

Chapter 6

The Cognitive Campaign alongside the War

The role of a cognitive campaign in a war has long been recognized, and its place has grown with the increasing reach of new media.¹² Leaders of the Shi'ite axis know well how to exploit the media to influence public opinion. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah spends a lot of time and effort trying to influence the consciousness of the Israeli, Lebanese, and international publics. And this pattern is expected to continue during the next war, when he will likely claim victory over Israel – whether or not that reflects reality on the ground. Nasrallah can be expected to apply scare and deterrence tactics against the Israeli public and IDF soldiers via all types of media, including social networks, in an attempt to sow fear and amplify Hezbollah's successes regardless of the actual outcomes of the war.

Israel needs to prepare ahead of time in the cognitive field. In this section we present guidelines for **an Israeli cognitive strategy** that were formulated as part of our project, and offer suggestions for messages aimed at the various target audiences. The cognitive effort must be directed at those same four target audiences: the Israeli public, the Lebanese political system and residents, the enemy (i.e., Hezbollah and other members of the Shi'ite axis), and regional and international audiences. A distinction should be made between messaging prior to war and during a campaign; a further distinction should be made between overt and covert messaging.¹³

12 This chapter was written with the assistance of David Siman-Tov.

13 The narrative and the messages in this section are presented in a generic way, and of course need to be adapted to the circumstances and the alternative ultimately chosen.

Vis-à-vis the Israeli public

The proposed narrative: Israel faces a grave and complex challenge and a significant threat to the home front, but the IDF can provide the necessary response.

Prior to war: It is important to expose the Israeli public in advance to the threat to the home front and to make it clear that in the next war a major attack on the home front is expected, though the magnitude remains unknown. If the circumstances suggest that the possibility of war is close, the public should be informed of Hezbollah's newest capabilities to help prepare for the severity of what might follow. At the same time it should be emphasized that the IDF's defensive capabilities are formidable, and that it has the skills to achieve victory in the campaign. The civilian population for its part will be required to heed the instructions of the Home Front Command.

During the campaign: It must be made clear to citizens that fulfilling Home Front Command instructions will help reduce damage, and that removing the threat requires time. The IDF's strength and its ability to overcome the threats must be highlighted time and again, but the message should also be conveyed that attaining victory will require patience on the part of the public. In parallel, it is also important to convey messages that refute the boastful statements of Hezbollah and others in the Shi'ite axis, making it clear that their claims of achievements are in fact baseless.

Vis-à-vis the Shi'ite axis

The proposed narrative: Israel has the military power and prowess, national resilience, and the determination to overcome threats to its security, and if there is no other choice it is ready to deal the enemy a severe blow even if that means that there will be extensive damage to infrastructure and civilians.

Prior to war: Israel should emphasize that it does not desire war against Hezbollah and Iran, but it will continue to work tirelessly to keep threats against it at bay. That said, a continued military buildup – for example, by Hezbollah and particularly its precision-guided missile project – is what will lead to war. Israel will not be deterred, and is preparing for confrontation

in that context. This war will exact a heavy price from Hezbollah and its partners in battle, including Iranian elements in Syria.

During the campaign: Israel should emphasize to Hezbollah that it has the ability and the staying power to continue fighting for as long as is needed to win the war, and any threats the organization makes about causing harm to Israelis will be met with a severe blow to the Lebanese home front. As for Iran and its other proxies, Israel should stress that it is aware that Tehran is posturing behind Hezbollah and other axis members attacking Israel, and warn it that any attack on Israel from Syria or Iraq will lead to a harsh Israeli response.

Vis-à-vis Lebanon – The Lebanese system and population

The proposed narrative: Israel has no interest in hurting the state of Lebanon and its residents; rather, it is interested in a prospering and stable Lebanon and in peaceful relations with it. It is Hezbollah and Iran, by repeatedly threatening Israel, that are leading the situation to war. Hezbollah does not care about Lebanon but is acting solely in the service of its Iranian masters, and it is responsible for Lebanon's precarious situation.

Prior to war: Israel should emphasize that Hezbollah is responsible for Lebanon's dire situation and is leading it to war for reasons that have nothing to do with Lebanon. The organization's connection to Iran should also be underlined, as well as the fact that Iran dictates Hezbollah policy in line with its own interests. Thus it is Iran that is dragging the region to war. Lebanon does not actually need Hezbollah to defend it, since Israel has no interest in acting against Lebanon per se and its only goal is to neutralize Hezbollah's threats against it. Hezbollah cynically uses the Lebanese population as a "human shield," concealing dangerous weapons within populated areas, which pose a serious threat to the public, as was proved in the August 2020 Beirut Port disaster.

During the campaign: Israel should emphasize that it is Iran and Hezbollah that are responsible for the destruction of Lebanon. Hezbollah is not the "protector of Lebanon," as it claims, but rather uses Lebanese civilians as a "human shield." Israel aspires to end the war by straightening out its relations with Lebanon, while removing the threat against it from Hezbollah. For that

reason, Israel demands an improved agreement with regard to UN Security Council Resolution 1701, passed in August 2006 at the end of the Second Lebanon War, that will ensure for the short term a cessation of Hezbollah's military buildup and the removal of the precision missiles from Lebanon, and calls for a long-term mechanism to be set up to disarm Hezbollah. Implementation of this arrangement will lead to the prosperity of Lebanon.

In the regional and international arenas

The proposed narrative: Israel's military operations are legitimate. Israel has no desire for war and is being dragged into it against its will due to the aggression of the Shi'ite axis against it and Hezbollah's continued military buildup. The responsibility for damages to infrastructures and the civilian population in Lebanon lies with Hezbollah and Iran.

Prior to war: Israel should send messages spotlighting Hezbollah's military buildup and in particular its precision-guided missile project, which threatens the security and stability of the entire region. Hezbollah, with the support of Iran, is pulling in the direction of a war that Israel does not want, but could be dragged into because of the military buildup and entrenchment of members of the Shi'ite axis. Israel will strive not to harm civilians and infrastructures, but if that does happen – it is Hezbollah that is responsible.

During the campaign: Israel should stress that it is under attack and taking all means necessary to defend itself. Strikes against civilian populations and infrastructures are being carried out as there is no choice, but it is Hezbollah and the Shi'ite axis that are responsible; Hezbollah uses the civilian population as "human shields," as seen in the Beirut Port disaster. The international community should be persuaded to intervene in order to assist in shortening the war (the actual time frame will be determined according to how events unfold during the course of the campaign). Israel should emphasize that international entities must step in early to stop the fighting, to help limit the destruction to Lebanon and to underscore the need for an improved agreement in relation to Security Council Resolution 1701, with an emphasis on realistic goals for the immediate term, above all halting Hezbollah's military buildup and its precision-missile program and, for the long term, as already noted, neutralizing Hezbollah as an independent militia.