Brand Terror
A corporate communication perspective for understanding terrorism
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September 19, 2006
Hypermedia Seductions for Terrorist Recruiting
Advanced research workshop

Sponsored by NATO- Security through Science
Co-sponsored by the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism
at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya
I. Introduction

Trying to understand terrorism and how organizations utilize it to achieve their strategic objectives is one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century. While there are many definitions for the term "Terror" and even more interpretations for the causes and effects of terrorism, there is no dispute over the fact that terror is in essence a form of psychological warfare. In the Article *Terror as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare* Dr. Boaz Ganor states:

"Terrorism works to undermine the sense of security and to disrupt everyday life so as to harm the target country’s ability to function. The goal of this strategy is, in turn, to drive public opinion to pressure decision-makers to surrender to the terrorists’ demands. Thus the target population becomes a tool in the hands of the terrorist in advancing the political agenda in the name of which the terrorism is perpetrated".¹

The title "Strategy of Psychological Warfare" indicates that there is more to terror than mere physical acts of violence. There is also a non-physical component in action which helps carry and communicate the message of terror. In simple terms, Terrorism can be viewed as a methodical strategy by which to change the behavior of people using violence and fear. To be effective in a political sense, the fear generated by the transmission of terror must, in turn, produce a level of intimidation in the target population sufficient to elicit the response desired by the terrorists. As noted by Sam Sarkesian, terrorism "is the creation of fear in a population in order to force the existing system to respond to the terrorists' demands and/or objectives."²

One of the channels that terrorist organizations rely on to deliver their message is visual communication. "We regard Jihadi imagery to be a primary vehicle for the communication and diffusion of Jihadi ideas, and an essential tool utilized by radical ideologues, terrorist organizations, and sympathetic propagandists, which plays to the

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particular religious and cultural experiences of their audience. Therefore, understanding how these images work, what ideas they convey, why they are employed, and what responses they may elicit, is vital to our struggle against the influence of Jihadi organizations and the violence they create.3

Given the broad definition of terror as a non-physical strategy to change people’s behavior, one can see how visual communication, which ultimately, serves also as a tool for moving people toward a desired behavior, plays a role in the strategy of terror. A simple example for the importance of visual communication in impacting behavior is a road sign (such as a stop sign), which not only informs the driver what he should expect up the road, but also directs him how to act in the given situation. However, visual communication goes far beyond simply being a tool for informing and directing, it also has the capacity to contain and deliver highly complex systems of meaning, emotion and value. In this paper I will show how organizations use visual communication (images, symbols, colors and video) to deliver their message. I will offer another look at the phenomena of terrorism using a corporate communication framework and, specifically, brand identity terminology.

II. What is corporate communication?
In the business world, companies have realized that communications with their constituencies are a critical vehicle through which to form a sustainable relationship with customers, partners, employees as well as shareholders. Corporate communication has become a critical aspect in management, marketing and public relations. Practically everything an organization does can be viewed as part of its communication. The first part of an effective corporate communication strategy relates to the organization itself. The three subsets of an organization strategy include (1) determining the objectives for particular communication, (2) deciding what resources are available for achieving those objectives, and (3) diagnosing the organization's reputation.4 In order to deliver a message appropriately the organization must first analyze the constituencies, what are the target audiences that need to receive the message, understand them, and react to them. Then, based on the audience and the nature of the message, the company needs

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3 The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda, Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, March 2006
to choose the communication channels it wishes to utilize as well as how it should structure the message in order to maximize its effectiveness. There are three basic stages to designing effective communication: the first stage has to do with defining, articulating and creating a vision. The second is planning the strategy for delivering the message and the third stage is executing the delivery of the message in a clear and valuable way.

Modern management and marketing models have mastered the utilization of communication strategies, developing sophisticated messages and using technology to effectively reach mass audiences. In order to maintain relationships with customers and build loyalty and trust amongst stakeholders, many (if not all) business models today recognize the importance of Identity, Image and Reputation. A company's identity is the visual manifestation of the company's reality as conveyed through the organization's name, logo, motto, products, services, buildings, stationery, uniforms and all other tangible assets created by the organization and communicated to a variety of constituents. Image is a reflection of an organization's identity – seen from the viewpoint of its constituencies. Managing the narrowing of the gap between Identity and Image is one of the primary objectives of corporate communications and one of the more advanced communication tools companies use is called branding.

A simple definition applies to all brands:

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\text{A brand is a promise with resonant value that's defined by the experience between the individual and the organization over time.}
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A distinction should be made between the function (product, organization or service) and the emotional and intangible ideas that are associated with the function. Take Coca Cola, for example. The product of Coca Cola is a sweet carbonated brown liquid; the brand of Coca Cola is the energetic and vibrant taste of life, youthfulness and fun. The whole purpose of brands is to attach this bundle of emotional associations to an otherwise undifferentiated product.

\[\text{5 Ibid.}\]
\[\text{6 Ibid}\]
"Customers must recognize that you stand for something"
Howard Schultz, Starbucks

Brands exist in the minds of people (consumers, employees, other stakeholders). They are not something that a company/organisation sells, but what the users of the brand perceive. They are the culmination of a user’s total experience with the product or service (or company) over time. A clear and distinctive brand proposition can influence stakeholders’ attitudes. Three basic criteria for creating a viable and enduring brand are:

A. Differentiation

A strong brand always represents an alternative. One of the most important marketing and communication functions of a brand is to differentiate itself from the competition and position itself as a better choice for the consumer. The brand’s visual identity plays a critical role in helping audiences identify this difference and believe it. Highlighting its own benefits or advantages over the competition is not only a way in which brands try to create a clear distinction in the marketplace, but also to the means by which to generate faith and loyalty amongst its customers, creating brand zealots.

B. Credibility

In a world of unlimited choices and options, with so much visual stimuli and clutter competing for our attention, brands serve as icons of trust and credibility. The promise that the same experience will be delivered every time the customer interacts with the brand is critical for creating a sense of confidence in the product, service or organization. Consistency is a key factor in creating and delivering a memorable message. This is why brands use strict guidelines for usage and application of their visual identity elements.

C. Emotive

Every brand has a story to tell, a reason for being, and an inspiring vision. A strong brand wraps the product, service or organization it represents with a world of meaning and a set of values for people to identify with and believe in. The brand narrative helps turn a complex reality into a simple and memorable idea that can be understood. Stories are also tools for creating an emotional response and tapping into values, which are extremely important for building not only a motivated audience but also a loyal one. In the next section I will use the above mentioned brand criteria to show and illustrate how Hezbollah uses visual communication strategies to convey their message.
III. Hezbollah: "The Party of God" - A brief overview

Hezbollah was formed in 1982 as a reaction to the Israeli invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. The organization, meaning "the party of god" originally sought to bring the Islamic Revolution to Lebanon, seeking the transformation of Lebanon's multi-confessional state into an Iranian-style Islamic state. 

Hezbollah and Israel have been clashing since 1982; Hezbollah is responsible for multiple kidnappings, murders, hijackings, and bombings against Israel. These violent acts are characterized by some as terrorist attacks, while others regard them as legitimate resistance or even military Jihad.  

In 1992, Hezbollah participated in the Lebanese elections for the first time, gaining 12 out of 128 seats in parliament. It acquired ten seats in 1996 and eight seats in 2000. In the general election of 2005, it gained 14 seats nationwide (of 128 total), and an Amal-Hezbollah alliance captured all 23 seats representing Southern Lebanon. The bloc it formed with others, the Resistance and Development Bloc, took 27.3% of the seats.

Hezbollah is a minority partner in the current cabinet, holding two cabinet positions (and endorsing a third) in the Lebanese government. Mohamed Fneish was appointed Energy and Water Minister in the cabinet and has been quoted as saying, "We are a political force that took part in the polls under the banner of defending the resistance and protecting Lebanon and received among the highest level of popular backing...Hezbollah’s resistance (against Israel) does not in any way contradict its political role. If joining the government and parliament is a national duty, then so is defending the country."  

Hezbollah's political success is regarded as a model for other Islamic parties in the Middle East, including Hamas and United Iraqi Alliance; its actions are thought to provide strong clues as to how these other emerging Islamist forces might behave.

IV. The Hezbollah brand

"Successful branding requires a carefully crafted message delivered with consistency and discipline."

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.
According to Wolff Olins, the head of a firm of design and image consultants, although brands historically are associated with products and corporations, the techniques of branding are essentially applicable to every area of mass communications. Political leaders, in order to inspire people, need to become “brand managers” of their parties and preferably of the entire nation. In order to analyze Hezbollah from a brand identity perspective we must observe how the identity and image of the organization are managed and carried out, according to the criteria for enduring brands mentioned earlier.

**Differentiation**

Hezbollah is differentiated on many levels. Internally, it represents the Shiite minority in Lebanon, standing as an alternative to the Sunni government. This differentiation has defined Hezbollah from the very beginning and it is a source of identification for its supporters. More importantly, Hezbollah has positioned itself as a counter force to Israel, the regional super power supported by the U.S. and this resistance has made the organization popular among non Shiite populations as well.

Every brand has graphic and visual elements which help people to first identify the brand and second to identify with the brand. Hezbollah’s flag is yellow, with the organization’s logo appearing in green and their main slogans in red. The logo serves as a powerful symbol representing the ideas that the organization stands for. The letters saying "party of god" in green support an upward-lifted arm holding a rifle which represents the military resistance of the Hezbollah. Beneath the rifle there is a wheat-like crop or plant to represent growth and prosperity. In the background we find a circle with some coordinates signifying the globe. The color green in Islamic tradition is always linked to the Prophet Muhammad, and is therefore synonymous with Islam itself. It is used Ubiquitously throughout the Islamic world, While the act of “coloring” a state (or a flag, an individual, or a symbol) green, may seem simple and of little consequence, it should be remembered that the color green is deeply significant to all sectors of the Islamic world.

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and the act of “coloring” specific symbols green is an overtly political and explicitly an Islamic statement.\(^\text{12}\) Above the logo is the slogan of the Hezbollah saying, "We will be victorious". This represents the essence of the Hezbollah's brand promise. The flag has become a powerful icon in the struggle against Israel.

**Credibility**

The high degree of credibility that Hezbollah enjoys is in many ways a by-product of the sophisticated and consistent use of mass media over time. Al-Manar, (Arabic for "The Beacon") is a television station launched by Hezbollah in 1991. The station has been estimated to be viewed by 10-15 million people daily worldwide and is the second most popular station among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.\(^\text{13}\)

Al-Manar often serves to convey official statements by Hezbollah and the speeches of Hezbollah's leader Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah. As of 2002, Al-Manar regularly aired self-produced "patriotic music videos" composed of video footage from the West Bank mixed with Hezbollah battle songs aired after news reports of suicide attacks in the West Bank and Gaza. According to the producer of one of these videos, they are intended to encourage Palestinian youth to become suicide bombers.\(^\text{14}\) The frequency and consistency of these messages over time create a powerful impact in viewers’ minds giving the organization not only a highly credible stance, but also creates a sense of legitimacy for their message and actions. At the same time, Hezbollah uses the media platform to communicate its message to their other foreign target audiences which they aim to terrorize.

**Emotive**

"Emotion is the adhesive that, when mixed with trust, equals loyalty"\(^\text{15}\), When consumer trust in a

\(^{\text{12}}\) The Islamic Imagery Project: Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda, Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, March 2006

\(^{\text{13}}\) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Manar

\(^{\text{14}}\) Ibid.

brand is undermined, there is a corresponding loss in market power, as customers have less faith that the company will live up to expectations\textsuperscript{16}. The emotional appeal of an organization such as Hezbollah is immense. Hassan Nasrallah is considered by many to be a national hero and an icon representing resistance to Israel and the United States not only in Lebanon but throughout the entire Muslim world. Incitement was always part and parcel of Hezbollah’s strategy, in an interview with Al-Safir, Nasrallah described his priorities and methods in the first months of Hezbollah’s formation: "The main effort at the time went into mustering and attracting young men and setting up military camps....The second effort was spreading the word among the people, first, in a bid to raise their morale, and second to instill in them a sense of animosity towards the enemy, coupled with a spirit of resistance...this required us to use the language of indoctrination rather than real-politic. People then were not in need of political analysis, they were in need of being incited and goaded". \textsuperscript{17}

**Conclusion**

The idea behind this paper is to examine the communication strategy of a terrorist organization such as Hezbollah using a brand identity and corporate communication framework. Assuming that any approach for countering terrorism should deal not only with the prevention of terror attacks but also with the understanding of the nature of the threat itself. In the recent conflict between Hezbollah and Israel, communications, propaganda and psychological warfare played a critical role. The fact that both Israel and Hezbollah were able to claim a victory comes to show that much is in the eye of the beholder and perception is as important (if not more) as reality. Having said this, Hezbollah following this current war is at a crossroad, on the one hand it has shown a great deal of courage and an unprecedented resistance to the mighty Israeli army, on the other hand it is facing the internal pressures and responsibility for creating complete chaos in Lebanon. From a brand management perspective, any organization must be flexible enough to respond to changing conditions yet constant enough to maintain a distinct identity. Facing this new political reality, Hezbollah’s "brand identity" is now at stake and time will tell what direction the organization will take, and if it will be able to maintain public support in the future.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah Born With a Vengeance*, Columbia University Press, 1997
References

3. The Islamic Imagery Project:, Visual Motifs in Jihadi Internet Propaganda, Combating Terrorism Center, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, March 2006