

# DIIS REPORT

## **HIZB'ALLAH'S COMMUNICATION STRATEGY:**

MAKING FRIENDS AND INTIMIDATING  
ENEMIES

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## **Abstract**

Managing external communication has proven an increasingly significant concern to Lebanese Hizb'allah. The nature of how Hizb'allah conducts its external communication is the subject of the present report. It is argued that the organisation relies on a sophisticated strategy that enables it to address a variety of target groups efficiently with differentiated aspects of its particular ideologically informed message, using the particular media platform best suited for this purpose. In doing so, the communication serves two main objectives: first, to disseminate aspects of the organisation's religiously informed world-view, ideology, values, motives and moral codes; and secondly, to conduct psychological warfare against its enemies.

The report falls into three parts. First, the versatility and comprehensiveness of the external and internal media used by Hizb'allah are outlined. The versatility offers Hizb'allah an opportunity to convey its message flexibly to audiences on a local, national, regional and international basis, while simultaneously being able to differentiate its message. In the second part, attention is turned to the content of Hizb'allah's communication, all of which is permeated by a clear ideological agenda. Two ideological tenets serve as a minimal ideological structure on which additional ideological layers are added, depending on who is being addressed. The two primary tenets are an antagonistic world-view and the primacy of resistance, epitomizing armed resistance. Thirdly, it is shown how Hizb'allah employs differences in foci, rhetoric and media organisation to convey different layers of its ideological package depending on which group is at the receiving end of the specific media being utilized.

## I. Introduction

Since Hizb'allah's emergence in Lebanon in the mid-1980's, the Shia Islamic movement has developed into one of the most significant actors in the Middle East today. The organisation's rise to prominence and fame has been propelled by a vehement armed struggle against the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon throughout its existence. However, its policy of armed resistance does not tell the full story. Another prerequisite for the organisation's success has been its awareness of the importance of media and communication, which has allowed it to convey its message to audiences globally. In a September 2001 interview, Hassan Ezzieddine, then head of Hizb'allah's Information Unit, acknowledged the emphasis that Hizb'allah places on managing the flow of information between the organisation and its various publics, stating: *'We feel that the media can be effective in creating a special climate in public opinion on the main issues of interest ... We are heading toward a new sensitive security situation [in the region] which means we need to follow events very closely so that we can informatively help shape international and Arab public opinion ... We believe that the media has an important role in the conflict, as important as the military wing'* (quoted in Conway 2005: 110). Thus, managing external communication has proved an increasingly significant concern and a key element in the efforts to achieve the organisation's overall objectives. Hizb'allah's great ability to manage its communications has not passed unnoticed, inducing one observer to label Hizb'allah *'a model of modern media use'* (Wagner 2005: 21). The nature of how Hizb'allah conducts its external communications is the subject of the present report, which is divided into three sections: the first the vehicles used in its communications strategy will be outlined, then the core content of the messages conveyed will be explored, and finally how the organisation communicates with various target groups will be analysed.

It is argued that the organisation relies on a sophisticated strategy that enables it to address efficiently a variety of target groups with differentiated aspects of its particular ideologically informed message, using the particular media platform best suited for this particular purpose. Thus, it is argued that the organisation takes advantage of both external media and an elaborate, modern and versatile media apparatus to use different media to target differentiated groups when conveying aspects of its message. In doing so, the communication serves two main objectives: first, to disseminate aspects of the organisation's religiously informed world-view, ideology,

values, motives and moral codes; and secondly, to conduct psychological warfare against its enemies.<sup>1</sup>

This study is based on the existing literature on the subject combined with the author's own field research in Lebanon, as well as primary sources. Hizb'allah's Media Office was invited to participate, but declined.

## **2. Hizb'allah: a versatile and powerful actor in the Middle East today**

Hizb'allah has come a long way since its initial formation in 1982-1984 in the midst of the Lebanese civil war. From being a small avant garde, Iranian-nurtured resistance organisation Hizb'allah has become a comprehensive organisational structure with significant influence both nationally and regionally.

The organisation made newspaper headlines around the world in the early 1980s through its involvement in kidnappings, bombings and airplane high-jacking. The organisation's military force has developed considerably since then and has – at least in its own view – celebrated significant military triumphs in its armed struggle against Lebanon's Southern neighbour, Israel, most notably forcing Israel into an unilateral withdrawal in the year 2000, having secured a number of prisoner swaps, and demonstrating its ability to withstand Israeli bombardments in the 2006 war, even labelling the latter a 'divine victory'. However, though it is, first and foremost, its military success that has earned the organisation its national and regional prominence, Hizb'allah is much more than a mere military force. Since its formation, it has conducted activities within almost all social spheres in Lebanon and has now developed a comprehensive organisational structure. In addition to the organisation's military dimension, *al-Muqawamah* or the Resistance, the organisation consists of a highly elaborate network of media outlets, travel agencies, gas stations and supermarkets, fitness clubs and other business companies, plus a social dimension, which offers fresh water delivery to the southern suburbs of Beirut, *dabiyeh*, health clinics, schools and financial subsidies to a large amount of families. Furthermore, the organisation holds a number of political seats locally and nationally, arguably making it the single most powerful political party in Lebanon today.

The organisation is believed to be funded largely from *bunyads* or funds under the control of the *wali al-faqih*, Ali al-Khamenei (commonly known as the supreme religious leader of Iran), but much suggests that in recent years the organisation has increasingly relied on its own income-generating activities and more importantly on religious taxes and donations, especially from the wealthy Lebanese diaspora (Hamzeh 2004). An increasing number of supporters are therefore likely to generate a higher income from donations and religious taxes.

Hizb'allah's media dimension is part and parcel of the organisation's overall organizational structure. Though Hizb'allah's exact organizational structure, opinions on which differ substantially amongst observers, remains concealed, there is a relative consensus that Hizb'allah's Media Office (also known as the Department of Media Relations) serves as the focal point for all external communication (Conway 2005, Hamzeh 2003, Rabil 2008).

Though Hizb'allah considers itself a national Lebanese resistance movement, liberation of Lebanese territory is not its only goal. In order to grasp the organisation's aims, one needs to understand its ideological framework. Hizb'allah draws on a religiously informed ideology derived from the Shia Islamic tradition along the lines of the political activism advocated by the late Ayatollah Khomeini. The ideology is based on a view of a world locked in a cosmic conflict between Right and Evil. The cosmic conflict saturates everything on all levels, whether individuals, organisations or countries. The US administration (but not its people) and Israel (both state and people) are considered manifestations of Evil today, due to what is perceived as their oppressive nature (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003, Friberg Lyme 2009). Israel constitutes in itself an illegitimate occupation from this point of view and should therefore be eradicated. The USA, on the other hand, is not perceived as an occupier *per se* and is therefore accorded a legitimate existence, as the cosmic conflict is bound to continue until Judgment Day, implicitly requiring the continuous existence of Evil. According to Hizb'allah, those who want to live up to God's will are obliged to resist Evil, both individually and collectively. Such resistance may include using military means under specific circumstances such as occupation. However, the obligation to wage an armed struggle is, according to Hizb'allah, structured along national boundaries, making armed resistance against an occupying force a matter only for the citizens of each country. All other believers are obliged to support the fight in any possible way short of fighting themselves. In other words, according to this point of view, the 'liberation of Palestine' must be carried out by Palestinians, the liberation of Iraq from the occupying American forces (as, due to the occupation, they are considered legitimate targets) by Iraqis, the liberation of Lebanon by Lebanese. As a consequence, while Hizb'allah is strongly engaged in supporting Palestinian and Iraqi organisations, its own military resistance ends at the borders of Lebanon. Hence, its aim is to liberate what are perceived to be Lebanese territories occupied by Israel, hoping for and encouraging the annihilation of Israel, but not having the aim of bringing this about itself (Friberg Lyme 2009).

Resistance to Evil, however, applies to all aspects of life and therefore includes resisting what is deemed to be injustice in the political Lebanese arena. Though Hizb'allah did initially embrace the idea of an Islamic state, the organisation has since gone through a substantial ideological change on this issue. Today, very little (if anything) suggests that Hizb'allah still has the ambition of creating an Islamic republic of Lebanon (Alagha 2006). Arguably, indeed, it has already created an Islamic order in parts of the Shia community in Lebanon, known as the Society of the Resistance, or *al-mujtamaa al-muqawamah*, which I shall return to below (Harb and Leenders 2005). Though the Society of the Resistance aims to secure a rightly guided community of believers within the Shia community, the Society can also be seen as an end in itself, as the goal of being rightly guidance is to behave in accordance with religious guidelines, which is exactly what the Society of the Resistance is claimed to provide.

Since 1991, the organisation has pursued what it calls *infitaḥ* or openness, a policy in which it is seeking to build bridges across confessional divides, nationally and beyond Lebanese borders, to allies that share some of its aspirations (on Hizb'allah's *infitaḥ* policy, see Alagha 2006). In order to understand fully the concept behind the *infitaḥ* policy, one must once again have recourse to Hizb'allah's religiously informed world view. Relying on a religiously informed conceptualization of man and two partly overlapping religious-ideological dichotomies, those of oppressor/oppressed and *Hizb'allah/Hizb'shaytan*, Hizb'allah identifies four overall groups of worldly actors: oppressors who are innately and unalterably evil; oppressors who are currently oppressive but who have the potential not to be so; oppressed who do not actively resist the oppressors; and oppressed who do resist the oppressors, thus living up to what Hizb'allah considers God's message. As mentioned above, two current actors are seen to embody Evil: Israel and the US leadership. Representing Evil, relations with them are to be held irreconcilable by those who follow God's message, i.e. Hizb'allah and those who follow the organisation. Instead they are to be resisted at all times. All other actors than Israel and the US leadership are seen to have the potential to behave differently and to resist Evil in accordance with their duty as humans, as demanded by God. In other words, while both Israel and the US leadership are considered unalterable enemies due to their evil nature, all others can potentially start living up to God's message in so far as they actively resist the evil forces of today (Friberg Lyme 2009). In order for them to realise the need for the latter to do so, they must be exposed to the message of rightly guided behaviour. The organisation's media therefore play a crucial role in this *infitaḥ* policy.

### **3. The means: the versatility of media platforms used by Hizb'allah**

In fulfilling its overall communications strategy, Hizb'allah relies on a wide range of available media platforms. Though most studies of Hizb'allah's external communication have been limited to either its TV station *al-Manar* (e.g. Jorisch 2004) or the organisation's websites (Conway 2007, Rizzo 2008), it seems more fruitful to consider Hizb'allah's vehicles for external communication in their totality and to acknowledge the versatility of these vehicles. The versatility of the media platforms is crucial to the organisation's media strategy, as will be demonstrated below.

The media platforms used by Hizb'allah can be divided into two main groups, external and internal. The external media include all national, regional and international media not managed by or affiliated to the organisation while the internal media comprise of the media apparatus commanded by the organisation. Seemingly both contact with external media and coordination and control of Hizb'allah affiliated mass media is controlled by Hizb'allah's Media Office.

#### **3.1 Hizb'allah's media apparatus**

Over the course of the last 25 years, Hizb'allah has developed a considerable media apparatus of its own which provides it with an autonomous communication that is one of its paramount objectives (Conway 2003). A brief overview of the nature of the affiliated media outlets reveals the versatility they provide in terms of reach and focus. An overview of these media is provided in Tables 1 and 2.

The TV station *al-Manar*, or the Beacon, is the very centrepiece of the entire media apparatus.<sup>2</sup> From small beginnings transmitting its signal to the southern suburbs of Beirut, *dabhiyyeh*, for a few hours a day on 3 June 1991 as one of about 55 small Lebanese TV stations, the network now broadcasts round the clock. The TV station's programming encompasses a wide range of programmes, including children's programmes, news programmes, game shows, and talk shows dealing with political, social, religious-judicial issues.

As *al-Manar* has been broadcast by satellite since May 2000, the TV station is able to reach an audience well beyond the borders of Lebanon. *Al-Manar* is believed to maintain an estimated audience of more than ten million viewers, particular-

ly in the Middle East, North and Central Africa and Europe (Hamzeh 2004: 60). This makes *it* one of Lebanon's and the Middle East's most significant TV stations. Furthermore, a live feed on the network's homepage easily allows those interested to bypass the bans of the TV station or the need for a broadcasting license in a number of countries in Europe and North America,<sup>3</sup> making it a significant tool to reach a potentially global audience. In addition to Arabic, the TV station offers programmes in English, French and Hebrew, while *al-Manar's* website is available in Arabic, French, English and Spanish.

Yet another electronic media outlet with the potential to reach audiences nationally, regionally and internationally is the radio station *al-Nour*, or the Light. Since 1997, *al-Nour* has been registered as a part of the Lebanese Media Group (also known as the Lebanese Communication Group) along with *al-Manar*.

*Al-Nour* began broadcasting in May 1988, when a number of young Hizb'allah fighters started reporting on battles with Israeli forces (Conway 2007a: 2). Today, *al-Nour's* analogue signal can be reached in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel/Palestine 24 hours a day. From as early as 1999, programmes have been accessible on the Internet and since 2006 as live streaming, thus allowing a worldwide audience to listen to them. *Al-Nour's* programming contains a wide palette of issues of a religious, political and social nature. Transcripts of numerous programmes are also offered in print and on-line versions (see *al-Nour's* website). Hamzeh (2004) claims that an additional three smaller radio stations are affiliated to Hizb'allah, covering only Lebanon or the Shia-dominated parts of the country. These are *al-Imam*, *al-Islam* and *Sawt al-mustad'afin*, the first former dealing above all with issues of a judicial-religious nature.

Hizb'allah controls a range of print media. Some of this consists of weeklies and magazines concerned with various political, social and religious subjects, most significantly the weekly *al-Intiqad*, or the Critique. As it first came out on 18 June 1984, initially called *al-Abd*, this weekly is considered to be Hizb'allah's first mouthpiece. *Al-Intiqad*, which today focuses largely on political and social issues, is available all over Lebanon. Since then, according to Hamzeh 2003, *al-Bilad*, *al-Wabda*, *al-Ismailya*, and the monthly *Al-Sabil* have followed. Some of these magazines focus on what is rightly guided in private matters, whereas others deal with political and religious affairs.

Other written media can be identified in Hizb'allah's involvement in the production of a substantial corpus of religious literature. Around the year 2000, Shia publishing houses in the southern suburbs of Beirut saw a yearly production of 2,000 religious

titles (Rosiny 2000: 33). Despite more than a third of the publishing houses behind this production being destroyed during the 2006 war, it seems unlikely that production has dropped considerably since then (Alagha 2008). Though by no means all the Shia printing houses are affiliated with Hizb'allah, a considerable number are engaged in producing material for the organisation. Exact organisational affiliation to Hizb'allah is rarely clear, as the printing houses are usually privately owned and thus not organisationally linked to Hizb'allah, though they usually cooperate closely with the organisation (as well as other religious organisations and clerics). The production of printed religious material covers a wide range of theological subjects, such as the religious judgments of various Islamic scholars or *mujtabids*, thus offering its audience a source of religious guidance in all aspects of life, whether questions of cloning, the armed struggle or how to balance work and family life. Furthermore, the printing houses are responsible for printing textbook materials for Islamic schools, including Hizb'allah's own *al-Mabdi* schools, reports from Hizb'allah's think tank, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation (CCSD), and its own magazines. Much of this material can be found in any newsstand and bookshop in the Shia-dominated areas of Beirut and in other Shia areas around the region.

A highly localised media type is Hizb'allah-related production and handling of graphic media such as posters, flags and banners displaying the logo, religious iconography and pictures of Hizb'allah leaders and those considered martyrs. Though often overlooked by observers, this is a potent medium in Shia-dominated areas. Hizb'allah manages the production, mounting and dismounting of these media above all in these areas in association with religious holidays and political events.

The production and distribution of CDs and tapes with speeches and music creates a regional and even global reach. CDs and tapes with speeches above all by Hizb'allah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, are distributed throughout the region (Norton 2008: 150). The significance of these media should be seen against the backdrop of the great impact of distributing tapes and CDs to disseminate the organisation's teachings to the wide cross-national audience that has emerged in recent decades for Shia clerics (Rosiny 2007). A considerable amount of pop music is produced, paying tribute to Hizb'allah's armed resistance, its (so-called) martyrs, the Palestinian intifada and Hizb'allah in general.<sup>4</sup> Though much of the tribute music is produced by musicians who are not affiliated to Hizb'allah, at least the music used for Hizb'allah-run events seems to be produced by the organisation itself. This music is aired on *al-Manar* and *al-Nour*, sold on CDs and made available on external Internet platforms like YouTube, thus providing it with a global reach. The CDs

and tapes are distributed regionally, often experiencing an upsurge following escalation in fighting involving Hizb’allah (Norton 2008: 150). Thus, following the 2006 war, a boom in exports of this music was reported in the media (AFP).

Table 1. Overview of Hizb’allah-affiliated media outlets

Name	Type	Primary focus issues	Languages	Geographical reach	Estimated targetgroups <sup>1</sup>				
					1	2	3	4	5
Al-Manar	TV station	Political, social, religious/judicial	Arabic, English, French, Hebrew	Global					
Al-Nour	Radio station	Political, social, religious/judicial	Arabic	Regional					
Al-Imam <sup>2</sup>	Local radio station	Religious/judicial	Arabic	Local					
Al-Islam <sup>2</sup>	Local radio station	Religious/judicial	Arabic	Local					
Sawt al-Mustad’afin <sup>2</sup>	Local radio station	Religious/judicial	Arabic	Local					
Al-Intiqad	Weekly	Political, social	Arabic	National					
Al-Bilad <sup>2</sup>	Journal	n/a	Arabic	National/local					
Al-Wahda <sup>2</sup>	Journal	n/a	Arabic	National/local					
El Ismailiya <sup>2</sup>	Journal	n/a	Arabic	National/local					
Al-Sabil <sup>2</sup>	Journal	n/a	Arabic	National/local					
Special Force/ Special Force 2	Computer games	Armed resistance	Arabic, English	Regional					
Various	Books, pamphlets and articles	Religious/Judicial	Arabic	Local/regional					
Various	Graphic media such as flags, banners and posters	Religious/Judicial	Arabic	Local (national)					
Various	CD, tapes	Political, social, religious/judicial	Arabic	Regional					
Various	Music production	Political, social, Religious/Judicial	Arabic	Regional (global)					
Various	Internet websites	See Table 2		Global					

<sup>1</sup> The target groups are numbered as follows: target group 1, the Lebanese Shia Community; target group 2, the Lebanese community in general; target group 3, a regional audience; target group 4, an international non-Arab, non-Muslim audience; and target group 5, an Israeli audience. For further details, see section 4.

<sup>2</sup> As described by Hamzeh 2004.

Each medium’s target group is assessed by comparing its content, geographical coverage and languages offered.

Hizb'allah has proved attentive to emerging forms of media. Thus, the prevalence of the computer has opened up new channels of communication. Early on, the Internet's potential to reach a global audience was embraced by Hizb'allah. Already at the beginning of 1996, the organisation launched its first homepages (the same year as the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR, launched its first website; Conway, 2007a: 2). Today, Hizb'allah and its affiliated social service organisations, institutions and media outlets operate a wide array of highly professional websites. The contents of these websites differ considerably, reflecting the nature of each particular Hizb'allah-affiliated organisation that the website in question is linked to (see Table 2). The website of Hizb'allah's reconstruction company *al-Waad*, for example, outlines the visions of its ongoing construction projects, the social service organisation *al-Emdad's* homepage describes the organisation's social projects and tells donors how to donate, while *al-Manar's* homepage looks like the homepage of any other TV station, displaying the latest sports news and international news. Hizb'allah's (current) official website, Hizbollah.tv, contains transcripts of speeches by the Secretary General and articles about Israeli aggression and the various activities of the organisation.

Some of the websites are available not only in Arabic, but also in English, French, Hebrew, and/or Spanish (previously in German too). Offering websites in different languages facilitates access to information for audiences inside Lebanon, the Middle East and outside the region. Most websites, however, are kept in Arabic and aimed only at very specific sectors of Lebanese society. However, as Conway has pointed out (2005), it is worth noticing that the low number of Internet users in both Lebanon and the Middle East in general indicates that, Hizb'allah was more interested in targeting non-Lebanese and non-Middle Eastern audiences.

In addition to the Internet, yet another product of the digital age has been embraced by Hizb'allah: computer games. Best known are the popular 'Special Force' and the 2007 sequel 'Special Force 2: The Story of the Truthful Pledge', which refer to the 2006 war against Israel. Both combat games recreate actual battles between Hizb'allah fighters and the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), celebrating the winner as a national hero in this life and a martyr in the life to come. Special Force 2 is distributed throughout the entire region, using among others a distributor in Bahrain (Special Force website). According to Special Force's own website, the game is produced by Hizb'allah's Central Intelligence Office.

Table 2. Known Hizb'allah-affiliated websites as of March 2009

Website	Affiliated organisation	Content	Languages	Estimated targetgroups <sup>1</sup>				
				1	2	3	4	5
www.hizbollah.tv	Hizb'allah's official website, replacing hizbollah.org	Information on religious leaders, speeches by SG, parliamentary activities, resistance operations, Israeli terror, resistance activities in Palestine	Arabic, English					
english.wa3ad.org/wa3ad.org	Allegedly Nasrallah's new official homepage following the demise of nasrollah.org/net	Information on the resistance, 'Zionist affairs', poetry, interviews of the SG	Arabic, English					
www.naimkassem.net	Official homepage for Vice-Secretary General Naim Qassem	Speeches, biography, standpoints on political issues, e-mail contact info	Arabic (e-mail info in English and French)					
www.almanar.com.lb	TV station <i>al-Manar</i>	News on politics, economics, sports etc. Live feed	Arabic, French, English, Spanish					
www.alnour.com.lb	Radio station <i>al-Nour</i>	Info on the radio station, programme archives, live feed	Arabic					
www.alintiqad.com	Weekly <i>al-Intiqad</i>	News on and analysis of Lebanese, Palestinian and Arab affairs, interviews with regional personalities, culture	Arabic					
www.intheireyes.info	TV show of the same name	Translated speeches of SG	English					
www.specialforce2.org	Computer game Special Force 2	Info about the game, shipping, wall papers and screen savers	Arabic, English					

Website	Affiliated organisation	Content	Languages	Estimated targetgroups <sup>1</sup>				
				1	2	3	4	5
www.jbf-lb.org	Social service organisation <i>Jihad al-Binaa</i>	Official <i>Jihad al-Binaa</i> website	English, Arabic					
www.ardee-jbf.org		Info on food fair, agricultural producers, the organisation	Arabic (English not active)					
www.jihadbinaa2006.org		Concerned specifically with the reconstruction efforts after the 2006 war	Arabic, English					
www.aljarha.net	Social service organisation <i>Al-Jarha</i>	News on events, the organisations history, services, facilities	Arabic, English,					
www.alshahid.org	Social service organisation <i>Al-Shahid</i>	Info on the organisation and its service centres	Arabic (English)					
www.hayaa.net/org	Social service organisation for Health	Info on health centres, publications, objectives, how to volunteer	Arabic, English, French					
www.waad-rebuild.com	Reconstruction company <i>al-Waad</i>	Info on the reconstruction efforts	Arabic					
www.agridev.info		Info on tool maintenance, articles on agriculture, weather forecasts	Arabic					
www.dirasat.net	CCSD, Hizb'allah's think tank	Info on the think tank's research areas, publications	French, Arabic, English					
www.alrasoul.org	The Rasul hospital (affiliated to <i>al-Hayaa</i> )	Info on the hospital's facilities, organisational setup	Arabic					
www.almahdischools.org	<i>Al-Mahdi</i> Schools	Info on the schools, organisational set up, outstanding students, pictures etc.	Arabic					

Website	Affiliated organisation	Content	Languages	Estimated targetgroups <sup>1</sup>				
				1	2	3	4	5
www.almahdiscouts.net	<i>Al-Mabdi</i> Scouts	Info on upcoming activities, info on scout-related issues as bonfires and compasses, guides how to teach and general scout rules	Arabic (overview in English and French)					
www.alahed.com	Football team	Info on games and pictures	Arabic					

<sup>1</sup> The target groups are numbered as follows: target group 1, the Lebanese Shia Community; target group 2, the Lebanese community in general; target group 3, a regional audience; target group 4, an international non-Arab, non-Muslim audience; and target group 5, an Israeli audience. Each medium's target group is assessed by comparing its content, geographical coverage and languages offered.

Thus, comprising a wide range of media, from the printing of posters and production of music to satellite TV, Hizb'allah has at its disposal a comprehensive media apparatus of great versatility, marked by variance in focus and reach. In terms of focus, some media deal with specific religious and judicial issues, for example the printing of religious books, while others mainly deal with political and social issues (though without ever abandoning explicit religious issues completely), for example *al-Manar* and *al-Intiqad*. At the same time, the media affiliated to Hizb'allah range from having a local to having a global reach. *Al-Manar*, *al-Nour* and the organisation's websites enjoy a global reach, while others such as CDs and tapes have a regional reach. Others such as the weekly *al-Intiqad* maintain a national reach, while media such as posters, banners with religious and political references and smaller media outlets are limited to a local reach within Shia-dominated areas in Lebanon. Whereas the local, national and regional media are generally in Arabic, media with a global reach are often offered in other languages as well. A number of Hizb'allah's websites offer text in English and French, and *al-Manar* broadcasts programmes in English and Hebrew. There seems to be correlation between media focus and reach, so that the media with the broadest reach are often concerned with political and social issues, whereas local media often deal with specific religious issues.

The versatility of the media apparatus is important as it offers Hizb'allah an opportunity to convey its message flexibly to audiences on a local, national, regional and international basis, while simultaneously being able to differentiate its message. As it

seems that all media are controlled and coordinated centrally by Hizb'allah's Media Office, the media apparatus should arguably be considered a well-coordinated organic unit. In that sense, all the different media constitute tools in the organisation's toolbox, each covering different aspects, though often overlapping and enhancing one another. This provides the organisation with a flexible, yet fairly accurate vehicle for addressing a specific audience. In order to obtain a maximum of efficiency in targeting the public, Hizb'allah has not avoided using any available type of media, but has proven attentive to new types of media technologies arising.

In addition to its versatility, one should be aware of the apparent entanglement of the media apparatus with other dimensions of Hizb'allah's activities. As will be shown later in greater detail, the armed resistance constitutes the ideological backbone of Hizb'allah's communication. However, in addition to disseminating its emphasis on the armed resistance, anecdotal evidence suggests that Hizb'allah media dimension maintains close coordination and cooperation with *al-Muqawamah*, the Resistance, its armed dimension. Broadcasting military operations and posting the most recent statistics regarding the losses sustained by the enemy has played a key role in *al-Manar's* coverage of the armed resistance in both Lebanon and Palestine, thus making Hizb'allah's media strategy different from that of any other military organization in the world except for Hamas (Tsfati and Weimann 2002:321). The first live recordings of Hizb'allah's military operations appeared in 1986, i.e. before *al-Manar* was created. Documenting Hizb'allah fighters' invasion of the Sujud fortress, the first video recordings were distributed to Lebanese TV stations (Conway 2007a: 2-3). Subsequently, the camera became, in the words of Vice-Secretary General Naim Qassim, "an essential element in all resistance operations" (Qassem 2005: 257). Fighters with cameras are often present when military operations take place, making sure that the recordings went straight from the battlefield to be broadcast, often retaining their original sound to underline the authenticity of the recordings, thus making them more dramatic. One example was the killing of Israel's top commander Eretz Gerstein by a roadside bomb (Harik 2004: 131). Another example was *al-Muqawamah's* shelling of an Israeli warship during the war of 2006, which *al-Manar* broadcast live with Secretary General Nasrallah appearing in front. There is therefore little doubt that the efforts of *al-Manar* and *al-Muqawamah* have been coordinated. One commentator even suggests that on some occasions *al-Manar* has dictated the military operations rather than the other way around (Schleifer 2006: 6). The claim does not seem unfounded, as some military operations seem to have been conducted for their symbolic rather than military effect. When in late 1994 Hizb'allah infiltrated an Israeli outpost and rose Hizb'allah's flag for a few minutes,

it was shown numerous times on *al-Manar*, despite the fact that *al-Muqawamah's* fighters abandoned the outpost immediately afterwards.

Less dramatic, though definitely significant, is media coordination with Hizb'allah's social service organisations. *Al-Manar* broadcasts updates from *Jihad al-binaas'* reconstruction efforts, makes interviews with recipients of social services, reports from Hizb'allah's schools, provides education in future health programmes and posts advertisements for fund-raising campaigns for the social service organisations. Several of Hizb'allah's social service organisations maintain websites on educational material, e.g. advice on rural production. Hence, the media apparatus arguably serves to underpin, enhance and support the social efforts of the overall organisation of Hizb'allah and should therefore not be seen as external to these. Hizb'allah's PR should rather be understood as part of the overall organic structure of the organisation.

### **3.2 Dealing with external media**

Hizb'allah officials regularly appear on external media platforms. As soon as Hassan Nasrallah was appointed Secretary General in 1992, he broke with the practice of his predecessors by appearing regularly in the media. However, in more recent years interviews with Nasrallah have become fairly rare, most likely due to security concerns (the latest were on Lebanese NBN in January 2008, NBN Qatari *al-Jazeera* in 2007 and Lebanese New TV in August 2006). However, Vice-Secretary General Naim Qassim has appeared on TV networks for lengthy interviews. High-ranking officials such as Muhammed Fneish, Minister of Labour, Nawaf al-Mussawi, newly elected MP and former Chargé des Relations Internationales, Nabil Qaouk, leader of Hizb'allah in the South and Hussein Khalil, political advisor to Nasrallah, often appear in both national, regional and to some degree international media. However, interaction with external media seems deliberate.

Using the media office as a gatekeeper, external media access to the organisation's officials and members is a centralised matter. Journalists (and researchers) are required to apply for a permit (after obtaining clearance from the Lebanese Ministry of Information) and to present a list of questions to the media office in order to conduct interviews with Hizb'allah officials. The issuing of permits depends on the current circumstances, and without such permit doors remain shut. On several occasions, this writer has personally experienced how the organisation refuses to issue permits in times of political turmoil, which then is observed effectively throughout the

entire organisation.<sup>5</sup> Whether this procedure is observed less with Lebanese journalists is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, the centralised decision-making seems to allow the organisation a relatively controlled flow of information from the organisation to the external media. Relatively few people serve as interfaces to the outside, making the organisation appear highly homogenous.

In addition to keeping track of who is being interviewed within the organisation, it seems that the organisation is selective concerning which external media are allowed interviews, judging from the interviews given in recent years. Nasrallah has given interviews to prestigious international media, most notably the *Washington Post* in 2000 and 2006 and the *New Yorker* in July 2003. However, interviews with the Secretary General other top officials in recent years have mostly been granted to the national and regional media. Taking advantage of precisely which media allows the organisation a cross-confessional reach, as will be shown further below.

Furthermore, the organisation seems to take an increasingly activist approach to external media. Following the 2006 war with Israel, Hizb'allah invited Arab journalists (thus underlining the organisation's selection of media) from the whole region to tour the Shia-dominated southern Lebanon and southern suburbs of Beirut in order view the destruction caused by the Israeli bombings. This suggests that Hizb'allah is fully aware of the strategic potential of influencing what external journalists are shown, and are therefore able to report about. A similar tendency can arguably be detected in Hizb'allah's use of external Internet platforms such as YouTube and Google Earth. After the war in 2006, Google Earth was used to pinpoint civilian areas that Israel had shelled and to post information about the extent of the killing and destruction (Rizzo 2008: 400). A great quantity of Hizb'allah material, such as interviews, music videos and clips of actual fighting, is posted on YouTube and thus made available to a global audience. However, whether these postings are made by the organisation itself or its external supporters is difficult to verify. Either way, Hizb'allah's interaction with external media is arguably marked by centralised decision-making which allows the organisation to manage both interviewer and interviewees. As such, the organisation is to some degree able to take strategic advantage of external media platforms.

In sum, Hizb'allah takes advantage of a varied selection of media platforms, both external and internal. Having decisions concerning external media handled by the Media Office, the organisation has established centralised control of the image it wants to convey to the outside world.

Coordination of Hizb'allah's own elaborate and versatile media apparatus also seems centralised. Hizb'allah commands a media apparatus which provides the organisation with a flexible toolbox with which to address its audiences efficiently. Encompassing a wide range of media types and media outlets, the media apparatus enables the organisation to pinpoint accurately and efficiently any particular segment of choice with different aspects of the organisation's message, locally, regionally or internationally.

## **4. The content: the primary tenets of Hizb'allah's propaganda**

Hizb'allah's communication through its various media platforms is permeated by a clear ideological agenda. In its use of both external and internal media, Hizb'allah does not strive for objectivity or neutrality, but rather to disseminate its own particular perceptions and ideology (Hamzeh 2004: 61). The organisation makes no secret of this aim. *Al-Manar's* operations director, Abbas Ghaffar, explained: '*Al-Manar's mission is to show the real picture to the Arab world and the rest of the world. We want to show the real picture as we see it*' (Orient Press Center). Along the same line of thought, *al-Manar's* chairman Nayyef Krayyem explained: '*Al Manar is an important weapon to us [...] It's a political weapon, social weapon and cultural weapon*' (Blanford 2001). Being highly biased and having the aim of disseminating a particular truth, Hizb'allah's external communications are profoundly marked by its strong propaganda features.

Across all the external backgrounds transmitted through the variety of media platforms employed by Hizb'allah, an 'ideological minimal structure' can be identified. The ideological minimal structure serves basically as an ideological skeleton on to which ideological layers can be added, depending on who is being addressed. The minimal structure consists of two primary tenets: a particular perception of the world, and a particular recipe for what needs to be done.

### **4.1 Hizb'allah's antagonistic world view**

A particular perception of the world permeates and structures the message in Hizb'allah's PR. This world view is ontological in nature and shapes how world events and actors are presented to Hizb'allah's audiences, which are structured around a fundamental axis of Right and Evil.

One pole is defined by the Evil assigned to the occupying forces of the world of today as perceived by Hizb'allah. Two actors represent such evil: Israel is consistently referred to as 'the Zionist unit', 'Palestine 1948' or 'the Zionist enemy', while the US is called 'a terrorist state' and 'an oppressor', thus echoing Hizb'allah's overall ideological conception of both.

The Evil of the US leadership and Israel is substantiated through the use of music videos, fillers (minute-long audio and visual sequences) and quiz shows.<sup>6</sup> Taking advantage of its dramatic and emotional effect, fillers have, for example, shown images of civilian Lebanese with amputated limbs and babies wounded by Israeli missiles. Another filler shows the Statue of Liberty holding a bloody knife, her dress dripping with blood, accompanied by a list of armed conflicts involving the US in Afghanistan, Korea, Somalia, Vietnam and Iraq, and pictures of bombers and explosions, ending with the words '*USA owes blood to all of humanity*'. These fillers aim to link the USA and Israel with all Evil throughout history, cementing their role as representatives of evil today. In one *al-Manar* video clip, cross-cutting techniques show recordings of Adolf Hitler and George W. Bush to create a comparison between the two, making them appear to be behaving the same way and saying the same things, and concluding with the phrase '*History repeats itself*' (Jorisch 2004: 54).

The dissemination of Hizb'allah's world view is not reserved for programmes and fillers of an exclusively political nature. Hizb'allah's ideology also shapes the TV station's entertainment shows, all of which incorporate an educational objective. An all-time favourite prime-time game show is *al-Muhimma*, the Mission. The objective of this virtual game is to reach Jerusalem by defeating the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Such material serves to underline, substantiate and disseminate a perception of Israel and the US government as enemies to all that is right, thus heavily reflecting Hizb'allah's religiously informed ideology.

As Hizb'allah's antagonistic world view is comprised of a cosmic conflict between Right and Evil in which Israel and the US government are considered the very manifestation of Evil, the latter are the focus of an irreconcilable animosity for those who live in accordance to with God's will. All other worldly actors are seen as potential friends, and Hizb'allah's relations with them are therefore alterable in so as far as they fulfil the religious duty to resist (in various forms) the Evil of today, i.e. Israel and the US leadership (Friberg Lyme, 2009). The way world events and actors are perceived and framed is structured around this bipolar ontology, with specific interests being attributed to Israel and the US government. In such a bipolar world view, one is either pro or con. Those who act against Hizb'allah are therefore necessarily in the same boat as the US government and Israel. One example is the framing of Walid Jumblatt, a prominent political opponent of Hizb'allah, in the midst of political tension in late January 2008. Jumblatt stated his willingness to fight Hizb'allah in civil war. News of his statement was broadcast on *al-Manar*, accompanied by ar-

chive shots of Jumblatt talking to Israeli and American officials to suggest his close relations with the enemy (al-Manar, January 28, 2008). As such, Hizb'allah's media arguably starts from a highly biased starting point when assessing events and actors. However, this biased view of the world does not amount simply to dogmatic and unreflected preaching. On the contrary, profound, though biased, knowledge of the (perceived) enemy is considered the very key to defeat it. Former head of the Media Office, Ezzieddine, explained: '*We are in a very real conflict with the Israeli enemy. Consequently, we must realize and understand the nature of this enemy ... The more we know them, the more we know their weak points. This makes it easier for us to confront them*' (Blanford 2001). In the al-Manar game show, *al-Muhimma*, or how Palestine can be liberated virtually, is achieved by correctly answering questions dealing with martyr missions, religious thinking, Israeli threats etc. The Israeli occupation can only be overcome through a profound knowledge (in the eyes of Hizb'allah, that is) of Israel and other oppressors throughout history (Harb and Leenders 2005: 182).

Similarly, the weekly *al-Intiqad* contains elaborate articles on and analysis of Israeli and US politics. *Al-Manar's* analysts explain Israeli politics through insightful and well-informed analysis and offer well-argued debate programmes visited by politicians and academics of various nationalities and religious confessions with the one common denominator that they regard the US government and Israel as the enemy. The *Al-Manar* talk-show, *Beit al-ankabut* or the Spider's Nest – a term often used as a reference to Israel – deals, for example, with Israel's weaknesses and how the Israeli enemy can be overcome, while *Irbabiyun*, Terrorists, deals with what is regarded as Zionist terrorism, documented by broadcasts and discussions of Israeli attacks, and pictures of dead children and of homes burned to the ground (Jorisch 2004: 66). Thus, in its external communications, Hizb'allah is seeking to disseminate a particular understanding of Israel and the US government and to analyse international relations and events within a framework of the antagonistic conflictual world view through highly informed yet biased programming.

#### **4.2. The primacy of resistance, epitomizing armed resistance**

The second ideological tenet in Hizb'allah's external communications is the need for or primacy of resistance against everything that is unfair and unjust. According to Hizb'allah, the unfairness and injustice that Evil represents should be countered in every way, whether in everyday life or by fighting against the forces of occupation. The later is indeed considered the very epitome of rightly guided resistance (in the shape of what is considered the 'finest' mode of the small, defensive *jihad*, Khashan

and Mussawi 2007). Thus, whereas Hizb'allah's media convey a sense of the conflict through the dissemination of its world view, armed resistance is conveyed as *the* answer to illegitimate occupation.

Hizb'allah promotes militarily resistance as a religious duty against what are considered occupation forces, as in the case for US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan (but not against USA itself), Israel in parts of Lebanon and in Israel itself. The need to resist the forces of occupation constitutes the backbone of the message conveyed by Hizb'allah. However, it should be stressed that it is not armed struggle as such that is being promoted, but the use of arms against what is perceived as an occupation (Saad-Ghorayeb 2003, Friberg Lyme 2009).

*Al-Manar* in particular has played a crucial role in promoting armed resistance against Israel. Using the slogan '*Qanat al-muqawamah*', 'the Resistance TV channel', *al-Manar* is explicit in its support of the armed resistance. Thus, it was by no means a coincidence that the TV station's first satellite broadcast coincided with Israel's withdrawal from occupied southern Lebanon on 25 May 2000, thus enabling it to show live footage of the Israeli withdrawal. Originally to be launched in July, Hizb'allah swiftly pushed the launch date forward as soon as the organisation realised that Israel was planning a withdrawal. Throughout *al-Manar*'s existence, the station has prioritized the armed struggle in Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and to some extent Afghanistan. Previously the TV station described itself as "*the first Arab establishment to stage an effective psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy*" (Conway, 2007a: 4). Today, the station instead claims to be '*highlighting the value of the human being as the centre of the Godly messages which endeavour to save his dignity and freedom and develop the spiritual and moral dimensions of his personality*' (*al-Manar* website). This apparent change in rhetoric should, however, be seen against the backdrop of Hizb'allah's religiously informed ideological outlook. According to Hizb'allah, the divine message consists in safeguarding human dignity and freedom through a willingness to engage in resisting Evil, ultimately using armed resistance (Friberg Lyme 2007). Taking part in the resistance, military or unarmed, is thus framed as a development of the spiritual and moral dimensions of the human being.

All of Hizb'allah's communications serve to reflect and disseminate aspects of the organisation's ideology. Reflecting and disseminating Hizb'allah's religiously informed ideology, communication is based on an ideological minimal structure encompassing two primary ideological tenets: the antagonistic world view, and the

need to resist Evil, both epitomised in armed resistance in the face of occupation. The antagonistic world view and the primacy of resistance can therefore be considered the intellectual backbone of Hizb'allah's communication. However, both the ideological layers the two tenets come with and the way the message is communicated differ significantly, depending on the specific target groups being addressed, as will be shown below.

## **5. The strategy: talking differently to different people to achieve different objectives ...**

When monitoring Hizb'allah's rhetoric in the internal and external media, one is first struck by the diversity of narratives used in its communication. Specific Shiite mythology is heavily employed on some occasions, while argumentation is centred on ecumenical rhetoric on others. National issues are sometimes emphasized, while at other times Hizb'allah explicitly talks of Arab unity. *Prima facie*, the diversity appears somewhat confusing and may even seem as if the organisation is talking with two (or more) tongues. However, at a second glance, the diversity appears rather to reflect a sophisticated communication strategy in which Hizb'allah employs different forms of rhetoric in order to address different target groups, taking advantage of the medium or media that are most suitable for the task. Using different media platforms, the organisation is able to address specific target groups with a particular rhetoric depending on the audience. In other words, Hizb'allah employs differences in focus, rhetoric and media organisation to convey different aspects and levels of its ideological package depending on which group is at the receiving end of the media in question. Five such groups can be identified in Hizb'allah's communication: 1) the Shia community (predominantly in Lebanon), 2) the remainder of the Lebanese population, 3) the Arab and Muslim population worldwide (in practice, Hizb'allah rarely differentiates between the two), 4) an international non-Arab/non-Shia audience, and 5) an Israeli audience (cf. Tables 1 and 2). However, these five audiences are at their most basic level organised in two groups: potential allies and eternal enemies, as mentioned in section 2 above. The objectives of communications with these two groups differ substantially. Communication with potential allies serves to disseminate aspects of the organisation's religiously informed world view, ideology, values, motives and moral codes, while communication with the enemy is performed as an aspect of psychological warfare.

### **5.1 Deepening the Islamic atmosphere and the Society of the Resistance in the Shia community**

When addressing the Shia community, the full religious ideological package of Hizb'allah is unfolded. Events and actors are framed in a religious context by relating these to distinct Shia mythology narratives and iconography. Religious elements that are exclusive to Shia Islam, such as the infallible Imams, especially Imam Hussein, and *ashura*, are strongly emphasized. The legendary battle of Karbala is linked

to Hizb'allah's armed resistance by linking Hussein to the organisation's fighters. Imam Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, refused to pledge allegiance to the Umayyad Caliph Yazeed, whom he viewed as an unjust and illegitimate ruler. As a consequence he was killed and beheaded at the battle of Karbala in 680. Pivotal in Shia Islam, the martyrdom of Hussein is commemorated annually in the *ashura*. In its media, Hizb'allah creates a virtual link between the resistance of Hussein to the Umayyad oppressor and the organisation's own resistance. One example is an *al-Manar* filler that uses a crosscutting technique by switching between an impassioned speech by Nasrallah and recordings of military operations, while a deep voice-over booms out "This is our Karbala. This is our Hussein, who we live through. Karbala lives through the Lebanese Resistance" (Deeb 2006: 159). In this way, Hizb'allah puts the struggle and everyday life into a religious and mythological context in order to justify the measures it uses. Hence, the organisation seeks to spread Islamic awareness within the Shia population and convince people of the importance of living a religious rightly guided life.

Hizb'allah's own media apparatus forms the primary tool in addressing the Shia population in Lebanon.

A number of Hizb'allah's media outlets are concerned directly with specifically religious matters. Hizb'allah's smaller radio stations broadcast sermons and other religious material, while *al-Nour* deals more with guidance in the political arena. Though *al-Manar* reaches well beyond the Shia population in Lebanon, the TV station also deals with religious issues on programmes such as *al-Kalima tayyiba*, the Good Word, which deals with religious matters from philosophical, cultural and other intellectual approaches with visiting clerics offering answers to what is rightly guided in different situations. A similar talk show is *Fikhut hayat*, where viewers from Lebanon and the rest of the region can call the studio and ask questions about religious practices. Another source is Hizb'allah's elaborate body of Islamic literature and recorded sermons, which also play a crucial role in deepening, producing and maintaining an Islamic awareness, in which religion is seen as the guiding principle.

What gives Hizb'allah's media its unparalleled impact in the Shia population has been its unique ability to create a physical milieu in Shia areas, in which the inhabitants are constantly reminded of religion and the armed struggle. Everywhere in the main Shia areas, *dahiyyeh*, the south and Beqaa valley, one is greeted with highly aesthetic posters, flags with religious symbols, Hizb'allah logos, pictures of the or-

ganisation's clerics and encouragement to support Hizb'allah's social service organisations. Putting up and taking down posters and flags is coordinated with traditional holidays such as *ashura* as well as the special days that Hizb'allah has introduced to the Lebanese arena such as al-Quds Day (Jerusalem Day, copying al-Khomeini's invention), the Day of the Martyr and Freedom Day (Harb 2008: 224). Further, Hizb'allah collaborates with local councils in naming roads and squares to make sure that they are named after religious personalities and martyrs (Harb 2008: 228).

The result of filling public space with religious iconography and references is a materialisation of the Islamic atmosphere in Shia-dominated areas. Religion – and Hizb'allah – becomes physically omnipresent as a natural part of public space and of local inhabitants' conceptualisations of the world. Pictures of religious figures such as Ayatollah al-Khomeini and Musa al-Sadr on the streets, taxis with the radio tuned to *al-Nour* (or *al-Bashair*, the Messenger, Ayatollah Fadlallah's pendant) and restaurants showing *al-Manar* are thus all important elements in condensing the religious atmosphere in Shia areas (Deeb 2006: 61). Religion is not 'just' something one believes in, but rather something one lives in and is brought up with. Hizb'allah encapsulates the population in a physical Islamic atmosphere in both public spaces and private homes, thus taking advantage of the versatility of its media apparatus.

Realising the potency of drama and personal identification, Hizb'allah rarely fails to mix powerful images, heavymusic and impassioned words to create a dramatic and effective ambience.<sup>7</sup> For example, when in 2008 a prisoner swap secured the release of the last four Lebanese prisoners in Israeli prisons, the newly released prisoners could be seen on *al-Manar* fighting their way out from a barred gate, physically breaking the sham bars. The quest for immediate personal identification is obvious in the media's use of martyrs. Usually, portraits of Hizb'allah's fallen fighters fill prominent spaces in public areas, e.g. the main road to *dahiyyeh*, where portraits of martyrs hang side by side on lampposts with those of high-ranking clerics. What is also interesting to notice is that the pictures of martyrs in a certain neighbourhood most often portray the fallen young men of that very neighbourhood in order to enhance identification with the fight and to root it firmly in the local community.<sup>8</sup> These portraits of martyrs, Imam Hussein and quotes from the Koran in the public space emphasise the importance of the willingness of the devout to sacrifice his life in the armed struggle. On a local level, Hizb'allah's media thus serve to deepen and broaden Islamic awareness within the Shia population and thus keep the perception of the world locked in a cosmic battle between Right and Evil, condensed into the everyday local environment.

As mentioned above, the cornerstone of the Islamic awareness and atmosphere that is promoted by Hizb'allah is the concept of 'the Society of the Resistance' (Harb and Leenders 2005). In Hizb'allah's optics, a rightly guided community and individual needs to ensure that all aspects of life, whether voluntary work as a social service or armed struggle, are conducted according to religious guidance and tied to resistance to Evil in the cosmic conflict. Everyday activities and political events are framed and analysed in relation to Shia mythology, thus closely tying them to crucial components of Shia belief such as Imam Hussein, the Battle of Karbala and the struggle between Right and Evil. In the Society of the Resistance, both the individual and the community as a whole are strengthened to participate most efficiently in the cosmic conflict. Accordingly, *Al-Nour* describes its vision as being to 'spread values and concepts from the heavenly divine, principles and concepts' to be used for 'the society's social, political, economic, scientific, educational and cultural development' (al-Nour website). At the street level, the omnipresent Hizb'allah posters, flags and collecting boxes remind people of their religious duty to partake in the voluntary social service work and in resistance to Evil. Hence, the media serve to disseminate and deepen the Society of Resistance within the Shia population in Lebanon. In the Society of the Resistance, the devout should resist Evil on every level of his or her everyday life, a view that inextricably links the armed resistance with volunteering in the social service organisation. As such, the Society of the Resistance proclaims that all social activities are to underpin the armed *jihad*, which is considered the epitome of one's willingness to sacrifice. In other words, through a highly proactive and intense communication with the Shia population, Hizb'allah seeks to deepen the Islamic atmosphere within the Shia community in order to create a Society of Resistance in the community on the basis of its own media platforms.

## 5.2 Building bridges

Hizb'allah's media has thus proved to be an important instrument in building bridges and securing backing nationally and regionally. In doing so, Hizb'allah has focused on the ideological elements that unite rather than those that divide. In building bridges with its national, multi-confessional audience Hizb'allah strikes a nationalistic tone, while addressing its pan-Arab audience by emphasizing pan-Arab issues. Reflecting the so-called *infitah* policy, or 'opening up policy', of the organisation, employed since 1991, Hizb'allah cautiously focuses on inclusive subjects. In other words, to build bridges with the target groups, the organisation focuses on the interests that are at least potentially shared by the audience in question.

### 5.2.1 Bridging national divides

When addressing the multi-confessional Lebanese audience outside the Shia community, the organisation primarily stresses two issues: national security, and ecumenical solidarity between Christianity and Islam.

Outside Shia holidays, Hizb'allah downplays religious references and instead fuses Islamic narratives with national references and symbols such as the cedars of Lebanon and the national flag, as well as rhetorically emphasising national aspects of the struggle such as defending the country and stressing national unity to make Lebanon invincible (Atrisi 2008: 247-8). When Hizb'allah's Secretary General appears on national television, a Lebanese flag is always displayed alongside that of Hizb'allah. Focusing on the outside enemy, *al-Manar* portrays *al-Muqawamah*, Hizb'allah's armed dimension, as a force for national resistance, and not just one for the Shia community. This is often done against the backdrop of a perceived ecumenical unity across confessional boundaries in the face of the enemy. One *al-Manar* filler, for example, shows Nasrallah encouraging a Christian-Muslim alliance against those who show aggression towards Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, i.e. the Zionist Israel and the US government (Jorisch 2004: 65). Similarly *al-Manar* states that the station works to 'promote a culture of dialogue and cooperation between followers of the Heavenly religions and human civilisations' (al-Manar website).

Realizing that a number of Lebanese remain sceptical, Hizb'allah has been highly cautious about using Shiite symbols in public spaces in Christian and Sunni areas, thus clearly differentiating between Shia-dominated areas and non-Shia-dominated areas. One example can be found in the huge banner adorning a high building in the very heart of Beirut, in Martyrs' Square, following the 2006 war. The banner displayed a black and white picture of a fighter shrouded in smoke. Nowhere could religious symbols or Hizb'allah icons be found, but only a depiction of a Lebanese flag and the word 'Resistance'. The organisation's awareness of how a lot of non-Shia Lebanese react to Shia and Hizb'allah symbols was further demonstrated during the local elections in 1998. In *dahiyeh*, the southern suburbs of Beirut which historically were largely inhabited by Christians but now host a great Shia majority, Hizb'allah made sure that the voting stations were kept on the outskirts of the neighbourhood, and it also removed all its religious and ideological symbols from voting stations in Christian areas in order not to intimidate voters there (Alagha 2006: 171). During the past decade, this strategy has seemingly picked up pace. In 2001, Hizb'allah's main weekly changed its name from *al-Ahd*, with its religious connotations, to the less religious *al-Intiqad*, the Critique, while the Quranic Sura and the pictures of

Khamenei and al-Khomeini were removed, thus giving the weekly a less exclusively Shia character in order to facilitate national receptiveness (Alagha 2007: 171).

Hence, while Hizb'allah on the one hand seeks to create a condensed Islamic atmosphere within the Shia population, on the other hand the organisation uses the media to promote an image of openness towards the remaining Lebanese population. While Hizb'allah in its communications internal to the Shia population seeks to deepen the impact of the full ideological package, the organisation is seeking to broaden its influence on the national level by focusing on the more inclusive aspects of its ideology and interests.

### *5.2.2 Bridging confessional, regional divides*

Similar to the inclusive strategy towards its non-Shia Lebanese audiences is Hizb'allah's communications with pan-Arab and pan-Muslim audiences, the two rarely being distinguished. Hizb'allah tries to build bridges across religious and national divides. Whereas the national bridge building is primarily performed with reference to shared national interests in protecting Lebanon, *al-Manar* has made it possible to reach a wide Arab audience, particularly Sunnis, by emphasizing another common shared interest; the Palestinian cause, in the TV station's programming. Emphasizing what is perceived as an Israeli occupation of Palestine and al-Quds or Jerusalem is highly effective in building bridges across confessional divides within the Muslim tradition and across Arab state borders. Focusing on the Palestinian issue has earned *al-Manar* a position as one of the five TV stations with the largest audience. Today, *al-Manar* promotes itself under the heading of *Qanat al-arab wa al-muslimin*, 'the Channel for Arabs and Muslims' (Jorisch 2004: 27, 31).

The emphasis on al-Quds and the Palestinian issue was significantly strengthened following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000 and the flaring of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September, making Palestine a key issue in its programming. *Al-Manar* celebrates Jerusalem Day annually while underlining the importance of maintaining awareness of the Palestinian cause as a matter of concern to all Arabs, even in game shows. In the above-mentioned game show *al-Mubimma*, 25% of the cash won by the viewer is for donation to the Intifada (Harb and Leenders 2005: 182). The focus on the Palestinian theme is consistent, among other things through the use of fillers to remind viewers of Israel's illegitimate occupation, its oppression of Islam, humanity and the Palestinian people, and not least the need to fight back. One such filler showed footage of an Israeli flag shading al-Aqsa mosque, until a rising dawn is filled with launching rockets, all accompanied by a text read-

ing: 'Uproot the night of Jerusalem! Wrest the dawn of al-Aqsa [mosque] and rise, sun of Palestine' (Jorisch 2004: 74). Furthermore the use of clips showing Israeli bombings of Palestinian civilians and children are frequent, thus contributing to promoting Hizb'allah's framing of the Arab and Palestinians as oppressed. Similar to what has been the case with Hizb'allah fighters, *al-Manar* has broadcast live recordings of Palestinian military operations and of the last words of martyrs-to-be's, and generally saluted the Palestinian martyrs. Palestinians killed in battle have their martyrdom announced at the bottom of the TV screen.

*Al-Manar's* Palestinian focus has won hearts throughout the Arab world, but indeed minds as well. *Al-Manar* proved to be the TV station with the best informed sources and the ability to deliver news on the Palestinian resistance days ahead of other media. In its coverage, *al-Manar* uses Palestinian reporters, thus allowing the station to be the first on the spot. One example was in 2001 when the station reported that boxes of ammunition and weapons had been successfully smuggled into Gaza (Jorisch 2004: 35). The focal point has been the need for armed struggle against the oppressors. Maintaining a focus on inclusive elements, Hizb'allah has willingly lent a number of Sunni Islamists airtime. Hence, *al-Manar* has often been able to present exclusive interviews with high-ranking leaders of Hamas and Jihad Islamiyyah, as well as numerous clerics (Harik 2004: 160). Doing so enforces the inclusive effect of focusing on the Palestinian issue. Featuring Sunni leaders on its media platforms is highly effective when building alliances with the region's Sunni communities, like Hizb'allah leaders appearing in Sunni-dominated Arab media throughout the region. This is a crucial tool in the organisation's *infatih* policy.

In its communication, Hizb'allah links the Palestinian and Lebanese arenas in its media to underline that they are merely two aspects of one overall struggle against the Evil of today, that is, Israel and the US leadership. Visually this is often done by crosscutting images of Palestinian and Lebanese fighters, whether rock-throwing Palestinian youngsters with Hizb'allah fighters or footage of the al-Aqsa mosque with military operations against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon, while a men's choir praises the Lord.

Furthermore, an equal message has been sent by reporter in other arenas in the context of a single overall armed struggle against the US government and Israel. *Al-Manar*, for example, was able to show comprehensive material of the American advance in Afghanistan, as the TV station had already dispatched a TV crew to Afghanistan a few days after the attacks on September 11, 2001. The US-led invasion in 2003

brought Iraq high on to the agenda of Hizb'allah's media. This was done with clips showing American missiles, mutilated bodies of Iraqi children and then US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld stating, *'Weapons that are being used today have a degree of precision never seen before that no one ever dreamed of'* (Jorisch, 2004: 58).

In its professional coverage and focus on a united armed struggle against the Zionist forces, Israel and the US government, *al-Manar* has secured itself a prominent position within the Arab media and has allowed Hizb'allah to penetrate Arab homes in disseminating its message. Thus, *al-Manar* serves as an important platform to make alliances with like-minded people and to communicate the need for armed struggle to an audience across Sunni–Shia divides and national borders.

### **5.3 Targeting an international audience: 'penetrating the wall of deception' ...**

Addressing an international, seemingly Western audience is marked by two characteristics: tight control of external access on the one hand, and easy access to the information the organisation itself wants to communicate on the other. The purpose of the communication efforts with the international audience are, according to Naim Qassim, to counterbalance the *'misgivings and misinformation'* in what are claimed to be Western media biased in favour of the Zionist course, adding: *'Where certain individuals or groups could be attracted to all or part of our convictions, this would be considered a valuable step toward penetrating the wall of deception'* (Qassem, 2005: 256). Hence, Hizb'allah seeks to communicate a different image of the organisation and of Islam itself, in order for others to see 'the truth'. While Hizb'allah employs an inclusive rhetoric towards its national and regional audience, seeking to incite support for active resistance to the Zionist, communication with international audiences seems less ambitious. Perhaps realising the difficulties of promoting active resistance to an international, de facto Western audience, here Hizb'allah adopts a 'step by step' strategy offering 'an alternative truth' and making knowledge of parts of its organisation accessible through its global-reach media. Communication here takes the form of programmes or articles in French and English, thus making them accessible for a wider audience outside Lebanon and the Middle East.

Compared to Hizb'allah's proactive approach to communication to its local, national and regional audiences, the communication strategy towards its international audience is therefore more passive, aimed at offering a particular truth rather than actively promoting its ideology.

## 5.4 The media as instruments in psychological warfare

In its communications with its enemy, Israel, Hizb'allah has continuously targeted both the Israeli population at large and Israel Defence Force (IDF) personnel in particular, trying to erode the morale of the Israeli forces and the Israeli population's faith in its government. Thus, while Hizb'allah has been wooing potential allies by aiming to make itself supporters and friends through its media outlets, the organisation has simultaneously been conducting psychological warfare by targeting its Israeli enemy.<sup>9</sup> This has taken three forms.

First, the organisation's internal media broadcasts military activities partly to counter official Israeli accounts. *Al-Manar's* practice of documenting *al-Muqawamah's* military activities has intentionally been to target an Israeli audience, which the organisation makes no secret of doing. Naim Qassim thus explained that one of the aims of the live recordings was '*spreading fear amongst the ranks of the Israeli military and uncovering its pretences of power*' (Qassem, 2005: 256). The recordings have proved to have quite an impact on the Israeli population and the Israeli media. Numerous times, official Israeli statements have been contradicted by Hizb'allah's live recordings, to such a degree that many civilian Israelis have turned to Hizb'allah news websites for reliable information (Schleifer 2006: 14). This was demonstrated in February 2008, when Nassim Nisr, a Lebanese imprisoned for six years, was released. According to official Israeli statements the release was for judicial reasons, but when *al-Manar* claimed that Nisr had been released as part of a swap with the remains of Israeli soldiers, Israeli authorities were bombarded with demands for more of such swaps by relatives of deceased Israeli soldiers, thus showing a lack of confidence of official Israeli statements (Lyons 2008: 4).

Secondly, the organisation has used programmes and fillers in Hebrew, thus directly targeting the Israeli audience. Already in 1996, *al-Manar* started broadcasting fillers and programmes in Hebrew (Harik, 2004: 161). One example of its attempt to undermine the morale of the Israeli soldiers is *al-Manar's* 'Who's next?' campaign in both Arabic and Hebrew, in which a series of pictures of newly fallen Israeli soldiers concludes with a silhouette and a question mark. Furthermore, *al-Manar* has continuously sought to erode the authority of the IDF by questioning the Israeli claim never to leave anyone behind, strongly focusing on Ron Arad, a missing bomber navigator, and showing clips of Israeli soldiers retreating from advancing Hizb'allah fighters. A similar use was made of its media before 2000 in Hizb'allah's release of the names of people working for the South Lebanese Army, which was allied to Israel in Israeli-occupied South Lebanon, promising retribution but also offering an

amnesty to Shia South Lebanon Army (SLA) personnel who deserted (Conway, 2007a: 7). Hizb'allah also published appeals to the parents of Israeli soldiers stationed in Lebanon on the Internet. A prominent example was the publication of an interview, originally aired in Israel, with four mothers of IDF soldiers, entitled '*I Don't Want My Son to Die in Lebanon*' (Conway 2005: 12).

Thirdly, using both internal and external media platforms, communication seems to be aimed at triggering a general state of emergency and a feeling of insecurity within the Israeli public by claiming great strength and the ability to strike anywhere in Israel. One example was Nasrallah's statements in an interview on the *al-Jazeera* television station in July 2007: '*In July and August [2006] there were no places in occupied Palestine which were outside the Resistance's missiles – Tel Aviv or other places. We were certain that we could reach any corners or places in occupied Palestine and now know that we can reach them*' (Al-Jazeera, transcript on al-Manar website). Similarly, employing a strategy of an intentional lack of clarity ever since the killing of the highly important Hizb'allah leader, Imad Mughniyyeh on 12 February 2008, the organisation has constantly repeated abstract threats of retaliation and annihilation.

## **5.5 Prioritizing audiences**

The versatility of the media platforms used by Hizb'allah enables the organisation to target several audiences simultaneously. Differentiated forms of rhetoric and focuses are used to convey layers of the organisation's overall ideology to potential allies. In that sense, Hizb'allah communicates its ideology in different ready-made sizes and packages. The pragmatism and focus on efficiency is reflected in the words of Hizb'allah's Vice-Secretary General, Naim Qassim: '*Our strategies should take [international] public opinion into consideration, and should address it with the language, style and proof befitting its level of culture and awareness*' (Qassem 2005: 256). Strategically communicating inclusive elements of its ideology helps the organisation to maximize its impact, thus optimizing the output of its efforts. As Naim Qassim puts it: '*It is our duty to choose to the best of our abilities and means in the race with the powers of hegemony and the measures they employ*' (Qassem 2005: 257).

Judging from the efforts put into communication, the target groups are prioritized differently. However, it is difficult to list the priorities, as they seem to fluctuate with world events.

Communication with the Shia community nonetheless seems constant (though fluctuating in character). The massive media bombardment of the Shia community is absolutely crucial for the organisation given its foothold in the community and its desire to create a fruitful foundation for recruitment to all parts of the organisation. The efforts put into communication with the non-Shia-Lebanese seem to have been steadily increasing too over the past decade, intensifying in times of skirmishes and fights against Israel. *Al-Manar* has played a crucial role in reaching beyond confessional and nation-state boundaries, proving itself to be particularly useful in addressing a regional audience. After the Israeli withdrawal from most of South Lebanon in 2000 and later on the Palestinian Intifada, the organisation gave a much greater priority to regional communication in order to build bridges across the region and actively promote resistance. Though live recordings of military activities began as early as in 1986, and much effort was put into communication with Israelis in the later years of the occupation, communication with the Israeli audience seems to have been firmly consolidated and used whenever it was found to be feasible. The least priority is arguably assigned to reaching the international audience. The early use of websites in English suggests that the international audience was a priority from the beginning. The organisation continues to offer websites and information about the organisation by using its own media, but in a non-proactive manner, thus suggesting that reaching an international audience is now low on its list of priorities. The first half of 2008 saw internal discussions of the feasibility conveying its message to an international, non-Arab audience, as some people in the organisation argued that the degree of receptiveness did not justify the efforts put into it (Musawi, 2008, author's interview)

## 6. Conclusion

The report has shown that Hizb'allah pursues a sophisticated and multi-pronged communications strategy. The versatility and flexibility of both the internal and external media platforms it uses enables the organisation to target specific audiences, conveying different aspects of its overall message.

When taking advantage of external media platforms, the organisation maintains tight control of access while simultaneously offering an external audience the image of Hizb'allah, its ideology and its perception of the world that the organisation itself wants to project. However, its internal media remain its primary platform in conveying this message. Being highly biased, the media serve as an educational tool in the hands of Hizb'allah, giving instruction in its particular world view. Using the different qualities and abilities of the various media platforms allows the organisation to differentiate between audiences in its communication, thus making communication more efficient.

The objectives of the differentiated approach to communication are on the one hand to disseminate aspects of the organisation's religiously informed world view, ideology, values, motives and moral codes to potential allies, and on the other to pursue psychological warfare against its enemies.

When addressing potential allies, Hizb'allah adds layers to a minimal ideological structure depending on the audience targeted. Hence, the Shia community is addressed using the full ideological package. In doing so, Hizb'allah depends heavily on Shia narratives and its own media's ability to encapsulate the Shia community in a materialised Islamic atmosphere. Hizb'allah's effectiveness in this regard is crucial for the organisation's ability to maintain itself.

When dealing with potential allies outside the Shia population, the exclusive Shia rhetoric is put aside for more inclusive purposes. In addressing a multi-confessional Lebanese audience, for example, Hizb'allah focuses on national issues such as the (perceived) Israeli threat to Lebanese sovereignty and ecumenical unity across confessional divides, and promotes Hizb'allah as a weapon of national resistance, rather than merely a Shia movement. Similarly, Hizb'allah uses both the external and internal media to build bridges across confessional and state divides on the regional level. Hizb'allah's TV station *al-Manar* plays a crucial part in this bridge-building when

pan-Arab and pan-Muslim audiences are being targeted. In doing so, Hizb'allah emphasizes in particular the liberation of Palestine as an inclusive issue for all Arabs.

While Hizb'allah is fairly active in using its media to build bridges on the national and regional levels, less priority is assigned to communication with its international audience (albeit still significant), which is marked by making an 'alternative truth' available, rather than by actively promoting bridge-building with this audience.

Simultaneously with Hizb'allah's attempt to deepen Islamic awareness within the Shia community and broadening its influence with potential allies, the organisation actively uses communication as a part of its struggle against Israel. Using communication as a weapon, the organisation seeks to erode the morale of Israeli soldiers, as well as the Israeli people's confidence in its political leadership.

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## Notes

- 1 Furthermore, a number of websites affiliated with Hizb'allah's social service organizations serve as platforms for distributing explicitly educational material for its clients, e.g. material on agricultural development. Since this type of service is part and parcel of the organisation's core services rather than being merely of a communicative nature, these are disregarded in this report.
- 2 The exact nature of the organisational link between *al-Manar* and Hizb'allah remains unclear. The management of both Hizb'allah proper and *al-Manar* deny there is any direct organizational connection. Nevertheless, the affiliation seems substantial: *al-Manar* was started by Hizb'allah members, while the TV station depends on funding from Hizb'allah, of which most of the station's shareholders, employees and board members are members (Conway 2007a: 3-4). Furthermore, *al-Manar* seems to be subject to Hizb'allahs Information Unit, which coordinates the joint efforts of other Hizb'allah-affiliated media outlets, as well as the coordination of the rest of Hizb'allah's organisational set-up. This suggests that, while *al-Manar* remains structurally autonomous, efforts and aims are coordinated with the Media Office.
- 3 In 2004, it was estimated that *al-Manars* budget was half of that of *al-Jazeera*, leaving it at around USD 15 millions annually (Jorich 2004a: xiii). Though many observers and critics claim that the network is funded by Iran, al-Manars management itself claims that this is not the case, arguing that the TV-station lives up to Lebanese legislation, prohibiting foreign funding (Jorich, 2004a:31-32). Instead the funding supposedly comes from Hizb'allah, private donations, revenues from sale of programmes, translation of and onward sale of Iranian programmes and commercial advertising (Conway 2007a:5).
- 4 Though the scale of the production and sale is not known, the owner of a music studio and music distributor in Beirut's southern suburbs claimed in an interview that he alone sells about half a million copies of CD's and recorded tapes annually (while complaining that sales have been reduced by unauthorized copying) (Sawf News 2006).
- 5 This writer personally experienced complete shutdowns during field research in Lebanon during the political tension peaking in 2008, which was also confirmed by numerous journalists.
- 6 While Israel is considered one unit, Hizb'allah distinguishes between the US leadership, which broadly encompasses both the political leadership and the economic leadership, and the US population at large. While these leaderships are considered the very epitome of evil today, the general American population is not (Friberg Lyme 2009).
- 7 An example of the latter is Hizb'allah's newly opened museum in South Lebanon. On 15 August 2008, exactly two years after the close of the 2006 war, Hizb'allah opened a museum in the town of Nabatiyyeh in remembrance of the war and the killing of Imad Mughniyyeh. The museum includes a multi-media presentation, with the voice of the martyr Mughniyyeh sounding over the exhibition, encompassing his bloodstained clothes, an artificial skeleton in Israeli uniform, destroyed Israeli Merkava tanks and a list of every single bomber used during the war.
- 8 However, the three highest ranking martyrs of Hizb'allah, Ragheb Harb, Abbas Mussawi and Imad Mughniyyeh, are seen in all neighbourhoods.

- 9 That Hizb'allah is not the only organisation that considers its media apparatus to be important has been demonstrated in Israel's keen interest in targeting it militarily. Al-Manar has repeatedly been targeted, including on the second day of the 2006 war, which completely annihilated the TV station's five-storey headquarters in Harat Hreik outside Beirut. However, except for a few minutes the station was able to broadcast continuously, as was al-Nour. A more sophisticated way of targeting of Hizb'allah's media has been to hack into its websites. In the first weeks of the al-Aqsa *intifada*, Hizb'allah's then official website, hizbollah.org, had nine million hits, half from Israel and half from Canada, effectively blocking the homepages until Hizb'allah established seven more. However, these too were hacked into and re-programmed to show the Israeli flag and play the Israeli national anthem (Skovgaard-Petersen 2001: 211).

