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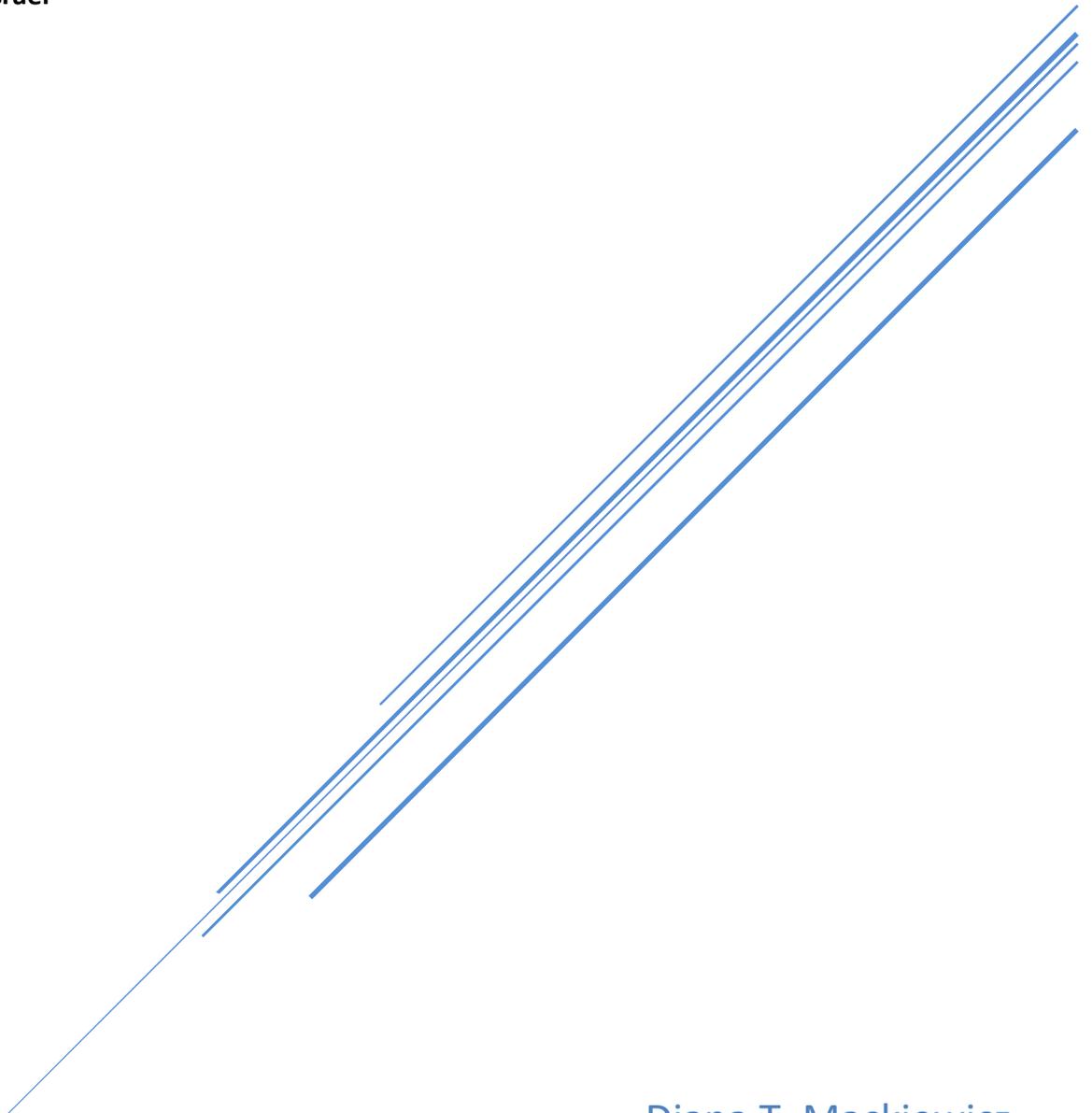
COGNITIVE WARFARE:

Hamas & Hezbollah and their insidious efforts

Course: Islamic Jihadi-Salafi Terrorism as an Ongoing Challenge

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Cognitive warfare, when practiced effectively has strength, an insidious nature and disrupts our ordinary understandings and reactions to events. The term, cognitive warfare, requires some dissection and interpretation in the context of national security; broadly defined it is a disinformation process to psychologically wear down the receivers of the information. It is strategically spread through information resources like social media, networking, Internet resources, videos, photos taken out of context, simplistic resources like political cartoons and even well-planned websites that encourage the making of disinformation. It is the, *“...manipulation of public discourse by external elements seeking to undermine social unity or damage political trust in the political system.”* (Rosner & Siman-Tov, 2018)

For those in the military, cognitive warfare is considered the 5th generation of warfare since it is used as a form of hard power while appearing innocuous. Modern day military and nation states now face the onslaught of disinformation that is designed to discredit credibility and confuse the public of plausible and truthful details. According to US Lt. Gen. Vincent Stewart, in a keynote address to the Department of Defense Intelligence regarding the age of cognitive war, *“There are about 3.7 billion people connected to the Internet now-that’s almost half of humanity with the ability to consume and share information in the blink of an eye and even...steal some of our information and private conversations.”* (Stewart, 2017)

Hamas and Hezbollah have employed a steady discourse of misinformation and deceit against Israel to engender worldwide support and humanitarian aid for the Palestinians. Meanwhile, Israel has had to regroup and consider an inherent national strategy for cognitive warfare while allowing civil liberties to prevail in a democratic society. (Rosner & Siman-Tov, 2018)

Therefore, the focus of this study is how Hamas and Hezbollah have applied cognitive warfare

and how the country of Israel has dealt with the ongoing effects of cognitive warfare from terrorist organizations.

2. Literature review

The use of misinformation, deceit and under-handedness in warfare has a long history. One can quote from The Art of War by Sun Tzu written during the Warring period of China (475-221BCE) relating to cognitive warfare,

“Thus, it follows that the highest form of warfare is to out-think the enemy.... thus, a skillful general must defeat the enemy without coming to a battle, take his cities without a siege and overthrow his state without a long campaign...” (Trapp & Sun Tzu, 2012)

For this research, a current starting point of reference and review of cognitive warfare begins with Osama bin Laden and his own communication of Al-Qaeda’s intent. Max Abrahms (2005), *“Al Qaeda’s Miscommunication War: The Terrorism Paradox,”* examined the psychological and political misperceptions that were conveyed by Al Qaeda. Abrahms directly states that terrorism is a form of communication and that the messages that Al Qaeda employed against the United States were consistent but not effective. The consistency was in the three points often quoted and now historicized: 1) Al Qaeda wanted to drive the American military from Muslim Holy sites in Mecca and Medina, 2) Al Qaeda was against the U.S. involvement in Iraq and that included Operation Desert Storm, 3) Al Qaeda “condemned” the U.S. Israeli alliance and U.S. assistance with Israel and its war against Palestine. (Abrahms, 2005)

Furthermore, Al Qaeda proceeded to narrate America as the ultimate villain due to its military prowess which was akin to “killing a fly with a shotgun.” (Abrahms, 2005) The messages sent out by Al Qaeda challenged America’s credibility and international standing and finally, on 11 September 2001, America was attacked in what seemed like a surprise. Al Qaeda understood

America to be a “paper tiger,” ineffectual and not much of a challenge based on past incidents, such as the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole and the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania.

(Abrahms, 2005)

Yet the paper tiger rationale did not work because Al Qaeda and the rest of the world reacted to the message sent. Here the cognitive warfare approach is explored because the receiver of the message (United States, George Bush) had to conciliate the sender (Al Qaeda, Bin Laden) and communication had to succeed at two levels. The receiver needed to understand the message communicated by the sender. Second, the receiver had to believe that the sender’s message accurately stated the intentions of the sender, all equaling clarity of communication and intention. (Abrahms, 2005)

President Bush’s reactions have been well documented but in this analysis one can suggest that he used “premature cognitive closure” based on the fact that Bin Laden was considered the “little terrorist in Afghan,” (Abrahms, 2005). Bush chose to swiftly react which was a reaction to the fast and far reaching effects of the events and that he enacted his own defense mechanisms before taking stock of all the countervailing information. (Abrahms, 2005)

One can also argue if Bush really believed all the signals sent from Al Qaeda were clear in their intentions or another smokescreen. How does the belief in the other side’s message apply to Israel and Hamas? Victims of aggression are often suspicious of making any compromises with the “winner” since winners may use it to their advantage and demand more of the “loser.” (Abrahms, 2005) Therefore, does Hamas feel that making concessions with Israel then imply that Israel is the winner and Hamas will have to follow through on future concessions?

The substantial tool that Al Qaeda gained from 9/11 was the coverage by the media of the event. Two-thirds of the world watched the event on TV, Internet and the news cycle rebroadcast the footage of the planes flying into the Twin Towers several times. Media coverage for terrorists is considered “oxygen of publicity” (Thatcher, 1985) and this phenomenon highlights the violence of the terrorist attacks and often does not portray the humanitarian and economic issues that create the grievances. (Abrahms, 2005) In addition, terrorist organizations rely on the media, social networking, videos, photos because these groups do not have a diplomatic body that is internationally accepted and institutionalized in the process of communications. (Abrahms, 2005)

Moreover, a major concern for cognitive warfare is when the enemy does it better, accomplishes their directives and remains in power despite all the futile attempts to thwart their skills. “*Psyoping Hezbollah: The Israeli Psychological Warfare Campaign During the 2006 Lebanon War,*” by Ron Schleifer, (2009) explains Israel’s attempts to defeat Hezbollah in the 2006 War between Israel and Hezbollah. The decision by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to employ psychological warfare, known as PSYOP against the terrorist group, Hezbollah, located in Lebanon was a complicated and tactical risk for the IDF. Psychological warfare in the military context focuses on the following three addressees: domestic, enemy and neutral, and all are exposed to carefully crafted messages. (Schleifer, 2009) The compounded effects that signal success are that the audiences will choose to act, support, oppose or remain neutral to what events are taking place. (Schleifer, 2009)

The practice of psychological warfare is not a new component for warfare but for the IDF, they had already scrubbed their PSYOP division six years before the campaigns against Hezbollah and had to regroup and form a new unit in 2005 called, *Mercaz L’Mitzaei Toda’a*:

The Center for Consciousness/Perception Operations or also known as MALAT. (Schleifer, 2009) The first mission was hastily pulled together against Hezbollah and had merit after learning from mistakes made.

Schleifer makes it apparent that the early days of MALAT could have also terminated its existence because it was working with two other elements: effects-based operations (EBO) and *Itsuv HaMa'aracha* (Battle Design) also known as GHQ. The EBO does not involve a full onslaught with the enemy but favors things like precision bombing, drone strikes and EBO was the “new” warfare. (Schleifer, 2009) Whereas, Battle Design was also included in the operations and this added further conflict to operational and organizational communications. (Schleifer, 2009) A non-militaristic point of view would suggest that there were too many theories and guidelines in place for the start-up of MALAT in 2005.



What is noteworthy about MALAT and EBO in tandem was that a plan was developed to discredit the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, thereby eliminating his command in the field and overall communications with Hezbollah troops. (Schleifer, 2009) The action to build a cognitive warfare campaign against Nasrallah involved fundamental

strategies like the use of caricatures (political cartoons), leaflets dropped on Lebanese towns and villages discrediting him, making fun of him in the news and on the TV and discrediting him publicly forcing his followers to reconsider how to support him. (Schleifer, 2009) Figure 1: Leaflet produced by Israeli Defense Force for Israel-Lebanon War 2006 “Your defenders are

your destroyers” Large head of Nasrallah behind the human shield of Lebanese citizens.

(Richards, 2012)

The PSYOP campaign delved into the power of persuasion and targeted the Lebanese citizens who had built a support for Nasrallah and Hezbollah. The rain of leaflets was targeting the other distinct groups: Druze, Christians and Sunnis who had not aligned with Nasrallah. Interestingly, a challenge the MALAT unit encountered was how to convince the Lebanese to read the leaflets which were dropped from planes that were avoided whenever seen flying overhead. (Schleifer, 2009)

Was the cognitive warfare against Hezbollah, especially Nasrallah a complete success? The decision is divided since Hezbollah never left Lebanon, Nasrallah is still in charge, but the fractures of public support were initiated. Without a victory, Israel had to settle for the fact that their cognitive warfare skills executed under MALAT needed to improve. The Israel Lebanon war in 2006 was a 33-day event and it was not enough time to establish a full drawn out *“psychologically based process of persuasion.”* (Schleifer, 2009)

In fact, the weak outcome for Israel became a significant learning experience that had strengthened the IDF’s resolve to improve their PSYOP methods. For example, they committed to the idea that all military events needed a name, and the war in 2006 became known as “The Second Lebanon War.” Hezbollah named the war in 2006, “Divine Victory”, and regaled in the fact that they had held off the IDF with a fighting force of 600-800 fighters and survived. (Schleifer, 2009)

What Israel and the IDF learned from all the experiences attributed to the victory/no-victory in Lebanon was explained more fully in the research by David Siman-Tov and David Sternberg,

(2017), *“The Missing Effort:” Integrating the “Non-lethal” Dimension in the Israeli Military Lines of Operation*. The bulk of information and data streaming into households via the Internet, TV, radio, newspapers and several computer devices is greater today when compared to the events of 9/11 which was seen by over 2/3 of the world population. The publicity of 9/11 fueled the mindset of many terrorists and could not be contained by the media, especially in democratic countries. Now in 2018, the direct pipeline to communities is through the media and in a democratic country, civil liberties and thirst to know the story work side by side. The civil liberties protect the power of free speech and allow the media to function in its ability to inform the public.

Yet nations, especially democratic ones like Israel, United States, France, encounter intrinsic challenges “controlling” the media and how to express the opinions posed. Lethal force in the form of armies and attacks have also been criticized for the damages caused and loss of life. The military force may be defined as a kinetic force, hard-driving linear forceful action. The non-kinetic force, also referred to as “soft-power” is manifested in the economic and diplomatic sanctions, legal forces, even the manipulation of information which falls into the category of cognitive warfare or perception management as it is often referred to in the United States. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017)

The power of persuasion through cognitive warfare is a troubling concept because as expressed in Siman-Tov and Sternberg’s work, the IDF needed to enhance their own abilities to persuade and “*adopt the logic of influence operations.*” (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017) The ability to take information and disseminate it across several platforms: computer, Internet, TV, newspaper and leaflets, ultimately controls the narratives projected and questions about authenticity and attribution may not be checked.

Therefore, a strategy against cognitive warfare requires a useful adage, “Know Thyself,” attributed to Socrates and located at the Temple of Delphi. Knowing yourself and knowing your enemy is a stronger dictum for success and this knowledge through intelligence resources, media, reports and first-hand accounts especially shape how cognitive warfare will impact public support, opinions, and decision-making. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017)

Israel’s model for cognitive warfare as explained in (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017) outlines the use of media, electronic warfare, and financial and cybernetic campaigns. These tools are varied in their use and have had some success however they have not been made as apparent on a world stage. For example, the use of humanitarian aid not only to Israel’s allies but also to neighboring enemies is not well known. A recent *Jerusalem Post* article, 16 October 2018, mentions that for a second time an infant of Syrian refugees living in Cyprus is returning to Israel for a needed operation. The story was displayed on Twitter via the Internet and yet stories like this do not consistently filter down to populations around the world. Yet, if Israeli’s knew this about their country and the humanitarian services it has established, would this assist Israel’s reputation at home and abroad? One may also suggest that the publicized humanitarian service is a soft power that is non-lethal in description and bridges many perceptions of distrust.

However, cognitive warfare and the use of the Internet and media outlets is a time-consuming process that resides often outside the military institutions and its leaders. Within the IDF there is a strong and visible practice that actions matter over words and the outcomes are definitive achievements, that can be quantified and are attained quickly. With cognitive warfare, the results are “slow,” hard to assess for success, and often difficult to discern. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017) Therefore, an approach to discredit an adversary via the use of propaganda tools: leaflets, memes, and cartoons may not be efficient and timely in a world where messages

like videos, texts and images travel in nanoseconds. But the psychological operation of providing plausible details and lies to discredit and confuse the enemy as used in leaflets and memes has a strong operational value in modern methods of communication. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017; Siboni, 2018)

For Israel and the IDF, the following suggestions about augmenting current cognitive warfare and success were made:

- **Information Warfare:** Focus on the person, organization, their message, pertinent groups and know the adversary's audience: local, regional, international and are they literate. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017)
- **Political-Legal Warfare:** Utilizes the legal systems in place to defend Israel from legal claims, expression of ethical and legal concerns through practices like early warnings to the enemy and proactively protecting Israel from ongoing lawsuits. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017)
- **Economic Warfare:** Damage, upset, curtail the enemy's economic resources to protect Israel from outside terrorist threats. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017)
- **Cyberwarfare:** Proactive approach to protect Israel's national security and reputation through cyberdefense and the use of information, intelligence collections, cognitive warfare, psychological warfare cohesively woven into the fabric of media, economics, and national security. (Siman-Tov & Sternberg, 2017)
- **Know Thyself:** Israel and the IDF, through constructive reflection and criticism, know who they are, where they want to be and maintain the knowledge of their own political, cultural and religious history. It is an exercise in self-knowledge which will enable all

Israelis to further defend their values as a free, moral and democratic country. (Kozloski, 2018)

Hence, cognitive warfare as practiced in Israel needs a robust upgrade in the 21st century. Attention to time frames on the release of powerful images, to the reaction time and numbers of reactions (views, hits) need to be assessed. Attention to how videos and images are plausible in one context and then imported into another context representing deceit also need further study. Finally, within the article by Siman-Tov and Sternberg, there is the conclusion that mechanisms to measure and interpret media resources and then rapidly reply with accurate information and knowledge is needed.

3. Application of Analysis

There are many audiences that are drawn into the vortex of misrepresentation and deceit when cognitive warfare is routinely practiced. Vulnerable audiences are those that conceptualize and gather information more from images than from language, audiences that have been raised in a sectarian perspective that diminishes any possibility of a resolution, and foreign audiences that do not have the background information to critically analyze the product and refute its message. A useful framework to follow is a triangle of communication as described by Brigitte Nacos,

“...terrorists calculate what they need and will get access to what one might call the triangle of political communication. The mass media, governmental decision-makers, and the public constitute the corners of the triangle.” (Nacos, pg. 361, 2016)

Domestic communication resources are the most important for the terrorists and these will include information technologies, TV stations, newspapers and of course the ubiquitous social networking campaigns. The medium of memes, cartoons and videos are appropriate tools for

cognitive warfare and often their targeted audiences share these qualities: young, technically savvy, educated, worldly and a range of knowledge about international political events.

The deliberate use of misinformation to threaten, distort and coerce when applied to the perspective of the young learner creates a cumulative effect since there is no other frame of reference. Children and adolescent audiences are exploited through the substantial use of TV and Internet related devices; cognitive warfare practiced at this young educational level needs just as much attention as the cognitive warfare practiced on adults.

3.1 Memes

Memetics have been in use since the 1970s and as tools for psychological warfare, memes, provide a realm of detachment while the responder interreacts and develops their own opinion. The adjacent meme, Figure 2, is credited to the website, Standwithus.com and constructed from clear photographs, grammatically correct for an English-speaking audience, and published online since March 2018. (Teaching Children to Hate, 2018)



The above meme is an attempt by a pro-Israeli group to discredit Hamas and Hezbollah. Ironically, Hamas and Hezbollah have advertised that they train their children to kill, hate and practice martyrdom. A technical feature about the meme is that it is easily disseminated across several social networking platforms: Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, WhatsApp and of course Internet websites. The meme heightens awareness about the enlistment of children by Hamas and Hezbollah as child soldiers and reinforces the idea that Israel is a peaceful partner.

3.2 Websites that Teach

Two websites that are currently active and available to adults and children also have the ability, in the “right” hands to shape perception management for positive and negative results.

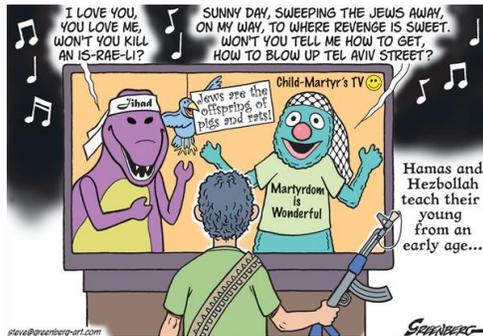
Storyboardthat.com, and [Palestine Remix](http://PalestineRemix.com): You Can Tell the Story Too, sponsored by Aljazeera.com. Both sites are geared for a young technocratic audience and analyzed below.

3.2a Cartoons-Amateur and Professional



The above cartoon, Figure 3, was made on Storyboardthat.com, 10/18/2015. Age of the creator is unknown, but the cartoon establishes the tone of how Israelis and Palestinians are not willing to help each other. Access to the software is free and continued usage is a monthly or one-time cost. The use of the software instills in the creator a creative freedom and independence. It is an amateurish design meant to engender inaccurate portrayals of the two societies and propagandize one side’s narrative. The Palestinians in the Gaza and West Bank receive water from the State of Israel at cost. The message the cartoon conveys is how Israelis and Palestinians are willing to kill each other over food and water resources. Cartoon was removed from Storyboardthat.com recently in fall of 2018.

Furthermore, cartooning and caricatures messaging increases in sophistication with age and experience, as shown below. The messages become timelier and nuanced in meaning. The two cartoons are made by professional cartoonists and have a stronger condensed artistic style.



An American editorial cartoonist drew this cartoon depicting how Hamas and Hezbollah train their young to hate and kill Israeli Jews. The use of TV characters like Barnie the Dinosaur and a Sesame Street character convey that terrorist training begins at a very young age and that TV is available.

Figure 4: Published August 21, 2012 by Steve Greenberg

AAEC Ref Num: 114037 (Greenberg, 2012)



A Palestinian drew this cartoon which depicts Israeli settlers as heartless for their actions when they torched homes in the Duma village near Nablus. An 18-month-old baby died and his family was severely wounded. The style is simplistic and contingent upon the audience, a moth too close to a flame will get burned. The moth could also be a butterfly.

Figure 5: July 13, 2015 (Sabaaneh, 2015)

Both cartoons depict a knowledge of current events, and international media as in the case of Figure 4 with Barnie the Dinosaur and a Sesame Street character chanting anti-Israel death slogan to a young child, representative of child soldiers in Hamas and Hezbollah. Figure 5 has few words in it suggesting simplicity, strong non-verbal communication through the symbols used and the choice for no words. The cartoons have directed messages at local, regional and international audiences designed to simultaneously produce sympathy and disgust for the intended target.

3.3 Videos and Cognitive Warfare

Palestine Remix: You Can Tell the Story Too, sponsored by Aljazeera.com, provides the compiler of the video with archived videos, interviews and images about Palestine. The compiler of the video, then has the option to upload it to Facebook, Twitter, Google+, or email it. The technical directions are uncomplicated; in English, Arabic, Bosnian and Turkish, and the whole service is free. One video on the website, [Beyond the Walls](#), (Al-Rahmy,2012), has an influential professional style that portrays prison as routine and depressing with well-drawn visual images that transition from one frame to the next. For the uninformed viewer, it illustrates a despotism and dire message about imprisonment of Palestinians for political crimes after the Six-Day War in 1967 by the Israeli's. The message of the video also supports the Palestinian narrative about Israeli prison systems and justice. The film director was Ahmad Adnan Al-Rahmy, and this production was overseen by Rawan Damen, senior filmmaker and media consultant at Al-Jazeera. After several comparison views to other projects at **Palestine Remix**, one can see the differences between a professional and amateur remix project.

Rawan Damen contributed her expertise to [The Price of Oslo](#) (2013), which launches a one-sided point of view that the Oslo Accords were more about establishing land settlements for Israel and not for future peaceful relations.

The disarming feature about both films mentioned is that they are made by experienced film crews with strengths in cognitive and psychological warfare. The less robust and amateurish films at **Palestine Remix** portray passion mixed with historical bias and are not comparable to the films listed above. Finally, if one wanted to remix a video that was unbiased, there is no way to introduce an outside video resource into the ones supplied by Aljazeera.com.

3.3a Hezbollah – Capabilities and Role in The Middle East (Full Documentary)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzBZpNxxkui8> Published: 18 Nov. 2017



Fig. 6 The screen shot from the Hezbollah documentary has professionally blended images of Hezbollah’s army, their leader, Nasrallah and states clearly that its roots were first “intra-

Lebanese” but later were supported by the Syrians and Iranians. The video is less than one year old, over 318,000 views and does not try to conceal who the outside supporters are for Hezbollah and what their goals are: targeting Israel, assisting Hamas, strengthening the role of Iran and Shiitism. (Hezbollah, 2017)

3.3b “ Hamas indoctrination of Kids: Bombs more precious than children”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=7&v=uVAVluyE0W0 Fig. 7

Published: 11 January 2009. The video has cobbled together video segments of children training as Hamas soldiers, children acting in certain video segments with people who are their parents, interviews with very young toddlers who are already answering questions about killing Jews. The Hamas message does not suppress hatred for Israeli Jews, nor does it shy away from training children to fight as



soldiers. Finally, the message of martyrdom is significant since children are emotionally being prepared to plan for suicide bombing missions. The video has had over 3,747 views. (Children of Hamas, 2009)

Palestinian Media Watch, palwatch.org is a nongovernmental organization that translates the videos, cartoons, media that are produced by the Palestinian Authority and associates. Their mission is to encourage peace and eventual cooperation among Israel and her neighbors and monitor the media despite how inciteful it is. In an unobtrusive manner, Palwatch.org seeks to raise the awareness of its viewers and explain in detail the truth. Therefore, Palestinian Media Watch's approach to cognitive warfare is to clearly define the misinformation listed and to explain publicly what it means.

4. Conclusion

The cognitive warfare campaign staged by Hamas and Hezbollah has exploited several means of communication, especially within the realm of TV, movies, memes, cartoons and the application of an Internet platform. The cognitive warfare has been insidious and relentless in its propaganda and overt messages of hatred and defeat of Israel and Zionism. The frenetic pace of the release of movies and memes for public consumption has been counteracted by Israeli nongovernmental institutions, the IDF and the Israeli public. A more stringent maneuver may be the continued removal of movies, websites and social networking sites that promote the hatred and propaganda against Israel. Removal of the "oxygen of publicity."

Finally, as of 12 November 2018, the Al Aqsa TV station located in the Gaza, which broadcast many TV shows meant to indoctrinate young Palestinians as the "cubs" for Hamas and Hezbollah was destroyed by IDF rocket fire. (Rasgon, et al, 2018) A cynical realist may suggest

that the TV station will be rebuilt, and Hamas and Hezbollah will then bolster their cognitive warfare campaign but for now, “no news is good news” when it comes to propaganda campaigns in its highest form of cognitive warfare. Meanwhile, Israel has an opportunity to regroup and upgrade their own messages of peace, humanitarian aid, and potential prosperity when there is mutual trust and cooperation.

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