

The Hezbollah War And Media Fraud

Israel 101: Pages 28-31

Rationale and Goals

The Hezbollah War, which took place in the summer of 2006, raised several important issues. The goals of this unit are:

- To give an overall picture of the causes and chronology of the war and to underscore that the alleged Sheba Farms dispute was not the cause of this war.
- To underscore Hezbollah's use of human shields and civilian structures and the difficulties their use posed to Israel (for military operations and media coverage) and to raise issues about how the international community can compel nonstate actors to comply with international humanitarian standards.
- To examine the issue of media bias which was a serious problem in journalists' reports on this war. For example, the press claimed that Israel had destroyed Beirut, when, in fact, Israel had targeted a tiny suburb of Beirut where Hezbollah had its headquarters (see map on p. 30).

Discussion questions

The Hezbollah War (2006)

- Who launched the attacks against Israel in July 2006? Was it the Lebanese government? Read the italicized comments on p. 28 and p. 30. What do they suggest about Hezbollah's relationship with the Lebanese government and people? What was the role of Iran?
- How did this war fit into the larger pattern of Arab-Israeli wars? How was it different?
- Hezbollah used human shields to protect its positions during the war. What should the international community do to prevent nonstate militant groups from repeating this war crime?
- Given that Israel had unilaterally withdrawn from its security zone in southern Lebanon in 2000, how do the Hezbollah kidnapping, rocket attacks and arms buildup affect your views about the wisdom of future unilateral withdrawals?
- It has been said that the Arab-Israeli war has been fought on two levels: on the ground and in the media. Judging from the information in *Israel 101*, how true do you think this is of the Hezbollah or Lebanon II War?
- Why is the issue of the Shebaa Farms so important? How does the Shebaa Farms issue fit into the larger pattern of the Arab-Israeli conflict? (*To the teacher:* Hezbollah justified its attack by claiming it was liberating Lebanese territory from Israeli control.)

Media Bias

- When should one suspect media bias—i.e., consistent lack of responsible checking of the facts or one-sided reporting? Have you had any experience with the media misreporting—or accurately reporting—events that you have known about personally? How did the misreporting or accurate reporting happen?

(Answers should include when reporters are in a country where it is common knowledge that they are threatened if they report against what the regime wants them to say.)

Activities

Activity 1

Evaluating the Use of Human Shields

Preparation

Estimated time: 1 class period • **Materials:** Internet access

Background: Hezbollah used human shields during the 2006 war with Israel, which violates international humanitarian law. This activity will allow students to investigate the definition of human shields, see evidence of Hezbollah's use of human shields, discuss the difficult issues involved when enemies use human shields, and the challenges posed to the international community by nonstate actors using human shields.

Activity

Introduction to the subject:

- In a general classroom discussion, help students define “human shields” and the types of human shields.

To the teacher: Human shields are noncombatants (civilians) whose presence protects certain objects or areas from attack. There are (1) proximity human shields when legitimate military targets are close to or embedded in civilian populations; (2) involuntary human shields when hostages or other unwilling civilians are forced to shield legitimate military targets; (3) voluntary human shields (a relatively new category) of people who willingly try to shield a legitimate military target. There is dispute whether these individuals are civilians with immunity or whether they forfeit their immunity by actively aiding one side in the conflict (www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/milreview/schoenekase.pdf).

- Is it legal for combatants to use human shields? Is it legal to strike a military target even when human shields are present? What kinds of criteria should a military use to determine whether an operation should proceed whether or not human shields are present?

To the teacher: The goal of international humanitarian law during war is to protect innocent civilian populations. The Fourth Geneva Convention and other international humanitarian agreements and laws outlaw the use of human shields. However, the Third Geneva Convention also stipulates that the presence of human shields may not be used to make a legitimate military target off limits. Article 23: “No prisoner of war may at any time be sent to or detained in areas where he may be exposed to the fire of the combat zone, nor may his presence be used to render certain points or areas immune from military operations.” (www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/91.htm (1949), also *Israel 101*, p. 30).

- Do nonstate actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah also have to protect civilian populations?

To the teacher: This is one of the difficult issues. Terrorist groups are nonstate actors. How does the international community impose or demand the same standards of combat from them as it does from the militaries of sovereign nations?

Photographic and video evidence that Hezbollah used human shields during the Hezbollah War.

- The photo on p. 30 is one example of Hezbollah combatants assuming the appearance of civilians to protect themselves from being targeted by Israel.

Activities

Activity 1

- A collection of videos and photos of Hezbollah using human shields is available at www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2006/Operation%20Change%20of%20Direction%20Video%20Clips.
- A *New York Times* article describes the despair of Lebanese villagers who involuntarily became human shields: “At Funeral, a Sunni Village Condemns Hezbollah’s Presence,” Aug. 24, 2006 at www.nytimes.com/2006/08/25/world/middleeast/25sunnis.html?ex=1314158400&en=8c506b51d98e4d2b&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss.

After students review this material, have a general class discussion addressing the following issues:

- Why do you think there are international laws against human shields?
- What does the evidence tell you about Hezbollah’s use of human shields and targeting of civilians?
- How does Hezbollah’s use of civilian shields help its war effort? (If Israel avoids military targets because of the presence of civilians, then Hezbollah can keep its arsenal intact and boast victories. If Israel attempts targeted operations in these areas and civilians are injured, Hezbollah can claim that Israel is committing war crimes and harm Israel’s international image.)
- Compare whom Hezbollah targeted (pp. 30-31) with what Israel targeted. Judging from these facts, how did the intentions of Hezbollah and Israel differ? What were the human costs of Israel’s and the IDF’s policies?
- Judging from the *NY Times* article, how do groups like Hezbollah convince people to be used as human shields?
- What do you think should be done when enemy combatants use human shields? In what ways did their use make it more difficult for Israel to fight this war? How do you weigh whether to continue an operation or not? (For example, if attacks against your own civilians will continue, will you save your own civilians’ lives if you proceed with an operation? One strategy Israel used was to warn civilians of an impending attack. While this took away the element of surprise and put the military operation at a disadvantage, it did allow civilians to leave the targeted areas.)
- How did—or do—attitudes toward Hezbollah change when people became informed of its use of human shields and its targeting of civilian populations?
- What do you think should be done about the fact that terrorist groups use human shields and target civilians?

Wrap-up: Terrorist groups using human shields and targeting civilians are becoming increasingly serious problems worldwide. These tactics made it much more difficult for Israel to fight the war against Hezbollah, and Hezbollah’s targeting of Israeli civilians made it imperative that the IDF take defensive action.

Activities

Activity 2

Evaluating Media Bias and Manipulation: A Case Study

Preparation

Estimated time: 1-2 class periods • **Materials:** *Israel 101*, internet access, copies of Melanie Phillips article, “The Media War against Israel” at www.melaniephillips.com/diary/?p=1316, and copies of the “Anatomy of a News Report” with the AP story on Israel striking ambulances for the main student activity. (Story and questions are at the end of this section).

Background: The media plays a major role in creating public attitudes and sympathies in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Terrorist groups’ efforts to use the media against Israel were dramatically illustrated during the Hezbollah War because media watch groups and bloggers exposed many of the manipulations in photo and news coverage. In this activity, students will investigate one particular incident in depth, draw larger conclusions from it, and develop strategies for evaluating the accuracy of reports.

Activity

Part 1 - Studying a Specific Example: “Anatomy of a News Report.”

- Explain the background material above, and have students reread the box on “The Media and the Hezbollah War” on p. 31, as well as the map on p. 30 showing what parts of Beirut were targeted, and Michael Young’s quote about Beirut on the same page.
- According to Ayman Al Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s closest advisor, “More than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media” (quoted in *The New Republic*, 8/7/06, p. 13). Given this perspective, how can a democracy ensure the independent, honest reporting of news?
- Explain to students that one specific example of media manipulation is that Israel was accused of targeting two Red Cross ambulances, which were clearly marked as ambulances. If this were true, Israel would be guilty of committing war crimes. Students will evaluate the impact of this report, and then investigate its accuracy as a case study of how media bias and manipulation occur.
- Have students read “Anatomy of a News Report” and fill in their reactions. Direct students to evaluate the accuracy of this report by reading www.zombietime.com/fraud/ambulance, the blog that exposed this story as a fraud. Then have students carry on a discussion about it.

Part 2 - General: Media Bias

- Analyze with students some of the ways the media can misinform the public. Pass out or have students read online the Melanie Phillips article at www.melaniephillips.com/diary/?p=1316 and CAMERA’s “Backgrounder: Hezbollah’s Media Weapon” at www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=16&x_article=1205. Then discuss with students the main ways the media can be misleading.
- Reporters ignore other simultaneous events that give the full context. (For example, Phillips writes that there was very limited coverage of the terrible toll on Israelis as a result of Hezbollah attacks.) How does this affect reactions to the news?

- Reporters use unreliable sources, and/or don't question their sources. (For example, reporters took what ambulance drivers and others said about Israeli attacks at face value.)
- Censorship can skew the news. (For example, Hezbollah heavily censored what reporters could see and whom they could talk to. CNN's Anderson Cooper reported on how Hezbollah strictly controlled journalists' access. You can show footage of his report from www.youtube.com/watch?v=BT5gDjg1coc.)
- Staging events for media consumption. (The ambulance incident is an example of this staging. Anderson Cooper's report listed above exposes this incident.)
- Doctoring photos. (For several examples, see the excellent compilation at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wm6fA-YfbII&feature=related.)
- Impact of the speed of the news cycle. One persistent problem Israel has faced is that when accusations against its operations are made, Israeli authorities tell reporters that they will investigate allegations about the incident so they can give an accurate explanation. But reporters do not wait, and file their stories without official Israeli input.

Wrap-up: What is the role of the media? Should it be an independent and objective reporter of news, or a purveyor of propaganda? What is the difference between "news" and "propaganda"? Why is it important in a democracy to have independent, honest reporting?



Activities

Activity 2

“Anatomy of a News Report” – To be passed out to students.

July 24, 2006 – AP version following a Red Cross press release.

The following story ran in dozens of newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times*. The AP version of the incident is much more elaborate than the initial report. Here is the relevant section:

The Lebanese Red Cross suspended operations outside Tyre after Israeli jets blasted two ambulances with rockets, said Ali Deebe, a Red Cross spokesman in Tyre. In the incident Sunday, one Red Cross ambulance went south of Tyre to meet an ambulance and transfer the wounded to the hospital. “When we have wounded outside the city, we always use two ambulances,” Deebe said. The rocket attack on the two vehicles wounded six ambulance workers and three civilians—an 11-year-old boy, an elderly woman and a man, Deebe said. “One of the rockets hit right in the middle of the big red cross that was painted on top of the ambulance,” he said. “This is a clear violation of humanitarian law, of international law. We are neutral and we should not be targeted.” Kassem Shalan, one of the ambulance workers, told AP Television News that nine people were injured. “We were transferring the wounded into our vehicle and something fell and I dropped to the floor,” he said. Amateur video provided by an ambulance worker confirmed Deebe’s account of damage to the vehicles, showing one large hole and several smaller ones in the roof of one ambulance and a large hole in the roof of the second. Both were destroyed.

1. Write your reactions to the above news report: _____

2. Now, go to the following blog and summarize the events revealed about the incident: www.zombietime.com/fraud/ambulance. _____

3. Write your reactions to what you have read in the blog. How do they compare with your initial reactions to the first news report?

Resources

Internet

Chronology of events of the Hezbollah War and Israeli actions from Israel's Foreign Ministry – www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-+Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+from+Lebanon-+Hizbullah/The%20Second%20Lebanon%20War%20-%20One%20year%20later%20-%20July%202007

Hezbollah's use of civilians as shields; deliberate targeting of Israeli civilians – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/arabs/hiz/part1.pdf

Hezbollah rockets targeted civilians – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/HRWonHezbollahViolations.html

Description of military operation plus aerial videos of Hezbollah rockets being launched from residential buildings – www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques/2006/Incident%20in%20Qana%20-%20IDF%20Spokesman%2030-Jul-2006

Video showing journalistic photo fraud during Hezbollah War – www.aish.com/movies/JP/PhotoFraud.asp

The media war against Israel – www.melaniephillips.com/diary/?p=1316

Pictures of the Qana incident – eureferendum.blogspot.com/2006/07/milking-it.html

U.S. House of Representatives passes resolution supporting Israel's right to defend itself – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/HR921.html

U.S. Senate passes resolution supporting Israel's right to defend itself – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/SenRes534.html

Media Watchdogs

StandWithUs (monitors media coverage of the Middle East and provides factual information to refute biased reporting) – www.standwithus.com

HonestReporting (monitors and reports anti-Israel bias in the media worldwide) –

(1) Short film on *Lebanon: Myths and Facts* – www.honestreporting.com/a/lebanonFlash.asp

(2) “The Israeli-Hezbollah War: The Media as a Weapon in Asymmetrical Conflict” – www.ksg.harvard.edu/presspol/research_publications/papers/research_papers/R29.pdf (See the section entitled “Coverage.”)

CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America): monitors and reports anti-Israel bias in media reporting –

(1) “Hezbollah's Media Weapon” – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1205

(2) “New York Times Mangles Sheba Farms Issue” – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1203

(3) “Washington Post – Failures in Coverage of Hezbollah” – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1202

(4) “Question to TIME Magazine: Who Are Hezbollah's Intended Targets?” – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1186

(5) “Hezbollah and Lebanon: Myths and Facts” – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1183

(6) “Media Photo Manipulation” – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1175

FLAME (Facts and Logic About the Middle East): provides factual information to counter common misconceptions about events in Israel – www.factsandlogic.org (Search for “Hezbollah 2006.”)

People

Hassan Nasrallah (Secretary General of Hezbollah) – www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=7&x_issue=63&x_article=1158

Ehud Olmert (prime minister of Israel during Hezbollah War) – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/olmert.html

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (president of Iran) – www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/talking/41_iranpres.html