HEZBOLLAH vs ISRAEL:
Confronting Information Strategies in the 2006 Lebanese War

by Lorenza Fontana*

Wars have changed in recent times in many ways, not least because of the role played in warfare by the media and communication technologies. The 'art of war' has inevitably felt the consequences of the information revolution that has left traces in all spheres of social life and in every part of the world. Various phrases have been invented to describe the result of this change, such as Fourth Generation War, Information Warfare, and the Sixth Military Revolution[2].

There is no complete agreement on the most accurate definitions[3] and categories are often controversial, especially within the domain of social sciences. Nevertheless, many scholars and practitioners, both in the political and military fields, have highlighted such changes in war history. An exemplary quotation comes from Colonel P.J. Crowley, speaking in the U.N .Security Council on June 10, 2000: "I don't think you can fight a war today without taking into account the media focus. So you have to plan a media strategy, just as you have to plan your operational strategy for any campaign"[4]. There is general agreement that conflicts and international interventions - peacekeeping, peace enforcement or humanitarian - have their own media dimension, and that all the actors have to integrate information and communication elements into their strategic plans.

The interaction between the information and military aspects brings into play some key words: information warfare, information strategy, *cyberwar* and *netwar*. The first refers to a new type of war in which the use of information equipment – computers, satellites, communication networks, databases – with a military aim has a crucial importance (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997); the second one indicates the strategic approach to this new aspect of the conflict, and that includes attentive planning, not only for the direct use of communication technologies by the army and the various military forces, but also for a strategic use of the media that takes into consideration the new characteristics of the global system (Fachot, 2000). The *cyberwar* and *netwar* are two models of conflict included in the spectrum of the information-age wars. The first one 'stands for the information era as the blitzkrieg for the industrial era', while the second one is characterized by an information-oriented approach to social conflict (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1997).

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[2] In the 1950s, M. Roberts proposed a classification that distinguished five main Revolutions in Military Affairs (RMA) defined as systemic and deep changes that involve society, politics and military organization. The five revolutions happened in correspondence to important historical moments: the birth of the Westphalian modern state's system, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, World War I and the discovery of nuclear weapons. Some people argue that new information technologies constitute the sixth military revolution, after the nuclear one.

[3] A critic of the Fourth Generation War concept could be found in A. J. Echevarria II, 2005.

[4] BBC, (2000) '*How the war was spun*', *BBC World TV*, 10th June, quoted in Fachot, 2000.

The relationship between armed forces and mass media is quite complex, and it is often contradictory and full of tension because of different characteristics and structural priorities. On the one hand, we have a military apparatus that is hierarchical by definition and for which secrecy is a fundamental value, but that at the same time is forced to take into consideration the media as a crucial factor in the dynamics of the conflict. On the other hand, we have the press, phobic with respect to control and external authority, and dedicated to maximizing the traceable information, with bare and flexible constraints, as soon as possible **(sorry, this is not a quote).** We have two antithetical *weltanschauungen*, forced to establish a relationship in the framework of a new type of conflict whose key word is 'information'.

Not only is the interaction between belligerents and media inevitable, but it also plays a crucial role in the very dynamics of the conflict and could determine its outcome. The Lebanon War of 2006 is a significant example that confirms this theory. In terms of sheer military force, the two parties were not nearly comparable: on the one side, a world nuclear power, on the other, a guerrilla group that, even if supplied by Iran and Syria, was small and poorly equipped. Basically, a bet without risks. But in this case, the crucial element was not the 'hard power'. This was not a traditional conflict in which the winner is generally the militarily stronger party. "In today's information age, it is often the party with the stronger story that wins" (Nye, 2006). Between Israel and Hezbollah, it was the latter that told the best story. The most important thing for Hezbollah was to avoid defeat and to enhance its reputation as the only Muslim force able to resist an Israeli offensive. Although, at the beginning of the conflict, the Lebanese government and a number of other Arab countries – such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia - criticized the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers, Hezbollah was later lauded for its resistance and its ability to respond to the attacks, thanks mainly to its media strategy. With a narrative that transcended time and space, Hezbollah depicted itself as the vanguard of resistance against perceived Israeli and Western domination, melding elements of its own unique political culture of militancy and Shi'ism with the broader nostalgic themes of pan-Arabism. This allowed the group to gather support beyond its domestic constituency (Ajemian, 2008).

Israel used its hard power in a way that strengthened Hezbollah's soft power and legitimacy in the eyes of the Arab world, even in the eyes of Sunni groups which have historically been hostile to Hezbollah, a pro-Iranian Shi'ite movement. Justifying its actions on security grounds, Israel launched a hard counteroffensive with large-scale aerial bombings that even in the era of precision weapons generate collateral damage unacceptable to domestic and international public opinion. At the political level, the results were still coming out months later, as was demonstrated by the debate generated by the Winograd report[5].

The costs of the military campaign exceeded the benefits, and opened the door to an enormous psychological defeat (Emiliani, 2007). Israel weakened itself by its own actions and permitted Hezbollah to play the part of David, overturning the roles that until that moment had characterized the Middle East chessboard.

The Third Israel-Lebanon War: A Brief Summary

Before presenting the core analysis on the role of information strategies and media during the conflict, I briefly outline the main stages of the war:

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[5] It is a report written by the judge Eliahu Winograd, and published in April 2007, in which the weaknesses and the faults of the Olmert government during the military intervention in Lebanon were highlighted. Among other superficialities, lack of circumspection and underestimation of the diplomatic alternatives. Baquis, A. (2007) 'E' Olmert il 'colpevole' del fallimento in Libano', *La Stampa*, 11 May.

On June 12, 2006, the apparently localized conflict between Palestinians and Israelis within the Gaza Strip suddenly became a regional crisis when Hezbollah, the Islamist movement that substantially controls south Lebanon, kidnapped two Israeli soldiers during an unexpected attack along the border. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called the kidnapping a 'war act', and launched a land-air offensive in south Lebanon. The Israeli government considered "the Lebanese government entirely responsible" according to Defense Minister Amir Peretz, and asked Beirut to take "immediate and serious actions to locate the kidnapped soldiers and ensure their return to Israel". During the first days of the conflict Israel destroyed a highway bridge and two main roads were destroyed. It also attacked power plants and artillery fire by the Israeli navy hit targets along the coast. Beirut airport and the broadcasting station of Al Manar – the Hezbollah TV channel – were bombed. At the same time, the guerrilla group launched Katyusha rockets towards towns in Northern Galilee.

With the aim of weakening the guerrilla group and expelling Hezbollah from a border zone, Israel began a full-scale operation. The conflict continued until the end of August, going down in history as the third Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

The outbreak of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Lebanese area generated a multidimensional crisis that involved a plurality of actors and required the intervention of international forces. On August 14, a ceasefire established by the United Nations under Resolution 1701 became effective and was supervised by the Lebanese army and by an expanded peacekeeping mission (enhancing the 15,000 troops of the UNIFIL contingent which has been in Lebanon since 1978).

Aside from the triangular dynamic that polarized the competitors in the Gaza Strip, Israel and south Lebanon, other actors stood out and interfered more or less directly in the situation. The White House rallied strongly in support to Israel, opposing, together with Britain, the immediate ceasefire that Lebanon had requested since the very beginning of hostilities. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that a ceasefire could only occur when "conditions are conducive to do so" (Democracy Now, 2006). Moreover, a spokesperson for the U.S. National Security Council, Frederick Jones, said, "The United States condemns in the strongest terms this unprovoked act of terrorism, which was timed to exacerbate already-high tensions in the region and sow further violence. (…) We also hold Syria and Iran, which directly support Hezbollah, responsible for this attack and the ensuing violence" (Israel News Agency, 2006). Iran and Syria have been using the Shiite Lebanese organization as an instrument to pursue their interests in the region. Iran in particular aspires to become the leader power in the Middle East, in a period when its nuclear program is attracting international attention. From this perspective, the fighting in south Lebanon could be seen as a clash between the two harshest, most powerful enemies in the Middle East context, playing a match for regional leadership[6].

The Role of the Media

The 'communication dimension' of war reached its summit with the war over Kuwait in 1991, after a long period of evolution from Vietnam to the Falkland/Malvinas.

The United States became a master in the art of narrative, spectacles and manipulation of consent through the media, particularly through the debated concepts of RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs) and of information dominance. They were soon emulated by Al Qaeda, with the extraordinary theatricality of the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

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[6] For an excursus on the stages of the conflict see: La Repubblica, (2006) 'Hezbollah: 'Sarà guerra totale'. Olmert: 'Pace a tre condizioni'. Presto il rimpatrio di 200 italiani', 14 July, avaliable on line at www.larepubblica.it; CRS Report for Congress, *Lebanon: the Israeli-Hamas-Hezbollah conflict*, Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, September 2006.

Information campaigns by the United States. helped prepare the public for the Pentagon's offensives – first in Afghanistan with the Taliban hunt, then in Iraq – and proved once more their effectiveness. The media was shown to accept the paradigm of the 'inevitable war' and debate around the wisdom of those interventions was slow to emerge into the mainstream.

However, something has changed in the communications dimension of war today as compared to the 1990s. The global media system is different and calls for the attention of policymakers and the various protagonists in 21st-century conflicts. On the one hand, the Internet has led to the fragmentation of the public and the infinite multiplication of sources and, on the other hand, there is a polycentric media landscape more differentiated than in the past – especially after the birth of the big Arab networks that have won big audiences in most of the Middle East (De Angelis, 2007). Both of these factors have strongly conditioned the recent conflicts in the Middle East, such as the second Palestinian intifada and the invasion of Iraq, which garnered the biggest media coverage in history. The clash between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon follows this path, showing once more the importance of information in time of conflict.

The next section will be dedicated to the analysis of Israeli and Hezbollah media systems, which are among the most innovative characteristics within the Middle East landscape; the second part deals with the analysis of the contents.

Internet and Intelligence

According to Kalb, the Internet was the key technological asset that made the Lebanon conflict the fist 'live' war in history. Never before had networks transmitted in real time the crude reality of the battlefield: pictures of Israeli troops advancing in south Lebanon, bombed houses and villages, fleeing civilians, the attack on Beirut airport, Hezbollah rockets over Haifa, evacuations, bunkers, dead bodies … everything reported on the Web thanks to widespread technologies, laptops and mini-video cameras, accessible to all, not only to journalists. Kalb also highlights how the very job of the journalist has been transforming: from the role of a professional seeking objectivity to a partisan role of advocacy (Kalb, 2007).

Even setting aside this kind of generalization, it is important to recognize how real-time communications and the new power of direct testimony had a remarkable impact on the course of the conflict, mainly because the two parties managed the situation using completely different approaches.

Coverage of the conflict involved a great amount of hi-tech equipment and 'populist journalists', besides the millions of bloggers who, in presenting their points of view, influenced public opinion and international politics and raised doubts over the credibility of official statements[7]. As Will Ward (2007) wrote , "the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict may have been the most intensely blogged-about war in history". Bloggers were also able to influence the agenda of traditional media, and their stories found their way into the mainstream press, originating a new cross-format trend. The blogger contributions gave voice to ordinary people experiencing the conflict and brought to light points of view different from those of the mainstream. Of course, at the same time the bloggers could not be considered representative of civil society since they suffered from a series of biases: in Lebanon blogging tends to be the hobby of the wealthy, educated, urban elite within the society, in other words the online representation of Maronite Christians and Sunni Muslims.

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[7] The fact that the more powerful states are also taking seriously the security threat coming from the Internet, and particularly from bloggers, is demonstrated by the Pentagon's decision to augment the controls over the use of the Web by US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, through the memorandum '530-1: Opsec'. Molinari, M. (2007) 'USA, chiusi i nemici blog', *La Stampa* 4 maggio.

The bloggers also played a crucial part in the scandal of the manipulated photographs known as 'Reutersgate'[8]. The Jerusalem-based correspondent of the Associated Press, Ravi Nessman, said:

> "The influence of bloggers, especially in the United States, was unprecedented. When the bloggers discovered that photographs had been doctored [their] credibility [...] skyrocketed and our credibility plummeted. [...] After that, everything that we did was suspect. And that makes it very difficult to cover a war, to have honest people who are trying, who are not doctoring photographs, who are not taking one side or the other, but who are trying to present the truth, what is going on there, and have everything we say be examined, which is fair, but basically be questioned as a lie, and starting with that premise that the media is lying"[9].

In one specific case, the Web may have interfered with military operations. At the end of July UNIFIL published detailed information on its website about Israeli troops movements. This was information that within military circles would have been considered as 'actionable intelligence'. As Kalb highlighted, it was the duty of the U.N. mission to report any violation of the ceasefire, but this might conceivably have been carried out through confidential channels, not through the Internet, where the information was available to everyone. After these messages spread, there was violent fighting in the region, in particular Hezbollah attacks to the detriment of Israeli forces. Obviously there is no certainty that the guerrilla group benefited from the UNIFIL information but it is certain that it was not the other way round, since UNIFIL never published detailed information about Hezbollah movements.

3.2 Media networks

From the point of view of the media, another crucial element in the Lebanese conflict was an extremely wide and diverse network and broadcasting system, where the Arab world's voices found considerable space. Within this new media context, which had had the chance to consolidate since the time of the second Intifada, the majority of the Arab audience had a fairly significant number of alternatives besides the Western media. For that reason, Al Jazeera – the famous Qatar network that combines an Anglo-Saxon style with an Arab point of view – was dubbed the 'Middle East CNN'. The number of Arab media sources is constantly growing. Apart from Al Jazeera, other options are Abu Dhabi TV, Al Arabiya, LBC (Lebanon Broadcasting Corporation), Arab News Network, Al Alam and Al Manar. In 2005, 150 Arab satellite channels were counted. The range is even wider for the printed press, growing mainly after the birth of high-quality Arab newspapers, some of which are edited in London or in other parts of the world (Seib, 2005).

It is not just a matter of numbers, however. The content is important as well and the material gains strength from being close to ordinary people: Arab people are telling their news, reflecting and giving importance to the opinions and feelings of the population (Rohozinsky, 2004). Within this

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[8] It refers to instances of photojournalism from 2006 Lebanon War that misrepresented scenes of death and destruction in Lebanon caused by Israeli air attacks. The controversy began as an investigation of documents by individual bloggers and spread to print and television sources. As a result of the scandal, Reuters fired one freelance photographer and a photo editor, and the AP disciplined several others. Frenkel, S.C. (2006) 'Reutersgate Strikes Other News Ooutlets', *Jerusalem Post*, 11 August.

[9] Ravi Nessman of the Associated Press said that photo-editors examined "hundreds and possibly thousands of photos a day, looking for the perfect representation of the ravages of war and always asking themselves: are these photos real, are they doctored, are they fake? There is a lot of anger over the photos" Nessman, R. *Coverage of the Lebabon War: the media responds*, Mideast Press Club, p. 4, quoted in Kalb, 2007.

context, it is easy to guess that the Western narrative, and particularly the Israeli one (that for historical, cultural and social reasons can be assimilated to the Western narrative), have lost some of their impact on the audience.

Hezbollah strongly benefits from these changes and it is fully aware of this. In 1991 it founded the TV channel Al Manar, which has shown the potential of the media as a weapon in a guerrilla conflict. "We see the media battle as equally important to the fighting on the ground", Manar chief Nayef Krayem told Reuters in October 2000 (Fachot, 2000). Al Manar defines itself as a 'station of resistance', and one of its goals is to wage 'psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy'. Its contents are available in digital format and broadcast via satellite. Apart from the news, transmitted on a large scale through video and the Internet, the TV's on-line archive includes songs, music and videos of Hezbollah fighters during attacks on Israel. Much of the content that appeared during the war and its aftermath has been integrated into the new and most popular Hezbollah websites[10], whose audiences are located primarily in other Arab countries. Much of this content has also appeared in YouTube as well. Over the last years, Al Manar widely documented the Israeli attacks in south Lebanon and the images often reached Israeli TV, Arab channels, CNN and other networks. Even though from a military point of view these episodes are nothing more than skirmishes, Hezbollah's sophisticated media packaging has made them relevant symbolic challenges for the Israeli military (Rohozinsky, 2004).

During clashes in 2006, Israel bombed the headquarters of Al Manar in southern Beirut twice. The buildings were burned and the satellite dishes were destroyed, but after a short period of silence, the network restarted normal activities. In 2004, when the United States put the organization on its list of alleged terrorist movements, public relations director Ibrahim Farhat, said the organization had developed an emergency plan to transmit from remote places (CRS Report, 2006).

These episodes clearly represent first signs that both sides, as actors in a conflict, were giving attention to the role of the media as conflict actors, as well as demonstrating the superiority of Hezbollah in the information strategy battlefield.

3.3 Content Analysis and Iconography

Kalb has been the only scholar who has accomplished a content analysis of the information materials which appeared during the Lebanon conflict, and who has formulated a theory on the media's approach to war coverage[11]. In the following paragraphs, Kalb's analysis will be presented with a particular focus on a feature that he tends to consider the most frequent within the media discourse, i.e. the lack of proportionality between the Israeli offensive and the initial Hezbollah operation.

On the side of Arab media, analysis of the photographs published by a London-based newspaper widely read in the Middle East, Asharq Al-Awsat, and the pictures broadcast by the two main Arab TV channels, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, reveal that in most cases Israel was depicted as the

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[10] Since the end of the conflict, the group's Internet presence has expanded to over 15 affiliated websites (Ajemian, 2008).

[11] This analysis will be based mainly on data collected by Marvin Kalb (2007) in his article 'The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict', *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 43-66

aggressor[12]. Analyzing the headlines and the photographs on the Al Jazeera website, the same conclusion is obtained.

One of the most important European media, the BBC, identified at different times both the belligerents as aggressors but generally tipped against Israel[13]. Among the most important TV networks in the USA, different trends are noticeable: Fox News favored Israel, CNN tried to be neutral, and the three main evening channels - ABC, CBS, NBC – maintained a more critical position towards Israel than towards Hezbollah, again according to Kalb. On the front pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post, Israel was represented as the aggressor twice as often as Hezbollah in the headlines, and three times more often in the pictures. According to Kalb, the lack of proportionality of the Israeli response to the Hezbollah operation was one of the hottest issues in international media. His paper clearly supports this hypothesis.

I would argue that this is not the result of a media construction theoretically planned by Hezbollah as part of its information strategy. Even though Hezbollah did demonstrate its awareness of the importance of information in the development of the conflict, this does not necessarily mean that Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was able to forecast the reaction of Israel, and the possible outcomes, in terms of potential empirical advantage. Whatever the case may be, Hezbollah was able to manage with extreme capability the course of events and was able to maximize the benefits, probably also helped by some *ad hoc* initiatives, and by the reactions in Arab and international public opinion.

One of the most effective ways in which Hezbollah manipulated the narrative of the conflict was through its strategic decision to control the territory and the population, which gave it the means to regulate access to the war zone. As often in these cases, many journalists complained about the restrictions on visiting the hottest areas. On the Israeli side, the government's efforts to regulate the flow of a thousand foreign correspondents to the northern regions and the military's attempts to prevent leaks were condemned. In practice, these measures had little effect. In fact, members of the army, generals and ministers gave many interviews and some reporters were even able to position video cameras directly on the border to record all the movements of the Israeli army in the area.

Hezbollah had to face less criticism, even if its control over the information was strict as well: this was partly a consequence of logistics and partly due to its rigid control over the Beqaa Valley. There is evidence that some journalists took part in tours organized by the guerrilla fighters to visit villages and Beirut neighborhoods destroyed by Israeli bombings. But in general, cameramen and reporters were not welcome in south Lebanon, which was a dangerous place. They in fact risked having their equipment confiscated if caught filming alone and without permission[14]. Moreover, from the beginning of the conflict, Hezbollah encouraged journalists and editors to draw upon Al Manar for reports and information about the war and handed out some shocking photographs of the victims of the conflict, once more acting by the motto 'no pictures, no news'.

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[12] "Media Tenor, the highly-respected media research organization in Germany, found first that Al Arabiya ran 214 stories on the subject and second that 94 percent of them referred to Israel as the 'aggressor'. Al Jazeera ran 83 stories on the subject and 78 percent of them reached the same conclusion" (Kalb, 2007).

[13] "The BBC ran 117 stories. Thirty-eight percent fingered Israel as the aggressor, only four percent fingered Hezbollah" (Kalb, 2007).

[14]   Kalb, M. (2007) 'The Israeli-Hezbollah War of 2006: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict', *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 43-66; Among other sources see: Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (2006) *Backgrounder: Hezbollah's Media Weapon*, 26 September, available on-line at **http://www.camera.org**; Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (2009) *Washington Post Correspondent Makes False Claims in LA Times Op-Ed*, 14 July, available on-line at **http://www.camera.org**; **Spencer**, R. (2006) *CNN reporter admits: I transmitted Hizballah propaganda*, 25 July, available on-line at **www.jihadwatch.org**

To this end, it might be useful to recall that the photograph that won the World Press Photo 2006 prize portrayed a group of young people in a sports car driving through the destroyed neighborhoods of Beirut and filming the scene with their bright new mobile phones (www.worldpressphoto.org): a Chinese-boxes iconography, concentrically auto-referential, that well portrayed the crucial role of images in conflicts and post-modern societies.

Comparing Information Strategies

In a book published in 1997, Gadi Wolfsfeld affirmed that in asymmetrical conflict, the media generally represents an advantage for the stronger party. Those who have consolidated authority do indeed also have secure access to information channels; they can control the news flows, organize press conferences, own newspapers and TV, and promote their own point of view. This theory has been overcome by history, and particularly by technology. In asymmetrical warfare, the dependence on the international news media is especially strong for the weaker parties and it is often the only means they have of convincing other countries to intervene.

> "One of the most powerful roles the news media can play in such conflicts
> is when they become 'equalizers' by allowing the weaker party to enlist the
> support of third parties. This was certainly what happened in the first
> *Intifada* in which the Palestinians were extremely successful at placing their
> plight on the international agenda". (Wolfsfeld 1997)

The Lebanese conflict constitutes further evidence of the new trend according to which, in asymmetrical 'hi-tech' conflicts, the weaker party could have in the media a strong and determinant ally. As far as information strategy is concerned, there are many analogies between the Lebanon War and the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Basically, in both cases Israel lost control over the media coverage. Firstly, the news reached the country from the outside, slowly eroding an already fragile consensus. Secondly, the guerrilla movements were able to manage the information factor in a better way, and to move the right pawns in the information battlefield, maximizing their endogenous strengths. In the next section, I will analyze in detail the information strategies of Hezbollah and Israel, highlighting their characteristics, their weaknesses and strengths.

Hezbollah

Generally speaking, an information strategy is more effective and easier to manage the better the political and military apparatus is able to control the information flow, both within the country and abroad. From this point of view, Hezbollah is supported by structural advantages that come from its very nature as a guerrilla movement. As Kalb highlights, "Hezbollah controlled its message with an iron grip. It had one spokesmen and no leaks" (Kalb, 2007). Thanks to its guerrilla-based military structure, its control of information flows is very efficient. Hezbollah's use of communication technologies was focused, and it gained advantage mainly through three factors: the regional media revolution, the availability of technological devices to control the internal network, and the ability to build an international consensus.

First of all, Hezbollah – following the example of Hamas and Al Qaeda – exploited the regional media revolution, particularly through Al Manar, to strengthen its discourse and its political-religious project within the Middle East. Its narrative blended radical Islam and Arab nationalism, avoiding any allusions to transnational ties with Iran and Syria. Its media strategy framed political violence within a narrative that had currency with both domestic and regional audiences: resistance.

Hezbollah's desire to be considered the leader of Arab resistance is evident in a music video produced by Al Manar to celebrate the first anniversary of the war. Tellingly, the title is 'The Victory of the Arabs'[15] . The project involved actors from Egypt, Lebanon and Syria, and the rhetorical content refers to an Arab celebration of Hezbollah victory.

Secondly, the organization used new technologies to control its internal network, and this allowed Hezbollah to have a decentralized system where the chain of command is more fluid and diversified. This characteristic can also be found by examining the military dynamics during the fighting.

Finally, a supranational dynamic exists because of the activist networks blossoming all around the world. In fact, Hezbollah demonstrated its ability to organize its supporters at a transnational level, and to promote regional and global actions that require more than the support of a local TV. This phenomenon can be compared to the 'network effect' that civil society activists used in the 1990s and that Arquilla and Ronfeldt labeled as 'social netwar', highlighting the ability to influence international communication technologies for specific political goals.

Already during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the pro-Palestinian movements had inaugurated this kind of war. But the peak was reached only with Hezbollah standing out as "the most successful and innovative [group] in harnessing social netwar" (Rohozinsky, 2004), particularly through the use of TV and the Internet. Al Manar boasted unprecedented regional popularity, and, according to Rohodinsky, transformed Hezbollah into a sort of 'Zapatista Army' of the Middle East – though there are important differences, most notably that Hezbollah was not as successful as the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) in winning Western converts (Rohozinsky, 2004).

To conclude this section, I would like to mention a typical dimension of traditional warfare, analyzed here through the lens of information technologies. This is the problem of 'knowing', i.e. the importance of the enemy's knowledge as a decisive element during a war or a conflict. Those who have more information also have a determinant advantage and a greater probability of prevailing (Arquilla, 2007). In this specific case, Hezbollah was favored because, due to its guerrilla core, it had strong control over communication channels and less constraint in terms of accountability to bloggers and public critics. On the contrary, Israeli formal military censorship on some occasions was not sufficient to prevent information slipping out (as in the example of UNIFIL mentioned earlier) and, at the same time, the Israeli government was not able to build an effective marketing strategy to gain consensus and support its actions during the conflict. To this point, the analysis highlights how, as a result of the information revolution, if compared to the traditional institutions, the weaker groups gain a new force in fighting new type of wars: the so-called information and social netwar. The opposite could be said for the states, as we will see in the next section.

Israel

As was the case for Hezbollah, Israel also had a wide range of factors that affected military actions and strategic planning to different degrees, depending both on contingent political decisions and on structural characteristics. The combination of these two last elements brought upon a bad outcome for Israel and a strong defeat on a media and moral plane.

The shortcomings and superficialities of Israeli strategic planning are clear, at least from a military point of view. Israel began the war in a reaction to a Hezbollah attack and to larger regional tensions. But as the conflict evolved, domestic and international public opinion and media began to criticize the decision to continue the fighting. The conflict ended without any substantial result (the kidnapped soldiers were not released and their bodies were returned only two years later, as a result

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[15] The video is available at the link http://mideastmedia.foreignpolicyblogs.com/2008/06/30/new-hezbollah-music-video-celebrates-july-war-of-06/

of a negotiation in exchange for the release of five Lebanese prisoners), and generated another serious shock: for the first time, Hezbollah rockets had reached Galilean towns in the heart of Israel, causing civilian victims and a new wave of fear. It became even more difficult for the government to justify its decisions, while the critics grew stronger and stronger. A U.S. congressional report gives a long list of shortcomings: hesitant decision-making; excessive reliance on air power; delayed launch of a ground offensive, which, once begun, was seen as deficient; launching an unnecessary and costly final ground action during the weekend after the United Nations passed the cease-fire resolution; deficient training and equipment for mobilized reservists; tactics unsuitable for terrain and enemy; ill-prepared home front defenses, which meant many poor and elderly people in north Israel were unable to escape; an inadequate presentation of the Israeli view to international audiences (CRS Report, 2006).

As for the last point on this list, Israel did not consider adequately the importance of information in this kind of conflict, demonstrating once more to be weak, both in the interface with the media and in balancing the soft/hard power ratio. The effort, either political or military, to explain its decisions to the public and to construct its own narrative and consensus were not effective, probably because there was not a strong communication strategy that could support military decisions. On the contrary, the media took a more or less critical position with respect to the Jewish state, tending to highlight the lack of proportionality of the Israeli response and the great damage inflicted across Lebanese territory. Even in the United States, where traditionally public opinion is pro-Israeli, numerous critics spoke up and voices of dissent were raised. Incorrect strategic decisions and the side effects of the conflict undermined the basis for domestic and international consensus. For example, two harshly criticized Israeli practices were the use of cluster bombs in populated areas (CRS Report, 2006) and the bombing of a U.N. building in Qana, where 106 civilians were killed (Kalb, 2007).

Soon after the end of the war, the government opposed a proposal to institute a commission to evaluate the decision-making process during the conflict. But after much criticism, on September 11, 2006, Olmert announced that a working group led by judge Eliahu Winograd would be formed. The provisional results of the investigation were published in April 2007, and brought the Israeli government towards an irreversible crisis[16]. The commission put forth two major criticisms of the management of the war, both from a political and military point of view. It formally named those deemed responsible, including Prime Minister Olmert, Defence Minister Peretz and General Halutz (Baquis, 2007). This storm, which overwhelmed the executive power and angered public opinion months after the end of the conflict, brings us to the structural elements that made Israel even weaker on the information battlefield. Even with a number of peculiarities concerning the role and the mechanisms for regulating military power, Israel is a state founded on democratic principles and in these circumstances is affected by the openness of its society, and by the control and transparency mechanisms of any democratic system. In this context, it is hard to monitor and restrict the news flow and preserve the information that should be kept secret because of their military relevance (Kalb, 2007). Moreover, within a decentralized and fragmented international telecommunication system, the possibility for the institutional apparatus to interact with the commercial sector diminishes, and this fact obliges "national security officials and military planners [...] to find new ways of issuing instructions and implementing policies" (Berkowitz, 1997).

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[16] After a long chain of scandals that overwhelmed Olmert during 2007-2008 (Talansky affair, the Gaza issue, the war in Lebanon), the Prime Minister finally resigned the 31st July 2008. According to Michael Oren, military historian and diplomatic, "Olmert suffers mainly for the War in Lebanon. The corruption charge is serious, but it's nothing if compared to Italian standards". Paci, F (2008) 'Questo Olmert Dimezzato potrebbe portarci alla pace', in *La Stampa*, 1 Agosto.

Finally, it is worth mentioning a less pragmatic but still crucial argument that lies at the very basis of the previous observations: from a political point of view, the protection of the democratic integrity of the state brings the typical democratic dilemma, well known from Thucydides and Machiavelli onwards: whether and to what extent the *salus rei publicae* (i.e. the welfare of the state) requires the violation of citizens' freedom, or, in other words, how to preserve freedom by violating freedom. This is a more theoretical debate that has had, and still has, important consequences for military strategic decisions, and even more in the information warfare era.

Conclusion

The 2006 Lebanon war prompts numerous reflections about the Middle East context and about ways of understanding war in the 21st century in general. This paper has introduced some ideas on both of these aspects, particularly focusing on a key word: information. For the Middle East, two elements were highlighted that brought a decisive change compared with the previous decade: the role of the Internet and a more polycentric and diversified media landscape, mainly due to the presence of big Arab networks. Both these aspects have strongly conditioned the recent conflicts in the Middle East, from the second Intifada to the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Israel-Hezbollah war has confirmed and strengthened this trend and has illustrated the importance of the role played by information to determine the dynamics and the outcomes of a conflict. The information strategies of the actors involved acquired an extraordinary importance which depended on the contextual elements and on the very nature of the belligerents – on the one hand, a world nuclear power nation-state, on the other hand a small and poorly equipped guerrilla group. They are two antithetic subjects which adopted very different strategies, both in their relationship with the media and in the management of internal information and of soft power (Nye, 2004). For Israel, the costs of the military campaign exceeded the benefits and the conflict opened the door to a significant defeat on the moral plan and to a Hezbollah success which overturned the traditional roles in the Middle East chessboard.

In closing, the Lebanese conflict is another example confirming the thesis according to which the Clausewitzian war is a dying species. A new type of war has emerged which Rupert Smith calls 'war among people' (Smith, 2006). The fight between Hezbollah and Israel would not have been defined as 'war' in any other historical period. It was just a 'tank's walk among the ruins of a city' (Galli, 2007). From a military point of view, a 'joke' for Israel that however cost it a 'false win' and the elements for a political crisis. On the contrary, from a strategic point of view, the protagonist was Hezbollah, which was able to astonish enemies and analysts by playing on its ability to control the media and on the wise management of its own soft power. It came out strengthened by the conflict with a new legitimacy and moral status.

The portrait of a new type of asymmetric conflict emerges, that is more and more relevant in the present age, and which is, together with other variables, modifying, not only the information arena, but also the very nature and the way of understanding war.

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