and associated web site and blogs.<sup>6</sup> Its media flagship – al Manar -- dedicates some 25% of its production capacity to "resistance" music and entertainment programmes, many of them glorifying Hezbollah military prowess. Al Manar distributes its video productions through a wide network of associated sites.<sup>7</sup> This content is then picked up by large networks of others – supporters or simply the curious -- and re-posted to YouTube and other video sharing sites. Hezbollah also created popular first-person "shooter" video games that reinforced the "resistance" narrative, while building up a warrior ethos among its young followers.

Because Hezbollah's own and associated new media resources are wide-ranging and globally dispersed, they are difficult to track or shut down by legal or conventional technical means. Moreover the low cost of operations and willingness of audience members to replicate and further distribute content makes the elimination of Hezbollah's informational reach difficult to achieve without a truly global agreement.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2006/02/full\\_english\\_te.php](http://yalibnan.com/site/archives/2006/02/full_english_te.php)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.meforum.org/article/583>

<sup>7</sup> ERLICH, R. & KAHATI, Y. (2007) Hezbollah as a case study of the battle for hearts and minds. Hezeliya, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Cente (Israel).

Hezbollah's well-honed media instrument was put to effective use during the 33 day war. Hezbollah's information strategy appears to have been focused on undermining the credibility and reliability of the Israeli accounts of the war in the eyes of all audiences (especially the Lebanese and Israeli audiences).

Hezbollah rapidly and accurately reported battlefield incidents, which were packaged into multi media products and distributed via the Hezbollah network and beyond in multiple languages. These reports established the credibility of Hezbollah's news products with a wide-range of internal and external audiences.<sup>8</sup> Reports prepared and broadcast or electronically disseminated in Hebrew signalled Hezbollah's deliberate targeting of Israeli domestic audiences, and indeed, Hezbollah reports were picked up and re-reported by Israeli media sources.<sup>9</sup> By staying ahead of the Israeli reporting cycle, Hezbollah managed to undermine the Israeli public's faith in Israel's own reporting efforts.<sup>10</sup>

Spectacular tactical actions were staged, reported, packaged and timed for maximal strategic effect. For example, within minutes of Hezbollah's successful missile attack on the Israeli naval destroyer "Hanit"<sup>11</sup>, Hassan Nasrallah (Hezbollah's secretary general and chief spokesman) was on the air<sup>12</sup>, telling viewers to look to the sea to see the burning Israeli vessel. This was backed up by al Manar footage of the missile launch.<sup>13</sup> It took Israel some 24 hours before it confirmed the attack. By then, Israeli audiences already knew of it from the al Manar video and media coverage, which was carried globally through dense networks of new media.

Hezbollah's information efforts focused on "exposing" the destruction wrought by Israel (to stir popular outrage) as well as Israeli casualties (to undermine Israeli morale), while maintaining a strict silence about the conduct and status of Hezbollah forces and casualties (See Case Study #1).

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<sup>8</sup> "Hezbollah made use of Al Manar to appeal directly to Israeli civilians, and at one point during the war there was a brief, almost hallucinatory, live exchange between Israeli TV journalists on channel 10 and the Al Manar news anchor." DAHAN, D. M. (2007) The "Infosphere" during the second Lebanon Israel War (Summary of research). IN ROHOZINSKI, R. (Ed.) Cambridge, The SecDev Group.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> As Dahan observes, "Via Al Manar and other media outlets, Nasrallah was viewed by the Israeli public as being more credible than the Israeli media outlets. This was also the first war where Israeli citizens were more fully exposed to what was happening in Lebanon, in almost real time, via different media outlets. After the war this led to severe criticism of the media in Israel." Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/INS\\_Hanit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/INS_Hanit)

<sup>12</sup> <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4453514200120177857&q=hanit+nasrallah&total=1&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=0>

<sup>13</sup> <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4453514200120177857&q=hanit+nasrallah&total=1&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=0>

Hezbollah reaped “collateral benefits” from popular “outrage” at the physical destruction and casualties caused by IDF firepower.<sup>14</sup> IDF actions provided stunning visuals of war, as did the one million people who fled the south of Lebanon, along with the evacuation of foreign nationals by western nations. Hezbollah packaged and distributed gruesome photographs of destruction, which they released to the press and posted to blogs and photo-sharing sites. Graphic videos were assembled and posted to YouTube, and also to email lists that were circulated widely throughout the region.<sup>15</sup> These images, along with the seemingly callous remarks made by some senior Israeli leaders (see Breakout Group # 3) meant that the sympathy of the Arab street, and certain international audiences, tended to side with the “suffering” of the Lebanese people. This groundswell of sympathy for the Lebanese victims dovetailed in important ways with Hezbollah’s narrative of resistance against a disproportional IDF response. Such sympathetic views were widely evident in email campaigns, blogs and websites that were not in any way related to Hezbollah (or its affiliates), but which none the less amplified and enhanced the effectiveness of Hezbollah’s own informational strategy.<sup>16</sup>

Hezbollah’s information strategy was enhanced by careful management of press visits to sites of devastation, and in some cases the circulation of touched up photographs and deliberately staged events, although the latter resulted in “blowback” when third party “whistleblowers” revealed the falsifications<sup>17</sup> (see Breakout Group #3 – Countering New Media)

Beyond this, Hezbollah’s position was buttressed by the emergence of many Lebanese “bloggers” who provided real time details and photos of Israeli actions (note: a quarter of the Lebanese population is connected to the Internet<sup>18</sup>). As Lebanese “bloggers” outpaced mass media reporting, major media organizations began to quote them as news sources, with several incorporating blogs into their main news coverage.<sup>19</sup> Post-war, it

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<sup>14</sup> KALB, M. (2007) *The Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Assymetrical Conflict. Kennedy School of Government Faculty Working Paper Series.* Boston, MA, Harvard University.

<sup>15</sup> For an excellent analysis of Hezbollah’s military-political war strategy, see, CROOKE, A. & PERRY, M. (2006a) *How Hezbollah Defeated Israel: Part One -- Winning the Intelligence War. Asia Times*, CROOKE, A. & PERRY, M. (2006c) *How Hezbollah Defeated Israel: Part Two -- Winning the Ground War. Asia Times*, CROOKE, A. & PERRY, M. (2006b) *How Hezbollah defeated Israel: Part Three -- The Political War. Asia Times.*

<sup>16</sup> See, THOMAS, T. (2007) *Hezbollah, Israel and the Cyber PSYOP. IO Sphere*, 31-35. AND, KINNIBURGH, J. & DENNING, D. (2006) *Blogs and Military Information Strategy. IO Sphere*, 5-13.

<sup>17</sup> KALB, M. (2007) *The Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Assymetrical Conflict. Kennedy School of Government Faculty Working Paper Series.* Boston, MA, Harvard University.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm>

<sup>19</sup> WARD, W. (2007) *Uneasy Bedfellows: Bloggers and Mainstream: Media Report the Conflict in Lebanon. Arab Media & Society.*

was clear that despite stunning visual images, the scale of destruction was not as great as was first reported.<sup>20</sup>

Civil society and other non-state groups also leveraged new media to map the conflict, some of which worked to the benefit of Hezbollah. For example, several groups independently mapped incidents of Israeli air and artillery strikes, as well as Hezbollah rocket launches and posted the results to GoogleEarth.<sup>21</sup> These maps worked against Israeli interests by demonstrating the asymmetry in relative firepower used by the different sides, which reinforced the Hezbollah “underdog” image.

## **B. Israel’s efforts to leverage new media**

By contrast to Hezbollah’s integrated approach to strategically leverage old as well as new media, Israel’s efforts were more modest and less systematic. Instead, the IDF and Israeli establishment relied largely on conventional IO techniques, as well as “collateral support” from the traditional powerbase of the Israeli diaspora and pro-Israel supporters. The IDF made some limited use of new media. As one Israeli observer notes, “The Army spokesperson apparently uploaded morale building video clips to a local version of YouTube<sup>22</sup>, Flickr<sup>23</sup>. Indeed, YouTube and other video content sites served as a virtual extension of the battlefield and news reports fighting over the hearts and minds of the general, *local and global* publics”.<sup>24</sup>

As during the Palestinian Intifada, Israel made use of rapidly declassified intelligence to bolster its factual reporting.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of the conflict it released the names, addresses, cell phone numbers and call signs of close to 600 alleged Hezbollah fighters as proof that this number had been killed. By contrast Hezbollah claimed only 150 deaths.<sup>26</sup> Other sources contested the higher Israeli figure arguing that this was not supported by the

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<sup>20</sup> ARKIN, W. M. (2007) *Divining Victory: Airpower in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War* Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, Air University Press

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.earthblog.com/blog/archives/2006/07/israellebanon\\_c.html](http://www.earthblog.com/blog/archives/2006/07/israellebanon_c.html)

<sup>22</sup> Some movies were also openly uploaded by the IDF to YouTube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQz0NSsqF\\_I](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQz0NSsqF_I) (video was removed due to “terms of use violation”)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.tapuz.co.il/flix/myFlix.asp?id=2027766>

<sup>24</sup> DAHAN, D. M. (2007) The “Infosphere” during the second Lebanon Israel War (Summary of research). IN ROHOZINSKI, R. (Ed.) Cambridge, The SecDev Group.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.intelligence.org.il/>

<sup>26</sup> CROOKE, A. & PERRY, M. (2006a) How Hezbollah Defeated Israel: Part One -- Winning the Intelligence War. *Asia Times*, CROOKE, A. & PERRY, M. (2006c) How Hezbollah Defeated Israel: Part Two -- Winning the Ground War. *Asia Times*, CROOKE, A. & PERRY, M. (2006b) How Hezbollah defeated Israel: Part Three -- The Political War. *Asia Timnes*.

number of funerals held by Hezbollah (who are usually quick to celebrate martyred fighters). Israel also released video footage of Hezbollah rocket launches from built up areas and Israeli surgical strikes against specific targets of a military nature. While this footage was compelling, it could not compete with the abundant visual imagery of Israeli destruction of civilian property and loss of life. Moreover, IDF's clear tactical losses only served to reinforce the image of Hezbollah as a "surprisingly tough and efficient" force.

In fact, the majority of Israeli activity to leverage new media appears to have come from civil society-led initiatives, with only limited (overt) support from the government. These included Israel's extensive hasbara<sup>27</sup> (or "explanation") information networks, which targeted major mass media globally, with pro-Israeli Op-Eds, letter writing campaigns and blogs. As always, the "hasbara" networks seek to explain and justify Israeli positions and actions. In recent years the effectiveness of "hasbara" has been boasted by the Internet as well as the development of software tools that automate the process of letter writing, greatly increasing both volume and reach. One such tool developed by the World Union of Jewish Students – Megaphone -- automated the process of voting in on-line polls as well as letter writing. While developed by a private group, the tool allegedly has the tacit support of the Israeli foreign ministry.<sup>28</sup>

Members of civil society also prepared various media products that were widely circulated on the Internet and various broadcast media. For example, two Israeli musicians developed a catchy music video, whose refrain was: "Bring it on Nasrallah; we'll kill you soon inshallah; we'll send you back to Allah; with the rest of Hezbollah." The song became an instant hit in Israel, but also unexpectedly in Lebanon.<sup>29</sup> One report claims that the IDF inserted the video on al Manar during one of its electronic attacks on the station.

There is also some indication that Israeli intelligence services were behind a number of "false flag" websites, although there has been no official confirmation.<sup>30</sup> The impact of such sites is difficult to judge.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hasbara>

<sup>28</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megaphone\\_desktop\\_tool](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Megaphone_desktop_tool)

<sup>29</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalla\\_Ya\\_Nasrallah](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yalla_Ya_Nasrallah)

<sup>30</sup> PAHLAVI, P. C. (2007) The 33 Day War: An Example of Psychological Warfare in the Information Age. *Canadian Army Journal*, 10, 12-24.

## C. Issues and Questions for Discussion

(Ground discussion in concrete examples where possible)

1. **The “underdog” advantage.** Leveraging new media effects seems to favour the “underdog”, who can attract collateral support and “reverberation” of his story by way of a compelling narrative of “injustice/resistance”, backed up by graphic visual evidence. The “underdog’s” domination of the informational space is buttressed by his ability to rapidly get his message out, which allows him to stake out an early “moral” advantage, which then becomes difficult to counter. (Once the “story” has been spun and “retold”...it quite often sticks. See *Shifting Fire*).<sup>31</sup>
  - Are COCOM’s able to be agile enough? Are there adequate systems in place to support a rapid declassification of intelligence product that could have psyop or strategic communications value if disseminated in a timely and accurate manner? Are there examples of how rapid informational response has yielded information wins? Is rapidity of information dissemination prudent? Can it lead to unacceptable OPSEC risks? (examples) Can it lead to blowback if swiftness compromises accuracy? (examples).
  - At the tactical level, is there sufficient evidence from current experience to support that low lethality, high accuracy attacks are effective in eliminating high value targets and threats? Is the “pinpoint” approach one way to contain the negative emotive “blowback” of more broadly kinetic approaches? Is current doctrinal sentiment in favour of such an approach?
2. **Getting the word out, with credibility.** As both the Israeli and Hezbollah examples show, new media is especially conducive to creating informational wins when (non-military) sympathetic bloggers and websites voluntarily endorse, reproduce and reinforce the military’s informational product and perspective (“reverberation”). However, reaching and engaging the global community of bloggers and new media producers requires a much broader approach than that currently practiced by public diplomacy, which tends to focus on international broadcasting and the use of websites as information portals. Blogging and counter-blogging raise complex issues of authority, effectiveness (value for effort) as well as legal and ethical issues over the use of un-attributed strategic communications (i.e. black propaganda).
  - Given that the most successful leveraging of new media (in Israel) came from the private initiative of Israeli citizens and their supporters abroad, is there any case to

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<sup>31</sup> COLLINGS, D. & ROHOZINSKI, R. (2006) *Shifting Fire: Information Effects in Counterinsurgency and Stability Operations*. Carlisle, US Army War College.

be made for developing a strategy / capacity for blogging and counter blogging by COCOMs as an operational requirement?

- Is there merit in an expanded effort to develop an open and covert “blogger corps” at the “all-of-government” strategic communications level? What advantages/ disadvantages would this present to the COCOM?
  - Media pools and “embedded” reporting has worked well to nurture “message discipline” and to ensure reporters understand the military perspective in operations. Is there an analogous “blogger” pool that could be harnessed for specific operations/ and if so what are the practical issues/liabilities that this could raise?
3. **“Winning” the war of information effects.** Because it is primarily a political organization with limited military capabilities, Hezbollah’s war plans focused on “winning” through the generation of strategic information effects. As noted, their war objectives were to “win by not loosing,” and to force a political end to the confrontation while maximizing the visibility of Israeli casualties and tactical reverses (so as to give the impression of humiliation). This kind of war aim has implications for the forces seeking to oppose such an actor/agenda, in terms of their choice of military options (both strategic and tactical). While not all future opponents will be as sophisticated as Hezbollah, US forces must be prepared to plan campaigns that engage militarized opponents whose goal is to effect strategic informational and political/moral “wins” by exploiting the collateral effects of US kinetic force.
- To what extent is current US doctrine adaptable to dealing with actors like Hezbollah, who possess a sophisticated capacity for blending military competence with strategic information effects? To what extent must current doctrine evolve to recognize new forms of engagement that lie along a continuum between counterinsurgency and manoeuvre warfare? Is there a need to develop a new doctrine that addresses the kind of hybrid actor environment presented by Hezbollah-type actors?

## Suggested Readings

ARKIN, W. M. (2007) *Divining Victory: Airpower in the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War* Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, Air University Press

COLLINGS, D. & ROHOZINSKI, R. (2006) *Shifting Fire: Information Effects in Counterinsurgency and Stability Operations*. Carlisle, US Army War College.

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THOMAS, T. (2007) Hezbollah, Israel and the Cyber PSYOP. *IO Sphere*, 31-35.

WARD, W. (2007) Uneasy Bedfellows: Bloggers and Mainstream: Media Report the Conflict in Lebanon. *Arab Media & Society*.