CHAPTER 24
Terror TV? An Exploration Of Hizbollah's Al-Manar Television
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In his introduction to *Covering Islam* (1997), Edward Said refers to the "information wars that have gone on since 1948 around the whole question of the Middle East."[1] He is particularly concerned with the way in which the Lebanese-based Shi'a group Hizbollah (Party of God) "who identify themselves and are perceived locally as resistance fighters" are "commonly referred to in the American media as terrorists."[2] In an effort to thwart such assertions, Hizbollah[3] instituted a savvy media strategy "to produce and articulate a conscious and forceful self-image"[4] of themselves not as terrorists but as resistance fighters and statesmen. The major focus of this chapter is the way in which Hizbollah have wielded their television station, al-Manar—the 'Beacon' or 'Lighthouse,' in Arabic—as a weapon in their information war. The argument put forward here is that Hizbollah have met with high levels of success in this regard—to the extent that they may recently be seen to have become the victims of their own success, with the institution of multiple bans on transmission of al-Manar globally and the repeated targeting of the station by Israeli forces during the summer 2006 crisis. On the other hand, these difficulties may also be viewed by the organization as blessings in disguise, as they have forced the station to streamline its processes which may, in the long term, not only ensure its continued existence, but even allow it to access a larger audience.

The first section of this chapter briefly describes the range of media products offered by Hizbollah, while section two gives a brief overview of the Lebanese television scene and the establishment of al-Manar. The third and fourth sections detail the station's mission and financing, respectively. Section five, which describes and analyzes the station's programming, is

divided into three parts: the first explores the type of programming prevalent in the station's early years, the second describes the station's contemporary format, and the third is devoted to a description of the type of viewing offered by the station to women and children. The station's viewership figures are briefly explored in section six, while section seven explores the recent banning of the station in Europe and the United States. The final section is devoted to an analysis of the role of the station in the Lebanese crisis of 2006.

Hizbollah's Range of Media Products

Autonomous communication has long been a paramount objective for Hizbollah. The group's weekly newspaper, *Al-Ahed* (The Pledge), was launched on 13 June, 1984, and was followed by the weeklies *Al Bilad*, *Al Wahda*, *El Ismailya*, and the monthly *Al Sabil*. Hizbollah's radio station, *Al-Nour* (The Light), was founded during the Amal-Hizbollah conflict in 1988, when a group of young Hizbollah fighters spontaneously began broadcasting news of the clashes. In terms of Hizbollah's Internet presence, they first went online in early 1996. The Central Press Office site, or Hizbollah.org, is the group's official homepage, and is available in both English and Arabic. Hizbollah maintains three other major websites (all of which are available in both English and Arabic versions): http://www.moqawama.net, known as the "Islamic Resistance Support Association" and which describes the group's attacks on Israeli targets; http://www.nasrollah.net, the official homepage of the group's leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah; and http://www.manartv.com.lb, the news and information site that is essentially the homepage of al-Manar Television.[5] There is no question, however, that the "jewel in Hizbollah's media crown"[6] is the al-Manar television station itself. Live footage of Hizbollah operations appeared for the first time in 1986, with coverage of the invasion of the Israeli-occupied Sujud fort at the

top of Jabal Safi hill in south Lebanon, and was distributed to those Lebanese television stations in operation at that time. According to Naim Qassem, Hizbollah's deputy Secretary General, "[f]ollowing the first television broadcast of this operation, the camera became an essential element in all resistance operations."[7] The establishment of al-Manar followed shortly thereafter: its first broadcast was Ayatollah Khomeini's funeral in June 1989.[8]

The Lebanese Television Scene and the Establishment of al-Manar

A majority of the factions involved in the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) established television stations during the conflict with, at one point, some 50 land-based stations in operation. After the war it was decided to regulate these, and the number of stations thus decreased to a dozen or so.[9] In terms of the provision of licenses, "the selection was made only on sectarian grounds, and all licenses were given to members of the government or their relatives, hence privileging sectarianism over professionalism."[10] Al-Manar was not amongst the stations that received permission to continue broadcasting, nor was Télé-Lumière, the station belonging to the Maronite Christian Church, but both continued to do so nonetheless. When other religiously oriented stations began to be set up, the government agreed to grant a license to both stations in order to dissuade other channels from following what Firmo-Fontan describes as "their subversive precedent."[11] Al-Manar thus became an official member of the Lebanese television community in 1996, and on 5 April, 2000 the Lebanese Council of Ministers agreed to allow Al-Manar Television to launch satellite transmissions.

Hizbollah denies that it controls al-Manar. However, most of the station's shareholders and staff are members of Hizbollah, which has its headquarters just around the corner from the

al-Manar building in the southern suburbs of Beirut, and the station is widely viewed as

Hizbollah's mouthpiece.[12] Al-Manar's Director General Abdallah Qasir insists that

> Hizbollah has no direct organizational relationship with the station, but is rather
> its partner. Several members of the board of directors are party members, while
> others are not. Some channel workers might agree with the party through the
> general outlines of their political, religious and social principles. This, however,
> does not mean that Al-Manar is a party channel.[13]

Ibrahim Farahat, the station's Public Relations officer, has made similar remarks.[14]

Mission

On its website, al-Manar is described as "a Lebanese TV station . . . motivated by the ambitions

of participation in building [a] better future for the Arab and Muslim generations by focusing on

the tolerant values of Islam and promoting the culture of dialogue and cooperation among the

followers of the Heavenly religions and human civilizations." Although at one time the station

was also described on the site as the "first Arab establishment to stage an effective psychological

warfare against the Zionist enemy," this particular claim has since been removed,[15] and today the

station claims instead to be "the true reflection of what each and every Muslim and Arab thinks

and believes in."[16] "Al-Manar is a Lebanese channel first of all," reiterates Farahat.[17] And indeed

at the core of the station's programming appears to be a consistent discourse constructed around

the notion of *moqawama* (resistance) against occupation. Hizbollah's mission and identity are

certainly rooted in its founders' belief that the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 could only be

overcome by armed resistance. The low-intensity warfare characteristic of the 1990s and the

Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in May 2000 notwithstanding, the notion of resistance

remains central to Hizbollah's self-proclaimed mission.[18] Al-Manar thus gears its messages

towards encouraging attitudes which spur action and involvement in that resistance. According to Baylouny, these messages center on

- Palestine, including American bias in the Arab-Israeli conflict,

- the continuing threat posed by Israel,

- the power and importance of community solidarity, and

- pride in Arab culture and the achievements of the Islamic Resistance (i.e., Hizbollah's armed wing).

These messages have strong resonance not just amongst Lebanese, but in the Arab and Muslim worlds more generally.[19]

Financing

In 2004, Jorisch put al-Manar's annual budget at U.S.$15 million, which at that time would have been approximately half the size of al-Jazeera's budget.[20] Numerous analysts contend that al-Manar receives the bulk of its funding from Iran,[21] but the station's managers deny this, saying they fully comply with Lebanese television licensing law, which prohibits foreign funding. The station is said to receive monetary support from donors and shareholders, while the station's Director General, Qasir, claims that the channel is largely self-financed through advertising revenue and the sale of programs: "Al-Manar produces from 80 to 85% of what it broadcasts. We also receive some aid through special sponsorships of religious programs, which are sponsored by the so-called Religious Rights (*Al-Huquq al-Shar'iyah*) [sic]. We also generate considerable revenues from the dubbing and redistribution of Iranian programs."[22]

Advertising revenues are somewhat circumscribed, as al-Manar does not accept advertisements for liquor or other "un-Islamic products,"[23] which allegedly results in the station

turning down some 90% of potential advertisers.[24] Until 2004, commercials only appeared on the land-based and not the satellite station. Among these advertisers were major American and European companies. However, this "support" of Hizbollah was brought to the attention of the U.S. Congress, which accused the companies of aiding terrorism, and the American and many European advertisers subsequently withdrew their advertisements. Currently, advertisements on al-Manar are infrequent and relatively few in number, airing mainly at primetime. The majority are for local and regionally based companies and products. On the land-based station, advertisements are for local clothes, shoe, and toy stores, along with other retail stores and a Lebanese mobile phone company, while advertisements for cleaning detergents, air conditioning products, and food products are also featured. Non-veiled women appear in a number of these segments. The station also airs announcements for Hizbollah-run social service organizations and schools, computer and Koran classes, and sports clubs.[25]

Description of Programming

The Station's Early Years

"Symbolism and the projection of messages to internal and external audiences have occupied a central place for Hizbollah throughout its evolution."[26] In his *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman recounts how, during the crisis precipitated by the hijacking of TWA flight 847 in 1985, Hizbollah deftly manipulated the U.S. television networks: "There were graduates of media studies from American colleges at meetings at Nabih Berri's house in West Beirut while ['spin doctoring'] tactics were being worked out."[27] Later, during the 1990s, Hizbollah utilized its media apparatus to wage successful campaigns against both the IDF and South Lebanese Army (SLA) when they adopted a two-pronged military strategy, combining guerrilla and

psychological warfare. According to Schliefer, "Hizbollah's unique contribution to PSYOP lay in the way it combined conventional and psychological warfare, creating a whole new PSYOP idiom."[28] Al-Manar was at the center of this campaign from its inception.

In terms of Hizbollah's offensive against the SLA, a campaign of psychological warfare was waged in conjunction with improved armed operations against SLA units. Infiltration within SLA ranks was subject to particular exploitation by the group, who capitalized on deteriorating SLA morale by regularly publicizing and distributing the names of SLA officers with promises of punishment, while at the same time televising daily broadcasts encouraging Shi'a SLA soldiers to desert and lacing these pleas with promises of financial remuneration coupled with pardons. Hizbollah even established a special information unit which highlighted SLA soldiers returning to their families.[29]

The group also waged an effective psychological warfare campaign against IDF soldiers serving in South Lebanon prior to their withdrawal in 2000. It utilized its own camera crews to record the efficiency of its attacks against IDF posts, which it then broadcast on al-Manar and, on a number of occasions, distributed to foreign media. The video-taping and dissemination of daring resistance operations served not only to boost the morale of Hizbollah's own fighters and supporters, but also undermined SLA and IDF morale when the latter were, in a number of instances, caught on camera fleeing from advancing Hizbollah fighters. The group also regularly publicized on its television station and its websites the acquisition of new and upgraded weaponry in an effort to instill a degree of uncertainty into IDF units without actually having to employ the actual hardware, and broadcast messages in Hebrew to Israelis who could receive al-Manar just across the border, asking mothers of Israeli soldiers to entreat their sons to come home.[30]

The station was also watched by the group's supporters, of course, and Hizbollah was determined to prove the effectiveness of its resistance against the Israeli occupation to this constituency. Al-Manar was at this time dominated by religious programs. The pictures and names of deceased fighters were regularly screened, supported by verses from the Quran which glorified martyrdom.[31] The purpose, according to Hala Jaber, was "to indoctrinate the minds of young and old alike with the idea that those who seek martyrdom will be rewarded with more pleasure than can ever be achieved during this earthly lifetime."[32] Jaber goes on to dismiss the suggestion that social welfare services provided by the organization were dependent on those in receipt of such services and their families serving in the resistance, pointing out that Hizbollah's fighters had gained the status of national heroes, and that this was underlined in TV broadcasts, thus making the latter a much more likely tool of recruitment than welfare services.[33] In 1997, she reported, "with each broadcast the Party of God gained new momentum and a new influx of recruits."[34]

Contemporary Programming

The initiation of the Second Palestinian Intifada on 28 September 2000 came just four months after Israel ended its 18-year military occupation of South Lebanon with the upshot—according to numerous analysts[35]—that al-Manar's main purpose from late 2000 onward was less the demoralization of an Israeli audience and more the assistance of the Palestinians in their struggle, along with the raising of awareness in Lebanon of the need to support the Palestinians against the Israeli government:

> The outbreak of violence in the Palestinian territories presented the new *raison d'etre* the TV station managers had been looking for—and also reflected the chronic need of Hizbollah as a radical movement to re-invent its agenda and claim to legitimacy within the domestic Lebanese political mosaic . . . . Early in 2001,

Hizbollah's deputy chairman, Sheikh Na'im Qasim, said that: 'Al-Manar is the television of the Intifada, in the same manner that it had been the medium of the resistance. It is now to be the television of this sacred cause.'[36]

Prior to the outbreak of the Second Intifada, al-Manar was broadcasting for just four hours per day; with the upsurge in violence, however, station executives decided to increase airtime by 14 hours daily, reaching a total of 18 hours of programming per day.[37]

In terms of al-Manar's contemporary programming, live news reports, video-clips, and "resistance" songs—including some 50 specially composed for the Intifada—are slotted between quiz shows, documentaries, and calls to prayer.[38] Shows produced in-house include such programs as "Zajal Is Lebanon," a folklore show that specializes in Zajal verse—a kind of local popular lyric verse—which spotlights distinguished Lebanese Zajal bands, while *Kil Shi Ilu Shi* ("Something for Everything") is a social comedy that is composed of short sketches that comment on the contemporary political and social situation within Lebanon and the Arab world more broadly. Another home-produced show is *Habbat Misk* ("Musk Seed"), which is a satire by actor Wisam Sabbagh (Abu Shafiq) that deals with daily social, educational, and political issues. It has two segments: the first is filmed outside, and the second is broadcast live from the studio, where Sabbagh takes calls from the audience and answers their questions in a dramatic way and with commentary. Other popular Manar-produced programs include *Al-Hal Bil-Qanun* ("Legal Solution"), which is devoted to discussion of legal issues with lawyers and judges, and is presented by the lawyer Husayn Nasir and *Wijhat Nazar* ("Viewpoint"), a talk show presented by Mariam Karnib, who raises social, psychological, and educational problems that touch the core of people's everyday lives.[39]

In addition to these, al-Manar also broadcasts programs aimed at informing viewers about the nature of Israeli and American society and politics. Harb and Leenders describe Hizbollah's

interest in the historical evolution of its main enemy, Israel, as particularly obsessive. The channel frequently broadcasts footage of Israeli politicians and journalist discussing the latest in Israeli politics, for example, while in-house commentators explain the workings of the Israeli parliament in voting for or against Israeli policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians. One of al-Manar's primetime game shows, *al-Muhimma* ("The Mission"), seeks to virtually enter Jerusalem by answering a series of questions dealing with resistance operations, Islamic thought, the Palestinian cause, Western conspiracies, Israeli plots, etc. In this show, the Israeli enemy is challenged through the audiovisual presentation of the merely virtual possibility of conquering Jerusalem, while knowledge about the "enemy" (and other oppressors) is celebrated and rewarded. This knowledge is also materially re-channelled into promoting the cause of armed resistance, since a quarter of the jackpot awarded to the winning candidate is sent to aid in the Palestinian Intifada.[40]

Much of the "filler" between programs is also concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and it is via this "filler" that the basic character of the station mainly comes through, according to Baylouny.[41] One such clip urges Palestinians to follow Hizbollah's lead by standing up to Israel, as Hizbollah guerrillas did in south Lebanon, while another points out that Arab states number 300 million people while in occupied Palestine there are only five million Jews, and follows up with the question: "What are you waiting for?"[42] A number of these transmissions are also in Hebrew; one of the most prominent of these messages is a video clip that sarcastically advises Israelis to leave for Europe and the United States, because those areas are safer for them than the Palestinian territories.[43] Some clips also address the American involvement in the conflict, with one clip depicting the Statue of Liberty as a skeleton, brandishing a blade dripping with blood.

Women & Children

Television viewing is important to women in the Muslim world because of their relatively higher rates of illiteracy.[44] Al-Manar's female audience is clearly important to them, and women are very visible on the station, composing at least half of the announcers and program hosts. In fact, the channel's English-language broadcasting department has a majority of women working as reporters, presenters, and political analysts. Female presenters include Safa Muslmany, Wafa Hoteit, Btoul Ayoub, Fatima Bdeir and Myriam Karnib, all of whom have played a leading role in the development of the channel. These all wear the *hijab* (a scarf covering the hair) and *manteau* (a floor-length coat), and thus no parts of these women's' bodies other than hands and faces are visible to viewers. However, not all the women appearing on programs—as audience members, for example—are veiled; advertisements also show unveiled women, though all of these are conservatively dressed.[45] Firmo-Fontan suggests, "the fact that women presenters wear the *manteau* and *hejab*, as opposed to the *chador*,[46] can be interpreted as an initiative on the channel's part to avoid antagonizing more liberal viewers and to appeal to all viewers of the Lebanese population."[47] Al-Manar has a wide following among Hizbollah women, who tune in to a range of soap operas (selected on moral grounds), talk shows, game shows, and news. Al-Manar's following is less obvious amongst non-Hizbollah women but, according to Firmo-Fontan, is still significant, especially in the realm of news and children's programs.[48]

The station's children's programming tends to focus on and reiterate the need for "resistance" in much the same fashion as much of the adult-oriented programming. *Asdiqa' al-manar* ("Friends of al-Manar") is a game show set as a pretend war game, with youngsters from 10-15 years old fighting with pretend weapons (guns, grenades, swords, arrows) against an

enemy with a "Western" appearance (which is understood to be Israeli). The children, Shi'a and Palestinians from the camps, shout *Allah Akhbar* (God is Great) as they cross over outdoor terrain to meet the enemy across a bridge. Another series, *Fatat al-muqawam al-Quds* ("Jerusalem Resistance Boy"), involves a young boy who wants to find his father who went missing in a war. To do so, he learns to fly planes, starting with paper airplanes and eventually graduating to lessons at a flying school. Unable to find his father, he joins Hizbollah's military wing and tries to recruit his friends into the organization also. Although religion is not mentioned in the series, the boy's mother is depicted traditionally dressed, and is shown praising him for his choices and advising her daughters to stay clear of western influences and keep to the southern and rural areas instead.[49]

Ratings/Audience

Al-Manar is one of the top-ranked stations in the Arab world, and often pointed to as being in the vanguard of a new and independent media. At the 2001 Cairo Television and Radio Festival, al-Manar won the most awards of all the competitors. The Lebanese Media Group, which includes al-Manar and al-Nour radio won four and nine awards respectively.[50] Al-Manar is one of the prime sources of news in the Arab world, particularly about Palestine. The top four news stations in the region, which capture 70-80% of satellite viewers, are al-Manar, al-Jazeera, LBC (Lebanese Broadcasting Company) and Abu Dhabi TV. According to the Jerusalem Media Communication Center, the majority of Palestinians watch al-Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, and al-Manar, with the latter particularly widely watched in the West Bank and Gaza, where it has a number of correspondents.[51] Jorisch reports a poll in 2003 which found TV viewers in Jordan turned first to al-Manar for news of Palestine (28%), followed closely by al-Jazeera (27.5%).[52] In Lebanon,

where al-Manar ranks fifth among the country's nine stations, its news bulletins are popular because they are deemed to be the most reliable and balanced on local politics.[53] Indeed al-Manar has been described as exceptional in Lebanese television because it displays "civic commitment,"[54] in the sense that it addresses the concerns of ordinary people rather than a political elite.[55] With the Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon in 2000 and the launch of its satellite channel the same year, al-Manar took its message to a wider audience, both regionally and internationally. Some estimates put its audience in 2003-2004 at 10 million viewers worldwide.[56] It is difficult to estimate current viewership, however, as a result of the bans on transmission of al-Manar instituted in various jurisdictions since 2004.

The Bans

The campaign to have al-Manar banned from transmitting via satellite began with an opinion piece that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* in October 2002. The article, penned by Avi Jorisch (the author of *Beacon of Hatred*), accused American companies who advertised on the station of promoting terrorism. The Pepsi Company, Proctor and Gamble, Western Union, and a number of other major U.S. and European companies were named as advertisers on al-Manar's local broadcasts (the satellite broadcast was, at that time, commercial free).[57] Jorisch followed up with a letter to the U.S. Congress asking elected representatives to put pressure on these companies, and using the opinion piece as support. The majority of U.S. advertisers duly pulled out, and pressure to ban the transmission of the station itself increased. The Coalition Against Terrorist Media (CATM), an offshoot of the U.S.-based neo-Conservative organization Foundation for Defence of Democracy (FDD), was also founded at this time in order to generate further momentum for a ban. Representatives of FDD and CATM—including Jorisch, who came on

board as the latter's Executive Director—have issued numerous statements claiming "Al-Manar runs graphic videos encouraging viewers, even children, to become suicide bombers and calls for acts of terrorism against civilians . . . Al-Manar is an operational weapon in the hands of one of the world's most dangerous terrorist organizations."[58]

Al-Manar was, at the same time, coming under pressure in Europe. While claims about incitement to suicide bombing are contested, this is not to deny that some measure of al-Manar's programming is objectionable by Western standards. The *Washington Post* has, for example, linked al-Manar to a rumor, widely spread in the Middle East, that Israel was behind the 9/11 attacks and that Jews working in the World Trade Center had been alerted not to come to work that day. Shortly after the attacks, the *Post* reported that "As far as can be established, the story of 4,000 Jewish survivors originated with a September 17 [2001] report by the Beirut-based Al Manar television network . . . [which] cited 'Arab diplomatic sources' quoted in an obscure Jordanian newspaper named *Al Watan*."[59] The French move against al-Manar began after the station caused an uproar in October 2002 by broadcasting a Syrian-produced drama series entitled *al-Shattat* ("The Diaspora"), which is based on the controversial text known as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a 19th-century publication that depicts a Zionist conspiracy to take over the world.[60] Scenes from the multipart miniseries include a dramatization of a Rabbi slaying a young boy in order to make Passover *matzoh*.[61] Another episode includes a scene depicting a secret Jewish government allegedly plotting to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. The transmission of this series caused uproar in France, where incitement to racial hatred and anti-Semitism is a criminal offence, and led France's higher audiovisual authority to instruct al-Manar to change the tone of its programming or face a ban. However, when in December 2004 a guest on a live show said that Zionists were deliberately trying to spread diseases,

including AIDS, to Arabs, the authority decided to take the station to court. On 6 January 2005, France's highest administrative court, the *Conseil d'État* (Council of State)—which had jurisdiction over the channel because it broadcast via a satellite based in France—decided that the programs al-Manar broadcast "were in a militant context, with anti-semitic connotations" and banned transmission of the station, warning the satellite provider Eutelsat that if it failed to stop broadcasting al-Manar on its satellite within 48 hours of the decision it would be liable for payment of a fine of €5,000 (U.S.$6,600) for every day it broadcast the station over the deadline.[62] For its part, the station said it was unfair to ban a channel on the basis of one live caller, and denies it is anti-Semitic.[63] In the event, al-Manar voluntarily stopped broadcasting several days before the ban was to take effect, a move that prevented other stations on the same satellite network from being removed from the airwaves as well, a decision that won the station praise from other networks and its international viewers.[64]

As regards the U.S. ban, which followed shortly thereafter: in George Bush's 2004 State of the Union address, he mentioned Arab media outlets he claimed were responsible for disseminating "hateful propaganda" against the U.S.[65] Certainly al-Manar was included by the U.S. administration in these ranks. In December 2004, al-Manar was placed on an "exclusion list" by the U.S. State Department. This was followed up in March 2006 with al-Manar's designation as a terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of the Treasury.[66] As a result, no one associated with the broadcaster is allowed entry to the U.S. and any U.S. company found to be doing business with al-Manar will be subject to sanctions and possible prosecution with the result that al-Manar is prohibited from transmitting in the United States. Although they result in the same outcomes, it's worth noting that the French and U.S. bans rest on different legal foundations, with the French ban focusing on constitutional issues of expression, and the U.S.

ban based on laws prohibiting the material support of terrorist organizations, which, according to Yadav, means that "At least in theory, then, the U.S. is suggesting that their own struggle against al-Manar is not based on the substance of what it says, but rather on what it does."[67] In addition to being unavailable in North America, and with access being restricted in Europe, al-Manar is also no longer available for viewing in South America, nor in Australia or much of Africa; however, it is still broadcast throughout the Middle East, parts of Europe, and North Africa by Nilesat, whose major shareholder is the government of Egypt, and Arabsat, which is owned in part by the government of Saudi Arabia.

Responses to Ban(s)

Unsurprisingly, al-Manar officials were some of the most vociferous critics of the ban. The station responded in a statement that the U.S. action amounted to "intellectual terrorism" and an attack on press freedom.[68] They also complained about the timing of the U.S. ban, pointing out that they had been broadcasting by satellite since 2000, and Hizbollah has been categorized as a terrorist organization by the United States since 1997, and questioning why the U.S. banning arrived on the heels of events in France, and insinuating conspiracy.[69] In Lebanon more widely, the mood was one of defiance. In response to the French ban, 50 cable operators in Beirut halted transmission of the French station TV5. The Lebanese Minister of Information declared the ban proof of censorship of any opposition to Israel, and students demonstrated in support of al-Manar. The then Lebanese Foreign Minister Mahmud Hammud commented "we consider this to be against the freedom of expression that the entire world including the EU demands. We believe this attitude is not in harmony with the call for freedom of expression these countries advocate, and we believe there is a contradiction."[70] The banning was also criticized by organizations

ranging from Hamas[71] and Palestinian Islamic Jihad[72] to Reporters Without Borders, with the latter warning against confusing anti-Israeli positions with anti-Semitism.[73] In any event, the station has also all but entirely circumvented the ban(s) by providing continuous live streaming online.

Al-Manar's Role in the 2006 Crisis

Following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, and believing itself relatively safe from the threat of Israeli aerial bombardment, al-Manar invested in high-specification antennas, which allowed it to extend its broadcasts further into Israel. As a result, residents of Haifa, Israel's third largest city—which is located some 30 miles from the Lebanese border—are now in range of al-Manar's transmissions. According to Ron Schliefer, discussing the spots in Hebrew described earlier, "beyond their specific verbal messages these transmissions also seek to create in the Israeli mind a frightening connection between Al-Manar's ability to target their television sets and Hizbollah's ability to shell their homes; the implication being that the range of the one is equal to the range of the other."[74] Interestingly, al-Manar's headquarters in Haret Hreik and the above-mentioned antennas—one of which was located near Baalbek, northeast of Beirut, and another in Maroun al-Ras in southern Lebanon[75]—were some of the first targets of IDF air attacks when hostilities erupted between Israel and Hizbollah in early July 2006. Al-Manar's Beirut headquarters was first struck by the Israeli Air Force on Thursday, 13 July, the second day of the crisis. The complex was bombed again on July 16, resulting in the outbreak of a fire in the station and surrounding buildings. Although the station's broadcasts continued uninterrupted during the first attack—which severely damaged the upper stories of the building—the second attack caused the station's signal to be briefly unavailable on several occasions before returning

to full strength.[76] Also, on the second day of the crisis, the first-ever Hizbollah rocket attacks on Haifa commenced.

The Israeli bombing of Hizbollah's media outlets received harsh criticism from journalistic and human rights organizations worldwide. The Committee to Protect Journalists, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Human Rights Watch, and others agreed that the attacks were a violation of international law, as the station's broadcasts were not serving any direct military function (e.g., sending military communiqués).[77] Aidan White, the IFJ's General Secretary, said: "The bombing of Al-Manar is a clear demonstration that Israel has a policy of using violence to silence media it does not agree with. This action means media can become routine targets in every conflict. It is a strategy that spells catastrophe for press freedom and should never be endorsed by a government that calls itself democratic."[78] Human Rights Watch agreed, insisting "that Lebanese civilian opinion might influence how the Lebanese government responds to Hizbollah is not a sufficiently direct contribution to military action to render the media used to influence that opinion a legitimate military target. Rather, broadcasts should be met with competing broadcasts, propaganda with propaganda."[79]

Indeed the IDF—in addition to conventional attacks on media targets in Lebanon—is also said to have broadened its psyop activities over the course of the crisis. The first reports of intercepts of al-Manar's satellite transmissions were carried by Egypt's Middle East News Agency, who said that on Sunday, 23 July Israel managed "to intercept the satellite transmissions of Hizbollah's al-Manar TV channel for the third successive day, replacing it with Israeli transmissions that reportedly showed Hizbollah command sites and rocket launching pads which Israel claimed it has raided."[80] A little over a week later, al-Jazeera reported that a series of still photos with captions appeared on the screen's of al-Manar viewers for several minutes during the

evening news. Al-Jazeera attributed the interruption to "Israeli-backed hackers." One of the images showed the corpse of a khaki-clad man lying face-down with accompanying Arabic text reading: "This is the photograph of a body of a member of Hizbollah's special forces. Nasrallah lies: it is not us that is hiding our losses." The al-Jazeera report is also accompanied by what appears to be a screen shot which shows a photograph of Nasrollah accompanied by the text "member of Hizbollah: watch out," which they say also appeared on TV screens.[81]

Conclusion

Al-Manar has, since its inception, been a television station devoted to prioritizing the goals of Hizbollah and although these have been subject to change over time, the overarching theme of resistance has persisted throughout. From its establishment in 1991 to the Israeli withdrawal from the south in 2000, the bulk of the station's programming was aimed at sustaining and, if possible, strengthening the Lebanese public's support for Hizbollah's campaign of resistance again the IDF in south Lebanon, while at the same time pressuring Israeli viewers to push their government for a unilateral withdrawal. The eventual withdrawal was celebrated live on air for days, but this "triumph" came tinged with distress: what was to be the station's purpose without the "hook" the resistance provided? The answer presented itself in the form of the outbreak of the so-called al-Aqsa Intifada. Al-Manar became "the secret weapon of the Palestinian intifada against Israeli occupation, the loyal supporter of armed resistance, devoting at least half its 24-hour-a-day satellite broadcasting to the battle between Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank and Gaza."[82] In the summer of 2006, circumstances changed again, however, and al-Manar reverted to its original role as mouthpiece of the Lebanese resistance; although this time around

the Israelis, cognizant of the role played by al-Manar in the previous conflict, quickly sought to neutralize the station, they had little success.

Between 1991 and 2006, other changes also occurred at the station. From a small local effort, the station grew to encompass a satellite audience of millions worldwide. This success was somewhat short-lived, however, as the station came to be banned in numerous jurisdictions around the world as a result of the anti-semitic nature of some of its content. The bans were applauded by many, but excoriated by others. The U.S. ban was likely ill-advised because by blocking al-Manar's transmission, Washington not only increased the station's notoriety and thus popularity, but also ignored political logic which upholds interests. Unfortunately for the U.S. and its interest in reaching out to the "Arab street," the likelihood is that the Chairman of Hizbollah's Executive Committee, Hashim Safiy-al-Din, summed up the feelings of a great many people in the Arab world when he said about the ban:

> [T]his impudent attack against our rights, with all their media, political, cultural and economic dimensions, is not a sign of strength but a sign of the U.S. weakness and powerlessness. By doing this it has proved its tyranny and oppression, which we have been talking about…[T]he U.S.A. is talking about democracy and freedom of speech, but at the same time it cannot tolerate a sound or an image despite all the media it has available throughout the world.[83]

On a more practical level, the goal of making al-Manar unavailable to large numbers of people worldwide was translated into an own-goal when, almost immediately on the announcement of the bans, the station commenced live online streaming. Eventually, this may mean that the station will draw more viewers via their freely available Internet service than via more costly satellite connections.

Further Reading/Information

The most comprehensive exploration of the al-Manar phenomenon to date was produced by Avi Jorisch of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. His *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's Al-Manar Television* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004) is, as the name suggests, an unalloyed critique of the station. Anne Marie Baylouny's more recent article, 'Al-Manar and Alhurra: Competing Satellite Stations and Ideologies,' which is available for free download from http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Special/csrc_mpf.2005-10-17.5799702381/05(49).pdf, adopts a more even-handed approach. Al-Manar's official website is online at http://www.almanar.com.lb/ with both Arabic and English versions. Live streaming of programming may be accessed at http://www.almanar.com.lb/live.htm; this is largely in Arabic, but the station also periodically broadcasts news in English and French. An archive of the latter broadcasts is accessible online at http://www.islamicdigest.net/almanar/start.php. Finally, Jorisch currently heads up the Coalition Against Terrorist Media (CATM), whose website at http://www.stopterroristmedia.org/ also contains clips from al-Manar. (The same clips, and others, are available on the CD accompanying *Beacon of Hatred*).

Notes

[1] Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (London: Vintage, 1997[1981]), p. xxi.

[2] Edward Said, p.xiii.

[3] The 'correct' English spelling of the group's Arabic name is Hizb'Allah or Hizbu'llah, however it is more usually spelled 'Hizbollah,' 'Hizbullah,' or 'Hezbollah.' I have chosen 'Hizbollah' because that is the spelling employed in the URL designating the group's official homepage. However, where I have employed quotation I have retained the original spelling used by the author.

[4] Edward Said, p.66.

[5] See Maura Conway, "Cybercortical Warfare: Hizbollah's Internet Strategy." In *The Internet and Politics: Citizens, Voters and Activists*, edited by Sarah Oates, Diana Owen and Rachel Gibson (London: Routledge, 2005).

[6] Ron Schleifer, "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah versus Israel," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 13.

[7] Naim Qassem, *Hizbullah: The Story from Within* (London: Saqi, 2005), p.257 fn.1.

[8] Hala Jaber, *Hezbollah: Born With A Vengeance* (New York: Columbia Press, 1997), p.42.

[9] Anna Marie Baylouny, "Al-Manar and Alhurra: Competing Satellite Stations and Ideologies," *CSRC Discussion Paper* 05/49 (2005): 5. Full text available online at

http://www.da.mod.uk/CSRC/documents/Special/csrc_mpf.2005-10-17.5799702381/05(49).pdf.

[10] Victoria Firmo-Fontan, "Power, NGOs and Lebanese Television: A Case Study of Al-Manar TV and the Hezbollah Women's Association." In *Women and the Media in the Middle East: Power Through Self-Expression* (London & New York: IB Tauris, 2004), p.167. The stations that received licenses were: the eponymous Murr Television (MTV), owned by the family of a former interior minister; the National Broadcasting Network (NBN), representing the Shia community, specifically supporters of the speaker of the parliament, Nabih Berri; the Lebanese Broadcasting Company International (LBCI), the strongest war-time television station, which was originally established by the Christian militia and is now owned by a group of largely Christian businessmen-cum-politicians; and Future Television, owned by relatives and associates of the deceased Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri (Firmo-Fontan, p.167-168).

[11] Baylouny, p. 5; Firmo-Fontan, 167-168; Naomi Sakr, "Arab Satellite Channels Between State and Private Ownership: Current and Future Implications," *TBS: Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 9 (2002). The full text of the latter is available online at http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall02/Sakr_paper.html.

[12] Kim Ghattas, "Al-Manar Network Feels World's Heat," *The Boston Globe* 21 December 2004: A24.

[13] BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Al-Manar TV Director on Sources of Income, Viewership," *Al-Safir* (Beirut) [translation from Arabic] 22 May 2006.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Firmo-Fontan, p.177.

[16] See the 'About Us' section of al-Manar's English language website (http://www.almanar.com.lb/aboutUs.aspx?Language=en).

[17] BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Al-Manar TV Spokesman on Channel's Policy, French Ban," *Al-Safir* (Beirut) [translation from Arabic] 24 March 2006.

[18] Mona Harb & Reinoud Leenders, "Know Thy Enemy: Hizbullah, 'Terrorism,' and the Politics of Perception," *Third World Quarterly* 26(2005): 180.

[19] Baylouny, p.2.

[20] Avi Jorisch, *Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's Al-Manar Television* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004), p.xiii.

[21] Daniel Byman, 'Iran and the Lebanese Hizballah.' In Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections: States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.88; Robert Fisk, "Television News is Secret Weapon of the Intifada," *The Independent* (London) 2 December 2000, available online at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20001202/ai_n14356264; Jorisch, p.31-32.

[22] BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Al-Manar TV Director on Sources of Income, Viewership." According to the journalist Robert Fisk, when he asked Qasir's predecessor, Nayef Krayim "where the money comes from to run this operation—I suspect that Iran provides much of the cash—Mr. Krayim raises his hands as if invoking the generosity of God." See Fisk, "Television News is Secret Weapon of the Intifada."

[23] Ghattas, p.A24.

[24] Baylouny, p.5; Jorisch, p.33.

[25] Baylouny, p.6.

[26] Magnus Ranstorp, "The Strategy and Tactics of Hizballah's Current "Lebanonization Process," *Mediterranean Politics* 3 (1998): 109. A preprint version of this paper is available online at http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/academic/intrel/research/cstpv/pdffiles/The%20Strategy%20and%20Tactic.pdf.

[27] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (London: Indigo, 1998), p.134.

[28] Ron Schliefer, "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah Versus Israel," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 5.

[29] Jaber, p.206; Ranstorp, p.111.

[30] Ghattas, p.A24; Ranstorp, p.112.

[31] Jaber (p.60-61) provides the example of the following Quranic verse: "Certainly you will find the most violent of people in enmity for those who believe are the Jews and those who are polytheists, and you will certainly find the nearest in friendship to those who believe are those why say: 'We are Christians.' This is because there are priests and monks among them and because they do not behave proudly" (*Surat al-Ma'idah*, verse 82).

[32] Jaber, p.89-90.

[33] Ibid., p.160.

[34] Ibid., p.42.

[35] Firmo-Fontan, p.177-178; Schliefer, p.14; Daniel Sobelman, "Hizbullah Lends Its Services to the Palestinian Intifada," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 13(2001): 12; Stacey Philbrick Yadav, "Of Bans, Boycotts, and Sacrificial Lambs: Al-Manar in the Crossfire," *TBS: Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 14 (2005). The full text of the latter is available online at http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Spring05/yadav.html.

[36] Sobelman, p.13.

[37] Firmo-Fontan, p.177.

[38] Fisk, "Television News is Secret Weapon of the Intifada."

[39] BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Al-Manar TV Spokesman on Channel's Policy, French Ban."

[40] Harb & Leenders, p.182.

[41] Baylouny, p.1.

[42] BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV Denies US-Iranian Pressure to Close," *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London) [translation from Arabic] 16 December 2001.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Firmo-Fontan, p.165.

[45] Baylouny, p.10-11; Firmo-Fontan, p.177.

[46] A chador is a loose, usually black, robe worn by Muslim women that covers all of the body, from head to toe, and most of the face.

[47] Firmo-Fontan, p.177.

[48] Ibid., 178.

[49] Baylouny, p.12.

[50] Baylouny, p.6.

[51] Ghattas, p.A24.

[52] Baylouny, p.15.

[53] "Of importance when taking into account the television ratings for the whole of Lebanon is the predominance of Al-Manar TV as a substitution channel, not constantly watched by non-Hezbollah viewers, but frequently consulted for specific programmes, especially the news" (Firmo-Fontan, p.178).

[54] Nabil Dajani, "The Confessional Scene in Lebanese Television," paper presented at the Carstun Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies workshop on *Islam on TV* (Copenhagen, Denmark, 1999): 12.

[55] Sakr, "Arab Satellite Channels."

[56] Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004* (Washington DC: United States Department of State, 2005), p.100. The full text of the latter is available online at http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/45313.pdf.

[57] The full text of the letter is available online at http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/pdf.php?template=C06&CID=453.

[58] See press releases at http://www.stopterroristmedia.org/News/DocumentQuery.aspx?DocumentTypeID=357.

[59] Magda Abu-Fadil, "Al-Manar TV: No Love for US but No Help From Taliban," *PoynterOnline* 23 October 2001. The full text is available online at http://poynter.org/dg.lts/id.16466/content.content_view.htm.

[60] In 2002, the US State Department objected, but failed, to prevent the broadcast by Egyptian television of the Ramadan mini-series *Horseman Without a Horse* which was also based upon *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* The *Protocols*, which the US State Department calls 'racist' and 'untrue,' is a work of fiction masquerading as fact, which claims to describe a Jewish plot for world domination and was used in Nazi Germany as a pretext to persecute Jews.

[61] 'Matzoh' is Yiddish for a brittle, flat piece of unleavened bread.

[62] BBC Monitoring, "IFJ Criticizes French Ban on Al-Manar TV," *International Federation of Journalists* 16 December 2004.

[63] Ghattas, p.A24.

[64] Baylouny, p.12.

[65] The full text of the address is available online at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html.

[66] This was carried out pursuant to Executive Order 13224, which was signed into law by US President George W. Bush on September 23, 2001 as a response to the 9/11 attacks. It describes powers designed to disrupt the financial activities of named terrorist organizations.

[67] Yadav, "Of Bans, Boycotts, and Sacrificial Lambs" (2005).

[68] Ghattas, p.A24.

[69] Yadav, "Of Bans, Boycotts, and Sacrificial Lambs."

[70] BBC Monitoring, "Lebanese Syrian Ministers Criticise European Ban on Al-Manar TV," *Lebanese National News Agency* [translated from Arabic] 21 March 2005.

[71] BBC Monitoring, "Hamas Expresses Solidarity with Al-Manar TV After French, US 'Harassment'," *Palestinian Information Centre* (online) 19 December 2004.

[72] BBC Monitoring, "Islamic Jihad Condemns US Campaign Against Lebanese Al-Manar TV," *Information Bureau of the Islamic Jihad Movement* (online) [translated from Arabic] 20 December 2004.

[73] Federal News Service, "Interview With Robert Menard, Secretary-General of the French Group *Reporters Sans Frontieres*, Discussing the French Ban on Lebanese Al-Manar TV Broadcasts in France," *Monday Morning Magazine* (Beirut) 18 January 2005.

[74] Schliefer, p.15.

[75] These transmission stations were also used by Future TV and the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC). According to the BBC, attacks on these transmitters on 22 July resulted in the death of an LBC technician. See Peter Feuilherade, "Israel Steps Up 'Psy-Ops' in Lebanon," *BBC Monitoring* 26 July 2006. Available online at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5217484.stm.

[76] Committee to Protect Journalists, "Lebanon: Israeli Forces Strike Al-Manar TV Facilities," 13 July 2006. Full text available online at http://www.cpj.org/news/2006/mideast/lebanon13july06na.html. The Beirut HQ of Hizbollah's al-Nour radio was also attacked on 16 July.

[77] See Human Rights Watch, "Can Israel Attack Hezbollah Radio and Television Stations?" 31 July 2006, which is available online at http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/17/lebano13748.htm#11.

[78] International Federation of Journalists, "IFJ Accuses Israel Over Pattern of Targeting After Strike on Beirut Broadcaster," 14 July 2006. The full text of this press release is available online at http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Index=4064&Language=EN. The Israeli Association of Journalists withdrew from the IFJ due to this criticism, claiming that al-Manar employees "are not journalists, they are terrorists." See Gil Hoffman, "Israeli Journalists Pull Out of IFJ," *Jerusalem Post* 20 July 2006. The full text of the latter is available online at http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1153291961355.

[79] Human Rights Watch, "Can Israel Attack Hezbollah Radio and Television Stations?" For an alternative perspective, see CATM's press release entitled "Hezbollah's Al-Manar Television Station Legitimate Target of Israeli Response," which is available online at http://www.stopterroristmedia.org/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=16668.

[80] Feuilherade, "Israel Steps Up 'Psy-Ops' in Lebanon." Feuilherade's article also details the hacking, presumably by the Israelis also, of local FM radio stations and Lebanese mobile phones.

[81] Agence France Press, "Israeli 'Hackers' Target Hezbollah TV," *Aljazeera.net* 2 August 2006. Online at http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/1DCBA43C-C892-4F02-8964-83BDA9081FC8.htm.

[82] Fisk, "Television News is Secret Weapon of the Intifada."

[83] BBC Monitoring, "Hezbollah Official Criticizes Decisions Against Al-Manar TV," *Al-Manar* (Beirut) [translated from Arabic] 20 December 2004.