

Illegal Attack or Legitimate Target?

Israel Attacks al-Manar

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Among the many targets hit by Israel during the Israel-Hizbullah conflict were the headquarters of Al Manar, Hizbullah's satellite television station. Also destroyed were relay stations in northern Lebanon used to broadcast two other Lebanese television stations, LBC and Al Mustaqbal. An Israeli military official later explained the second attack "which killed one LBC employee" reasoning that LBC may have been sharing relay facilities with Al Manar.

These attacks were not surprising to most commentators on the war. While the bombing of the LBC and Al Mustaqbal facilities on Mount Terbol may have shocked some, few if any expected Al Manar, located in the heart of Beirut's southern suburbs, to emerge from the conflict unscathed. Indeed, as some predicted, Al Manar's central headquarters in southern Beirut were one of the first targets hit by Israel.

The central question raised by these attacks on media outlets is when, if ever, is it appropriate and/or legal to deliberately target the media as part of a military campaign? Did Al Manar constitute a legitimate military target? Or did Israel cross the line in targeting a media outlet? What, exactly, constitutes a "legitimate" military target? And are critics of Israel's strike against Al Manar correct when they allege that Israel's actions against Al Manar create such a precedent that it endangers all media?

In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to examine both relevant precedent and the international laws protecting journalists in combat zones. The justness of all military actions is determined by the body of international laws and rulings that have applied to combat actions in the past and remain applied to present-day combat operations. At the same time, all media are not created alike. And likewise, not all media are accorded the same protections under the international laws of land and air warfare. Thus, to what degree Israel's attacks on Al Manar could be considered lawful and legitimate in international law depends largely on the actions of Al Manar and the question of whether it may be seen to be playing a role as an interested party on the battlefield. . . . ❖

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