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## *Jedi mind tricks: The enemy's cognitive war on Lebanon*

A psychological war is being waged to make normalization with Israel seem inevitable, but Lebanon's resistance is not just on the battlefield – it is also in the battle for perception.



Photo

Credit: The Cradle

Following Hezbollah Secretary-General Naim Qassem's remarks on 18 April, it became clear that much of what dominates Lebanese media is merely a projection of lost hopes.

For years, pro-west Lebanese political figures and media elites have promoted the inevitability of disarming the resistance and steering Beirut toward normalization with Israel.

But Qassem's position was unambiguous: The resistance will [not be disarmed](#), and the occupation state remains an eternal enemy.

Since the November 2024 ceasefire, Lebanon has come under a coordinated cognitive assault. This campaign – spearheaded by political elites, technocrats, and both domestic and foreign media – portrays normalization with Israel not as betrayal, but as pragmatic national interest. It is presented as a rational step, an economic necessity, a gateway to stability. And like any effective psychological operation, it follows a blueprint.

A NATO paper describes [cognitive warfare](#) as going beyond “winning without fighting.” It reshapes how societies think, what they value, and how they perceive their reality. The objective is to dismantle the logical scaffolding of collective consciousness and erode the moral boundaries that have historically defined political identity. Once those internal defenses are compromised, advancing a foreign agenda becomes a question of timing.

In Lebanon, this playbook has manifested in eight distinct, deliberate stages. From reframing narratives to softening psychological resistance and ultimately granting moral legitimacy to the occupier, this cognitive campaign attempts to make normalization with Israel appear not only acceptable, but inevitable.

### **Reframe, Repeat, Reprogram**

It begins with narrative engineering. As Robert Entman explains in his *Framing Theory* (1993), how an issue is framed determines how it is understood. In Lebanon, loaded words like “occupation,” “enemy,” and “resistance” are being replaced by soft terms like “coexistence” and “integration.” Instead of threats, there is now talk of “opportunity.” Instead of hostility, there is “regional partnership.”

This reframing relies on emotional cues: hope replaces fear; dialogue supersedes deterrence. Politicians, journalists, and economists amplify these talking points, reinforcing the illusion that normalization offers jobs, investment, and stability. Repetition is the mechanism. The more people hear it, the more palatable it becomes.

As psychologist Robert Zajonc's “mere exposure effect” (1968) shows, repetition breeds familiarity, and familiarity lowers resistance. In Lebanon, normalization is being injected into public discourse through political meetings, trade discussions, and [border demarcation talks](#) – like the [indirect US-sponsored negotiations](#) in March 2025.

Each exposure dilutes the emotional charge around the concept. What was once shocking now feels routine. Eventually, curiosity overtakes caution.

### **Dismantle identity, manufacture consent**

The third stage targets collective identity. Based on Gordon Allport's "intergroup contact hypothesis" (1954), the idea is simple: facilitate neutral, non-political encounters – academic conferences, climate workshops, joint relief programs – between Lebanese and Israeli professionals.

A September 2024 [summit in Larnaca](#), Cyprus, on the climate crisis brought together 250 experts from 22 countries, including Lebanon and Israel. These settings are meant to humanize the occupier, shifting Lebanese group identity from resistance to cooperation without ever engaging in political debate.

Next comes the manipulation of authority and peer influence. When rabble-rousing media figures like Marcel Ghanem declare that opposition to Israel is a fringe view – “very few anti-Israel people remain on the planet,” he claimed – it creates the illusion of consensus.

#### Lebanese journalists and influencers who advocate for normalization with Israel

Name	Title	Quote
Marcel Ghanem	Media presenter on MTV Lebanon	"The treason in talking about normalization is gradually turning into excessive enthusiasm on the part of some ... and those who are hostile to 'Israel' are very few on planet Earth!"
Nawfal Daou	Executive Director of the Board of Trustees of "Arabism Vision"	"If normalization with Israel is based on the country's sovereignty and Arab rights, then I normalize with Israel."
Alfred Riachi	Coordinator of the Permanent Conference of the Federation	"We support the idea of peace with Israel."
Majed Harb	Lawyer and political activist	"Normalization with Israel must be achieved and Hezbollah must be forcibly disarmed, even if this leads to clashes with the army."
Nadim Koteich	General Manager of UAE's Sky News Arabia	"Peace with Israel is near ... whoever believes that Israel can be terminated is dumb. I support normalization and Hezbollah is responsible for destroying Beirut."
Raghida Dargham	CEO of Beirut Institute and advisor to the Saudi Al Hadath TV channel	"It is natural for normalization to happen, and it is Syria that prevented us [Lebanese] from reaching a peace agreement with Israel."
Rami Naeem	Deputy Editor-in-Chief of Nidaa al-Watan newspaper	"We want peace with Israel ... Peace with Israel is a matter of time."
Joseph Abu Fadel	Lawyer and political analyst	"Surely we will go to peace or normalization with Israel ... in no way will the US accept us not going to peace and normalization."
Simon Abu Fadel	Journalist and publisher of Al-Kalima Online website	"We are on the path to normalization."
Makram Rabah	Professor at the American University of Beirut	"The most significant thing we can achieve as Lebanese is peace with Israel."
Layal Ikhteyar	Media presenter at the Saudi Al Arabiya TV channel	She spoke with the Israeli army's spokesman, Avichay Adraee, and said that she doesn't regret it.

This is also what Lebanese MP Walid al-Baarini showcased when he said, “Yes to normalization if it protects [Lebanon] against attacks ... yes to normalization if it gives Lebanon peace and prosperity.” The aim was to breach a social group, the Sunni community, by a Sunni MP calling for normalization with Tel Aviv.

This is a classic example of authority bias and social proof: People tend to defer to perceived majorities and powerful voices. But the reality contradicts the performance. A poll by the International Information Center shows that [75.3 percent](#) of Lebanese still see Israel as the number one enemy. Arab Barometer puts support for normalization in all of West Asia at a meager [13 percent](#).

### Lebanese politicians who advocate for normalization with Israel

Name	Title	Quote
Naji Hayek	Vice President of the Free Patriotic Movement	"Peace with Israel is approaching."
Charles Jabbour	Head of the Media and Communications Department of the Lebanese Forces Party	"I am for peace with Israel ... I am waiting for peace with Israel so we stop being enemies."
Elie Mahfoud	Head of the Change Movement	"I support peace with anyone, even with demons; we should support any peace that guarantees stability and prosperity."
Ibrahim Murad	Chairman of the International Syriac Union Party	"Lebanon must establish peace with all countries, including Israel ... normalization and peace with Israel ends wars and puts an end to poverty and ignorance."
Wadih Aqel	Member of the Political Council of the Free Patriotic Movement	"We in the Free Patriotic Movement support 'fair' peace with Israel."
Paula Yacoubian	Member of the Lebanese Parliament	"It is forbidden that peace with Israel remains a taboo ... like what's the big deal?"
Walid al-Baarini	Representative for Akkar district	"Yes to normalization if it protects [Lebanon] against attacks ... yes to normalization if it gives Lebanon peace and prosperity."
Fares Saed	Former Member of the Lebanese Parliament	"The solution is through direct negotiation ... looking away will lead to more occupation; negotiating under fire is better than fire."
Camille Chamoun	Deputy and Chairman of the Liberal Patriots Party	"The wars in the region are over ... things are heading, whether we like it or not, to normalization, if not peace."
Nadeem Gemayel	Member of the Lebanese Kataeb Party	"It is the right of some Lebanese to express their request for normalization with Israel ... this topic cannot remain a taboo."
Samir Gemayel	Head of the Lebanese Kataeb Party	"I support peace between Israel and the Palestinians ... which in turn will lead to peace between Lebanon and Israel."

Cognitive dissonance is then weaponized. As Leon Festinger wrote in 1957, people modify beliefs to align with behavior. When Lebanese citizens participate in “apolitical” regional initiatives – like the Union for the Mediterranean's [GreenerMed 2030](#) environmental projects that include both Lebanon and Israel – they engage in de facto cooperation. This creates internal tension: How can one reject normalization while sharing platforms with the occupier? The resolution often comes at the expense of resistance.

The “foot in the door” tactic follows. First, attend a joint workshop. Next, join a panel. Eventually, the groundwork is laid for political or economic cooperation. Each small step lowers the barrier to the next, because people prefer consistency with past behavior.

Finally, the narrative reshapes Israel itself. It is no longer an existential threat but a strategic partner. Fear is replaced with opportunity. When the psychological threat evaporates, so does the [instinct to resist](#).

### Normalization as betrayal

This psychological campaign does not operate in a legal vacuum. Under Lebanese law, normalization is criminal. Article 285 of the Penal Code criminalizes any dealings with enemy nationals. Law No. 1/1955 prohibits agreements of any kind with Israeli institutions or individuals. Normalization is not a policy debate – it is a legal red line.

And yet, voices calling for “peace” proliferate. Some are media personalities, others are MPs. Their statements are not mere opinions; they are carefully crafted attempts to legitimize what Lebanese law, and Lebanese blood, have rejected. They erase Gaza’s mass graves and the scorched earth of South Lebanon beneath platitudes of "dialogue" and "coexistence."

This is the new frontline. The occupation army is no longer storming borders – it is infiltrating minds. But the battle is not lost. The overwhelming majority of Lebanese, the letter of the law, and the memory of martyrs form a firewall against this cognitive war.

Lebanon's sovereignty is not for sale. Its resistance is not obsolete. And its memory is not so short that it will confuse colonization with coexistence.

As Sheikh Naim Qassem [emphasized](#) in last week's speech:

**“Disarming the resistance by force would serve the enemy and only create dissent with the army ... We will not allow anyone to disarm the resistance. We will confront those who attack it just as we have confronted Israel. There will be no capitulation.”**

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