

Inside Hizballah's al-Manar Television

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Avi Jorisch is an adjunct scholar of The Washington Institute and author of its new monograph and CD-ROM [Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's al-Manar Television \(templateC04.php?CID=66\)](#) (2004). As the Institute's Soref fellow from 2001 to 2003, he specialized in Arab and Islamic politics. More recently, he served as an



Brief Analysis

On October 25, 2004, Avi Jorisch and Salameh Nematt addressed The Washington Institute's Special Policy Forum. Mr. Jorisch, an adjunct scholar of The Washington Institute, is the author of [Beacon of Hatred: Inside Hizballah's al-Manar Television \(templateC04.php?CID=66\)](#) (The Washington Institute, 2004). Mr. Nematt is the Washington bureau chief and a weekly columnist for the Arabic daily al-Hayat. The following is a rapporteur's summary of their remarks.

AVI JORISCH

Al-Manar, the official television station of Hizballah, is cited in public opinion polling in some Arab countries as one of the most widely used sources of news on the Arab-Israeli conflict. With ground stations in Lebanon and programming broadcast on seven satellites worldwide, al-Manar is watched by fifteen million viewers daily and has the look of an advanced television network. The professional appearance, however, is not at all complemented by professional, fair, and balanced journalism.

Al-Manar defines its public enemy as the United States (the Great Satan) and Israel (the little Satan). Its programming themes are anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism, and revolution. U.S. foreign policy is presented as hegemonic and oppressive. The visual interpretation of this perspective is shown by a graphic video depicting the Statue of Liberty with a skull face, holding a blade instead of a torch as cascades of blood drip down her gown. As this horrifying image is being shown, names of nations in which the United States is said to have intervened -- such as Iran, Panama, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Laos -- pop out on the screen, with a grand finale message that "America owes blood to all of humanity." Indeed, al-Manar equates U.S. leadership with that of the fascists of World War II; for example, photographs of President George W. Bush and Adolf Hitler are displayed side by side with the caption "History Repeats Itself." The United States is depicted as an evil entity because it supports institutionalized state terrorism -- that is, Israel.

Condemnation of Israel's very existence is a staple for al-Manar. Consider that it was the first news outlet to report that the Jews and Mossad were behind the attacks of September 11 -- an indication of how al-Manar's outrageous lies are widely picked up and disseminated by other Arab media. Al-Manar drives home its anti-Israel message with clips proudly exhibiting children training for combat as a chorus in the background heatedly chants "Death, Death, Death to Israel," or heroic images of those who took their own lives for the anti-Israel cause, thereby glamorizing the

act of suicide bombing. According to al-Manar, the only way to peace in the region is for the Zionist state to disappear, to be replaced by a Palestinian state. The station argues that the only way to defeat the state of Israel is through violence, which requires promoting a militant radical ideology to increase recruitment into Hizballah.

Although it is impossible to bring such programming to a halt, it is within Washington's reach to lessen its scope and availability. One approach is financial. Al-Manar's \$15 million annual budget comes largely from Hizballah, which in turn gets the money from Iran (Lebanese law forbids direct foreign-state funding of local television). Al-Manar has significant advertising revenue as well. Until 2002 the four biggest Western corporate advertisers on al-Manar were Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Procter and Gamble, and Western Union. After an op-ed appeared exposing their business with the network, the companies pulled the advertisements immediately (the [op-ed \(templateC06.php?CID=453\)](#), written by Avi Jorisch, appeared in the Los Angeles Times on October 13). Al-Manar's numerous European advertisers have not followed suit, however. The station also continues to run announcements of bank accounts to which donations for suicide bombing and other terrorist acts can be sent. The Treasury Department should use the full weight of U.S. law to forbid transactions with any bank that maintains such accounts. In addition to financial pressure, the United States should urge France and Saudi Arabia, the countries that host al-Manar's two major satellite providers, to remove the station from the satellites in question. That would block al-Manar programming from reaching 95 percent of the globe.

SALAMEH NEMATT

The Arab media offer one extreme view, which is not counterbalanced by an opposing perspective. Even those Arab regimes that are largely secular never counter religious militants, out of fear of seeming to be against God; instead, Islamists are allowed free run in the media. Similarly, to be a good Arab citizen is all too often identified with being anti-American and anti-Israeli, so these are the only views shown on television. In the world of an al-Manar viewer, there are only two events currently taking place: Israelis killing Palestinians and Americans killing Iraqis. No other television network exists to provide a different perspective. That makes the situation entirely different from a vigorous news market like that in the United States, where there are clear differences of perspective between CNN and Fox and the Wall Street Journal and New York Times.

Such a lack of pluralism in the media impedes peace with Israel and good relations with the United States. Al-Manar and its fellow networks dwell on long-past events, such as the U.S. use of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, until the belief that the United States is evil is pounded firmly into the viewer's mind, leaving no room for an alternate standpoint. Soon enough, Americans, like Israelis, could fear walking the streets of an Arab country.

A few prescriptive measures would do much to reverse the problem. First, it is crucial to provide a media alternative that will pursue proportional coverage more aggressively. There must be reporting that focuses on the national perspective of each country, not only on the pan-Arab level. The U.S.-government-funded television station al-Hurra attempts to act as an alternative, but it has largely failed because it too clings to obsessive reporting about Palestinian and Iraqi issues. More serious reporting about the situation in each country would allow Arabs to learn about human rights violations in their own countries; Syrians, Jordanians, Egyptians, and others will have the opportunity to reflect on the character of their own governments compared to that of the United States.

Another tactic is for the United States to demonstrate that its motives are altruistic, not imperialistic. The Arab audience is not only anti-American because of U.S. policy on Arab-Israeli issues, but also because America is seen as a supporter of corrupt dictatorships. The United States must prove to the region that it stands by its declared policy of promoting democracy and condemns any government, including U.S. allies, that oppresses its people.

Finally, the glorification of terrorists on the state-owned television networks across the region must come to an end. A significant part of the Arab television audience is illiterate and therefore depends on television as the main source

of news. When figures like Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden are presented as heroes it is only natural for viewers to want to emulate them, as they too desire the fame and attention. Moreover, dedicating airtime for those who take their own lives entices uninformed viewers to do the same.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Haleh Zareei. ❖

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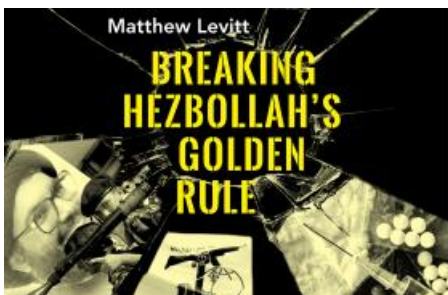
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