

LUISS



Department of Political Science

Chair of Political Sociology

A battle for hearts and minds: the use of
da'wa by hybrid terrorist organisations.
The case studies of Hezbollah and Hamas

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Academic Year 2021/2022

“Caduti per un’idea, [...] essi additano agli italiani,
nella buona e nell’avversa fortuna,
il cammino dell’onore e della gloria.
Viandante, arrestati e riverisci.
Dio degli Eserciti, accogli gli spiriti di questi ragazzi
in quell’angolo di cielo che riserbi ai martiri e agli Eroi”.

“[...] vivono per sempre
gli occhi che furono chiusi alla luce
perché tutti li avessero aperti
per sempre alla luce”.

Al caporal maggiore dei bersaglieri Monica Contrafatto,
fulgido esempio di elette virtù militari, senso del dovere e donna immensa.
Ai 53 soldati italiani morti nei 20 anni di conflitto in Afghanistan.
A tutti gli uomini e le donne d’Italia in divisa che hanno perso la vita
nella lotta al terrorismo.
La nostra memoria è la loro vita.

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ABSTRACT

With the emergence of violent groups claiming to represent Islam, there has been a corresponding upsurge in the adoption of Islamic rituals and ideals for more nefarious purposes. In order to shed light on this phenomenon, this research will concentrate on the abuse of one such tradition, da'wa, or the practice of encouraging both Muslims and non-Muslims to follow the Prophet's example. To this end, this piece will compare the da'wa programmes of two renowned organisations, namely Hezbollah and Hamas, and analyse whether each group's strategies and techniques are planned and in accordance with the organisational aims of each. As a result, it will be possible to assess if their choice of activities is actually more strategic than religiously inspired.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout human history, there have been several threats to the security of nations and individuals resulting in large-scale losses of life, property devastation, widespread diseases and injuries, the displacement of large numbers of people, and huge economic losses. However, since the end of the Cold War a notion of multidimensionality has emerged in relation to security issues and terror. In fact, the bulk of threats, both at the global and local level, are no longer exclusively military in nature. Western countries have shifted their efforts and attention away from the protection of national borders against possible invasions by Warsaw Pact forces and toward the fight against phenomena such as piracy, illegal immigration, failed states, environmental disasters, regional crises, organised crime, or international terrorism. State actors and regular armed forces do not, in reality, pose the majority of contemporary challenges. The 9/11 attacks clearly demonstrated how terrorism by non-state entities constitutes one of the most significant concerns the world of the 21st century must face. Indeed, modern states find it difficult to withstand these provocations since their legitimacy is dependent on their pledge to preserve the public realm free of political violence. A government may tolerate, if not ignore, horrible disasters as long as its legitimacy is not reliant on averting them. On the other hand, it may fall apart over a minor problem if this is perceived as eroding its rightfulness. Murdering a few individuals in Belgium garners significantly more attention than killing hundreds in Nigeria or Iraq. Paradoxically, then, modern states' success in reducing political violence leaves them more susceptible to terrorism¹.

The concept of hybrid threat, in particular, is connected to the global destabilisation experienced since the '90s, which laid the groundwork for its establishment and development together with the rapid expansion of disruptive technologies and means of mass communication that have provided such new-born dangers with exceptional propaganda tools and modern military instruments. As the terrorism business has developed, so has Western governments' concern about such threat². For instance, hybrid terrorist organisations like Hezbollah and Hamas are gradually taking root and expanding their influence in the areas they control, namely Lebanon and the Gaza Strip respectively, by employing military techniques, communicative strategies, and tactics to penetrate the social and economic fabric of the occupied territories. They represent a problem which the West is struggling to define and classify, as portrayed in the

¹ Harari, 2019

² Gunning, 2007, p. 363

current impasse where military actions constitute only a partial remedy to a phenomenon which can count on:

- the time factor, related to the devastating effects that the capillary work of indoctrination to religious extremism and ethnic hatred, aimed primarily at younger generations, will have in the near future;
- the support, more or less explicit and openly declared, of neighbouring states which try to exploit the organisations' activities for political and/or economic benefits;
- the necessity for the Western alliance to be assisted by a coalition of moderate Islamic states, overcoming millenary differences (in terms of religion, between Sunni and Shiites) and decades-old enmities (the USA/Israel and Iran)³.

In such context, the purpose of this thesis is to analyse hybrid terrorism and particularly the cases of Hezbollah and Hamas, which exploit and misuse liberal democratic values and, in the future, will likely represent a threat to countries other than their immediate neighbour, Israel. Their da'wa programmes will be studied to determine what the common themes and crucial differences between them are, as well as how they connect to the groups' political actions. A qualitative assessment of each organisation's activities will be conducted, with the ultimate aim of evaluating if there is a link between the objectives pursued and the use of da'wa, and whether that relationship is likely to achieve those aims. The two above-mentioned examples were chosen as they share a number of traits, such as the possession of territory and vast resources, the implementation of da'wa activities and the causes they espouse. In addition, since they both operate in the Levant and adhere to radical Islamic ideologies, there are less inherent distinctions between their activities when compared. As professor Ganor phrased it, Israel's local battle against them is nothing more than a microcosm of the global international fight that has been going on in recent years between Islamist-jihadist terrorist organisations on one side, and the Western and democratic-liberal world's culture on the other⁴.

³ CASD, 2015

⁴ Ganor, 2014

CHAPTER 1

HYBRID TERRORIST ORGANISATIONS

1.1 Definition of hybrid terrorist organisation

In recent years, military authorities and scholars have been debating the nature of future warfare⁵. Among others, the definition and characterisation of prospective threats has been an important topic of discussion. Researchers commonly share the idea that these are not clear-cut, but rather complex, multidimensional, driven by globalisation and the development of modern technology, and influenced by the presence of both global and local jihadist terrorist organisations, as well as the co-existence of state and non-state actors. For these reasons, military experts have begun to think of future conflicts as “multi-modal” or “multivariant”⁶, also dubbing them “hybrid warfare”, as suggested by former US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates⁷. However, considering that the assessment of this phenomenon is still in its infancy, terminology is inconsistent, and researchers have yet to come to an agreement. Indeed, the concept of hybrid threat has prompted several debates ever since its entry in the defence vocabulary. On the one hand, critics contend that talks about these kinds of threats are too abstract, thereby exposing the notion to the risk of being used as a blanket term to represent all non-traditional menaces⁸. On the other, supporters of the hybrid threat concept advocate that by employing 21st-century technologies and communications networks together with unrestricted operational art and novel combinations of conventional and non-conventional capabilities, contemporary threat actors are crafting a new type of warfare distinct from traditional irregular warfare methods⁹. Frank Hoffman, a leading proponent for developing a concept for countering hybrid threats, was one the first to put forward clear characteristics for this phenomenon, which include: blended modalities, meaning the use of a mix of conventional and non-conventional tactics combined with terrorism and criminal activities; simultaneity of different modes of conflict in a coherent way; fusion, referring to the mix of professional soldiers, terrorists, guerrilla fighters, and criminals that constitute hybrid threats; and criminality, employed not only to sustain operations, but also in some cases as a deliberate mode of conflict¹⁰. The United States Department of Defence, for its part, defines hybrid

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), 2010; Glenn, 2009; Hoffman, 2009; Mattis & Hoffman, 2005

⁶ Hoffman, 2009, *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*

⁷ Cf. Gates, 2009

⁸ Cf. Carati 2014; Kofman & Rojansky, 2015

⁹ Davis, 2013

¹⁰ Hoffman, 2009, *Hybrid vs. compound war*

warfare as “a blend of conventional and irregular warfare approaches, across the full spectrum of conflict”¹¹. Furthermore, the hybrid threat has also been deemed “... an adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs some fused combination of political, military, economic, social and information means, and conventional, irregular, terrorism and disruptive/criminal conflict methods. It may include a combination of state and non-state actors as well”¹².

Terrorism in particular, an evolving and mutable phenomenon, is a breed of warfare that originated in the mid-20th century, and which is conducted on both the military and media battlefields. It is waged asymmetrically between a state and one or more non-state actors, between an army and a militia, or an army and an organisation. The imperative to win both a psychological and a public opinion war, in and through the media, has recently given rise to a new form of non-state actor: the hybrid terrorist organisation, the first of which in the Middle East region is the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928¹³. A terrorist group’s evolution into a hybrid terrorist organisation is impacted by both internal and external factors. Ganor pinpoints one cause in a “government’s quiescence”¹⁴, which allows it to fulfil a crucial role which the government has failed to perform. Once the political establishment has been taken over, the organisation is free to dispose of the state’s resources for its own purposes, gradually acquiring power and wealth. Since contemporary, asymmetrical warfare is a fight for legitimacy, as described above, the hybrid organisation was specifically developed and shaped to try to garner it for terrorism itself. According to Ganor¹⁵, it stands on two or, in many cases, three legs.

The first one is that of a traditional terrorist organisation, which can be defined as a military or paramilitary group that commits terrorist acts.

The second one, on the other hand, entails attempting to legitimise terrorism by forming a political “enterprise” that may either merely represent the group’s ideology or compete in lawful, free, and democratic campaigns and elections¹⁶. This political party is sometimes “genuine” and legitimate, while in other cases it is mere camouflage.

¹¹ GAO, 2010; Kouri, 2010

¹² GAO, 2010

¹³ Azani, 2013, *The Hybrid Terrorist Organisation: Hezbollah as a Case Study*

¹⁴ Ganor, 2015

¹⁵ Idem, 2012

¹⁶ Ibidem

After winning seats in the election and earning legitimate support, the group must assume the functions of a government. This is when the social-welfare component, namely the third leg, enters the picture. In this regard, the organisation provides long-term, continuous, and free of charge - or at least much cheaper than the state or any other legitimate entity - social services to its potential supporters, the constituency, which can include educational and childcare services, jobs creation, and the construction of hospitals and mosques, all of which are extremely valuable to society. Among Islamic jihadist organisations, this practice is known as da'wa (literally "proselytizing") and it allows terrorists to win the population's support for their political engagement. In this way the hybrid terrorist organisation gradually builds a political party which appears to be a natural extension of its humanitarian work but is actually a mere cover for its terrorist activities. No one points a gun at the voters; rather, the engineers of the hybrid terrorist group have "legitimately" purchased their hearts and minds, brainwashing them, in a sense, to "legitimately" vote for them despite the fact that they are fundamentalist terrorists¹⁷. Once these terrorists have gained enough authority and power, they proceed to incrementally take over the political system, a move that enables them to subordinate the resources of the municipality, province, or state to their own ends, i.e. to undertake more da'wa activities, including further indoctrination. As a result, it can be affirmed that the hybrid terrorist organisation "runs in perpetuum mobile"¹⁸, increasing its strength over time. In its radical connotation, da'wa may thus be utilised to promote more sinister intentions by laundering money, disseminating jihadi philosophy, and constantly recruiting new members, while concealing a level of indoctrination beneath the surface.

The Middle East, with its long history of intertwining between different ethnic groups and religions, is an extremely fertile ground for the emergence and development of these hybrid threats which carry out terrorist attacks against civilians under the pseudo-legitimate guise of a political organisation and welfare movement. Famous examples are Hezbollah and Hamas. Without forsaking terrorism, the organisation's leaders and supporters demand that the democratic-liberal world they so strongly oppose treats them as a legitimate political movement. In conclusion, these groups strive to gain legitimacy through whatever means they can in order to flip the asymmetrical balance of power on its head and gain the upper hand.

¹⁷ Ibidem

¹⁸ Idem, 2012

1.2 Characteristics of a hybrid terrorist organisation

The war on terror launched by George W. Bush in 2001 has sparked interest in the profiles of organisations and individuals who engage in terrorist activities, with the special focus on hybrid terrorism that can be credited to Hezbollah in particular. As a consequence, endless words have been spent in the attempt to characterise this phenomenon and its key aspects. For instance, in his book “Global Alert: The Rationality of Modern Islamist Terrorism and the Challenge to the Liberal Democratic World”, Ganor argues that a hybrid terrorist organisation is one that operates on two different levels, one related to pseudo-legitimate and voluntary activities, such as providing welfare and education, as well as political ones, either within a municipal framework or through central authorities; and the second to illegitimate and illegal activities, such as political violence and terrorism¹⁹. In the methods for achieving their goals, these groups differentiate themselves by the combined employment of a variety of different tactics, a flexible and adaptive structure, terrorist acts, propaganda and information warfare, and various forms of state assistance.

a. Complex of the employed tactics

Hybrid organisations have the ability to train, implement and sustain traditional manoeuvring troops while also employing “cellular” and disruptive tactics that can adapt quite smoothly to changing battlefield conditions, thereby reducing their susceptibility to counter-offensives and air strikes. Hezbollah, for example, utilised a mix of traditional tactics, e.g. anti-armour ambushes, and unconventional ones, such as entrenched missile positions and the deployment of launchers in residential buildings, in its 2006 war against Israel²⁰. Hezbollah’s superior warfare tactics and technology, including the successful employment of an advanced ground-to-ship missile and anti-tank weapons, astounded Israel’s Defence Forces²¹.

On a more ideological and psychological level, terrorists and those who promote terrorism aim to delegitimise their enemy while bolstering their own legitimacy. More specifically, they seek it by riding on the shoulders of the adversary they have delegitimised by waging a multidimensional campaign, namely a diplomatic, humanitarian, legal, and propaganda one. This campaign enlists a bizarre mix of entities and actors, such as well-intentioned but naïve human rights organisations, sponsor states, charities (often the groups’ own front

¹⁹ Idem, 2015, p. 74

²⁰ Glenn, 2009

²¹ Flournoy & Brimley, 2008

organisations), supporters of terrorism, and the well-meaning international community²². Having identified the weaknesses of democracy, terrorists have learnt how to abuse democratic terminology, slogans, and apparatuses to obtain power and rightfulness. For example, during a series of talks in the first half of 2014 with Iranian authorities in Tehran and Hezbollah leaders in Beirut, Hamas' delegates were instructed to pursue a more ambitious strategy than simply protecting Gaza, notably challenging Fatah in its own West Bank area. Hezbollah's *modus operandi* in Lebanon, which can be summed up as "add ballots to your bullets", was pushed as a strategy to be emulated²³.

b. Command and Control structure

Not only do hybrid terrorist organisations have the ability to attract and integrate in their own lines new personnel, as well as the funding and equipment required to carry out their operations, but also the combination of charisma and competence which guarantees good results in military activities. As of 2014, Hamas could count on 20,000 well-trained military and security professionals, whereas it had recruited no less than 50,000 public sector employees since its military takeover of Gaza in June 2007²⁴. In regard to Hezbollah, in addition to its clandestine foreign agents it also maintains a more public international presence through its Foreign Relations Department (FRD), which operates openly in Lebanon and in a semi-public manner abroad. Previously headed by Nawaf al-Musawi, it is currently led by Ali Damush²⁵. Some of the members are Lebanese who have been dispatched overseas, while others are loyalists who already reside in the countries in question. Most have tight relationships to senior Hezbollah officials, many have extensive military training, as Saleh in Columbia²⁶, and some even have personal ties to the External Security Organisation (ESO) operatives, like Fawaz and Tahini in Africa²⁷. In particular, Canadian authorities identify the FRD's principal tasks as propaganda, fundraising, and assistance, while the ESO's shall be procurement and terrorism, as argued in government counterterrorism websites and private conversations with officials²⁸. According to a National Defence University study published by Shmuel Bar in October 2006, the FRD reports up through Hezbollah's Political Council, while the ESO reports through the Jihad

²² Ganor, 2012

²³ Yaari, 2014

²⁴ Ibidem

²⁵ GFATF, 2022

²⁶ CEP, n.d.

²⁷ Rubinfeld, 2015; Dyer, 2015

²⁸ Levitt, 2016

Council²⁹. Nonetheless, FRD operatives have a long history of undertaking not only political and ambassadorial duties, but also logistical, fundraising, and even operational activities in service of the ESO. For example, a 2015 Treasury Department analysis released in the context of identifying FRD operatives in Africa stated that “the FRD claims to be in charge of ‘community relations’, but the primary goal of the FRD in Nigeria is to scout recruits for Hezbollah’s military units, as well as to create and support Hezbollah’s terrorist infrastructure for its operational units in Africa and globally”³⁰. In terms of overt “diplomatic” activities, instead, Canadian intelligence officials believe that FRD members perform a variety of tasks abroad, including: logistical support for visiting Hezbollah delegations; the construction of “community centres” to incentivise local Shiite support for Hezbollah and serve as a base for the group’s activities; raising funds; discovering potential recruits; establishing front organisations and working as liaisons; and maintaining communication between local supporters and Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon, as well as between Hezbollah operatives in various countries³¹.

c. Terrorism

Within their area of influence, hybrid terrorist organisations resort to violence as a tool for subjugating local communities and as a key element of hatred and terror propaganda. As a result, much as Hezbollah maintains significantly superior armed forces with respect to the Lebanese army and various secret services, so does Hamas plan to grow its independent military units, which are currently far larger and better equipped than the PA’s National Security Forces. For example, even though Abbas previously endorsed the notion of a demilitarised Palestinian state, Gaza’s factories will continue to produce M-75 missiles which are capable of reaching Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Hamas also demonstrates no willingness of dismantling its intelligence agencies, which enable it to preserve *de facto* control of Gaza in the same way as Hezbollah troops control southern Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the Beqa Valley³².

Terrorist attacks are carried out by terrorist organisations, hybrid or otherwise, with the objective of not only killing innocent civilians but also inciting the adversary state to retaliate. Considering that the hybrid terrorist organisation has meanwhile rooted itself within the civilian

²⁹ Ibidem

³⁰ Ibidem

³¹ Ibidem

³² Yaari, 2014

population it targets, it also effectively compels the state to react and harm those same civilians. It accomplishes this by stationing its military facilities, rocket launchers, and combatants in schools, mosques, hospitals, and other public buildings, thereby converting its followers into human shields. Hiding among civilians to launch attacks is a time-honoured tactic of Hamas, and in doing so it puts Israel in a no-win scenario. The state that seeks to destroy terrorist installations has thus no choice except to risk striking civilian targets. For instance, on 10th May 2021 the beginning of Operation Guardian of the Walls by Hamas was signalled by bombardments of rockets fired indiscriminately against Israeli civilians and especially toward Jerusalem. Approximately 680 of these rockets misfired and fell within the Gaza Strip, causing Palestinian casualties³³.

d. Propaganda and Information Warfare

Hezbollah and Hamas have both demonstrated a great command in the use of social media to build an efficient network for recruiting, fundraising, and marketing their ideology. They make propaganda videos with avant-garde cinematographic techniques, so as to exhibit determination and enhance their warriors' heroic image. Long before ISIS began to engage significantly in propaganda, the Lebanese Shiite terrorist group had laid the groundwork for a proficient use of information warfare, namely the ability to gain an edge over an adversary through the management of information. Hezbollah's operations have long been governed by the mantra "If you have not captured it on film, you have not fought". Indeed, when its militants and a photographer penetrated an Israeli military complex in Lebanon in 1994 and flew a flag inside the camp, capturing the event on tape and scoring a significant propaganda win, the group realised the value of recording its victories³⁴.

On the other hand, due to a paucity of finances, Hamas has limited its psychological operations to propaganda broadcasts on its own Al Aqsa TV station, including Hebrew language appeals urging Israelis to "choose between a peace that gives us back our rights or a war that will smash you down"³⁵. Residents of Israel's southern communities have also reported receiving threatening text messages telling them to stay underground because Hamas was coming for them. In addition, statements claiming that Israeli soldiers have been kidnapped or even killed

³³ IDF Editorial Team, 2021

³⁴ Clarke, 2017

³⁵ The Associated Press, 2010

have been routinely published and, even if later disproved, they initially demoralised forces on the ground.

Another trump card used by Hamas is Al-Fateh, literally “the conqueror”, which is its children’s magazine published biweekly in London. According to MEMRI, the magazine, which contains stories, poems, riddles, puzzles, and so on, favours incitement to Jihad and martyrdom, as well as glorification of terrorist operations and their planners and perpetrators, not to mention the characterisations of Jews as “murderers of the prophets” and laudatory descriptions of parents who incentivise their sons to kill them. In particular, in each issue there is a recurring feature titled “The Story of a Martyr” which presents the “heroic deeds” of a mujahid who died in a suicide operation or who was killed by the IDF. On the same line, MEMRI also pointed out that the magazine includes illustrations of characters, such as child warriors, who exemplify the ancient Islamic ethos of Jihad and martyrdom and are presented as role models. These comprise the magazine’s titular character, Al-Fateh, a small boy on a horse brandishing a drawn sword, as well as children carrying guns, and photos of fighters launching Qassam rockets³⁶.

e. State support

Once the organisation has won considerable influence through legitimate political processes, it begins to incrementally get hold of the political establishment, and when this has been accomplished it can subordinate public resources for its own ends. This so-called lawful mechanism cannot succeed without the support of genuinely legitimate state entities, which include patron states, sponsor states, and states that unintentionally aid the process.

First of all, the patron state is the one within whose territory the terrorist organisation operates. Lebanon, for example, is Hezbollah’s patron state. This actor either ignores the illegal activities of the hybrid terrorist organisation or even allows it to officially engage in the legitimate political arena even though, by so doing, it is promoting this vicious cycle. In this way the patron state bears responsibility for the terrorists’ “legitimate” acquisition of power.

The sponsor state, instead, participates in the process as a source of finance and assistance. However, it is not the terrorist activities themselves that require funding, since conducting a terrorist attack is quite inexpensive. What costs a lot is, rather, conducting the da’wa activities,

³⁶ Jacob, 2007

given that providing social welfare and education services is conversely expensive. For instance, Hezbollah's sponsor state is Iran.

Finally, the third kind of state which helps a hybrid terrorist organisation in amassing power is the one that supports the process unintentionally and unwillingly. Occasionally such states, mainly Western ones, are unaware that they are involved in the process. A striking example is the United States, which unknowingly legitimises this seizure of control by obsessing over two related ideas, namely that democracy is a miracle solution to every country's problems³⁷, and that free elections, which represent democracy, are sacred. The United States apparently forgets from time to time that democracy is first and foremost a set of ideals, among which civil society, human rights, gender equality, and minority rights. Free elections, on the other hand, are only the means to establishing democracy, but when they are offered to, or even imposed on, populations that have been plied with da'wa and indoctrinated for decades, citizens will vote for what they believe is "the real thing". In the case of the Gaza Strip, this meant that in 2006 they voted for Hamas and not for Mahmoud Abbas³⁸.

In the last analysis, understanding the nuances of irregular warfare appears to still pose a considerable challenge. Given that incorporating hybrid concepts into doctrine should aid in clarifying the nature of modern conflict and addressing its challenges, perhaps more emphasis should be placed on gaining further understanding of how tactically combinations of techniques, technologies, and skill levels are infinite and overlapping, causing the claim to separateness a very difficult hurdle to overcome³⁹. In truth, it can be affirmed that Hezbollah and Hamas are more than a military force, and this is where their true power rests. They exhibit political, social, diplomatic, and informational components that provide bedrock support for their military wings. Even in the aftermath of military defeat, such a foundation, built over years of giving humanitarian help, creating physical infrastructure, teaching Lebanese and Gazans, and functioning as a medical provider, would survive. Like the deep roots of a plant, these other aspects of the two hybrid terrorist groups would eventually produce new forces to replace those lost in combat, and both of them would continue to thrive⁴⁰.

³⁷ Rice, 2011

³⁸ Ganor, 2012

³⁹ Ibidem

⁴⁰ Glenn, 2009

CHAPTER 2

DA'WA AND POLITICS: HOW TERRORISTS GAIN POLITICAL POWER

The major objective of this work is to analyse and focus on useful elements to address one of the most critical issues concerning terrorism that has been faced in decades, namely the significance of communication and media in Islamic jihadist groups' information warfare and proselytism. Their influence is not only psychological, but is also manifested in a multi-front offensive, with various propaganda initiatives via social media and targeted attacks, which are often conducted with the preparation of local cells and without the involvement of infiltrating elements from outside the concerned country. Learning how this type of messages affect and successfully reach so many people, significantly contributing to the recruitment of members and spreading the word, is undeniably a key topic nowadays. At the beginning of the 20th century, Thomas Arnold observed that "the formation of societies carrying on propaganda in an organized and systematic manner is a recent development in the missionary history of Islam"⁴¹. On the other hand, the second half of the century saw meaningful increase in the spectrum of Muslim missionary activities, ranging from publications, recordings, and public seminars to preaching in mosques and on street corners. However, things have changed radically in the last decade or so. Now one no longer needs to leave his or her home or office in order to contact Muslim missionaries and obtain instant information about Islam while being in constant live contact. The internet has enabled users to receive enormous amount of data nearly instantaneously by sending an e-mail message at almost no cost and with minimal effort. Online conferences and discussions on Islam have grown frequent and there is a plethora of information available regarding both da'wa and religious conversion. To summarise, physical interaction has been progressively complemented by virtual engagement. In light of these developments, Muzammil Siddiqi contends that "Da`wah in this kind of global exchange medium takes on a whole new flavour. It is no longer sufficient to meet on a one-on-one basis: we are talking about mass appeal and an approach to mass communication. Despite this aspect, da`wah remains a communication between hearts and thus the global information technology is only a door for individuals to introduce themselves to other individuals"⁴². It can be noted that da'wa has entered a new phase of its evolution in which its individual form, strongly advocated by many concerned Muslims, interweaves the institutionalised type practised by organisations established solely for the purpose of either Islamisation or else implementing

⁴¹ Arnold, 1913

⁴² Siddiqi, 1998

da'wa amongst its other activities. The institutionalising of such practice, which started around the turn of the 20th century, has gained momentum on all levels – local, national, and international – ever since World War II. This implies that, in addition to the proliferation of local da'wa groups, larger forces are sought, which in turn leads to the emergence of NGO-type associations that collaborate and work hand in hand with – and are funded by – governmental and intergovernmental Islamic agencies. Moreover, as Janson properly remarks, “da'wa has increasingly come to denote charity, public relations and dialogue”⁴³. He expresses himself even more bluntly: “In several senses, da'wa could be seen as marketing of Islam. And since the purpose of all marketing is the creation of a need to consume, da'wa might be regarded as, to be a little blunt, the creation of the need for Islam among Muslims and non-Muslims”. Nonetheless, experts and students of Islam have yet to properly comprehend modern missionary activity.

2.1 Propaganda and proselytising: What? For whom? Why? How?

Religion's involvement in warfare is not a recent phenomenon. Throughout history, it has served a number of objectives in armed groups, including both justifying fighting and enabling it by producing a recruitment basis or inspiring followers to undertake more extreme actions than they would otherwise. Although it is far from being the only example of this trend, the number of armed groups using Islamic ideology to legitimise their causes and acts has surged in recent decades. One aspect of Islam that is frequently exploited by violent groups is da'wa, which alludes to the principle of proselytizing, i.e. calling both Muslims and non-Muslims to live in accordance with Allah's will and the Prophet's teachings⁴⁴. The term often appears in the Quran, its commentaries, classical Muslim texts, and contemporary theological or ideological texts, both written and spoken. Even non-academic non-Muslims are becoming more familiar with the word and its diverse connotations thanks to mass media and other channels of communication, especially since it has become central to the vocabulary of contemporary Islamic activism. The widely known and accepted interpretation for da'wa in Europe and North America is that it consists of activities which, in the Christian context, are referred to as “missions” or “missionary activities”. Almost all students of Islam, as well as Muslims themselves, recognise that their faith is a missionary religion. Indeed, it meets Max Müller's 1873 description of a missionary religion. According to him, this type of creed is one

⁴³ Janson, 2000, 16

⁴⁴ Barber, 2016

“in which the spreading of the truth and the conversion of unbelievers are raised to the rank of a sacred duty by the founder or his immediate successors”⁴⁵. This is the case with Islam, for Muhammad’s very life represented the fulfilment of the holy obligation about which Müller writes. However, there has recently been a great debate over whether da’wa can be considered “missionary activity” at all, since some Muslims as well as non-Muslim scholars contend that it differs significantly from what missions have traditionally included in the Christian past⁴⁶. It is noted, among other things, that da’wa, at least until recently, lacked authoritative centralised institutions such as those of Christian missions. These are frequently viewed by Muslims – and not only them – as a tool of imperialism and colonialism, something the Islamic da’wa arguably has never been. As a result, it has been asserted that because the relationship between the two is so complex, even though the ultimate goal of both the Islamic da’wa and Christian missions has been the diffusion of their respective faith’s message and ensuing conversion of people to that creed, concepts such as “missionary activity”, “missionaries” and similar can only be used with caution to describe Islamic proselytising and those involved in it.

Though other scriptural and classical notions – *ijtihād*, *jihād*, *islāh*, *sharī‘a* and *tajdīd*, to mention a few – emerge regularly in modern Islamic thinking and activism, the concept of da’wa has proven to be particularly dynamic with respect to mobilising Muslims on a large scale. Contemporary examples vary from traditional mosque-based sermons to street preaching; from Quran translation and transmission to the publication of fragments on Islam and science; from state-sponsored campaigning to the production of children’s literature; from inter-religious talks to the work of Muslim student associations; from Muslim websites to televangelism; from da’wa departments in Islamic universities to the recruitment efforts of jihadi groups. Today’s Muslim proselytising extends outside the more traditional venue of the mosque, and most of it is actually done under the umbrella of da’wa⁴⁷. Muslim scholars claim that Allah directed Muhammad to begin making the da’wa, to bring the whole globe under Islamic authority from the first day he was bestowed with Islam’s mission. They all agree that when Muslims encounter infidels who have not yet heard the Islamic message, they should not attack them until they have been requested to convert to Islam. According to the scripture, Jihad may only be undertaken after the missionary activity of da’wa has failed: “Who finds the right path does so for himself; and he who goes astray does so to his own loss . . . we never punish

⁴⁵ Arnold, 1913

⁴⁶ Chambésy Dialogue Consultation, 1982

⁴⁷ Kuiper, 2017

till we send a messenger”⁴⁸. However, this approach was used only in the first century of Islamic conquests, and since then there has been no proof that the Muslims really preceded da’wa to Jihad. The rationale was once again provided by the classical scholars, who explained that there was no longer a need to do so because the Islamic call had spread throughout the region and all people had heard its purpose. Therefore, they declared, “if they do not capitulate, they are fought”⁴⁹.

Over a century ago, Thomas Arnold wrote “The Preaching of Islam: A History of the Propagation of the Muslim Faith”. First published in 1897, this book is possibly the earliest modern endeavour at a thorough scholarly study of da’wa. Arnold, a British colonial administrator and orientalist scholar, dedicated himself to the study of Islam with profound commitment. He spent ten years, from 1888 to 1898, at the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College in Aligarh, India, and was shaped by the prominent Muslim modernist academics Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muḥammad Shiblī Nu’mānī⁵⁰. Arnold, for his part, could not have predicted the magnitude of da’wa initiatives in the 20th and early 21st centuries, so an obvious shortcoming of his narrative is that it concludes shortly before this da’wa resurgence occurred. In fact, despite the growing prominence of da’wa over the course of the last century, it would take almost a hundred years after the first publication of his book for da’wa to resurface as a major concern for scholars. In 1991 Yvonne Haddad observed that little of the intellectual contribution of modern Islamic revival movements had been examined. She wrote that “The revivalist vision of the world calls on every Muslim to be ... someone who summons others to Islam.... There are currently neither studies of this phenomenon nor of the literature that describes ... the work of da’wa”⁵¹. Though much progress has been achieved in the three decades since Haddad wrote these words, her comments remain valid, for da’wa, both past and present, still constitutes an under researched and intriguing area of Islamic studies.

So, what exactly is da’wa? Derived from an Arabic word that means “inviting” or “calling,” it refers to attempts to propagate Islam or certain forms of it, as well as to urge greater adherence to Islamic values. Within this definition, there are various key principles. First, it must be consensual⁵², as forced conversion is prohibited. Second, da’wa activities should be tailored to their audience and the individual performing the appeal⁵³. Furthermore, those seeking to do

⁴⁸ Ali, 1937, Sûrat Bani Isrâil, 17:15

⁴⁹ Bukay, 2017

⁵⁰ Watt, 2002

⁵¹ Haddad, 1991

⁵² Kerr, 2000, p. 163; Racijs, 2004, p. 56

⁵³ Wiedl, 2009, 120-59

da'wa are encouraged to employ methods that are acceptable to everyone in order to prevent controversy, therefore safeguarding both the *da'ee*, i.e. the preacher, and those listening to him⁵⁴. Third, whoever conducts da'wa must be knowledgeable about the subject matter⁵⁵. Fourth, as previously mentioned, it may manifest in several forms, including education, social welfare, preaching, or simply setting a good example⁵⁶. This definitional flexibility allows parties to selectively interpret the concept in service of their aims. Muslim scholars and preachers specifically outline two objectives: for Muslims, to return to the faith by observing all *Shari'ah*'s precepts, to be virtuous and devoted; and for non-Muslims, to motivate them to join the ranks of Islam as Allah's chosen religion. Believers have to convey the message of Islam in its entirety to those who are unfamiliar with it and assist them in accepting it. The foundation of Muslim religious and educational institutions, meaning mosques ("Masjid") and schools ("Madrassah")⁵⁷, constitutes one possible way to accomplish this within the Islamic community. In other words, da'wa alludes to both "intra-ummaic" missions (exhorting Muslims to be exemplary believers) and "extra-ummaic" ones (inviting non-Muslims to embrace or convert to Islam). For instance, Kate Zebiri maintains that "while in the past da'wa has most often been directed at lax or heterodox Muslims, it now increasingly targets non-Muslims, especially in the Western context"⁵⁸. This observation is, nonetheless, only partially correct, since albeit their efforts have not always been coordinated or organised, Muslims have indeed historically practiced da'wa toward non-Muslims. Da'wa's fourteen-centuries-long history has thus been far more multifaceted than Zebiri appears to imply. To begin with, it was originally designed as a principle of persuading non-Muslims to join Islam, as it is stated in the Quran. However, it rapidly became a term of paramount importance for building structured sectarian entities for the transmission of beliefs of certain parties (e.g. 'Abbasid da'wa) and sects (e.g. Fatimid Isma'ili da'wa) inside the Muslim Ummah. During the Middle Ages, Muslim missionary activity towards non-Muslims spread beyond the Muslim world's borders, particularly the Sufi kind in Africa and Southeast Asia. "Da'wa" was utilised as a term indicating religious-political ideology of separate Muslim groups, and it was only in reconnection with revivalist movements in the Muslim countries and as a backlash to Christian missions of the 19th century that it became associated with obligation of Muslims to call fellow devotees back to the true way of God from which they were seen to have gone astray. Currently,

⁵⁴ Al-Ulthaymeen, n.d.

⁵⁵ Kerr, 2000, p. 156

⁵⁶ Ivi, p.157; Racijs, 2004, p.7

⁵⁷ Bukay, 2017

⁵⁸ Zebiri, 1997, p. 29

Muslim missionary efforts are once again being redirected toward gaining believers to Islam, while the “calling back” of fellow Muslims endures. Indeed, da’wa has been connected to initiatives to Islamise communities from the top down when force or state authority is concerned, but it may also allude to attempts of Islamisation from the bottom up. Muslim rulers, intellectuals (“ulamā”), thinkers, saints (Sufis), merchants, warriors, popular preachers, and, increasingly, laymen, women, and children have carried it out. Rooted in the call of God to mankind as taught by the Quran, it is personified for Muslims by the Prophet Muhammad, who is portrayed as the ideal *dā’ī* in the Quran, hadith and *sīra* literatures. According to the scriptures, God’s da’wa to obedience (“islām”), which is linked to Muhammad’s doctrine and conduct, is universal⁵⁹. From this perspective, it can function as an active, dynamic, and missionary influence. Ultimately, Muslims must encourage, urge, reason with, and persuade all non-believers to follow Allah’s path, submit to his will, and educate them about his great religion and its mission to people and the world⁶⁰.

Radical Islamic groups have been recurring to this otherwise harmless technique to accomplish a number of their organisational purposes. The first is visible in a group’s propaganda and recruitment strategies, which place its ideology within the context of their religious interpretation. This is especially helpful for connecting to young Muslims craving for a sense of identity⁶¹. It is crucial to emphasise, however, that these accounts distinguish between the radical da’wa utilised by violent individuals and groups, and its more frequent, peaceful forms⁶². The former is indeed employed as the extremists’ primary political operation with the aim of deceiving, misguiding, and confounding infidels about Islam’s true intentions. Furthermore, it aids in the distortion and manipulation of reality. The goals of da’wa are thus fairly transparent: to invite all peoples to adopt Islam as the sole legitimate faith and to help in spreading its word worldwide⁶³.

The second lies in a group’s charitable activities. These actions, serving in particular otherwise neglected communities, are critical for the “hearts-and-minds” campaign for control of a region and its inhabitants since they operate as very effective publicity for terrorist organisations⁶⁴. Moreover, for the hybrid ones that function at least partially as state actors, administering their constituents’ social welfare programmes acts as successful governance training, helping them

⁵⁹ Kuiper, 2017

⁶⁰ Khurshid, n.d.

⁶¹ AIVD, 2007

⁶² Ibidem

⁶³ Bukay, 2017

⁶⁴ Ly, 2007

to glide effortlessly into power and increase their chances of effectiveness whenever given additional responsibilities⁶⁵. In these occurrences, the da'wa projects supplied by such groups might sometimes be the only outreach the constituent populations receive, as states are either reluctant or incapable to provide for them⁶⁶. It goes without saying that these operations ensure a certain degree of leverage power over the local inhabitants to the organisations, especially in circumstances where the groups join forces with their host governments, which then hesitate to intervene against them unless it proves to be absolutely unavoidable.

The third aim refers to a group's deployment of its da'wa infrastructures in the service of other, more sinister purposes. In addition to assisting in money laundering and recruiting, charitable organisations may also cooperate in military personnel placement, both for specialised operations and to provide covering for individuals⁶⁷.

Fourth and last, some analysts regard da'wa as a mechanism to realise the goals of these organisations in and of themselves. From this standpoint, radical da'wa is framed as an alternative to violent Jihad⁶⁸. While it is still used as a method for radicalisation and recruitment⁶⁹, da'wa also contributes to the formation of an alternative society and the isolation of Muslims from Western culture, eventually compromising the democratic order⁷⁰. This fractures a community into two mutually exclusive and autonomous spheres, i.e. Muslims on one side and non-Muslims on the other. In a Western state founded on representative governance and the ideas of inclusiveness and participation, this can be devastating for a state's internal legitimacy. Moreover, the division hampers any long-term efforts at inclusion by delivering the message to young Muslims that Western society is not fit for them. This not only blows at Western ideology as a whole, but it also generates the sense of isolation that these organisations rely on for recruiting.

In the last analysis, it can be concluded that the motive of da'wa is religious, that is, the consolidation and spreading of Islam based on the Quran precepts, which can be observed as "Jihād al-Da'wah", i.e. the (peaceful) propagation of Islam among the infidels. It is an approach intended to change minds and behaviour and to subvert people's mode of thinking, a cultural coercive technique aimed at overthrowing Western democratic liberal governments by

⁶⁵ Gartenstein-Ross & Magen, 2014

⁶⁶ Oswald, 2013; Ly, 2007

⁶⁷ Levitt, 2004

⁶⁸ AIVD, 2005; Ramsay, 2015; Haklai, 2009, p. 27-45

⁶⁹ Gendron, 2006

⁷⁰ AIVD, 2005; Ramsay, 2015

removing their freedoms and penetrating Western technology and society's fabrics to destroy them from the inside. Where Jihad works on the body, on the material structure, da'wa works as a persuasion method on the mental-spiritual side; where Jihad operates to scare and intimidate, da'wa attempts at confusing and misleading; where Jihad acts to subjugate, da'wa paves the way to Islamisation⁷¹. While the West can defeat all sorts of Jihad terrorism after classifying, concentrating on, and combating them, da'wa is the covert fatal adversary of which it is oblivious. It is the nonviolent stealth coercion tactic; it is the notion of missionary activity to proselytise; it is the promotion to engage unbelievers in moderate, sensitive, and charming ways; and lastly, it is the legitimisation basis to urge all human beings to embrace Islam as the supreme religion: "Call them in the way of Allah, with wisdom and words of good advice; and reason with them in the best way possible. Allah surely knows who strays from his path and knows those who are guided in the right way"⁷².

⁷¹ Bukay, 2017

⁷² Ali, 1937, Sûrat al-Nahl, 16:125

2.2 Nina Wiedl's theoretical framework and analysis

Summing up what has been said thus far, da'wa can be interpreted as “invitation” or “call to Islam”, and especially for those who adhere to the Salafist ideology typical of the Muslim Brotherhood and associated revivalist factions, it does not merely represent a means for broadcasting a spiritual teaching or doing charity work. In fact, it also constitutes an intrinsically political engagement whose primary goal is an Islamic overhaul and renaissance leading to the eventual foundation of an Islamic state. According to several Quranic verses, it is a sort of religious proselytization and an obligation required of all Muslims. For instance, Surat an-Nahl, verse 125 exhorts Muslims to “Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them [non-Muslims] in ways that are best...”⁷³. Other passages commonly quoted by religious scholars underline its role in safeguarding and enhancing the Muslim community's socio-moral nature, as well as its general obedience to Sharia law. Surat al-Imran, verses 104 and 110 in particular, refers to the Muslim communal responsibility (“fard kifaya”) to invite all of mankind to Islam and to enjoin right and prohibit wrong.

In her framework for assessing da'wa activities⁷⁴, Nina Wiedl highlights three major themes: proselytising; strengthening the socio-moral character of the Muslim community; and expanding the Ummah, that is, the entire Muslim community. Undoubtedly the most obvious among the three, proselytising alludes to the encouragement to convert to Islam. Akin to Christian missionary activity, the *da'ee*'s focus is on a person or population who has not yet been introduced to the faith. Instead, strengthening the socio-moral character of the Muslim community relates to acts intended to support and enhance present members of the Ummah. Typical actions that fall into this category are social assistance initiatives. Finally, enlarging the Ummah is an approach typically correlated with Salafism, a fundamentalist Islamic movement that strives to observe Sunni Islam as Muhammad and his closest disciples did. These efforts are aimed at the fortification and transmission of a certain interpretation of Islam's doctrines, as well as the re-education of Muslims who have deviated from that view.

⁷³ Idem, 1937

⁷⁴ Wiedl, 2009

2.3 Psychological aspects: how the audience is targeted and converted

While investigating hybrid terrorism and how these organisations propagandise, it is also necessary to examine the notion of audience and the different groups to which the messages are delivered. In this situation, identification seems to be a more complex process than anticipated, rather than the expected logistical and practical reasons. In fact, whereas until a few years ago the main exponents of Al-Qaida principally pursued followers among people of faith and guided them on the path of martyrdom, now the complexity of the message has massively increased. Even the radical jihadist galaxy, like a genuine communication agency, has snatched the ball by accurately assessing the circumstances and so defining four primary audience profiles and a message for each one of them. The channels and contents remain the same, but they are tailored to help the various parties involved comprehend different things:

- the “sympathisers” are the category that in marketing corresponds to that of the devoted clients⁷⁵. They are relatively simple to satisfy in terms of contents since, being already conscious of the organisation’s activities and monitoring the many projects being sponsored, they have a better understanding of the situation’s progress. Therefore, they must be provided with a type of message that conveys power, a warrior spirit and a desire to remain in the movement or act more than they currently do;

- national governments, which are not the direct competitor but one of the institutions to be brought down to ensure victory. In many cases, any reaction and engagement from them will count as an achievement for terrorists. Creating public embarrassment and insecurity inevitably entails undermining a government and exposing its failure for everyone to observe and judge. As a result, the message in this case is both a challenge and a proclamation of powerlessness;

- young people and potential followers who need to be motivated in a different way and who are becoming more interested by the day. This is not a simple task, especially given how diverse everyone’s concerns are. For this very reason, ISIS and other groups argue that there is always time to join the cause and commence to reap its benefits. Above all, they attempt to deliver the message that whoever joins them will certainly find a place and a purpose, since everyone can contribute in his or her own unique way⁷⁶;

⁷⁵ Lamanna, 2016

⁷⁶ Ibidem

- European peoples, who represent both victims and direct interlocutors for terrorists. They are the ones on whom the message must be imposed and to whom the strongest shock must be transmitted. It is thus no coincidence that the grounds for each assault are persistently repeated, with the most recurring undoubtedly being the corruption and decadence of the West, as well as the Crusades or false religious worship. Furthermore, particularly in recent years, efforts have been made to communicate the impression of a stringent and ongoing presence within the very foundations of Europe in order to foment further division and mistrust⁷⁷.

Secondly, propaganda actions achieve the optimal outcomes when they are conducted according to techniques that are customised with the goal of persuading the mind, whose psychological mechanisms they exploit in order to be successful. The examination of these dynamics reveals how individuals are led towards the approach of the jihadists and eventually end up being completely ensnared⁷⁸.

To begin with, the so-called devil effect is the cognitive bias diametrically opposed to the Halo effect, which was first described in the research papers of the psychologist Edward Thorndike in 1920. These two biases can be defined as prejudices (positive or negative) on a person based on a first impression, a misrepresentation that causes one attribute, either good or bad, to overshadow other actions, traits, beliefs, or behaviours. It occurs, for example, when a person who appears beautiful at first glance is regarded as educated or accomplished irrespective of other possible considerations. The consequence is therefore a distortion based solely on one aspect of the individual and exclusively on specific elements which, in a vicious circle, cause a person to be seen more and more favourably or adversely⁷⁹. This effect is crucial to understand since some groups, such as Muslims, are its unintentional targets on various occasions, and this risks jeopardising the entire community, triggering a violent backlash on both sides.

Secondly, the priming effect involves the formation of a stimulus-reaction scheme in which the input stimulus causes particular connections and responses. Specifically, this process is thought to occur when mental representations of concepts are triggered by a person's exposure to anything relevant to those notions. This activation affects how the individual reacts to them, for example by making the response quicker. Some scientists characterise priming effects as a type of rational bias due to which the mind processes ambiguous incoming perceptual information in a way that is compatible with previously received information. Since they unconsciously and

⁷⁷ Ibidem

⁷⁸ Attili, 2011

⁷⁹ Perera, 2021

automatically interpret a priming stimulus dissimilarly, people modify their behaviour and react differently due to this stimulus⁸⁰. It is one of the most fundamental factors for acquiring knowledge. Getting burned by fire implies, in fact, adjusting to future situations and therefore not getting too close to a heat source the next time. Priming is even more noticeable in on-line media. Users that are interested in the topic will be enticed to click on a header that contains suspenseful phrases, active verbs, and enticing promises. The same is valid for visual and video material which makes one long for more, a fact that can be exploited by terrorists to their own advantage.

The Forer effect, which must be mentioned alongside the so-called confirmation bias, is another psychological mechanism worth addressing. Concerning the object of this study, they intervene when, whether for social reasons or for personal hardships, the subject feels excluded, craves answers about his own identity and is persuaded that he is something he is not, or convinces himself to become one. The Forer effect is thus a typical psychological process in which individuals give high accuracy scores to descriptions of their personality that are ostensibly tailored to them but are in reality ambiguous and general enough to apply to a wide range of people⁸¹. Researcher Bertram Forer originally coined the term “fallacy of personal validation” to describe this phenomenon⁸². The confirmation bias represents the following phase, when the subject, now aware of who he is or who he thinks he is, seeks confirmation of his convictions, preferring information that supports his existing assumptions over evidence that could disprove them. People exhibit this bias when they selectively acquire or recall information, or when they interpret it in a biased way. In addition, the effect is stronger for emotionally charged issues and for deeply rooted preconceptions⁸³.

Instead, primacy and recency effects are the commonly media effects known at the level of marketing, propaganda and advertising, for which the first and last information presented in a document are the easiest to recall, especially if the message is concise and not overly complicated. One suggested explanation for the primacy effect is that the first presented items are most effectively stored in long-term memory due to the higher amount of processing reserved to them. The recency effect, on the other hand, is justified by the fact that these elements are still alive in working memory when remembrance is solicited. Items that benefit

⁸⁰ Psychology Today, n.d.

⁸¹ Vohs, 2016

⁸² APA, n.d.

⁸³ Noor, 2020

from neither, notably the middle ones, are recalled most poorly⁸⁴. These rules are applicable to political lists, news releases, videos, speeches, films, messages, and posters. They do not extend to books, which are by their nature more complex to comprehend and store mentally. Indeed, whether novels or essays, they provide descriptions or frequent re-elaborations, all of which are critical to reach the end point. Furthermore, reading requires numerous days, and is hindered by various interruptions, but it nonetheless presents the advantage of allowing the reader to return to previous sections and paragraphs. In shorter messages, where understanding a point is fundamental from the outset, the central part of the speeches, which is therefore an expansion, an explanation, or a deepening of the message, is secondary. These effects are extensively exploited in jihadist propaganda, which concentrates valuable information in the initial stages of its work.

Finally, the Rosenthal effect, which consists of induced emulation, is important for understanding the psychology of terror. According to it, the targets of high expectations internalise the positive labels they have been assigned to them and succeed accordingly; a similar reaction happens in the opposite direction in the event of low expectations⁸⁵. The premise behind it is that raising the leader's hopes of the follower's performance would lead to better outcomes from the latter. The jihadist applicant is thus further motivated by the expectations of other apprentices and teachers. The more clearly and frequently the leader's demands are articulated, the more he will tend to comply to them; the more he is recognised as an example or an equal by his comrades, the more likely he will become the prototype of a fighter. Avoiding humiliating or demoralising a pupil is crucial for any school and learning method, and it is also essential for the jihadist trainers who instruct and encourage their followers as much as possible in the camps.

In conclusion, the stimuli that operate on the subjects can come from a variety of sources, as for example another person, a whole group, a situation, some kind of authority, or a theoretical and impersonal support such as a magazine, a film, or a documentary, where the relationship between people is not required for learning. On the other hand, recruiters will display a propensity to supply what the subject, who is psychologically needy, demands or believes is right to receive. As a result, when the individual demonstrates the appropriate behaviours and becomes convinced of the new message's validity, he will obtain cooperation and "pardon" for his prior erroneous lifestyle, as well as acceptance. Deeper identification with the community

⁸⁴ Cuncic, 2022; Webster, Richter & Kruglanski, 1996, pp. 181-195

⁸⁵ Salkind, 2010; APA, n.d.

will then be granted, gratifying the person and making him feel even more proud to be part of the new reality. Delegating him with a specific duty or a distinctive function in the organisation, sect, or community, will serve to affect him even after he joins, so that he internalizes the essence of the message, his recruiters' judgments, and the group's viewpoints and moral standards.

2.4 Practical examples of da'wa activities

2.4.1 Special audiences: youngsters and children

The most recent inquiry into the workings of da'wa has been performed by Torsten Janson. "Your Cradle is Green: the Islamic Foundation and the Call to Islam in Children's Literature", his recent publication on the activities of one of Europe's best-known Muslim missionary entities, the Islamic Foundation of Leicester, contextualises Muslim missionary initiatives of recent decades within the socio-political progressions of the Muslim world and host societies, such as the British one⁸⁶. More specifically, Janson's study deals with da'wa's general role in Muslim life, and through a case study of children's materials published and marketed by the Islamic Foundation, he exposes how da'wa realistically works for Muslims in the United Kingdom. Though the case study itself is instructive, Janson's research is valuable foremost for its conceptual and empirical approach. No one before him had chosen the standpoint of literary critique or discourse analysis. He adopts what he calls a "genealogical perspective on da'wa" and places himself within the "tradition of recent studies that explore the intersections of Islamic terminology and contemporary social experience (and its modes of expression) as synthesised in Muslim discourses"⁸⁷. The usage of da'wa in children's literature is in fact a completely new phenomenon, and it definitely deserves to be studied separately.

In fact, if an adult can at least attempt to defend himself against the terrorist groups' information warfare, a teenager or a child might endure a physical and psychological vulnerability, which is often fatal and renders them victims of abuse. The so-called "denied childhood" phenomenon is a condition that is sadly already extensively witnessed even during peacetime, particularly in those circumstances where child labour is accepted, sexual exploitation of minors exists, and their rights are not safeguarded. In states where children's rights are limited, some lacking aspects, such as schooling or freedom from planned marriages, remain a permanent barrier to societal growth. These cultural factors oftentimes hamper not only social progress and development, but also a popular reaction, a sort of quiescence generated by centuries of traditions. When it comes to minors, one can seek to differentiate between children and young people. Despite their varying ages, here they are referred to as "young" in a broader sense for a particular cause: most of them have endured traumas or changes as a result of the conditions in which they grow or are schooled. This is unfathomable for modern European generations who have just lately witnessed tragic events such as attacks on national territory, which instead are

⁸⁶ Janson, 2003

⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 35

the sad daily reality of some other countries. Young adolescents, therefore, are children by birth, but they are compelled to mature fast and without a well-studied or determined path. Young people can therefore be classified as little more than children, teenagers, or late adolescents who, for a variety of traumatising and grave reasons, find themselves entangled in the theatre of terrorist groups' operations⁸⁸. With respect to the other types of audiences analysed above, a speech to children will be different because they are even more defenceless and reliant on caring adults who are not always available in their households. Whatever environment they find themselves in, three primary categories of children may be distinguished, all of which are equally dramatic:

- children residing in the areas adjacent to the combat, who are likely to be the subjects involved whose situation proves to be more tragic since they face a more consistent number of hazards and hardships than others. The prospect of being slaughtered, of being used as human shields, of losing their families, of enduring misery and sickness are just a few of the numerous tragedies that they have to face. Another factor that enormously amplifies these threats is the pressing necessity for households to relocate almost incessantly in order to avoid the fire of confrontations or roundups. It is at this point that, as a direct consequence of a chaotic escape, the members are frequently split. Other escapes, on the other hand, are not confined to the battle zone. Indeed, when the territory is not entirely isolated, civilians may attempt to evacuate and abandon the impacted area. Although this leads to further deprivation in the future, it paradoxically protects the affected children from the risk of being killed or exploited. Many of them find themselves traveling alone at this point, entrusted to friends or close relatives;

- children in the occupied territories. For instance, among people residing in the areas seized by the self-styled caliphate, initially the newcomers supplied free water, food, gasoline, schooling, basic necessities and other commodities to the population. From the standpoint of communication, this was an excellent business card for selling oneself favourably or as saviours. As a result, the militants secured the allegiance and cooperation of numerous families, as well as guaranteeing the safety of the future generation, and then gaining control of them. Once the locals' trust was acquired, formerly free help and products were strictly rationed, or withheld, or even distributed under more rigorous terms. This constitutes the worst moment, when the population, particularly the helpless category of children, is more readily harmed through physical and emotional abuse⁸⁹;

⁸⁸ Lamanna, 2016

⁸⁹ Quirico, 2015

- children being trained or directly managed by armed groups, as plainly evident in certain propaganda videos or films. Child soldiers have been a reality in Africa for decades, and they are notorious for being brainwashed or for the terrifying conditions under which they are forced to train. Even in this case one can discern a message to the West. Those youngsters, who are also known as “cubs” puppies⁹⁰, are often referred to as the future generation. The statement appears simple on the surface, but it conveys a couple of important points to its recipient. First of all, even if the currently fighting soldiers are defeated, a new group will already be ready to take their place. Second, having already been thoroughly instructed, these children are fully capable of embodying the Caliphate’s values. Not unexpectedly, they are indeed subjected to a series of tests, one of which comprises the cold-blooded murder of a grown man. The implied message to Westerners is something along the line of “not only do you not scare us, but even our children can kill you”⁹¹.

At this stage, it is simple to realise how the management of young people, who are frequently forcefully recruited due to their age, does not pose an insurmountable difficulty for the organisations.

2.4.2 Da’wa through cartoon films and television

Along with technological advancements, da’wa is no longer solely done face-to-face but may now enjoy the benefits of technologies such as television, radio, mass and social media. The internet indeed facilitates the finding and access to varied da’wa content, both sophisticated and simple⁹². Although eye to eye sermons predominate, religious content communicated through television media, such as music and movies, is growing increasingly popular. Da’wa to children, on the other hand, necessitates a different approach from that adopted with adolescents and adults. Religious speech on the pulpit is namely not suitable for the former. It is vital to acknowledge that they are in the developmental stage of thinking concretely, and hence da’wa teachings which contain Islamic values that are abstract and contextual but lack concrete examples will be difficult for them to understand⁹³. Instead, they will pay close attention if the da’wa message is delivered in audio-visual formats, such as songs or films⁹⁴. Cartoon films, for example, have a major impact on the children who watch them, since they tend to picture

⁹⁰ Lamanna, 2016

⁹¹ Ibidem

⁹² Budiantoro, 2018

⁹³ Hikmah, 2014; Rusmalita, 2017

⁹⁴ Hikmah, 2014

themselves as the characters in the movie, allowing for a psychological process of values' internalisation to occur whereby the child mimics the movie sequences⁹⁵. Children are namely subjects easily influenced and they try to emulate what they watch on television, especially if not under their parent's supervision⁹⁶. On the other side, it is also true that parents sometimes wish that television will aid in their children's religious and moral education. Specifically, a text is classified as da'wa if it is designed to intentionally invoke "amar ma'ruf nahi munkar", i.e. enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil, to alter a person's mind and behaviour in accordance with the content of the da'wa discourse⁹⁷. Ali Azis categorises da'wa teachings into three forms, i.e. faith, sharia, and morality. A cartoon film has a religious message if the material in the film provides information or an incentive to embrace or defend the core tenets of the Islamic faith, meaning the belief in Allah, prophets, and destiny ("qada" and "qadar")⁹⁸. Sharia lessons encompass messages about deeds in the context of obeying God's commandments, including worship and "muamalah" (in a broad sense this stands for God's rule for man to associate with other human beings in interacting, while in a special sense in developing property). Meanwhile, the teaching of virtuousness includes comments on Muslim behaviour, both in relation to Allah, the cosmos, and fellow humans⁹⁹. If a cartoon's contents correspond to the description above, it can be affirmed that the film carries a da'wa's message.

This being the case, analysing how Islamic ideals were constructed and portrayed in the cartoon film "Omar and Hana" episode "Alalala Raju" might provide valuable insight. The "Omar dan Hana" series, a cartoon produced by Digital Durian and broadcasted in Indonesia, has become a popular children Islamic cartoon with 3.59 million subscribers internationally¹⁰⁰. According to qualitative research undertaken with the Van Dijk framework of critical discourse and content analysis, which elaborated the data collected from a YouTube channel called "Omar & Hana - Islamic Children's Songs", the study findings showed that the structure of the film's text incorporates a narrative of counsel to children to share objects they possess and love. According to the social cognition system, this video has a goal and mission to instil Islamic values and delight in children all across the world via sharing, with the social setting that creates the background for this kind of films being parents' anxiety about the paucity of Islamic cartoons

⁹⁵ Rakhmat, 2008

⁹⁶ Dhahir, 2017

⁹⁷ Sujatmiko & Ishaq, 2017

⁹⁸ Azi, 2007; Hoyt, 2019

⁹⁹ Anshari, 1993

¹⁰⁰ Muhyiddin, 2020

and the difficulty of youngsters sharing. Ultimately, the purpose of the film's discourse is to transmit a message of da'wa morals.

In conclusion, cartoon films are a successful da'wa medium to target children because they serve four distinctive functions: providing information; educating; inspiring; and amusing. All of this make them an appealing and efficient channel for sending messages, especially if the cartoon is complemented with musical activities which make the message more memorable for children.

2.4.3 Da'wa during the internet era: the role of social media

The interplay between faith and the cyberworld is becoming inescapable, and particularly the role of media culture in promoting Islamic ideals is a well-known phenomenon that predates the digital era by many decades. Audiotapes aided Ayatollah Khomeini in his "cassette revolution" by disseminating his messages and played a significant part in the 1978-79 Islamic revolution¹⁰¹. Indeed, the proliferation of cassettes together with television and satellites during the 1980s and 1990s penetrated a more diversified Muslim audience and boosted the propagation of Islam¹⁰². However, over the past two decades media culture has been dramatically enhanced with the emergence of new online media, which has become a formidable instrument among, for example, American Muslim preachers. They have been employing it to market a friendly and peaceful image of their creed¹⁰³, which was frequently accused of being a "religion of terror" in the aftermath of 9/11¹⁰⁴. Actually, following the 2001 catastrophe, Islamophobia acted as a strong motivation for many American Muslim Imams and activists to intensify their da'wa activities. They understood that in order to protect their spiritual convictions they needed to improve their integration with their fellow American non-Muslims via increased social interaction and civic responsibility¹⁰⁵.

Because the COVID-19 pandemic has, in many respects, made social media pivotal to the religious public sphere, it appears that the online growth has contributed to the further popularisation of online da'wa through social media platforms. Their influence and popularity also provided a tactical instrument for engaging a wider and more diversified audience,

¹⁰¹ Sivan, 2005, p. 110

¹⁰² Echchaibi, 2011, p. 28

¹⁰³ Lisnyansky, pp. 182, 184

¹⁰⁴ Ivi, p. 29

¹⁰⁵ Ukeles, 2003, p. 8-9

allowing the peaceful sides of Islam to be presented more effectively. Indeed, da'wa via social media has raised both obstacles and possibilities, mainly due to them favouring openness, affiliation, and interconnectedness¹⁰⁶. Recent data, updated for March 31st, 2021, demonstrate that internet users in the area of this research's interest, namely Israel, Lebanon, and Palestine, have reached respectively: 7,002,759 Israeli users or approximately 79.7% of the total population (8,789,774); 5,546,494 Lebanese users or around 81.9% of the total population (6,769,146); and 3,381,787 Palestinians or about 64.8% of the total population (5,222,748)¹⁰⁷. These data imply that the opportunity to reach a huge audience through the internet is indeed at hand, a possibility that is even bigger for the millennial generation who are more familiar with social media platforms as for example Twitter, Telegram, and Instagram. In this regard, Tempo Magazine, 18-24 June 2018 edition, highlights Hannan Attaki's da'wa. Assisted by a team of six people from Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah, he seeks to optimise the use of social media, especially Instagram, which, according to the article, is popular among individuals under 30. Pemuda Hijrah Movement also created videos with skateboard and motorist groups to demonstrate their inclusive approach to da'wa¹⁰⁸. "One Minute Booster" instead, which comprises Attaki's most renowned recorded sermons in short and chopped form, is one of the various contents that characterise his work. Attaki became famous on social media because of his good da'wa management and adequate resources, a success evidenced by the huge number of followers he was able to attract with his clips being consistently reposted by the millennial generation and generation Z. This popularity, however, calls into question the motivation of those who share them and join the online da'wa bandwagon. In fact, it is questionable that many follow the preacher merely due to his online fame rather than his mastery of Islamic doctrines.

All in all, it can be stated that da'wa activity on social media is prominent on three major platforms, namely YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and the majority of preachers have an active account on each of them. Among these, YouTube is probably the most prolific one due to the variety of ways and techniques it offers to promote visual da'wa as part of Islamic discourse. First, sermons' titles express common human feelings, such as how to overcome unhappiness or anguish, or why everyone necessitates empathy. Moreover, sermons may feature dubbed over cartoons or animated videos to reinforce the Islamic message in an entertaining and attractive way. Secondly, the capacity of animation to engage young and old generations is crucial to its success since the message is insightful on the one hand and presented

¹⁰⁶ Mayfield, 2008

¹⁰⁷ Middle East Internet Use - Population Data and Facebook Statistics, 2021

¹⁰⁸ Majalah Tempo, 2018, 23-37

flamboyantly and straightforwardly on the other. Another point to be kept in mind is that online da'wa may feature extremely brief videos labelled “funny” or “very funny”, in which a few minutes of a complete speech are cut to showcase the preacher’s punch line. One of the primary strategies these preachers implement to endorse Islam entails connecting human and global modern challenges to Islamic messages, for example by explaining how to mitigate anger or envy or how to achieve one’s inner peace, lessons normally stemming from the Prophet Muhammed’s deeds or other historical Quranic characters. This enables the preachers to be presented as individuals who are connected to life rather than alienated religious figures, a form of virtual preaching activity which also fosters a sense of cohesion among Muslims by depicting Islam as a religion that has the remedy for modern challenges and miseries. This approach is especially significant among young viewers, who might discover in this innovative teaching method a new style of religious expression that is closer to their everyday lives and struggles as Muslim minority in the West. Several instances from the YouTube posts of Ali Khan and Yasmin Mogahed can assist highlight how, in the online context, the COVID-19 pandemic is utilised to strengthen confidence in Allah in contemporary Islamic discourse.

Nouman Ali Khan is an American Muslim of Pakistani ancestry who founded the Bayyinah Institute for Arabic and Quranic Studies. Khan is regarded as one of the most well-known Muslim speakers in America, having over 2.2 million followers on Facebook, and almost 120 hundred million YouTube subscribers¹⁰⁹. The Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre of Jordan has also named him one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world¹¹⁰. In his video “How Muslims Should Respond If Coronavirus Spreads”, he compares the sense of vulnerability and terror caused by the unknown circumstances surrounding COVID-19 to the scene of Prophet Moses (“Musa”) and the Israeli people (“Isra’iliyyat”) after crossing the river from Pharaoh (“Fara’un”) and feeling helpless in the desert: “Thousands and thousands of people, men, women and children that have left their home (Egypt) behind... and Fara’un had so much power over the Isra’iliyyat, that he was killing their children in front of them and they could not fight back...that’s how suppressed they were”¹¹¹. Khan further explains that in that scenario, Moses reassured them that if Allah had already protected them from the Pharaoh’s torment, they should be confident that He would continue to help them. From this, Ali Khan attempts to demonstrate that, even if the world appears to be in an impossible position as a consequence of the virus’

¹⁰⁹ David, 2021

¹¹⁰ MABDA, 2022, p. 149

¹¹¹ Ali Khan, 2020

effects, Allah will not permit Muslims to perish from COVID-19, just as He cared for the people of Israel in the desert¹¹².

Yasmin Mogahed, on the other hand, is an Egyptian American who is acknowledged to be one of the leading female Muslims in the United States. She is also the first female lecturer at the AlMaghrib Institute, which is based in Houston, Texas, and caters to Western Sunni Muslims. She is frequently asked to speak at annual conferences of American Islamic groups including ISNA (Islamic Society of North America), ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America) and mosques around the country. Her official Facebook profile has 1.1 million followers, while her YouTube channel has gained 290 thousand subscriptions¹¹³. In her clip “COVID-19: Are we being punished?” posted during Ramadan last year, Mogahed refutes the idea that the pandemic is a punishment from Allah intended to harm humanity, but rather a sign of mercy sent by Him to invigorate the faith of his worshippers¹¹⁴. She compares the human immune system’s response to COVID-19 to everyone’s “spiritual immunity” to adversities, arguing that conquering hurdles would make us stronger. Mogahed, in specific, differentiates between two types of punishment from Allah, namely “Adab Al-Adna” (lesser afflictions) and “Adab Al-Akbar” (greater afflictions), and emphasises that the COVID-19 pandemic should be viewed as a lesser punishment acting as an alarm system and an act of mercy from Allah, so that one can return to him: “Imagine that your house is on fire... before you see the fire in front of your eyes, how you gonna know that your house is on fire...? ‘cause you have a smoke alarm that goes off and it beeps... that smoking alarm is intended as a warning, wake-up call, telling you- sort yourself out before your house burns down”¹¹⁵. She underlines that COVID-19 should be seen as a gift from Allah to purify our souls and mend our actions. According to her, rather than being a deliberate punishment, the pandemic breakout during Ramadan thus contributes to deepen adherents’ devotion by reconnecting their Islamic faith to reality.

The abovementioned examples manifest how American preachers mobilise interpretations of COVID-19 to re-establish trust in Allah, overcome adversities, and even connect the current illness to earlier historical Muslim struggles. These characteristics demonstrate that religion, as portrayed in YouTube da’wa, has evolved into an authority that adjusts to social and environmental transformation, adapting to contemporary events and issues. Therefore, albeit COVID-19 has brought problems to daily religious habits, it has also drawn attention to the

¹¹² Ibidem

¹¹³ David, 2021

¹¹⁴ Mogahed, 2020

¹¹⁵ Ibidem

importance of proselytism on social media platforms. In an era when entire states are in lockdown and people are obliged to reduce their physical religious rituals, such as praying in a mosque or attending Islamic conventions, the use of virtual da'wa as an independent religious practice retains contact within the Muslim community and preserves its members' unity through private online mediation. Indeed, the balance between orthodoxy and modernisation constitutes one of the most pressing concerns Islam faces nowadays. Part of the young generation of Muslims born in Western countries encounters daily problems for which there are no obvious solutions in classical texts¹¹⁶. They battle with secularism and individualism, religious uncertainties, and cultural clashes between Western and Islamic civilisations¹¹⁷. This reality renders it problematic for old conservative religious leaders to reconcile Islam with modern challenges, such as atheism, LGBT movements, and feminism. However, Western-born youtuber preachers who speak fluent English¹¹⁸ and are acquainted with modernity and all its aspects may more easily engage in such confrontations within the context of Western society. Their da'wa, which is marketed in a native medium with straightforward language, serves as a channel of communication with the youth. Islam is here namely depicted as a progressive and relevant faith to Western Muslims who seek to reconcile it with the environment in which they were born while maintaining their religion in tune with modernity.

¹¹⁶ Masooda, 2018, p. 23

¹¹⁷ Lang, 2017, pp. 4-6

¹¹⁸ Idem, 1997, pp. 213-225

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDY: HEZBOLLAH

In the international system, there are two types of actors: status quo and revolutionary. The former generally accepts the existing international system as it is, whereas the latter disputes its legitimacy and aspires to significantly modify or topple it entirely. The dichotomy between the two also extends to subsystems of the international system. As a result, in an area like the Middle East, organisations such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad can be classified as revolutionary. What counts in this regard is not necessarily their capacity to achieve all of their objectives, but rather their motivation and willingness to do so. Thus, neither Hezbollah nor Hamas might be able to realise their respective goals, but their aim remains the same, that is to subvert the prevailing order, the former by fostering a Shia-dominated structure led by Iran, and the latter a Sunni-dominated Islamic subsystem in the spirit of the Muslim Brotherhood. Both require Israel's annihilation as a sovereign state and the reconfiguration of the current Arab regimes¹¹⁹.

3.1 Hezbollah: a brief identikit

3.1.1 Hezbollah's history

When Lebanon achieved its independence in 1943, Shiites became an economically and politically alienated group¹²⁰. Following the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, numerous Islamic revivalist factions motivated by escalating Shia resentment gained traction in Lebanon. In these turbulent times, the Amal movement, from which Hezbollah would one day originate, arose and became the most prominent Shia militia. The group's goals were to obtain greater recognition for Lebanon's Shia community and to expand the share of public funds allotted to Lebanon's southern, Shia-dominated province¹²¹.

In June 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon to combat Palestinian militants in the southern area¹²². Some Shiites originally welcomed Israeli soldiers because they offered protection against Palestinian terrorists. However, as civilian casualties increased, popular sentiment began to

¹¹⁹ Tenenbaum, 2021

¹²⁰ Hamzeh, 2004

¹²¹ Harik, 2004

¹²² Goldberg, 2002

shift against the foreigners¹²³. In fact, several incidents weakened support for Israeli forces. For example, in September 1982 the IDF permitted the slaughter of at least 800 Palestinian and Lebanese residents in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps by a Christian Lebanese militia¹²⁴. The following year, an Israeli patrol inadvertently ploughed into a Shia festival; as spectators began hurling stones, the patrol retaliated with gunshots and grenades, killing several in the crowd¹²⁵. Following these episodes and in the midst of rising anti-Israeli opinion, many Shiite Amal movement officials defected from the militia. They founded a new organisation named Islamic Amal and led by Husain al-Musawi that advocated a more aggressive reaction to the occupation¹²⁶. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) was vital in its establishment, considering that thousands of its members were deployed to assist it, bolstering the group through financial backing¹²⁷. With Iranian support, Islamic Amal swiftly gained momentum by enrolling members from other revolutionary Shia organisations, such as the Muslim Student Union and the Dawa Party of Lebanon¹²⁸. The group first garnered international notoriety on 9th April 1983, when it assumed credit for the bombings of the US Embassy and the American and French military barracks in Beirut, which killed 63 people¹²⁹. Islamic Amal then issued a manifesto under the new name of Hezbollah in 1985. It remains uncertain whether a group of Islamic Amal members split away from the bigger organisation to establish another, or whether the former was merely a forerunner of the latter¹³⁰. From 1984 to the Israeli retreat in 1985, Hezbollah carried out the great majority of strikes against Israeli soldiers¹³¹, boosting its reputation as the most powerful actor in compelling Israeli's withdrawal¹³². Its attacks killed an average of 25 Israeli soldiers per year throughout the occupation¹³³. In the 1980s groups affiliated with the organisation abducted numerous high-profile foreigners, including American journalist Terry Anderson and US Marine Lt. Colonel William R. Higgins¹³⁴. During this time, Hezbollah acquired Shia support and became the Amal movement's principal rival for the leadership, which led to bloody clashes from 1985 to 1989¹³⁵. While the former was a strategic

¹²³ Norton, 2007, p. 33

¹²⁴ Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1983; Anziska, 2012

¹²⁵ Norton, 2007, p. 66

¹²⁶ START, 2015; BBC, 2013; Addis & Blanchard, 2011, p. 7; Deeb, 2003

¹²⁷ Hudson, 1999

¹²⁸ Levitt, 2013, p. 12

¹²⁹ Worth, 2011; Addis & Blanchard, 2011, pp. 7-8

¹³⁰ Norton, 2007, pp. 34-45

¹³¹ Faksh, 1991, pp. 51, 61

¹³² Norton, 2007, p. 80

¹³³ Ivi, p. 90

¹³⁴ Specter, 1991

¹³⁵ Faksh, 1991

ally of Iran, the latter was closely tied to Syria's Assad regime. The kidnapping of Lt. Colonel Higgins in 1988, for example, generated disagreement between the two factions since Hezbollah planned the operation whereas Amal opposed it because it wanted to preserve a stable relationship with the UN, which would be complicated by the kidnapping of American personnel. It ultimately tried and failed to liberate Higgins, sparking further confrontations with its antagonist.

Hezbollah also maintained an active global presence from 1985 through the 1990s. The External Security Organisation, also known as the Islamic Jihad Organisation or the External Services Organisation, was in charge of preparing and carrying out attacks outside of Lebanon. In 1985, members of this branch hijacked TWA Flight 847 from Cairo to Athens. Hezbollah militants held hostages for weeks and murdered one passenger to raise attention to the plight of Lebanese detainees in Israel¹³⁶. The remaining captives were released once the Israeli authorities decided to free 300 Lebanese inmates¹³⁷. In March 1992, Hezbollah operatives bombed the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 29 people and injuring hundreds more. In July 1994, the group was blamed of having bombed the Argentine Israeli Mutual Association, murdering nearly 100 people and wounding over 200, even though it denied responsibility for the attack¹³⁸. In addition, in June 1996 it also blew the American Khobar Towers housing complex in Saudi Arabia, killing 19¹³⁹.

In 1989 Hezbollah adopted a new philosophy and strategy. The 1989 Taif Agreement namely terminated the Lebanese Civil War and allowed the organisation to become an official party in the national political process. Both Hezbollah Secretary-General Abbas al-Musawi and Iranian president Hashimi Rafsanjani favoured this transition from only militancy to politics as well¹⁴⁰. In its inaugural national elections in 1992, Hezbollah secured eight seats in Parliament, running for office also in 1996, 2000, 2005, 2009, and 2018. Throughout its time as a political party, it has frequently clashed with the sitting government. Following the 2005 elections, it vehemently opposed Prime Minister Fouad Siniora's American- and Saudi-backed government. Consequently, in an attempt to compel the sitting administration to resign, in December 2006 it led the opposition in a sit-in that culminated in an eighteen-month political impasse¹⁴¹. Tensions between the organisation and the national government reignited in May 2008, when

¹³⁶ START, 2015; Collelo, 1987; Norton, 2007, p. 42; Levitt, 2013, pp. 13, 222

¹³⁷ Pearson, 2011, pp. 595-596

¹³⁸ U.S. Department of State, 1993; U.S. Department of State, 1995

¹³⁹ Leonnig, 2006; GTD, n.d.

¹⁴⁰ Hamzeh, 1993

¹⁴¹ Worth & Bakri, 2008, May 22; Shadid, 2006

the government revealed a plan to disband Hezbollah's private telecommunications network. On the streets of Beirut, fighting erupted between government supporters and Hezbollah, with the Lebanese army notably absent. Eventually the Arab League struck a deal between the parties, putting an end to speculation that the bloodshed might lead to a coup¹⁴². The Doha Agreement guaranteed Hezbollah veto power in the government and declared that no political faction would resort to weapons to settle intra-country disputes¹⁴³. Despite becoming a prominent political party, Hezbollah continued to conduct terrorist attacks against Israeli soldiers¹⁴⁴. The withdrawal of Israel in 2000 was generally attributed to these offensives, which increased the group's popularity among the Lebanese population¹⁴⁵. In July 2006, after a period of relative peace, two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped, and eight others killed. These casualties resulted in a month-long war¹⁴⁶, during which 164 Israelis and over 1,125 Lebanese, the majority of whom were civilians, perished¹⁴⁷. Supporters praised Hezbollah's resilience and alleged victory against the enemy, while detractors condemned it of instigating a useless and highly destructive conflict¹⁴⁸.

Following the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Hezbollah established Unit 3800 to help anti-American groups in the region. According to American intelligence, this was a specialised division which exclusively trained and backed Iraqi Shia armed groups targeting US forces¹⁴⁹. Unit 3800 also provided finances and weapons. These Hezbollah-sponsored cells helped plot numerous strikes in Iraq, including the 2007 attack on the Karbala Joint Coordination Centre which killed five Americans¹⁵⁰.

In relation to Syria, instead, in 2011 Hezbollah began deploying military advisers to the regime of Bashar al-Assad in the country's bloody civil war. In June two years after, its officials admitted that the organisation had also dispatched combat forces, which were considered the most professional and effective ones, to operate alongside Assad's troops, Russian forces, and other Shia allies. The group's most common adversaries were the Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham, and elements of the Free Syrian Army¹⁵¹. The two primary objectives of the

¹⁴² Worth & Bakri, 2008, May 10

¹⁴³ BBC, 2008; Worth & Bakri, 2008, May 22

¹⁴⁴ Norton, 2007, p. 90

¹⁴⁵ Worth, 2011; START, 2015

¹⁴⁶ START, 2015

¹⁴⁷ BBC, 2010; BBC, 2013

¹⁴⁸ Levitt & Pollak, 2014

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*

¹⁵⁰ Wyer, 2012; Samaha, 2015

¹⁵¹ Samaha, 2015; De Luce, 2015

intervention were to protect the Assad regime, which has been an important regional partner for Hezbollah and was thought crucial to deter Israeli forces from re-entering Lebanon¹⁵², and to safeguard and enlarge the group's access to Syrian territory, as this land provided corridors for transporting Iranian missile parts and armaments¹⁵³. Initially, Hezbollah forces in Syria were mostly on the border city of al-Qusayr, but by 2015 they had moved as well to other areas, including the northwest cities of Idlib and Aleppo, the south near Daraa, and even the country's central and eastern parts¹⁵⁴. In particular, they played a key role in the late-2016 Aleppo Offensive, supporting Assad troops in reconquering the city¹⁵⁵. The Lebanese terrorist organisation not only sent militants to fight in the Syrian Civil War, but it also trained and organised Syrian Shia militias and enlisted thousands of foreign fighters¹⁵⁶. By 2017, the Assad regime had regained some of its authority and reasserted control over many Shia militias¹⁵⁷. In most areas combat subsided after 2018. Hezbollah commanders agreed to return a considerable number of their men home. Some forces, however, remained stationed near Damascus, in Deir al-Zour, and across southern Syria¹⁵⁸. Notwithstanding their efficiency, the Lebanese militias sustained substantial casualties. It is estimated that 1,600-2,000 of the 7,000-10,000 troops deployed to Syria died in action¹⁵⁹. Additionally, several top Hezbollah leaders, like Abu Jaafar and Ali Fayyad, were slain in service¹⁶⁰. Hezbollah's credibility also suffered as a result of the group's involvement. Once considered one of the region's most popular Arab movements, with support from both Shiites and Sunnis, its intervention in favour of Assad alienated many of the Middle East's Sunnis¹⁶¹, which led to an increase in the radicalisation of those in Tripoli and near the northern Lebanon-Syria border¹⁶². This rising unpopularity is said to have played a key role in the decisions of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Arab League, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to classify Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation in the spring of 2016¹⁶³. Despite its effects, the Syrian war enhanced Hezbollah's military capability and armament stockpile significantly, considering that Russia and Iran have sent

¹⁵² Jones & Markusen, 2018

¹⁵³ Ibidem

¹⁵⁴ De Luce, 2015

¹⁵⁵ Perry, et al., 2016

¹⁵⁶ Ali, 2019

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem

¹⁵⁸ Kajjo, 2019

¹⁵⁹ Chulov, 2019

¹⁶⁰ Al Arabiya News, 2016

¹⁶¹ Samaha, 2015

¹⁶² Anderson, 2017

¹⁶³ Nader, 2016; Karami, 2016

considerable amounts of high-tech military equipment and ammunition to the organisation¹⁶⁴. Its fighters have also gained expertise battling other non-state entities like the Islamic State and operating in densely populated metropolitan areas¹⁶⁵. Furthermore, sources indicate that the group's recruiting skills in Lebanon have grown dramatically ever since¹⁶⁶. When Assad's troops reclaimed possession of the Syrian-administered sector of the Golan Heights in 2018, an area bordering Israeli-occupied territory, Hezbollah began establishing cells and militias in that zone¹⁶⁷. It has also located significant weaponry and missiles there, as well as recruited hundreds of locals to form new militias¹⁶⁸.

However, the organisation's actions did not end with its immediate neighbours. It has also provided soldiers and supplies to Houthi insurgents in the Yemeni Civil War since 2014. Initially its key efforts were focused on transferring funds and training rebels¹⁶⁹, but as the fighting progressed it began sending its own forces.

Today, both the political and military branches of the organisation are active within the country and participate in elections and strong ties are still maintained with Assad as well as Iranian regimes, which supplied critical support for Hezbollah's foundation and remains the group's primary patron. When it changed its operational strategy in the 1990s, evolving into a hybrid terrorist organisation that combined political engagement with acts of violence, a global campaign was launched to disguise the terrorist branch by branding itself as a legitimate Lebanese party operating within the framework of the Lebanese political system. Specifically, Hezbollah's approach to the political arena is to "walk on the edge"¹⁷⁰, with violence functioning as a primary tool for accomplishing political objectives. For example, its implication in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who was a prominent antagonist of the group and of the Syrian presence in Lebanon, is commonly known¹⁷¹.

3.1.2 The organisation's structure, resources, and financing

¹⁶⁴ Samaha, 2015; Wood, 2016

¹⁶⁵ Clarke & Serena, 2017

¹⁶⁶ George, 2015

¹⁶⁷ Kubovich, 2019

¹⁶⁸ Ibidem

¹⁶⁹ Levitt & Pollak, 2014

¹⁷⁰ Azani, 2012, pp. 741-759

¹⁷¹ Idem, 2013, *An Overview: Hezbollah as a Terrorist Organization*

Hezbollah had a considerable organisational growth process over its more than three decades of existence. It evolved from one of several local Lebanese terrorist groups operating in the national arena into a political party with international influence in the fields of terrorism, military infrastructure, and strategic capabilities, including ground-to-ground missiles. This complex system, which encompasses civilian, military, and social functions, is led by the decision-making “Shura Council”, which is also responsible of appointing the Secretary-General. Hassan Nasrallah has presided over the Council since 1992, following Abbas Musawi’s assassination in February of that year. It is composed by nine members, seven of whom are Lebanese and two Iranians who defend their nation’s interests within Hezbollah. The organisation’s regulations were altered during the elections for the sixth Shura Council, and it was determined that the Secretary-General’s term would last three years, with no restriction on the number of terms he might serve. A political council, a jihadi one, and a political wing were also created to manage activities in Parliament¹⁷², for a total of five Shura Councils whose heads sit in the decision-making one. They are:

1. the Jihad Council, responsible for Hezbollah’s terrorist operations in Lebanon and across the world;
2. the Executive Council, in charge of the organisation’s social activities, human resources, and education. Because this council has territorial authority, it is also involved in the group’s operational and terrorist actions;
3. the Political Council, which incorporates members of the Parliament and is responsible for the activities in the Lebanese political arena as well as the execution of the chairman’s policies in Parliament;
4. the Political Advisor, responsible for promoting Hezbollah’s policies and political interests vis-à-vis parties, organisations, and political entities both inside and outside Lebanon;
5. the Judiciary Council, in charge of the court system in Hezbollah-controlled territories, particularly Shiite villages¹⁷³.

In conclusion, the Council is responsible for running all of the organisation’s components and it is engaged in all of the initiatives in the Middle Eastern and international arenas. It takes strategic choices on terrorist activities on a local, regional, and international scale, as well as socio-political policy in the Lebanese, regional and international systems. As a result, it can be

¹⁷² Idem, 2013, *The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study*

¹⁷³ Qassem, 2002, pp. 85-87

affirmed that Hezbollah is an organisation managed by a cohesive and unified leadership that oversees all its aspects, including its military-terrorist operations¹⁷⁴. Hezbollah namely functions through two “arms”, i.e. the socio-political one and the military one, composed of a dedicated military unit, the Islamic Resistance, which has proven to be a powerful guerrilla force. Both are interwoven, sustain each other, and are accountable to the Shura Council. On 18th January 2002, Hezbollah parliamentary representative Muhammad Fanish explained the nature of the cooperation between the two arms when he asserted that “Hezbollah is being seduced in order to stop it. The goal is not to harm the political arm, but rather the military arm. However, I can state that there is no separating between Hezbollah’s military and political arms”¹⁷⁵. This one-track system has been repeatedly confirmed by remarks made by leadership¹⁷⁶, who maintain that the dual nature was devised by Britain when it placed the military wing on its blacklist of terrorist organisations¹⁷⁷. Naim Qassem, Hezbollah’s deputy Secretary-General, announced in a public statement on 24th May 2013 that “In our resistance, we do not distinguish between one position and another position, because we never divided our movement in such a way that we would have different projects. Therefore, all our martyrs in every position are martyrs [who perished] by force of the obligation [to wage] Jihad... We do not maintain one status for a resistance fighter and another [for someone] who is not a resistance fighter. We do not have a military arm and another [arm] that is political. These Europeans are making themselves ridiculous by imitating Britain, which drew the distinction [Hezbollah’s] military arm and political arm; [they are drawing this distinction] because they need relations with us, and they are manipulating their own peoples [by saying] that they are conducting a dialogue with [Hezbollah’s] politicians rather than with members of [its] military [arm]. They have forgotten that for us, every child is both a military man and politician”¹⁷⁸.

The group’s conduct is also influenced by its ties with Syria and Iran¹⁷⁹, both of which provide major assistance¹⁸⁰. This dependence has had tremendous repercussions on Hezbollah, as indicated by Iran’s appointment of Nasrallah after he pledged to work in line with Iran’s objectives¹⁸¹. Such bond, however, extends far beyond mere pecuniary and ideological connections. For instance, Hezbollah continues to operate training camps under IRGC’s

¹⁷⁴ Azani, 2006

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem

¹⁷⁶ MEMRI, 2013

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem

¹⁷⁹ Jane’s Intelligence Review, 1995, Pt. 1

¹⁸⁰ Alami, 2014

¹⁸¹ Jane’s Intelligence Review, 1995, Pt. 2

supervision. Nevertheless, due to the organisation's emphasis on security and discretion, little is known regarding the command structure inside its military branch¹⁸². Among the primary figures who have shaped Hezbollah's history, a few are worth mentioning:

- Abbas Musawi, Hezbollah's cofounder and first Secretary-General. He perished in 1992 due to an Israeli helicopter strike that killed also six other men¹⁸³;
- Hassan Nasrallah, the current Secretary-General. He joined the Amal movement at age fifteen during the 1975 Lebanese Civil War, and when Musawi left the group in 1982, Nasrallah followed him to help build Hezbollah. Following Musawi's assassination, he then assumed leadership at the behest of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Under his guidance, Hezbollah became a powerful opponent of the Israeli forces in southern Lebanon, so as to influence Israel's decision to retreat from Lebanon in 2000¹⁸⁴. In 2013, Nasrallah declared his support for the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War, deploying thousands of troops to help¹⁸⁵. Since 2018 he has made only few public appearances, thus raising concerns about his present health¹⁸⁶;
- Imad Mughniyeh, Hezbollah's senior military commander, who was allegedly behind a number of overseas strikes. He died in a car bombing in 2008 that was supposedly planned by Israeli intelligence in collaboration with the CIA¹⁸⁷;
- Naim Qassem, who was appointed as deputy chief in 1992, after being affiliated to the organisation since 1982¹⁸⁸. He is largely regarded as Hezbollah's leading media personality. Since 2018, due to Nasrallah's limited public appearances, Qassem has taken up more public leadership;
- Talal Hamiyah, the ESO leader. Although no incidents have been explicitly traced to the ESO since 1994, Israel suspects Hamiyah is recruiting cells in Europe, South America, and Africa¹⁸⁹. On 10th October 2017, the US government announced a \$7 million reward for information on him¹⁹⁰.

In terms of membership, the number of combatants on which Hezbollah can rely has fluctuated throughout time. According to Jane's Intelligence Review, in 2006 there were 3,000 full time

¹⁸² Levitt, 2013

¹⁸³ Haberman, 1992

¹⁸⁴ Kaplan, 2010

¹⁸⁵ Associated Press, 2013

¹⁸⁶ Perry, 2019

¹⁸⁷ Bakri & Bowley, 2008; Goldman & Nakashima, 2015

¹⁸⁸ Barnard, 2015

¹⁸⁹ CEP, n.d., *Talal Hamiyah*

¹⁹⁰ Ahronheim, 2017

and part time fighters¹⁹¹. Two years later, in 2008, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, also known as START, reports that the group counted about 1,000 core members and between 3,000 and 10,000 reserve militants¹⁹². Additionally, in 2015 Hezbollah MP Nawwaf Moussawi stated that the organisation's membership had "increased significantly" since the 2006 war against Israel¹⁹³. Jane's Intelligence Review also reported that in 2017 the fully trained and active fighters had increased to 25,000 units with an estimated 20,000-30,000 reservists¹⁹⁴. Lastly, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies estimated that by 2019, there would be between 7,000 and 10,000 combatants in Syria alone¹⁹⁵. Although the majority of Hezbollah members are Lebanese Shiites, the organisation recruits from all over the world. In the early 2000s, for example, foreign-born individuals and Arab Israelis residing abroad were in high demand. Their passports namely enabled them to bypass Israeli security checks more easily, allowing terrorist operations to take place inside Israeli borders. Some members working overseas serve as logistical or financial operatives, undertaking tasks like fundraising and recruitment¹⁹⁶. Hezbollah also mobilised thousands of foreign Shiites to form autonomous militias to fight in the Syrian Civil War, with a large number of volunteers coming from Pakistan and Afghanistan¹⁹⁷.

Ever since Hezbollah's foundation, Iran and its Revolutionary Guard have contributed significantly to training, equipping, and financing the organisation, as proven by the Israeli capture of an Iranian navy ship carrying 400-500 tonnes of munitions bound for the terrorist group in 2009¹⁹⁸. While experts acknowledge that Iran constitutes a major source of money, projections of its yearly financial support range greatly over time, specifically from \$60,000 to \$200 million per year¹⁹⁹. Indeed, the quantity of money lent by Iran has mostly been determined by those in power in its neighbouring country. Under Ayatollah Khomeini, who is often credited with founding Hezbollah, Iran provided considerable funds to the organisation. However, such support dropped dramatically after his death in 1989²⁰⁰, and the American sanctions enforced on Iran in 2018 have lately hampered the country's capacity to finance the terrorist group²⁰¹, as

¹⁹¹ Blandford, 2017

¹⁹² START, 2015

¹⁹³ Samaha, 2015

¹⁹⁴ Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019

¹⁹⁵ Jones & Markusen, 2018

¹⁹⁶ Levitt, 2013, pp. 208-37

¹⁹⁷ Dehghanpisheh, 2015

¹⁹⁸ U.S. Department of State, 2010

¹⁹⁹ Masters & Laub, 2014; START, 2015; Szekely, 2012

²⁰⁰ Szekely, 2012

²⁰¹ Ghaddar, 2019

demonstrated by the blocked finances, the merger of multiple institutions, and the closure of hundreds of offices and apartments throughout Lebanon²⁰². Following an earlier cut in 2013, Hezbollah's social services budget has also been reduced. Soldiers have protested about income losses, considering that married fighters are only receiving half of their planned wages, which generally range between \$600 and \$12,000 per month, whereas single militants are receiving solely \$200 per month²⁰³. As a consequence, Nasrallah issued a public call for donations in March 2019 to sustain the group's activities and contrast US punitive measures²⁰⁴. Hezbollah also aims to utilise public resources to benefit its community, taking into account that since it obtained control of three ministries in the January 2019 elections, it can use thier funds to assist individuals harmed by recent budgetary reductions²⁰⁵. Another measure that has been adopted is the increase in smuggling operations along the Lebanon-Syria border²⁰⁶.

On the other hand, there are other sources of income available, such as those stemming from engaging in international criminal activities, like counterfeiting currency, documents, and commodities, credit card fraud, money-laundering, armaments smuggling, and drug trafficking – particularly marijuana, cocaine, and captagon²⁰⁷. Kassim Tajideen, for example, who ran a series of shell fictitious companies and import/export businesses across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe with his two brothers and an extended network of family members, has been defined as the key to Hezbollah's extensive international fundraising networks. According to sources in Lebanon who have worked with the Beirut-based shell corporations that operate the network, Tajideen's multibillion-dollar enterprises have contributed millions of dollars yearly to Hezbollah for more than two decades. Finally, in an operation orchestrated by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and executed by Moroccan authorities in March 2017, Tajideen was detained during a flight stopover and extradited to the US to face money laundering allegations²⁰⁸. The arrest concluded a nearly 15-year investigation into alleged financial fraud on behalf of Hezbollah by the Tajideen family's extensive networks on three continents. However, the Tajideen-controlled enterprises constituted only a small portion of the group's international fundraising infrastructure. This ranges from collecting donations from the Lebanese Shia diaspora to directly participating in drug trafficking from South America to the US and Europe, as well as taxing drug dealing, and other international

²⁰² Ibidem

²⁰³ Ibidem

²⁰⁴ Barrington, 2019

²⁰⁵ Ghaddar, 2019

²⁰⁶ Ibidem

²⁰⁷ Levitt, 2011

²⁰⁸ Janes, n.d.

illicit activities undertaken by community members who are not directly governed by Hezbollah. An Israeli intelligence official known only as “Avi” who concentrates on Hezbollah activities in Africa and South America affirmed that “It’s been taking place since the 1980s and the ... group – [Shia] families in Africa and South America – have always been expected to pay taxes and make religiously-mandated donations to the resistance [as Hezbollah describes itself], but since the summer war of 2006 [with Israel], we have seen Hezbollah being much more aggressive about running their own companies and directly investing the profits, not just taxes or donations, from criminal or corporate activity around the world”. He said, “Yes Iran backs the group to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars annually and the relationship is good, but Hezbollah’s leadership knows that they are but a card to be played by the Iranians, it would be foolish to rely on only one stream of income”. He added, “Because of the extensive [Shia] diaspora in Africa, South America, and even North America, the party has long sought to diversify its economic operations. So, to fight it is to confront a complex tangle of donations, taxes, direct investment, drug trafficking, legal imports and exports, criminal scams on a low level and on a high level. They will use any method at their disposal to increase income and are very fine business minds. So ... to understand ‘Hezbollah fundraising’ you are actually talking about a complex and diverse web of operations that spans most of the third world”²⁰⁹.

Another evidence that attests to the complexity and diversity of Hezbollah’s finance structure is the existence of the Resistance Support Association, which was created in 1989 to regularise the organisation’s fundraising campaigns. It is led by Al-Hajj Hussein al-Shami and works through Beit al-Mal, Hezbollah’s bank, to gather large quantities of money in Lebanon from both the private and public sectors, including companies, mosques, educational institutions, gas stations, shopping centres, checkpoints, and so on²¹⁰. For example, during the second Lebanon war the Association distributed flyers and other papers connected to Hezbollah fundraising with the aim of brainwashing the Lebanese population seized in the villages of ‘Aita al-Sha’ab and Aita’run²¹¹. Furthermore, some of its initiatives are coordinated with those of other Hezbollah socioeconomic bodies, such as the building fund (“jihad al-bina”), the fund for the wounded and the martyrs’ fund (“muasasat al-shaheed”)²¹². It should be noted that the Association has also previously been involved in raising donations in Detroit, which has a considerable Shiite Muslim population of Lebanese descent. The funds were collected in the same type of collecting

²⁰⁹ Ibidem

²¹⁰ The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, 2019

²¹¹ Jewish Virtual Library, 2006

²¹² Ibidem

box utilised in south Lebanon, placed in restaurants and probably other locations frequented by Detroit's Shiite minority. The Association also had a website where contributions could be submitted, and which pleaded for financial support from the Palestinian people to reinforce its terrorist campaign²¹³.

Lastly, it is assumed that Hezbollah has built a massive stockpile of rather advanced weaponry over the past several decades. AIPAC, a pro-Israel lobbying group, recently claimed that this would encompass between 120,000 and 150,000 rockets and missiles of various ranges and sizes²¹⁴. In June 2019, Nasrallah announced at a gathering in Beirut that the organisation had obtained precision missiles capable of striking any town, city, and military installation in Israel²¹⁵. In the event of future conflicts, therefore, Hezbollah has the capability to launch 1,500 rockets per day, compared with the 120 in 2006²¹⁶.

3.1.3 Ideology and objectives

Hezbollah's ideology is based on the teachings of Ayatollah Ruhollah Mosavi Khomeini, the Islamic Republic's founder and first Supreme Leader. This orientation was revealed in the group's founding statement, the 1985 Open Letter, which officially proclaimed its establishment. In the Letter it professed its loyalty to "one leader, wise and just", the Wali al-Faqih, and that it was a continuation of the Islamic revolution "made victorious by God in Iran"²¹⁷. The organisation saw itself as a global Shiite Islamic institution whose "behaviour is dictated" by the Wali al-Faqih, rather than "an organized or closed party in Lebanon"²¹⁸. According to Nasrallah, this implied that the party's "leadership, direction, mandate, decisions of war and peace, and so on, is in the hand of the Wali al-Faqih"²¹⁹. Hezbollah highlighted many primary aims in the manifesto, including the destruction of Israel, the expulsion of Western influences from Lebanon and the wider Middle East, and combating enemies within Lebanon, notably the Phalanges Party. Lebanese people

²¹³ Ibidem

²¹⁴ Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019

²¹⁵ Khoury, 2019

²¹⁶ Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019

²¹⁷ Hezbollah, 1985

²¹⁸ Qaseer, 2017, pp. 143-168

²¹⁹ Nasrallah, 2009; Al-Amin, 2009

would be “permitted” to elect their own government, with the condition that “only an Islamic regime can stop any further tentative attempts of imperialistic infiltration into our county”²²⁰.

Leaders like Nasrallah and Qassem argued that as Hezbollah’s constituency grew to include more moderate Shiites, the manifesto became more detached from the group’s activities and objectives²²¹. As a result, a new political statement was produced in 2009, the completion of a process that began in the early 1990s, emphasising national unity, condemning sectarianism, and not identifying Islamic governance as the exclusive choice for Lebanon’s future. This did not mean that all of Hezbollah’s goals had changed. The group was still seeking to free Palestine, and the manifesto reaffirmed its ongoing antagonism to the US and dedication to combat Israeli expansion and violence²²². In a 1994 interview, Nasrallah stated that the revision would “account for the changes...that took place in previous years” but would not imply any “major alteration to our overall doctrines and orientations”²²³. However, unlike in the Open Letter, no reference of devotion to Iran or the Wilayat al-Faqih was made in the new document. In the ensuing Q&A session, Nasrallah nonetheless refuted the claim that Hezbollah has shifted away from its previous ideological stance. The same remark was made after the party’s Sixth Conclave in 2001, when Nasrallah’s deputy Qassem told the Daily Star that while Hezbollah was being flexible, its values would “remain the same because they are at the heart of our movement”²²⁴. Qassem reaffirmed this argument in early 2016, calling the Open Letter a “permanent and continuous document” with the 2009 political document making “minor” or “trivial” changes that had no consequence on the group’s core ideology²²⁵.

²²⁰ Hezbollah, 1985

²²¹ Ibidem; Norton, 2007, pp. 34-45

²²² Collelo, 1987; Norton, 2007, p. 175

²²³ Alagha, 2011, p. 25

²²⁴ Blanford, 2002

²²⁵ Al Mayadeen Culture, 2016

3.2 Hezbollah's da'wa

After World War II, the Shia became a marginalised community in Lebanon, suffering from poor economic conditions and historically holding very limited political power²²⁶. Civilian needs in the Shia-dominated south have also been regularly overlooked by the central government²²⁷. Moreover, the state became extremely inefficient as a service provider during the Lebanese Civil War, causing civil service organisations, including Hezbollah, to develop a reputation for supplying Shiite citizens with essential commodities²²⁸. In the early 1990s Hezbollah thus evolved from a non-state revolutionary group to a hybrid state actor, adopting both political and violent measures to achieve its goals. Unlike at its beginnings, Hezbollah came to see the established Lebanese political system as a suitable conduit for gaining power. Today, its activities and structure indeed resemble those of a state, and it has used social outreach to strengthen the Shia community's political support, recruit new members, and spread its interpretation of Islam²²⁹, while fostering local trust also by delivering humanitarian aid during times of crises. For example, the organisation's members rebuilt the houses and businesses of Christian families who had returned to southern Beirut after the war²³⁰. After an Israeli raid in 1996, it was instead claimed that 5,000 homes were reconstructed in 82 villages, compensating 2,300 farmers in the area²³¹. Furthermore, Hezbollah has run schools, clinics, and hospitals, as well as collected garbage, provided credit assistance, and delivered drinking water²³². In 2006 it was projected that Hezbollah's schools helped around 14,000 students²³³. In particular, its social services sector is composed of multiple NGOs organised into three branches: the Social Unit, the Islamic Health Unit, and the Education Unit. The activities of the first range from the construction of neighbourhood infrastructure to assisting the families of dead militants. The second Unit is in charge of several hospitals, clinics, and social health programmes. Lastly, the Education Unit supervises schools and gives scholarships to gifted pupils²³⁴.

In relation to its social branch, Hezbollah's da'wa structure is a striking example of the strengthening the socio-moral character of the Muslim community type. Given the

²²⁶ Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009, p. 126

²²⁷ Tavernise, 2006

²²⁸ Cammett, 2006

²²⁹ Azani, 2013, *The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study*

²³⁰ Cammett, 2006

²³¹ Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009, p. 126

²³² Canter & Rudorin, 2013

²³³ Flanigan & Abdel-Samad, 2009, pp. 126-9

²³⁴ Ivi, p. 125

organisation's rising political activity, this is a logical decision. In fact, in order to preserve its people's votes, a political party would naturally attempt to improve the lives of its constituents. Hezbollah's initiatives indeed encourage involvement and contributions to the community. As previously stated, during the Civil War there was indeed a focus on inclusion and indoctrination, as well as a highly structured training programme for members under Iran's supervision. They often arrange public events such as memorials and lectures²³⁵, and their official website provides several opportunities to remain in touch, including a guest book and newsletters which are customised to audience interests.

With its organisational goal of reforming Lebanon's political process, it is easy to understand why the group opted for their da'wa strategy. As it becomes more and more entrenched in the political world, acquiring the power to mobilise its constituents plays a crucial role. In addition, as many of its efforts focus on infrastructure and boosting welfare, it has used its da'wa activities as a kind of training ground for its growing position in government. In short, it is utilising its da'wa to both enhance its own capacity as a pseudo-state actor and to demonstrate to the citizens that it is capable of efficient governance, securing their votes in the next election. Such attempts, however, are not coercive in nature. The provision of infrastructure support, for instance, is a public good that benefits supporters and detractors alike, thus proving how Hezbollah is acting cunningly, similar to a democratic government that has a responsibility to care for people who do not support it as much as those who do.

In order to have an even better understanding of its da'wa strategy, it is helpful to consider some concrete examples of its activities. Terrorist groups utilise indoctrination as one of their primary methods to conquer hearts and minds, as part of their assault against Israel and the Western world. The tool's purpose is to mould the perceptions of the internal target audience in line with the various organisations' ideologies and doctrines. For example, in the village of 'Aita al Sha'ab, a kit for children comprising both a request to contribute to Hezbollah and a quiz with prizes for accurate answers was discovered. The headline says, "The competition of the youth of victory – 2006", and there is a child raising a Hezbollah flag over an Israeli tank with one hand and making the victory sign with the other. In the bottom left there is also a note stating that the tournament will be conducted to commemorate "Islamic Resistance Week", which is devoted to the remembrance of the martyrdom deaths of two of the organisation's leaders,

²³⁵ Cf. *Resistenza Islamica - Libano*, 2007; *Resistenza Islamica - Libano*, 2008; *Resistenza Islamica - Libano*, 2011, November 29; *Resistenza Islamica - Libano*, 2011, December 2; *Resistenza Islamica - Libano*, 2011, December 4; *Resistenza Islamica - Libano*, 2012

sheikh Ragheb Harb and ‘Abbas Musawi²³⁶. This “innocent” children’s quiz is meant to indoctrinate the youngsters who will become the organisation’s future terrorist-operatives. It highlights the need of fighting the Israeli enemy using Hezbollah’s “battle heritage”, and it promotes the images of Musawi and Ass’ad Bero, the suicide bomber. Moreover, it reiterates the organisation’s political demands, which explain the continued Jihad against its Jewish neighbour and its unwillingness to disarm, the demand for prisoners’ release, and the “liberation” of the Sheba’a Farms. The quiz’ last section tells the reader where to send answers and how to give contributions, which are both delivered either to representatives of the Islamic Resistance Support Association or to schools. The bottom of the page claims that the results will be broadcast on Al-Manar TV, on the show called “Little Al-Manar”, a children’s programme, and at “participating schools”²³⁷. This is another attempt to include schools in Hezbollah’s intense indoctrination activities and efforts to prepare new generations of terrorist-operatives for its ranks.

The organisation has also developed a scout body called the Imam al-Mahdi Scouts as part of its investment in the education of the younger generation. This institution is one of the instruments used to propagandise Khomeini’s radical Shiite Islam and the personality cults of Khomeini and Khamenei. Its philosophy is founded on hatred for Israel, the importance of Jihad, and its members’ willingness to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Allah as part of the war against Israel. The ultimate goal is to train the Imam al-Mahdi scouts to join operative ranks when they reach the age of 17²³⁸. Indeed, over 120 former scouts have turned shaheeds, including suicide bombers²³⁹.

The hybrid terrorist group’s brainwashing programme extends as well to video games. For example, on 14th March 2007, Al-Manar aired a show called Open Studio. Its topic was the creation of computer games that would convey the message that the second Lebanon war was a fulfilment of Nasrallah’s promise to obtain the release of Lebanese troops captured by Israel thanks to the abduction of IDF soldiers. Indeed, the name given to the game was “The Kept Promise”, which was Hezbollah’s nickname for the conflict. It was said that the game’s developer would release a beta version by the end of March 2007, with all the battles fought by Hezbollah and the IDF day by day throughout the 33 days of warfare. In addition, it was

²³⁶ Jewish Virtual Library, 2006

²³⁷ Ibidem

²³⁸ Erlich & Kahati, 2007

²³⁹ Ibidem

promised that the game would include a “toned-down” version for young children and one for adults with images of blood and killings²⁴⁰.

In the last analysis, the struggle for hearts and minds is waged not just to strengthen followers’ positions, but also to win over neutral and hostile target audiences. Each party attempts to build a positive image for itself and a negative image for its adversary, as well as to sway public opinion in favour of its cause. To achieve this objective, several tactics have been employed to influence, either directly or indirectly, the perceptions and insights of the various target audiences. Hezbollah, for example, has always tried to directly appeal to Shiites by recurring to Nasrallah’s undeniable talents as a speaker and propagandist. As a matter of fact, in the 1980s and 1990s it built a vast media empire with enormous funding from Iran. The network encompasses Al-Manar TV, Radio Nur, newspapers, websites, and publishing houses. To this it adds a clever use of Lebanese, Arab and Western communications, either managing to insert its “news” into other media broadcasts to reach foreign target audiences outside Lebanon, or restricting information from reporters who refuse to obey the limits it imposes. One last tool in its vast arsenal, a network of educational, religious, and cultural institutions, including kindergartens, elementary schools, religious and trade high schools, religious colleges, and teachers’ seminaries, was established. The hybrid terrorist organisation can rely on this cultural-educational apparatus for radical Islam indoctrination, particularly among the younger generation.

²⁴⁰ Ibidem

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: HAMAS

4.1 Hamas: a brief identikit

4.1.1 Hamas' history

During the Arab Israeli conflict of 1948, the Palestinian territories were partitioned into the Jordanian-administered West Bank and the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip²⁴¹. This division also signified the separation of the Muslim Brotherhood's Palestinian branch from its parent organisation, laying the groundwork for the creation of Hamas, an acronym for "Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya", that is Islamic Resistance Movement, at the hands of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin forty years later. Yassin, a Palestinian cleric, became an activist in local sections of the Brotherhood after devoting his early life to Islamic education in Cairo. Beginning in the late 1960s, he preached and undertook charitable efforts in the West Bank and Gaza, both of which were held by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War. The man's charisma, Islamic schooling, and organisational skills proved extremely influential among the youngsters in the refugee camps, where the socioeconomic situation was dismal. As a matter of fact, the Islamic option was embraced as a viable option to address poverty under Israel's military rule. In this sense, Hamas was a religious movement in its conception, but even so Yassin stated that it "was basically a political movement with its primary goal being to secure the legitimate and natural rights of the Palestinian people"²⁴². Furthermore, it also provided a means for the Muslim Brotherhood to support the First Intifada without becoming directly involved, as this could expose the Brotherhood and its institutions to Israeli wrath²⁴³. Taking inspiration from the PLO's early success and popularity as an armed rebellion force, Hamas also provided the Islamic flavour that an armed branch linked with the Brotherhood required. Nonetheless, unlike Islamic Jihad, another Islamic resistance movement, it exemplified and adhered to the Brotherhood's Islamic ideology, which proved critical in establishing and preserving its appeal and "uniqueness"²⁴⁴.

According to its own historical narrative, Hamas is considered to have evolved through four major phases, the first of which occurred between 1967 and 1976, when the hard core of the Brotherhood was formed in Gaza through the development of institutional and social

²⁴¹ Mishal & Seka, 2006, p. 16

²⁴² Abu-Amr, 1997, p. 235

²⁴³ Gunning, 2004, pp. 24-26

²⁴⁴ Mishal & Sela, 2006, p. 178: Appendix 2, article 6

infrastructure. From 1976 to 1981, instead, the focus was set on geographical growth through membership in professional associations in both the Strip and the West Bank, as well as institution establishment, such as the Islamic Center (al-Mujamma' al-islami), the Islamic Association (al-Jam'iyya al-islamiyya), and the Islamic University in Gaza (IUG). Lastly, with the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, Hamas was officially founded as the fighting arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. At the time, Hamas' primary goal was to counter Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), another organisation whose determination to forcefully opposing Israel threatened to divert Palestinian favour away from the Brotherhood.

The 1990s were formative years during which the movement built and refined its activist credentials as the counter-establishment, marketing itself as an alternative to the PLO and Fatah and soon overtaking the Brotherhood in popularity. Several events shaped its identity, including its rejection of the 1993 Oslo Accords. The hostility stemmed partly from the PLO's support for the negotiations, but mostly from the inherent inconsistencies with respect to the organisation's Charter, such as the recognition of the state of Israel²⁴⁵. This opposition signalled what many predicted would be the beginning of the movement's demise. However, by refusing to accept the Accords, which ultimately failed, it significantly strengthened its prestige and public support²⁴⁶. This bet came off handsomely, as Hamas was able to refer to a past history of adhering to its charter and pursuing an agenda of active resistance²⁴⁷, which contrasted sharply with the view that the PLO and Fatah had betrayed their constituency by agreeing to so many concessions²⁴⁸.

The decision to boycott the 1996 PLC elections was the second important event that consolidated Hamas' image, which proved to be critical in maintaining its history of consultative decision-making²⁴⁹ while also contributing to cement the internal, external, and prison-based leaderships. Hamas reiterated its commitment to its principles by citing the Charter as the rationale for the boycott²⁵⁰, highlighting in particular legitimacy concerns as a primary argument. As a matter of fact, the elections were founded in the Oslo Accords, which the group had discharged, and the additional self-governing privileges granted to the Palestinians under them. Consequently, Hamas deemed the electoral process to be

²⁴⁵ Ibidem

²⁴⁶ Milton-Edwards & Crooke, 2004, p. 40

²⁴⁷ Usher, 2006, p. 3

²⁴⁸ Milton-Edwards & Crooke, 2004, p. 40

²⁴⁹ Klein, 2009, pp. 883-884

²⁵⁰ Mishal & Sela, 2006, pp. 133-135

illegitimate²⁵¹, a claim that was largely supported by its followers since it was perceived as a renewed commitment to its values and the community²⁵².

In the early 2000s the Second Intifada broke out, which brought about new violence and clashes. In particular, on 19th August 2003 a Hamas militant detonated himself on a Jerusalem bus. This incident, in which 21 Israeli citizens were murdered and over a hundred more were wounded, terminated the fragile cease-fire between Israel and Palestinian terror groups, precipitated the resignation of PA Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, and postponed a peace process based on the so-called roadmap. In the end, Israel unilaterally retreated from the Strip in 2005, dismantling all its communities and military structures, handing over full control of the territory and the Rafah border crossing to the PA.

One year later, the PLC elections represented a watershed moment in Palestinian history. Previously, Hamas conducted another internal consultative process, which proclaimed its constituencies' overwhelming approval for the movement's engagement²⁵³. The supporters' needs are paramount for the organisation, therefore, considering that the Palestinians were struggling back then, the time was deemed ripe to put down the activist mantle and join mainstream politics, taking the first step toward blending the group into the establishment²⁵⁴. Hamas' triumph was entirely unexpected²⁵⁵. Following a brief endeavour at forming a unity government under Ismail Haniyeh, the confrontation between Hamas and Fatah escalated and unrest flared throughout Gaza and the West Bank. In the 2007 battle of Gaza, Hamas brutally grabbed control of the Strip, where it has operated as the *de facto* authority ever since. Consequently, a shift in Hamas' strategy was pushed to the side lines, as the group attempted to entrench its dominance rather than seek agreement with other parties²⁵⁶. Moreover, a clear schism developed between the internal, Gaza-based leadership and the external, at the time Damascus-based one. Indeed, the constraints of ruling without a proper transition phase forced Hamas to push its customary pragmatism and flexibility to the limit²⁵⁷. Such sacrifice represented a novel situation for the domestic leadership, leaving the door open to internal turmoil for many saw the growing compromises as a betrayal of the organisation's beliefs²⁵⁸.

²⁵¹ Knudsen & Ezbidi, 2007, p. 189

²⁵² Klein, 2009, p. 882

²⁵³ Knudsen & Ezbidi, 2007, pp. 190-191

²⁵⁴ Ivi, pp. 193-194

²⁵⁵ Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010, p. 261

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*

²⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 203

²⁵⁸ Milton-Edwards, 2008

In April 2011, Hamas and Fatah resolved to constitute an interim government and schedule elections, reaffirming this commitment in February 2012. The origins of international legitimization bestowed during the November 2012 conflict, which thrust Hamas back into the global spotlight, are the final indicator of its transformation into the establishment, after the takeover of government-like responsibilities, namely the monopoly of force, and the birth of domestic dissent. Unlike past conflicts with Israel, such as Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009, there was a significant shift in how the combat was perceived across the Middle East. During Operation Cast Lead, Arab leaders spoke out against the Israeli-led warfare, but little action was actually undertaken²⁵⁹. Instead, during this one, representatives of Egypt²⁶⁰, Tunisia²⁶¹, and the Arab League²⁶² visited Gaza to demonstrate their government's solidarity with the people there. Although none of the delegations openly accepted Hamas as the establishment, their first-ever trips signalled a possible change in regional governments' attitudes toward Hamas. The emergence of Islamist regimes in the aftermath of the Arab Spring is clearly a crucial factor in this shift. The new Egyptian government facilitated dialogue that resulted in a cessation of hostilities between Hamas authorities and the Israeli government²⁶³, which was founded on preceding peace deals that communicate the concept that Israel sees the enemy's authorities as the ruling power there. While this does not attest to the former's assessment of the latter's legitimacy to rule, it does acknowledge it being the Israeli government's equivalent.

Three years later, Hamas and Fatah decided to establish a technocratic unity government led by PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah, with legislative elections to be held within six months. The shaky truce between the Gaza-based terrorist group and Israel was broken in July of that year, however, when three Israeli teens were abducted and slain in the West Bank in June, killings which Israel attributed to Hamas, and a Palestinian was assassinated in retaliation by Israeli settlers. Punitive rocket assaults by the military wing and other Palestinian fighters erupted into the longest and deadliest conflict with Israel since 2009²⁶⁴.

In what analysts dubbed an attempt to modify its reputation, in 2017 a new policy statement was released that tempered some of its stances and adopted more cautious language. There was no recognition of Israel, but it did publicly concede the establishment of an interim Palestinian

²⁵⁹ Arab News, 2009

²⁶⁰ Sanders, 2012

²⁶¹ Reuters, 2012

²⁶² Arab News, 2012

²⁶³ Smith, Lister & Fahmy, 2012

²⁶⁴ NCTC, 2014

state in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, along the pre-1967 lines. Israel, for his part, stated that the group was “attempting to fool the world”²⁶⁵.

Later on, protests staged in 2019 in response to tax hikes imposed by the governing administration, dubbed “The Revolt of the Hungry”²⁶⁶ by participants, were met with violent police raids and widespread arrests. The media has generally interpreted the riots as a repudiation of Hamas’ governance and a sign of the Islamist organisation’s mismanagement over the past years. In fact, it is hardly surprising that the territory’s awful economic situation represents a source of popular dissatisfaction. Gaza currently has a poverty rate of more than 80%²⁶⁷, endured 52% unemployment in 2018²⁶⁸, and 92% of the residents deal with “personal anxiety related to the overall economic conditions”²⁶⁹. Furthermore, major power outages are frequent, with inhabitants averaging only a few hours of electricity per day²⁷⁰.

4.1.2 The organisation’s structure, resources, and financing

Many scholars have distinguished three branches within the organisation, namely the political, social, and military wings, which are all inextricably intertwined²⁷¹. Substantial differences between each branch’s operations are essentially fictitious, as they flow smoothly into one another²⁷², a concept also explained by Salah Shehadeh, once commander of the Al-Qassam Brigades, who stated that “the political apparatus [of Hamas] is sovereign over the military apparatus”²⁷³.

Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and the other six founding members constituted the group’s early leaders. Later, command wings and committees were established to handle political issues, security, military activities, and the media. Currently there are three circles of leadership, with the first one including the military wing and local chiefs inside the West Bank and Gaza. The most well-known of these, Yassin and Abd al-Aziz Rantissi, were killed by Israel. The second consists of the external leadership, a “political bureau”. Lastly, the third comprises the global Muslim Brotherhood movement’s international leadership, which encompasses prominent individuals

²⁶⁵ BBC, 2021

²⁶⁶ Hass, 2019

²⁶⁷ MEMO, 2019

²⁶⁸ Gisha, 2019

²⁶⁹ Valent, 2018

²⁷⁰ Almasri, 2017

²⁷¹ Levitt, 2006, p. 6

²⁷² Idem, 2004, p. 3-15

²⁷³ MEMRI, 2002

such as Muhammad Akef, president of the Egyptian branch, and Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the Qatar-based Muslim scholar and television star. These three spheres each display different domains of competence, despite the fact that both insiders and outsiders play a vital part in shaping Hamas' policy on terrorist operations against Israel, as well as soliciting and disbursing funds for that purpose. Otherwise, the inner circle is more responsive to everyday Palestinian problems and strengthens Hamas' political image through combating corruption and endorsing social welfare activities. The outer circle, on the other hand, located outside the borders of the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria, preserves contact with international sympathisers and donors, including the leaders of other terrorist organisations and Iran²⁷⁴.

In terms of its most prominent members, Hamas' founder, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, has previously been discussed in this chapter. After his and al-Rantissi's assassination in 2004, Khaled Meshal, who served as the chairman of the political bureau from 1996 until 2017, became the movement's leader and major voice. Meshal, Hamas' main international representative, backed the group's resort to violence and its unwillingness to recognise Israel, even though he also suggested openness to a long-term peace with its neighbour provided it retreated to the pre-1967 boundaries²⁷⁵. When Ismail Haniyeh succeeded Meshal as political head in 2017, the occurrence marked a shift in the balance of power from those residing overseas, such as Meshal, to those living in the Strip. Haniyeh has apparently been operating from Doha since 2020, supposedly due to Egypt's restrictions on his mobility into and out of Gaza²⁷⁶.

Yahya Sinwar is Hamas' leader in Gaza. He is best known for his involvement in founding the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, now led by Mohammad Deif and Marwan Issa²⁷⁷, and Majd, an internal security agency intended to track down Palestinians who have connections with Israel. Previously serving twenty-two years in an Israeli jail for orchestrating the kidnapping and execution of two Israeli soldiers, he was one of over one thousand Palestinian detainees released in 2011 in return for an Israeli soldier held by Hamas. As of June 2021, Gaza's *de facto* prime minister is Issam al-Da'alis.

²⁷⁴ Satloff, 2006

²⁷⁵ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2022

²⁷⁶ Truzman & Dershowitz, 2021

²⁷⁷ Ibidem

Finally, following internal elections in 2021, Saleh al-Arouri, who had previously commanded the group's military operations in the territory from overseas, was appointed leader in the West Bank.

In order to best express the general membership's viewpoints, the hybrid terrorist group employs a complex consultation mechanism, which engages its major constituencies, i.e. the domestic populace, the external one, and the prison one²⁷⁸. The leadership of these three groups then articulates a comprehensive resolution that matches the preferences of the overall constituency. This approach holds Hamas directly accountable to its followers, but it also adds a significant time restriction since it takes a while to consult the different populaces and then consolidate all of the information²⁷⁹. Another consequence has been the emergence of powerhouses within the system, in particular Meshal in the external leadership and Haniyeh in the internal one²⁸⁰. Even though such dualism was not a major issue during the activist years and particularly as Yassin was still recognised as the movement's leader, following his targeted assassination it became a more prominent problem.

According to Israeli military estimates, Hamas possesses around 7,000 rockets, 300 anti-tank and 100 anti-aircraft missiles. It also has acquired dozens of unmanned aerial vehicles and a 30,000 men army, including 400 navy commandos who have received advanced training and equipment to conduct maritime operations²⁸¹. To finance all this, aside the tens of millions of dollars collected each year from foreign charities, individuals, enterprises, and criminal syndicates, it also receives numerous resources from foreign governments, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Yemen, and Qatar. The nature of each country's assistance varies, thus some nations, like Iran, offer direct state funding, while others contribute by granting military training or a safe refuge for wanted activists, or by merely turning a blind eye to Hamas' activity within their borders. Of the countries labelled above, Iran, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Iraq under Saddam Hussein have been designated by the United States as sponsors of terrorism, while Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Lebanon, and Qatar are perhaps most accurately defined as "facilitators"²⁸². In particular, Iran and Saudi Arabia account for the majority of the group's total financial support, though the former provides it directly through state institutions

²⁷⁸ Klein, 2009, p. 886

²⁷⁹ Cardi, 2012, p. 220

²⁸⁰ Klein, 2009, p. 886

²⁸¹ Federman, 2021

²⁸² Levitt, 2006, p. 171

whereas the latter primarily through private organisations and individuals, some close to or members of the royal family²⁸³.

As a matter of fact, Iran is a key benefactor for Hamas. Despite a temporary split after supporting different sides in the Syrian Civil War²⁸⁴, according to a U.S. State Department report Iran was contributing \$100 million annually to Hamas by 2019²⁸⁵. As the hybrid organisation has frequently stated, it would be practically unable to launch attacks against Israel without the IRGC's support. Indeed, Iran not only supplies weaponry and missiles, but it has also built local manufacturing capabilities for all of its proxies and instructed operatives in technical areas, including custom-designing cruder rockets like the Badr-3 that can be easily made in Gaza²⁸⁶. Sinwar said that his group's "complete gratitude is extended to the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has spared us and the other Palestinian resistance factions nothing in recent years. They have provided us with money, weapons, and expertise. They have supported us in everything ... They weren't with us on the ground, but they were with us through those capabilities"²⁸⁷. However, sanctions imposed by the United States following Washington's 2018 withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal have limited Tehran's capacity to finance its foreign partners²⁸⁸.

Another notable supporter is undoubtedly Qatar, whose ruling clan has contributed billions of dollars in donations²⁸⁹ over the last several years to sustain the movement, bankrolling²⁹⁰ everything from electricity to public-sector salaries. In 2017, Hamas officials confirmed that Doha was planning to dispatch \$100 million to Gaza²⁹¹, an aid that has ensured a great economic boost, allowing Hamas to continue its business despite its governance flaws. Furthermore, in 2019 it gave more than \$150 million and a year later it announced \$100 million in funding, while pledging a further \$360 million in 2021²⁹².

Following Erdogan's election to office in 2002, Turkey has been a staunch supporter of Hamas and a critic of Israel. Though Ankara asserts it only backs it politically, it has been accused of aiding the group's terrorism, particularly through funds redirected from the Turkish

²⁸³ Ibidem

²⁸⁴ Berman, 2017

²⁸⁵ U.S. Department of State, 2019

²⁸⁶ Lobel, 2021

²⁸⁷ MEMRI, 2021

²⁸⁸ Laub & Robinson, 2021

²⁸⁹ Shuttleworth & Balousha, 2014

²⁹⁰ Abu Amer, 2017

²⁹¹ Rasgon, 2017

²⁹² Truzman & Dershowitz, 2021

Cooperation and Coordination Agency²⁹³. Moreover, in October 2020 a U.S. district court ruled that an Istanbul-based bank, Kuveyt Turk²⁹⁴, intentionally supplied financial services to operatives in Gaza. Four months later, Israel seized over \$120,000, as well as cargo containers full of material transferred from Turkey²⁹⁵. Such interest and support are motivated by the top priority of the Turkish president to undermine Israeli power over its citizens, Israeli Arabs, and especially over events in Jerusalem, which he desires to liberate from non-Muslim rule²⁹⁶.

In addition, for years after the embargo began, Hamas accumulated earnings by charging commodities moving through an elaborate tunnel system that bypassed the Egyptian crossing into Gaza. This stratagem managed to bring essential items such as food, medicine, and cheap gas for electricity production into the region, as well as construction equipment, cash, and weapons. After Abdel Fatah al-Sisi won elections in 2013, Cairo turned hostile to the terrorists, since it considered them as an extension of its main domestic opponent, the Muslim Brotherhood. However, in 2018 Egypt began allowing certain commercial products into Gaza through its Salah al-Din border crossing. As of 2021, Hamas is said to be collecting up to \$12 million per month in taxes on Egyptian smuggled items²⁹⁷.

According to the State Department's 2019 Country Reports on Terrorism, Hamas "receives donations from some Palestinian and other expatriates as well as from its own charity organisations"²⁹⁸. Since the early 1990s, the group has progressively established a global financial network to ensure a steady flow of money to sustain its extensive activities in the Territories and abroad, with the fund-raising being kept as hidden and discrete as possible. Some of the most important charitable societies are Interpal, namely the Palestinian Relief and Development Fund in Britain, the Al Aqsa Fund and its European branches, and Le Comité de Benfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens (CBSP). From 2001, these entities have revised their business model and created the Charity Coalition (Union of Good), a worldwide organisational structure which functions under a "common directorship", which between 2001 and 2008 has transferred hundreds of millions of dollars to Hamas-controlled groups and entities in the territories²⁹⁹. However, the convictions of the head of a U.S. charity working in Gaza and of a UN engineer have focused international attention on terrorism financing in the non-profit

²⁹³ Kenez, 2021

²⁹⁴ Arab News, 2020

²⁹⁵ Gross, 2021

²⁹⁶ Carlin, 2021

²⁹⁷ Jalal, 2021

²⁹⁸ Zweig, 2021

²⁹⁹ ISA, n.d.

sector. For instance, following the claims levelled against Christian non-profit World Vision, Australia and Germany suspended their donations to the NGO. Mohammad El Halabi, World Vision's executive director since 2010, was namely arrested and accused of syphoning tens of millions of dollars in donor aid to Hamas. The Shin Bet alleges that El Halabi joined the Qassam Brigades in 2004, before entering World Vision in 2005. According to the prosecution, he was ordered to join a foreign nongovernmental organisation and advance to a position where he could divert funds to Hamas initiatives³⁰⁰. Another case in point is the UK-based organisation Islamic Relief Worldwide, which was prohibited from operating in Israel in June 2014 for the same reason³⁰¹, not to mention the UN refugee agency for Palestinians, UNRWA, which was notoriously exploited during the 2014 war with Israel³⁰². Notably, Hamas stored rockets in UN-funded schools, and a Palestinian group "highly likely"³⁰³ fired them against Israel from a school facility.

4.1.3 Ideology and objectives

According to its 1988 Charter, Hamas' main goal is the confrontation of Israel, which it regards as a foreign parasite on holy Muslim land, echoing the famous Protocols of the Elders of Zion in accusing Jews of an international plot to take over the world. As stated in the Charter, "The land of Palestine is an Islamic trust... It is forbidden to anyone to yield or concede any part of it...Israel will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it..."³⁰⁴. The ideological mandate is thus absolutist and essentially violent, considering that it holds that the Zionist colonial plan can only be eradicated via a holy war in which armed struggle is a fundamental tool. Moreover, many of its activists interpret Hezbollah's bleeding of the IDF as the reason for Israel's retreat from southern Lebanon, leading them to consider this strategy to be the most efficient one for driving Israelis out of the West Bank³⁰⁵. In contrast to its previous history, the group has now taken a progressive and regionalised approach rather than a dramatic revolutionary one³⁰⁶ in order to turn the ethno-nationalist fight in Palestine into a religious struggle³⁰⁷, most likely due to the public criticism after large-scale violent actions taken in the past. For example, the

³⁰⁰ DW, 2016; Weinthal, 2016

³⁰¹ Williams, 2014

³⁰² UNRWA, 2014

³⁰³ Lazaroff, 2015; UN Watch, 2015

³⁰⁴ ADL, 2022

³⁰⁵ Simon & Stevenson, 2003

³⁰⁶ Mneimneh, 2009, pp. 5-17

³⁰⁷ Levitt, 2007; Mehr, 2008

majority of Arabs held a negative opinion of Hamas leading up to the summer 2014 conflict, as most preferred a truce over unrelenting opposition³⁰⁸. As a result, at a press conference in Doha on 1st May 2017, outgoing Hamas politburo chief Meshal unveiled a new “Document of General Principles and Policies”, which however was not intended to substitute the 1988 Covenant. The difference between the two is striking, though, making it worth reading them back-to-back. In a subsequent interview, Meshal affirmed that “we are not a rigid ideological organization . . . that we are a dynamic and adaptive organization and that we are eager to change if it is in the best interests of our people. In the future, Hamas will issue more papers and policy guidelines to deal with new realities”³⁰⁹. To better comprehend Hamas’ evolution, it is important to analyse more in depth some of the new document’s headlines.

To begin with, concerning the Palestinian internal political system, Hamas promises to “managing its Palestinian relations on the basis of pluralism, democracy, national partnership, acceptance of the other and the adoption of dialogue”³¹⁰. It advocates of fostering unity and recognises the PLO as a national framework to be “preserved, developed and rebuilt on democratic foundations”, highlighting the importance of “free and fair elections”³¹¹.

Secondly, Hamas currently regards “the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of June 4, 1967, with the return of the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled” as a national consensus formula. It proposes the two-state solution while remaining committed to “the full and complete liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea”, the “rejection of the Zionist entity” and not “relinquishing any Palestinian rights”³¹². Indeed, the 1988 Covenant was an anti-Semitic document, whose content was full of allusions to warmongering Jews, their secret societies, wealth and “control of the world media, news agencies, the press, publishing houses, broadcasting stations”³¹³. The new charter, on the other hand, proclaims that Hamas’ “conflict is with the Zionist project, not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine”³¹⁴.

³⁰⁸ Levitt, 2007

³⁰⁹ Younes, 2017

³¹⁰ Hamas, 2017, Art. 28

³¹¹ Ivi, Artt. 29-30

³¹² Ivi, Art. 20

³¹³ Idem, 1988, Art. 22

³¹⁴ Idem, 2017, Artt. 16-17

Furthermore, Hamas currently “opposes intervention in the internal affairs of any country” or being “drawn into disputes and conflicts that take place among different countries”³¹⁵. It also calls itself a “Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement”³¹⁶, a major departure from Article 2 of the previous Covenant, which identifies Hamas as the “Islamic Resistance Movement”, “one of the wings of Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine”³¹⁷.

Lastly, the document claims that opposing the occupation “with all means and methods is a legitimate right guaranteed by . . . international norms and laws”³¹⁸. It also states that Palestinians can “develop and diversify the means and mechanisms of resistance”³¹⁹ and that “from a legal and humanitarian perspective, the liberation of Palestine is a legitimate activity”³²⁰. Armed struggle therefore remains at the forefront, including, it appears, indiscriminate attacks against civilians, even though a door has been opened both for elucidating what international law and legality declare about the boundaries of lawful armed struggle, and implicitly also to other nonviolent forms of resistance.

The document appears to be the outcome of extensive and laborious internal discussion, and it was also unveiled on the brink of a long-awaited leadership turnover. It builds on the public messaging of several Hamas’ leaders, in particular Meshal, as demonstrated by the fact that the potential acceptance of the 1967 borders as part of a unified Palestinian national framework, as well as the endorsement for democratic elections and internal Palestinian institutional reform, had been expressed in interviews and op-eds in the Western and Arabic press on multiple occasions. Specifically, external messaging concerning changes in Hamas’ position were more intense during the participation and victory in Palestinian elections, the national unity attempts in 2007-2008, and the early period of the Arab Spring, especially the upheavals in Egypt between 2011 and 2013. In reality, this stance can be traced back to Yassin himself, so that the document therefore represents the climax and most refined formulation of a protracted formation process and consensus building one. Indeed, it provides some explanation and significant signalling for a variety of audiences, while also establishing a forum for assisting in the resolution of Palestinian divisions and the advancement of international engagement with Hamas³²¹.

³¹⁵ Ivi, Art. 37

³¹⁶ Ivi, Art. 1

³¹⁷ Idem, 1988, Art. 2

³¹⁸ Idem, 2017, Art. 25

³¹⁹ Ivi, Art. 26

³²⁰ Ivi, Art. 39

³²¹ Levy, 2017

The hybrid terrorist group proved its adaptability by distinguishing between the short-term goal of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and the long-term one of supplanting Israel. By viewing any political arrangement involving the West Bank and the Strip only as a halt on the road of Jihad and accepting it as complementary rather than antithetical to its objectives, Hamas acquired political flexibility without sacrificing its ideological credibility. As a weaker player with less resources and allies, it has acknowledged that the conventional crusade strategy is inconsequential and outdated, given that Israel has recently formed relations with several Arab governments and wields one of the world's most powerful militaries. However, when Israel retaliates against Hamas, it is subsequently denounced for human rights breaches, bolstering the Palestinian cause among relevant international actors. There are 1.5 billion Muslims in the world and the vast majority of them are Palestine's sympathisers, therefore by spreading allegations that local organisations fight Israel back only because its government attacks them first, Palestinians may be able to persuade a substantial number of Israelis to opt for a peace-friendly administration. Considering that Hamas' strategy is about conviction rather than military victory, conveying the psychological impression that Israel is vulnerable is sufficient. Even if most of Hamas' rockets strike their targets, Palestinians would still be unable to free a single town since they are incapable to directly confront the IDF, let alone hold territory. Therefore, Hamas is attempting to influence perception rather than facts on the ground, and the image of hundreds of rockets flying over Jerusalem and Tel Aviv has proven successful, altering Israelis' vision of their security, and leading the Minister of Defence to declare that if Israelis have no place to sleep, they will raze Gaza. This affirmation demonstrates the effectiveness of Hamas' strategy³²².

In conclusion, for Hamas renunciation of fighting does not constitute a viable option, since the battle is what validates the group's existence. Casualties and destruction on both sides are secondary in its strategic calculations. Broadly speaking, Hamas is thus representative of the widespread phenomenon of political Islam in our day, embodying an attempt by social and political revisionist groups to communicate their frustrations and reshape the national agenda accordingly. At the same time, however, it is an exception since, aside from its dedication to reform Muslim society with true Islam, it also carries the flag of historic Palestine's national liberation through armed conflict with Israel and staunch opposition to the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Hamas' agenda thus acts on both the domestic and international arenas, a dual act that determines its political strategy and behaviour, an inherent contradiction between fulfilling

³²² Namdar, 2021

the Islamic duty of holy war and being conscious of the constraints of the political and social *milieu* in which it operates. In summary, Hamas regards Palestine as its main concern and favours armed rebellion as its political tactic rather than waiting for the Islamisation of society.

4.2 Hamas' da'wa

Hamas' socioeconomic architecture, its da'wa network, is a key component of its operations and a primary means of achieving its objectives. At first glance, it looks to be imparting Islamic education and values to Palestinians in order to make them more religious. *De facto*, its real purpose is to broaden and enhance its constituency base, draw it closer to its ideas, especially the notion of Jihad against Israel, and even attract sympathisers and participants in terrorist acts. In the long term, the goal is to develop an alternative civilian infrastructure that would permit the PA's secular government to be replaced by an Islamic administration whose beliefs are similar to that of the hybrid terrorist group. In other words, Hamas targets those who receive da'wa support from birth to adulthood. The Islamic Society in Gaza, for example, staged a graduation ceremony for the 1,650 children who attended its forty-one kindergartens in 2001. Photographs from the event show preschool-aged children dressed in military uniforms and holding mock rifles, a five-year-old girl plunging her hands in red paint to emulate the bloodstained hands Palestinians proudly exhibited after the stoning of two Israelis in Ramallah, whereas another child is dressed as Hamas' founder Yassin, accompanied by others costumed as suicide bombers³²³. The radicalisation effort then proceeds throughout the academic career of a Palestinian student. For instance, the Hamas Islamic Student Movement in the Bethlehem area issued "instruction cards" to students, which depicted suicide attackers and encouraged youngsters to follow in their footsteps³²⁴.

Additionally, Hamas da'wa organisations run summer camps³²⁵ where young Palestinians are bombarded with the group's propaganda and even given semi-military training. Instead of typical camp T-shirts, participants wear Hamas' uniforms, and rather than singing camp songs, they are instructed for military combat with Israel³²⁶. These lessons encompass strategies for kidnapping Israeli troops, assembling, loading, and firing weapons, and other physical activities. According to Sheikh Bahar, summer camps are exceptionally effective in indoctrinating both religious and secular adolescents. He added that teaching them Islam's history when they are exposed to images of martyrs sows "seeds of hate against Israel"³²⁷.

Palestinian youth radicalisation is also common in higher education institutions. University campuses are littered with Hamas propaganda in the form of booklets, posters, and a plethora

³²³ Levitt, 2007

³²⁴ Ibidem

³²⁵ Idem, 2004, pp. 3-15; Idem, 2009, pp. 80-95; Navins, 2021

³²⁶ Staff, 2021

³²⁷ Levitt, 2007

of other printed assets. For example, a timetable for lectures on one campus contained images of suicide bombers, whereas during student elections at Bir Zeit University in 2003, Hamas candidates re-enacted deadly attacks by detonating replicas of Israeli buses³²⁸. Moreover, the aforementioned IUG is where generations of political and military leadership formed and flourished, as well as where their extreme Islamist beliefs and philosophy were forged. Specifically, indoctrination involves fighting Israel, the Jews, and the West; enacting Jihad; establishing an Islamist Palestinian state and imposing Hamas' radical Islamic code. Several of the students are enlisted into the military wing while still in college. Dr. Isma'il Radwan, a senior Hamas member, stated in a speech he delivered while serving as dean of students that "...the IUG is the main stage for the preparation, recruitment and direction of faithful young [students]... the IUG has sacrificed shaheeds of both genders, and it is working hard to raise a new generation that believes in Allah"³²⁹.

Nowadays, the hybrid terrorist organisation also utilises the Internet to attract new members, since it enables terrorist groups to undertake a virtual recruiting campaign that, while passive and intangible, has the potential to reach out to the whole world. To this end, Hamas manages websites in Arabic, English, Russian, French, Farsi (Persian), Urdu, and Malay, which are hosted on servers in the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and Indonesia³³⁰. Moreover, it has an extensive repertoire of movies and television programmes³³¹, as well as a children's magazine³³². For example, in a scene from the TV show "Self-Sacrificing Fighter", a Jewish family stands by a relative's hospital bed, debating who might have hurt him. They conclude that it could only have been an Arab. The son declares that he "hates Arabs" and "wants to kill them", to which the elder relatives immediately agree³³³.

To summarise, Hamas has evolved into a key actor in providing social assistance to Palestinians³³⁴ whom the government is either incapable or reluctant to help. As previously indicated, there is a special emphasis on children and families within its da'wa activities, as demonstrated by the consistent expenditures devoted to schools, summer camps, and orphanages³³⁵. Furthermore, a variety of social groups have been founded to supply supporters

³²⁸ Ibidem

³²⁹ The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, 2020, *The Islamic University of Gaza, A Hamas Stronghold, Has Been Supported by the EU for Years*

³³⁰ Levitt, 2007

³³¹ Idem, 2009, pp. 80-95

³³² Idem, 2007

³³³ Zilberdik, 2020

³³⁴ Idem, 2006, pp. 236-239

³³⁵ Idem, 2009, pp. 80-95

with both social and educational advantages, as well as to serve as a recruiting tool for potential members, such as the soccer teams employed to enlist suicide bombers³³⁶. One of the most well-known instances are the Islamic Blocs on college campuses, which arrange events and lectures with indoctrination purposes³³⁷. Similarly, sponsored Quran readings are a common recruiting avenue³³⁸. The group's family-centred social welfare efforts are indeed important sources of radicalisation³³⁹. By delivering humanitarian efforts couched in Islamic principles, these programmes meet the health, education, and welfare requirements of Palestinians³⁴⁰, aiming at increasing support for the Islamic agenda, engaging hard-to-reach people, undermining moderate Palestinian leaders, and purchasing Hamas goodwill³⁴¹. It is worth emphasising that their ulterior motivations are evident in the fact that families with Hamas ties receive greater financial support³⁴².

Finally, according to Wiedl's model, Hamas' efforts clearly fall within the category of strengthening the socio-moral character of the Muslim community. In addition to meeting the constituency's social and economic demands, Hamas' da'wa activities are intended to raise support for the cause and strategically situate and assist military personnel³⁴³. This approach is consistent with the organisation's "long-game" strategy, which attempts to profoundly affect public opinion of a decades-old war. Its principal goal is namely to grant social and religious initiatives for people of all ages, with an early focus on social welfare and Islamisation³⁴⁴, which is combined with a special attention on youngsters, who are difficult to protect from such manipulations and are eventually converted into life-long supporters³⁴⁵.

³³⁶ Idem, 2004, pp. 3-15

³³⁷ Idem, 2014

³³⁸ Yaari, 2014

³³⁹ Levitt, 2007

³⁴⁰ Ibidem

³⁴¹ Ibidem

³⁴² Levitt, 2004, pp. 3-15

³⁴³ Ibidem; Idem, 2007

³⁴⁴ Satloff, 2006

³⁴⁵ Levitt, 2004, pp. 3-15

CONCLUSION

With sophisticated, multidimensional warfare as a new reality in today's society, terrorists and their followers have by now identified vulnerabilities in democracy and have learned how to exploit democratic principles, slogans, and institutions to gain power and recognition. The hybrid terrorist organisation, in particular, born of the changing dynamics of terrorism, aims to achieve this legitimacy while also striving to deprive its adversaries of it by all means available, including provocation, indoctrination, and propaganda, and therefore reverse the asymmetrical balance of power to its own favour. Terrorists are indeed experts at mind control. They murder few people, and yet manage to frighten billions and destabilise massive political structures like the European Union or the United States. Hence it can be said that they resemble a fly attempting to destroy a porcelain shop. The fly is so feeble that it cannot even lift a teacup. So, how exactly does a fly demolish the shop? It locates a bull, enters its ear, and begins buzzing. The bull bursts in terror and rage and destroys the china store³⁴⁶. Terrorism is theatre; it is assessed on the basis of its emotional rather than material effects, as shown by public recollection of the 9/11 attacks. Nobody who witnessed the fall of the World Trade Center will ever forget those moments. However, the attack involved not just the towers, but also two additional strikes, among which a successful one on the Pentagon. How come so few people recall that? If the 9/11 operation had been a traditional military campaign, the Pentagon assault should have garnered the greatest attention, considering that Al-Qaeda was able to tear down part of the enemy's central headquarters, killing and injuring senior officers and analysts. The reason why far more relevance is attributed to the devastation of two civilian buildings, and the deaths of brokers, accountants, and clerks, is that the Pentagon is a relatively flat and unpretentious infrastructure, whereas the World Trade Center was an emblem whose destruction created a massive audio-visual effect.

Unfortunately, many studies of contemporary radical Islam fail to approach the topic of employed strategy in a systematic manner. This is explained in part by the fact that individuals involved keep their cards close to their chests. Often hypotheses can only be formulated and not tested, since radical Islam lacks a heritage of explicit, well-formulated techniques. An additional issue is the common absence of logically and thoroughly developed tactics. After all, a less coherent and consistent strategy is still a strategy, but when analysing the wider horizon of religious extremism, it cannot be ignored that distinct kinds of radical Islam cannot be comprehended on the grounds of a plainly outlined end-means logic. Activities are not actually

³⁴⁶ Harari, 2019

founded on clear beliefs, but rather on extreme ideas about the perceived opponent, and about how to combat this enemy³⁴⁷.

This research, in particular, addressed the main peculiarities of hybrid terrorist organisations, using Hezbollah and Hamas as case studies. First and foremost, it has been analysed how the use of means of modern communication and typically Western “tricks” altered the recruitment process, as well as the achieved effects, while not overlooking the more traditional means and tactics already in use, which have in any case been adjusted according to need. These people have acted successfully by focusing on the human dimension without ignoring the global mission, recurring to the power of a message that was able not only to “sell” itself brilliantly, but also to engage and captivate, a new frontier that made the most of the instruments that the West itself supplied. No longer are conventional arms the only ones employed, but also social media and new social networks, which have provided jihadists with previously unknown platforms and audiences, especially young people, to whom they have been able to relate efficiently thanks to tweets posted in real time, HD movies, film shooting techniques, videos in different languages, blogs, and information always available, without mentioning the already well-known online periodicals. The fusion of old and modern is the true secret to prosperity for these groups, which have combined historic and always valid forms of terror such as killings, beheadings, and intimidation with the most advanced methods of persuasion.

In the final analysis, these organisations opportunistically and dangerously exploit the fundamental values of the democratic-liberal world, and despite actively opposing this set of morals, they seek to merge into the political and welfare systems as well as stand for elections, while continuing to undertake terrorist activities. There is namely no ideal recipe for effective propaganda, just as there is no infallible way of recruiting. There are several variables and factors that, when combined and studied in advance, can lead to allegiance, ensnare, and persuade an individual, depending on the circumstances, to engage in military conflict, espionage, or carry out lone attacks. Understanding these approaches is crucial not only for preventing further measures and avoiding immediate slaughter, but also for interrupting a process of societal discouragement and distrust among specific vulnerable groups.

Hezbollah has been shown to fit the description of a hybrid terrorist organisation. From humble beginnings as a paramilitary resistance movement during Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982³⁴⁸, when it was little more than a loose collection of underground terrorist cells, it has

³⁴⁷ AIVD, 2005

³⁴⁸ Jane’s World Insurgency and Terrorism, 2015

evolved into a hybrid entity woven within the structure of Lebanese society. It offers social services and actively participates in politics, in addition to being involved in international terrorist attacks and regional military operations³⁴⁹.

By providing free childcare services as one of its social and humanitarian branches, Hamas, too, exemplifies this type of terrorism. Indeed, it places a major emphasis on reaching out to youngsters and families, who are regarded as society's future and backbone. This demonstrates a great deal of concern about progressively moulding the constituent population into its own image in order to fulfil the group's greater goals.

However, Hezbollah differs from Hamas in that it places a greater importance on both engagement and societal growth, whereas Hamas' programmes often demand participants to just consume information or benefits. Finally, when comparing the two entities, it is clear that each organisation's chosen da'wa technique was deliberate and representative of its philosophy. Nonetheless, both of them have adopted a cautious and far-reaching approach, relying on generational change to accomplish their objectives. Indeed, a hybrid strategy reduces the political cost of aggression, allowing for regime change and territory acquisition "on the cheap". Far from being a primarily religious activity, da'wa has matured into a carefully planned tactic in the hands of armed groups. While some, like Hezbollah and Hamas, adopt a slower and long-term approach, relying on generational change to push their aims forward, others, such as ISIS, view da'wa as a tool of conquest. Regardless of their methodologies or intentions, armed groups have been harnessing the soft power potential of da'wa in pursuit of their ends. Studying da'wa in all of its facets can thus shed greater light on an organisation's motives and priorities that may be difficult to discern otherwise. As a result, such practice should be given greater consideration in the context of terrorist activity. This is indeed a wake-up call for the Western world, the one which supposedly, according to Ganor, "believes in the values of democracy, liberalism and humanity; the world that believes in human rights, civil society, minority rights and, above all, the right of all civilians to live in security and peace regardless of religion, race and gender"³⁵⁰.

³⁴⁹ Azani, 2013, *The Hybrid Terrorist Organization: Hezbollah as a Case Study*

³⁵⁰ Ganor, 2014

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EXCERPT

Nel corso della storia sono state diverse le minacce all'integrità delle nazioni che hanno causato perdite di vite umane su larga scala, devastazioni di infrastrutture e palazzi, malattie, lo sfollamento di un gran numero di persone e ingenti danni economici. Tuttavia, dalla fine della Guerra Fredda è emerso un nuovo concetto di multidimensionalità in relazione ai problemi di sicurezza. Gli attacchi dell'11 settembre hanno infatti dimostrato chiaramente come il terrorismo da parte di entità non statali costituisca una delle problematiche più significative che il mondo del XXI secolo deve affrontare. Tuttavia, considerando che lo studio di questo fenomeno è ancora agli inizi, la terminologia è incoerente. Frank Hoffman, uno dei principali sostenitori dello sviluppo di una definizione unica, è stato uno dei primi a proporre delle caratteristiche ben definite: modalità miste, ovvero l'impiego di un insieme di tattiche convenzionali e non combinate con terrorismo e attività criminali; simultaneità; fusione, riferendosi al fatto che le minacce ibride si avvalgono al contempo di soldati professionisti, terroristi, guerriglieri e criminali; e criminalità, impiegata non solo per sostenere le operazioni, ma anche in alcuni casi come deliberata modalità di conflitto. In particolare, la necessità di vincere una guerra sia psicologica che di opinione pubblica ha recentemente dato vita alle organizzazioni terroristiche ibride, di cui un primo esempio nella regione del Medio Oriente è la Fratellanza musulmana, fondata in Egitto nel 1928. Ganor individua una causa di questo mutamento nella "quiescenza del governo", che consente quindi al gruppo di svolgere un ruolo cruciale laddove lo Stato è venuto meno. Una volta che l'establishment politico è stato conquistato, l'organizzazione è libera di disporre delle risorse statali per i propri scopi, acquisendo gradualmente sempre più potere e ricchezza. Sempre secondo Ganor, tali gruppi si reggono su due o, in molti casi, tre gambe. La prima è quella tipica di un'organizzazione terroristica tradizionale, che può essere definita come un gruppo militare o paramilitare che commette atti terroristici. La seconda, invece, consiste nel tentativo di legittimare il terrorismo formando un'"impresa" politica che può semplicemente rappresentare l'ideologia del gruppo o competere in elezioni "legali, libere e democratiche". Dopo aver vinto dei seggi e aver ottenuto un sostegno legittimo, l'organizzazione deve assumere le funzioni di governo. È qui che entra in gioco la componente socioassistenziale, ovvero la terza gamba. A questo proposito, vengono assicurati ai potenziali sostenitori servizi sociali a lungo termine, continui e gratuiti, o almeno molto più economici di quelli dello stato o di qualsiasi altro ente legittimo. Tra le organizzazioni jihadiste islamiche, questa pratica è nota come da'wa (letteralmente "proselitismo") e consente loro di ottenere il sostegno della popolazione per il loro impegno politico, conquistandone i cuori e le menti.

In particolar modo, il Medio Oriente, con la sua lunga storia di intrecci tra etnie e religioni diverse, è un terreno estremamente fertile per la nascita e l'affermazione di minacce ibride. Esempi famosi sono Hezbollah e Hamas, operativi rispettivamente in Libano e nella Striscia di Gaza. Senza rinunciare al terrorismo, i leader e i sostenitori chiedono che il mondo democratico-liberale a cui si oppongono strenuamente li tratti come un movimento politico legittimo. Tra i metodi impiegati per il perseguimento dei loro obiettivi, come sostenuto in precedenza, questi gruppi si differenziano per il ricorso a una varietà di tattiche diverse, una struttura flessibile, atti terroristici, propaganda, guerra dell'informazione e varie forme di assistenza statale. Di fatti, si può affermare che nei casi specifici di Hezbollah e Hamas si tratta di ben più di una forza militare ed è qui che risiede il loro vero potere, dato che esibiscono componenti politiche, sociali, diplomatiche e comunicative che forniscono un supporto fondamentale alle componenti militari. Perciò, anche all'indomani di una sconfitta sul campo, queste altre "gambe" dei gruppi terroristici ibridi alla fine produrrebbero nuove forze per sostituire quelle perse in combattimento, ed essi continuerebbero a prosperare.

Il coinvolgimento della religione nella guerra non è un fenomeno recente. Nel corso della storia, ha servito una serie di obiettivi tra cui giustificare il conflitto e consentirlo producendo una base di reclutamento o ispirando i seguaci a intraprendere azioni estreme. Sebbene sia lungi dall'essere l'unico esempio di tale tendenza, il numero di gruppi armati che utilizzano l'ideologia islamica per legittimare le proprie cause è aumentato negli ultimi decenni. In particolare, è la sopraccitata da'wa, ovvero l'invitare sia i musulmani che i non musulmani a vivere secondo la volontà di Allah e gli insegnamenti del Profeta, a svolgere un ruolo centrale. Nel suo quadro di valutazione delle attività di da'wa, Nina Wiedl evidenzia tre scopi principali di tale pratica: il proselitismo; il rafforzamento del carattere socio-morale della comunità musulmana; l'espansione della Ummah, cioè dell'intera comunità musulmana. Al giorno d'oggi gli sforzi delle organizzazioni terroristiche ibride sono sempre più adattati al tipo di pubblico cui sono indirizzati, principalmente attraverso l'impiego di tecniche differenti e il ricorso a "trucchetti" psicologici (vedasi per esempio gli effetti Halo, Rosenthal e Forer) per facilitare la buona riuscita della missione di evangelizzazione. Con i bambini e gli adolescenti, tuttavia, i metodi sono naturalmente differenti. I cartoni animati, ad esempio, hanno un forte impatto su di loro, poiché essi tendono a immedesimarsi nei personaggi del film, interiorizzandone così i valori. Tutto ciò li rende un canale attraente ed efficiente per l'indottrinamento, soprattutto se sono integrati da attività musicali che li rendono più facilmente memorizzabili dai bambini. Inoltre, l'interazione tra fede e cyberworld sta diventando sempre più inevitabile e sembra che lo scoppio della pandemia di COVID-19 abbia contribuito ulteriormente alla crescita della

da'wa online attraverso le piattaforme social. Si può affermare di fatto che il focus sia rivolto principalmente a tre di queste, vale a dire Youtube, Facebook e Twitter. Qui i predicatori tentano di collegare le sfide contemporanee ai messaggi islamici, ad esempio spiegando come mitigare la rabbia o come raggiungere la propria pace interiore, lezioni che normalmente attingono dalle azioni del profeta Maometto o altre figure coraniche. Ciò consente loro di presentarsi come consapevoli e informati della vita reale piuttosto che come figure religiose alienate, raffigurando l'Islam come una religione che ha il rimedio alle sfide e alle miserie moderne.

Si prendano ora in esame i due casi studio cui si accennava all'inizio.

Dopo lo scoppio della guerra civile libanese nel 1975, nacque il movimento Amal, i cui obiettivi erano ottenere un maggiore riconoscimento per la comunità sciita locale e ampliare la quota di fondi pubblici assegnati alla provincia meridionale da loro dominata. Nel giugno 1982 però, Israele invase il Paese e nel mezzo del crescente risentimento popolare, molti funzionari di Amal disertarono dalla milizia fondando una nuova organizzazione chiamata Amal islamica che sosteneva una reazione più aggressiva all'occupazione. Nel 1985 venne quindi pubblicato un manifesto con il nuovo nome dell'organizzazione, Hezbollah. Successivamente, l'accordo di Taif del 1989 pose fine alla guerra civile e consentì a Hezbollah di diventare un partito ufficiale all'interno del sistema politico nazionale. Nelle sue prime elezioni nazionali del 1992, il gruppo si assicurò otto seggi in Parlamento, ma nonostante fosse diventato un protagonista sulla scena pubblica continuò a condurre attacchi terroristici contro i soldati israeliani. Nel luglio 2006, infatti, dopo un periodo di relativa pace, scoppiò una nuova guerra tra i due stati confinanti. In relazione alla Siria, invece, a partire dal 2011 Hezbollah inviò consiglieri militari al regime di Bashar al-Assad nel contesto della sanguinosa guerra civile che affliggeva il Paese. I due obiettivi primari dell'intervento erano proteggere il regime di Assad, importante partner regionale per Hezbollah, e salvaguardare e ampliare l'accesso al territorio siriano, in quanto forniva corridoi per il trasporto di componenti di missili e armamenti iraniani.

A capo del sistema, che comprende funzioni civili, militari e sociali, vi è il Consiglio della Shura, composto da nove membri, sette dei quali libanesi e due iraniani, i quali difendono gli interessi della propria nazione all'interno di Hezbollah. Sono stati inoltre istituiti un consiglio politico, uno jihadista e uno per gestire le attività in Parlamento, per un totale di cinque consigli i cui capi siedono in quello decisionale. Di conseguenza, si può affermare che Hezbollah è gestito da una leadership coesa e unificata che ne supervisiona tutti gli aspetti, comprese le sue operazioni militari-terroristiche.

Per quanto concerne invece l'aspetto finanziario, oltre ai fondi forniti dall'Iran, vi sono altre fonti di reddito di cui Hezbollah si avvale, come quelle derivanti dal coinvolgimento in attività criminali internazionali, quali la contraffazione di valuta, documenti e merci, frodi con carte di credito, riciclaggio di denaro, contrabbando di armamenti e traffico di droga.

Infine, l'ideologia promossa dall'organizzazione si basa sugli insegnamenti dell'Ayatollah Khomeini, così come dichiarato nella Lettera Aperta del 1985 che ne ha ufficialmente proclamato la nascita ed evidenziato molti obiettivi primari, tra cui la distruzione di Israele, l'espulsione delle influenze occidentali dal Libano e la lotta contro i nemici all'interno del Paese. Nel 2009 è stata prodotta una nuova dichiarazione politica d'intenti, senza che però gli obiettivi chiave venissero cambiati radicalmente. In seguito, all'inizio degli anni '90, Hezbollah si è quindi evoluto da gruppo rivoluzionario non statale ad attore statale ibrido. Oggi continua a ricorrere alle attività di da'wa sia per rafforzare la propria capacità di attore pseudo-statale sia per dimostrare ai cittadini che è capace di un governo efficiente, assicurandosene il supporto alle elezioni seguenti. Per comprendere meglio la sua strategia di da'wa, è utile considerare alcuni esempi concreti. Nel villaggio di 'Aita al Sha'ab è stato ritrovato un kit per bambini comprendente una richiesta di contributo a Hezbollah e un quiz a premi. Questo gioco all'apparenza innocente ha lo scopo di indottrinare i giovani che diventeranno futuri terroristi operativi. L'organizzazione ha inoltre sviluppato un corpo scout chiamato Imam al-Mahdi Scouts, il cui obiettivo finale è addestrare i giovani per unirsi ai ranghi operativi quando raggiungono l'età di 17 anni.

Per quanto concerne Hamas, in seguito al conflitto Arabo Israeliano del 1948 i territori palestinesi vennero divisi tra la Cisgiordania amministrata dalla Giordania e la striscia di Gaza dall'Egitto, una separazione che, allontanandolo dalla Fratellanza musulmana originale, pose le basi per la nascita del gruppo terroristico quarant'anni più tardi a opera di Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, un attivista palestinese che riuscì a imporsi grazie alla situazione catastrofica in cui versava la popolazione locale. Hamas venne così istituito ufficialmente con lo scoppio della seconda Intifada nel 1987. Nei successivi anni Novanta il movimento costruì e perfezionò le proprie credenziali come anti-establishment, proponendosi come alternativa all'OLP e a Fatah e superando presto la Fratellanza in popolarità, grazie per esempio alla credibilità ottenuta in seguito al rigetto degli Accordi di Oslo del 1993 e al boicottaggio delle elezioni del 1996, dato che entrambi erano in contraddizione con i valori fondamentali di Hamas. Gli anni dopo il 2000 sono stati invece segnati da continui scontri con Fatah e Israele, intercalati da tregue e coalizioni

momentanee e dall'entrata in politica del gruppo nel 2006. Recentemente vi sono state alcune proteste per la miseria economica dilagante.

Come per Hezbollah, anche le tre “gambe” di Hamas sono distinte ma al tempo stesso altamente intrecciate tra loro e tre sono i livelli di leadership (domestico, l'ufficio politico e quello internazionale) che amministrano e dirigono l'intero apparato. Tra i leader più importanti dopo le morti di Yassin e al-Rantissi, troviamo Meshal, Haniyeh, Sinwar, Deif, Issa, al-Da'alis e al-Arouri. Il gruppo terroristico ibrido si avvale inoltre di un complesso meccanismo di consultazione che coinvolge i suoi maggiori collegi elettorali, ovvero la popolazione domestica, quella esterna e quella carceraria. La leadership di questi tre gruppi articola quindi una risoluzione finale che corrisponde alle preferenze dell'intera comunità.

Tra i maggiori finanziatori di Hamas vi sono: Arabia Saudita; Iran; Siria; Libano; Libia; Sudan; Yemen; Qatar. Inoltre, per anni dopo l'inizio dell'embargo, Hamas ha accumulato guadagni facendo pagare le tasse su merci che arrivano fino a Gaza attraverso un elaborato sistema di tunnel che aggira il valico egiziano. Da ultime ma non per importanza, un ruolo chiave è quello delle ONG che segretamente finanziano i terroristi palestinesi, come l'Interpal e la CBSP.

Secondo la Carta del 1988, l'obiettivo principale di Hamas è il confronto con Israele, che considera un parassita straniero in terra santa musulmana, facendo eco ai famosi Protocolli dei Savi di Sion nell'accusare gli ebrei di un complotto internazionale per conquistare il mondo. In contrasto con la sua storia precedente, il gruppo ha tuttavia attualmente adottato un approccio più moderato e regionalizzato piuttosto che rivoluzionario, tanto che nel 2017 è stato rilasciato un nuovo documento a sostituzione di quello del 1988. Questo sembra essere il risultato di un'ampia e laboriosa discussione interna e si basa sui messaggi pubblici di diversi leader, come dimostrato dal fatto che la potenziale accettazione dei confini del 1967 quale parte di uno Stato palestinese unificato, così come il supporto per elezioni democratiche e una riforma istituzionale interna palestinese, erano stati espressi in interviste ed editoriali nella stampa occidentale e araba in più occasioni. Considerando che la strategia di Hamas riguarda il convincimento piuttosto che la vittoria militare, è sufficiente trasmettere l'impressione psicologica che Israele sia vulnerabile. Pertanto, il gruppo sta tentando di influenzare la percezione piuttosto che i fatti concreti, e l'immagine di centinaia di razzi che volano su Gerusalemme e Tel Aviv si è rivelata vincente, alterando la visione degli israeliani riguardo alla loro sicurezza. In conclusione, per Hamas la rinuncia al combattimento non costituisce un'opzione praticabile, poiché la battaglia è ciò che convalida l'esistenza del gruppo. La

Palestina è la sua preoccupazione principale e favorisce la ribellione armata come tattica politica.

Per quanto riguarda l'attività di da'wa, essa è una componente chiave delle sue operazioni oltre che un mezzo primario per raggiungere i suoi scopi. Di fatto, il vero obiettivo è ampliare e rafforzare la base elettorale, avvicinarla alle idee del gruppo, in particolare alla nozione di Jihad contro Israele, e persino attrarre simpatizzanti e possibili partecipanti ad attacchi terroristici. In questo contesto, Hamas prende di mira i propri cittadini dalla nascita all'età adulta, come dimostrato dalle feste di fine anno a tema terroristico negli asili nido, dai campi estivi dove vengono formati e reclutati i futuri attentatori e dall'attività di propaganda nelle università. Di particolare importanza è l'attività della IUG, dove si sono formate intere generazioni di leadership politica e militare, nonché dove sono state forgiate le loro convinzioni e filosofie islamiche estreme. Inoltre, al giorno d'oggi Hamas ricorre anche ai social media, alle serie televisive e ai cartoni animati per l'indottrinamento dei più piccoli. Riassumendo, Hamas si è evoluto in un attore chiave nel fornire assistenza sociale ai palestinesi che il governo è incapace o riluttante ad aiutare, ponendo un'enfasi speciale sui bambini e sulle famiglie.

In ultima analisi, sebbene entrambi i gruppi analizzati corrispondano alla descrizione di un'organizzazione terroristica ibrida e, secondo il modello di Wiedl, rientrino ambedue nella categoria dedicata al rafforzamento del carattere socio morale della comunità musulmana, Hezbollah differisce da Hamas in quanto attribuisce maggiore importanza sia al coinvolgimento che alla crescita sociale della comunità, mentre Hamas spesso richiede una consumazione passiva di informazioni e benefici. Confrontando le due entità, è chiaro che la tecnica di da'wa scelta da ciascuna di esse è deliberata e rappresentativa della sua filosofia. Tuttavia, entrambe si affidano *in primis* al cambio generazionale per raggiungere i propri obiettivi. Si può quindi dire che uno studio approfondito delle pratiche di da'wa di un'organizzazione terroristica può spiegarne motivazioni e priorità che altrimenti risulterebbero difficili da individuare. La fusione di antico e moderno è il vero segreto della prosperità di questi gruppi, che hanno unito forme storiche e sempre valide di terrore come uccisioni, decapitazioni e intimidazioni con i più avanzati metodi di persuasione. La lotta per i cuori e le menti è infatti condotta anche attraverso lo sfruttamento delle vulnerabilità, principi, slogan e istituzioni democratiche dell'Occidente con lo scopo di ottenere potere e riconoscimento. La comprensione di tali tecniche è fondamentale non solo per prevenire ulteriori minacce ed evitare il massacro immediato, ma anche per interrompere un processo di scoraggiamento sociale all'interno di specifici gruppi maggiormente vulnerabili.