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## ***Mind Games: The Resistance Axis' cognitive war on Israel***

Israel's adversaries are heavily engaged in psychological warfare against the occupation state, aiming to exacerbate cracks in its society and diminish public morale to buttress the Resistance Axis' conventional military campaigns.



(Photo Credit: The Cradle)

**The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.**

– Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

A successful war is one that leads to breaking the enemy without having to fight. This concept, highlighted by Sun Tzu in his timeless work, *The Art of War*, underscores the essence of **cognitive warfare** – a branch of psychological warfare. Cognitive warfare, alongside other non-military strategies, aims to achieve victory by dismantling the enemy's resolve and capacity to resist.

An Israeli example of this kind of cognitive manipulation took place last Saturday after an unknown projectile killed 12 civilians in the Golan Heights town of **Majd al-Shams**. Although local witnesses claim the deaths were caused by an Israeli Iron Dome missile that fell onto a football field, Tel Aviv accused Lebanon's Hezbollah of striking the site and has parlayed this misinformation into a campaign to impact Lebanese civilians broadly by announcing imminent and escalatory strikes against Lebanon.

This is part and parcel of the war of perceptions between Israel and the region's Axis of Resistance – one that has been practiced for years and which tends to escalate dramatically during times of conflict.

### **Sowing internal discord**

But Tel Aviv no longer dominates the field. Every action, military or non-military, undertaken by West Asia's Axis of Resistance against the Israeli occupation state inherently possesses a cognitive dimension impacting the psyche of Israelis.

Cognition involves how individuals absorb, interpret, and store information, influenced by their experiences, knowledge, and expectations. This perception process directly affects decision-making, reflecting the choices made by individuals.

Cognitive warfare encompasses activities aimed at **influencing** another party's consciousness. The human mind becomes the battlefield, with the goal being to change thoughts and reshape thinking patterns to influence actions and decisions. This form of warfare often places a significant burden on the home front, particularly on civilians.

According to a NATO paper, cognitive warfare targets the second step in the decision-making model developed by military strategist and US Air Force Colonel John Boyd, which is the cycle of "observe, orient, decide, and act" (**OODA**). Mistakes in the orientation phase can lead to erroneous decisions and actions, making this phase a critical target for cognitive warfare.

Modern cognitive warfare extends beyond disrupting decision-making to fostering internal destruction within the enemy. By influencing the population's consciousness, cognitive warfare can reshape beliefs and behaviors to favor the attacker's objectives, potentially fragmenting society and undermining collective resistance.

This fragmentation is already unfolding in the occupation state, as protests demanding the release of prisoners of war reinforce the deep political divisions among Israelis – and more recently, over [clashes](#) between military police, occupation forces, and the far-right over an incident involving the [rape](#) of male Palestinian captives in Israeli detention.

### **Cognitive war on Israel**

A 2017 article titled “[The First Cognitive War](#),” published by the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), recognized the cognitive warfare waged by states and non-state actors as a significant threat to Israel. The article recommended that the occupation military invest in building and developing cognitive warfare capabilities alongside traditional military strength.

**Most of the action is aimed at people’s psyches, whether it is to persuade the international community to act against Israel or to incite individuals to commit lone acts of terrorism. At the same time, the country’s enemies use the web for a host of ends, including promoting the BDS movement, harming Israel’s legal system, and damaging Israel’s freedom of action and the legitimacy of the State of Israel.**

A [recent study](#) published in May by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA) suggests that Iran’s cognitive war on Israel is more dangerous than missiles and drones and aims to influence three main areas:

First, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is a primary target, where the war seeks to undermine Tel Aviv’s ability to nullify the Palestinian cause. Second is the goal to erode the Israeli society’s confidence in its government and the occupation. Third, the war seeks to shape international public opinion, especially in the west, garnering support for the Palestinian cause and spotlighting Israel’s brutality and oppression.

[Viral footage](#) of a football fan being compelled to chant “Free, free Palestine” by a provocative Israeli supporter who interrupted his post-match television interview at this year’s Olympics is a case in point, in addition to the [waving of Palestinian flags](#) and the booing of Israel’s national anthem at the games.

### **The Axis of Resistance’s use of hybrid warfare**

The cognitive war also targets the consciousness of enemy leaders and civilians regarding the dangers of confronting the Axis of Resistance forces outside Palestine.

The Resistance Axis employs hybrid warfare, blending military and non-military tools, including cognitive warfare activities, to influence Israeli awareness. Its methods include introducing and disseminating new narratives on the Israeli occupation that emphasize Axis causes and strengthening its social media presence to amplify this new perspective.

Additionally, the Axis broadcasts issues within Israel in various languages and produces videos and media campaigns that highlight Israel's vulnerabilities.

The Axis periodically reveals its new military capabilities and directly addresses the Israeli public to spread uncertainty about their security and future in the country. These varied tactics are designed to influence the perceptions and morale of the Israeli population.

Even military activities, like the [Hoopoe series](#), have cognitive dimensions. These activities aim to emphasize the risks of escalation with Lebanon and instill fear about Hezbollah's military capabilities.

### **Israel's narrative collapse**

While the Resistance Axis's information reach and efficacy have reached new heights, Israel's is in fast decline.

Tel Aviv relies on "information dumping" as a primary component of its cognitive warfare tools against its adversaries. This process involves bullhoring a flood of analyses, threats, and propaganda to disseminate Israel's carefully crafted narratives. The goal is either to intimidate its enemies or to attract and buoy public opinion in allied countries.

On 23 July 2014, retired Lieutenant Colonel Avital Leibovich, founder of the occupation army's Social Media Unit and then-director of the American Jewish Committee in Israel, said during an interview with CNBC:

**Social media is a war zone for us here in Israel, it's a way to communicate with a wide variety of audiences around the world, without the intervention of an editor and here we can manage our own campaigns, decide what the title will be, and exactly what images and footage we will upload and that really empowers us From reaching millions and millions of people who use social media as their sole source of information.**

As an example, at the onset of the Gaza genocide and nearly a week after the start of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on 7 October, 30 ads defaming Hamas – published by Israel's [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#) – were viewed more than four million times on the X platform.

The paid videos and images that began appearing on 12 October were aimed at adults over 25 in Brussels, Paris, Munich, and The Hague. On YouTube, the Israeli Foreign Ministry released more than 75 different ads directed at viewers in western countries, including France, Germany, the US, and the UK.

This particular Israeli goal was to secure the support of western public opinion for Tel Aviv's brutal assault on Gaza and to ensure these populations viewed Hamas as a terrorist movement. The "Hamas=ISIS" campaign was one such example.

But 10 months after Israel launched its war on Gaza, the live-streamed genocide amplified throughout social media platforms has shifted global perceptions in the opposite direction entirely. Tel Aviv finds itself on the narrative back foot, skewered in the court of public opinion, and possibly, for the first time, unable to make its statements and declarations stick. Even Israelis no longer believe their government, much less the global masses stunned by Israel's cognitive dissonance when it continues to proclaim itself "the most moral army in the world," all while massacring Palestinian women and children as the whole world watches in high definition.

### **Subduing the enemy without fighting**

Israel's "[Declaration of Independence](#)" idealizes the creation of a safe state for Jews to attract the immigration of global Jewry. However, the growing number of Israelis [emigrating and residing abroad](#) by the end of 2020 indicates Tel Aviv's failure to maintain this perception among Jews.

A March poll conducted by the Hebrew University and the World Zionist Organization revealed that [80 percent](#) of Israelis living abroad do not intend to return.

A 2023 Channel 1 poll found that [28 percent](#) of Israelis are considering emigration. A survey by the Israel Democracy Institute tracking 2022–2024 data showed only [35 percent](#) of Israelis were optimistic about democratic governance and 34 percent about national security. Security, being a core justification for Israel's creation, is a critical concern. In March 2023, optimism about national security dropped to 30 percent, with democracy slightly higher at 32 percent.

This erosion of confidence results from the Axis of Resistance's psychological campaigns, exacerbating the risks to national security. The perception of imminent threats from the likes of Hezbollah and the Ansarallah-aligned Yemeni armed forces deeply affects Israelis today.

This can also be seen anecdotally within the Israel population. In one such example, Efrat Eldan Shechter, an Israeli settler in the northern Galilee, [expressed](#) her fear to the BBC, saying, "What we fear most is that nothing will be done because Hezbollah are just waiting there on the border to come in and invade Israel ... I cannot sleep in peace."

Arguably, the Axis of Resistance has achieved Sun Tzu's mastery of cognitive warfare. This sophisticated strategy undermined the occupation state's will and capacity to resist, perfectly aligning with Sun Tzu's principle of subduing the enemy without fighting.

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