

Al-Manar: Hizbullah TV, 24/7

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Articles & Testimony

Al-Manar (the beacon) is the official television station of the Lebanon-based Hizbullah, the Iranian-supported Shi'ite movement that appears on every U.S. terrorism list. Many political movements and organizations in the Arab world publish in print, and some even have clandestine radio stations. Terrorist groups such as al-Qa'ida have been especially adept at manipulating television through the release of videos. But Hizbullah is unique in its operation of a full-fledged television station, offering a rich menu of news, commentary, and entertainment.

Al-Manar beamed its first signal on June 3, 1991. Since then, Hizbullah has exploited its privileged position in Lebanon—a position fortified by its successful guerrilla war to end the Israeli occupation—to create a mass media outlet with global reach. With access to continuous funding from Iran, the station has grown by leaps and bounds from a clandestine, ramshackle operation to a comprehensive satellite station.

The significance of the station goes far beyond Lebanon. Calling itself the "station of resistance" (qanat al-muqawama), al-Manar has become an integral part of Hizbullah's plan to reach the entire Arab and Muslim worlds. As a disseminator of radicalism throughout the region, al-Manar has an impact second only to al-Jazeera. It has become a potent instrument in what Hizbullah calls its "psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy,"[1] keeping the Arab world focused on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the station has been using the same methods to undermine the U.S. occupation.

In the debate over al-Jazeera, there are arguments on both sides as to whether its content informs or propagandizes the Arab viewing public. (It does both.) In the case of al-Manar, there is no space for debate. Al-Manar is propaganda in its most undiluted form. Every aspect of al-Manar's content, from news to filler, is fine-tuned to present a single point of view: that of a militantly Islamist sponsor, consistently urging the recourse to violent "resistance" as the only legitimate response to Israel's existence and the U.S. presence in the Middle East.

Al-Manar thus represents the darker side of the media revolution in the Arab world. It is one more example of how new technologies, born of the West, may be exploited to promote profoundly anti-Western agendas. At the same time, it is the product of unique circumstances. This article examines the particular genesis of al-Manar, the nature of its message, and what the United States should do to mitigate its effects.

Who Decides?

Al-Manar is located in the poor, Shi'ite-populated neighborhood of Harat Hurayk in Beirut's southern suburbs. Unlike West Beirut, where clubs, alcohol, and Western culture abound, this neighborhood is conservative and strongly affiliated with Hizbullah.

Al-Manar, housed in a six-story building, appears to the casual eye to be a conventional station with reporters, newsrooms, studios, state-of-the-art editing suites, and television screens with feeds from the world's leading media, including CNN, BBC, al-Jazeera, and Israeli channels. However, upon closer examination, it is clear this station is unlike any other. Armed Hizbullah security guards stand watch outside the station, checking visitors' papers and belongings. In a marble-floored lobby, two pictures of station cameramen killed in Israeli military operations in July 1993 are displayed.

Al-Manar also houses an extensive video library- containing thousands of carefully labeled al-Manar videotapes - below ground in one of the basement floors for fear of Israeli or American attacks.[2] Indeed, according to Bilal Zarur, al-Manar's programming director, al-Manar has "another base in case the station is bombed." [3] While male employees are dressed in suits, every woman wears the traditional Islamic head-covering.

Precautions are taken because al-Manar is an arm of Hizbullah. This is a fact that the station's managers are at pains to emphasize. According to Nayef Krayem, al-Manar's previous general manager and chairman of its board, "al-Manar gets its political support for the continuation of the channel from Hizbullah. It gets money from the shareholders who are leaders in Hizbullah." [4] Describing the relationship between Hizbullah and al-Manar, Krayem explains, "They breathe life into one another. Each provides the other with inspiration. Hizbullah uses al-Manar to express its stands and its views, etc. Al-Manar in turn receives political support for its continuation." [5] Despite al-Manar's registration under the name of the "Lebanese Media Group Company" in 1997, Muhammad 'Afif Ahmad, the station's second general manager, asserts that al-Manar has belonged to Hizbullah "culturally and politically" from its very establishment. [6]

In point of fact, the station is run by Hizbullah members, reports to Hizbullah officials, and takes its direction from the personal office of Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Hizbullah's secretary general.

Who Permits?

Al-Manar emerged at a moment in the history of Lebanon when political movements and militias ran television stations without licenses. In the years of civil war, the Lebanese state exercised no effective authority over broadcasting. In the 1980s, Hizbullah operated its own clandestine radio station, and the move into television was the sequel to its earlier ventures in media.

In its first few years, al-Manar operated outside any legal or regulatory framework. But in the mid-1990s, the Lebanese government moved to reassert its control over broadcasting. In November 1994, the Lebanese government passed a law subjecting all stations to government licensing.

In September 1996, the Lebanese government granted licenses to only five television stations. These tended to be commercial stations, and they did not include al-Manar. All other stations, around fifty in number, were ordered closed. The government argued that the reduction was necessary for "technical" reasons and voiced its "determination to put an end to years of media anarchy and partisan propaganda which emerged during the war." [7]

The decision to license only five stations provoked widespread criticism. Many in Lebanon believed that the decision was based on political and sectarian considerations rather than professional standards. A number of the stations that failed to receive a license, including al-Manar, refused to stop broadcasting. [8] The government threatened them, and in some cases, even used force in order to enforce the law. Several stations then elected to appeal the

government's decision.

How did al-Manar pursue its appeal? Nayef Krayem maintains al-Manar put "pressure on parliament and utilized outside sources, which also put pressure on the government." [9] In fact, Hizbullah sent a delegation to Damascus in order to lobby the then-president of Syria, Hafez al-Assad, for permission to broadcast. The strategy worked: on September 18, 1996, at the request of the Lebanese president, the cabinet reconsidered its decision and decided to grant al-Manar an operating license. In a sense, the decision extended to al-Manar the same exemption enjoyed by Hizbullah. Since Israel continued to occupy Lebanese and Syrian land, Hizbullah continued to enjoy an exemption from the general disarmament of militias. For the same reason, al-Manar was given an exemption from the general dismantlement of ideological television stations.

It is al-Manar's message, especially against Israel, that assures its continued freedom to broadcast. What would happen were it to turn against Syria? There is a precedent: on September 4, 2002, Lebanese authorities closed down Murr Television (MTV) for "violating an election law prohibiting propaganda." [10] In reality, however, the station was closed because of its outspoken opposition to the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. In late October, the Lebanese appeals court turned down an appeal by MTV. [11] This episode demonstrated that the Syrian and Lebanese authorities do not hesitate to practice censorship when they deem it necessary. The fact that al-Manar continues to operate freely is proof that the station's message enjoys the approval of the governments in Damascus and Beirut.

Who Pays?

Al-Manar is an expensive operation for a simple reason: it is Lebanon's leader in producing in-house programming. By 1994, the station was producing 50 percent of its own material, and by 2003 that figure approached around 70 percent. This reflected Hizbullah's desire to preserve "the integrity of Islamic and cultural programming." [12]

As of July 2002, station officials report al-Manar was unprofitable and losing money every year. "Annual financial losses are huge," Krayem maintains, and covered by unnamed investors whose interests he described as "political rather than financial." [13] If the station loses money, how has al-Manar been able to buy a new building, purchase first-rate equipment from Sony, run four bureaus, and pay the salaries of reporters around the world? Answer: Iranian largesse.

At the time of al-Manar's founding, the station reportedly received seed money from Iran and had an operating budget of \$1 million. [14] According to station officials, al-Manar's annual budget currently stands at approximately \$15 million. [15] (This is about half of al-Jazeera's annual budget.) Many reports maintain that al-Manar receives a significant portion of this sum from Iran. [16] But al-Manar officials vociferously deny this. Krayem maintains that the station does not receive money from any government. Al-Manar, he claims, is in full compliance with Lebanese law, which prohibits stations from receiving foreign government funding. [17]

Technically, Krayem may be speaking the truth. Over the years, many reports have placed Iranian subsidies to Hizbullah at somewhere between \$100 and \$200 million a year. Some of that money-by this time, it is "Lebanese"-goes to al-Manar. Both station officials and researchers corroborate this. Sheikh Nasir al-Akhdar, al-Manar's former program director, asserts in the Jordanian daily ar-Ra'y that al-Manar receives a good portion of its budget as "subsidies offered by the party [i.e. Hizbullah]." [18] Radwan al-Hamrouni and Adel al-Sahbani, Tunisian students who wrote a short study on al-Manar, maintain that al-Manar depends on "monthly assistance from Hizbullah." [19] In other words, al-Manar uses a loophole to get around the law prohibiting foreign subsidies of Lebanese television stations. It receives its subsidies from Hizbullah-which gets its stipend from its patron, Iran.

Other sources of income include donations from overseas Shi'ite communities and other Arabs and Muslims who support both Hizbullah and al-Manar. Reportedly, large donations have been received from Muslim communities in Europe, the United States, and Canada. [20] Al-Manar makes appeals for donors during commercial breaks, urging

viewers to make deposits directly into accounts in four Lebanese banks: Beirut Riyad Bank, the Banque Libanaise pour le Commerce SAL, the Byblos Bank SAL, and the Fransa Bank. These banks also receive funds solicited for Hizbullah itself (e.g., "The Organization for the Support of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon," "The Intifada in Occupied Palestine Fund," "The Palestine Uprising," and "The Resistance Information Donation Fund"). There are also two funds under the name of Krayem, for "Support the Resistance Media al-Manar Television."

It has also been reported that al-Manar receives small amounts from Hizbullah's own business ventures and cooperatives in Beirut, south Lebanon, and the Bekaa valley.[21] These business ventures and cooperatives operate in the shadows. However, it has been reported that they include building companies, heavy machinery manufacturers, and drug trafficking. Researchers Hamrouni and Sahbani also maintain that al-Manar receives income from "renting out some of its operational equipment to Arab or foreign stations covering events in Lebanon." [22]

Who Advertises?

Of secondary importance is the income al-Manar receives from corporate advertisers. Since al-Manar's founding in 1991 to the present day, the station has had many commercial advertising requests, both from Lebanese and Western companies. It has been reported that since its establishment, the station has consistently turned down approximately 90 percent of potential clients for religious reasons (e.g., the use in advertising of "women as a temptation").[23]

In order to manage the station's commercial advertising, al-Manar has set up its own advertising company, Media-Publi Management.[24] It has been reported that the company has worked with over thirty-five advertising firms, including Britain's Saatchi and Saatchi. As of 2003, commercial advertisements were broadcast terrestrially only, and not on al-Manar's satellite station. This suggests that companies perhaps want to keep their commercial links to al-Manar away from the prying eyes of U.S.-based viewers.

Al-Manar officials reported that as of July 2002, their biggest American commercial advertisers included Pepsi, Coke, Proctor and Gamble, and Western Union.[25] Other corporate sponsors include the German chocolate Milka, the American washing powder Ariel, Nestle's Nido milk, German Maggie Cubes, Finnish Smeds cheese and butter, French Picon cheese, Austrian Red Bull, the French cigarette company Gauloises, and the German Henkel's Der general detergent.[26] Following an op-ed that appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Pepsi, Coke, Proctor and Gamble, and Western Union ceased advertising on al-Manar, but the other European companies continue to do so.[27]

Who Reports?

The station employs about 300 employees of Lebanese, Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian, Moroccan, and American nationality.[28] While employees are not required to be Hizbullah members, "we prefer it all the same," says Muhammad 'Afif Ahmad.[29] It has been reported that most of the male reporters were guerrilla fighters before joining al-Manar.[30]

According to Zarur, most of the station's employees are in their twenties and thirties and learn their trade on the job. Zarur reports that station officials have attended special training courses at colleges and institutes and sometimes even take courses via the Internet in cooperation with international companies.[31] In 1997 the Lebanese press reported that al-Manar officials attended lectures and seminars on the workings of the Israeli foreign ministry and other Israeli agencies, in order to conduct more effective propaganda. Other courses attended included world weather and sports news.[32] Additionally, station journalists and technicians upgrade their qualifications through training sessions with organizations such as Reuters and the Thomson Foundation.[33]

The station also has four bureaus located in Dubai, Egypt, Iran, and Jordan. According to Ibrahim al-Musawi, editor-in-chief of the English news desk, al-Manar plans to open another in Britain in the near future.[34] Al-Manar also has

about a dozen individual correspondents abroad. In 2002 and 2003, these correspondents filed reports from Belgium, France, Iraq, Kosovo, Kuwait, Morocco, Russia, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, and the United States. In the Palestinian territories, al-Manar employs a number of correspondents, enabling the station to effectively cover breaking news. (Attacks and casualties are immediately flashed in ticker tape across the bottom of the television screen). The station also uses freelancers when necessary but prefers to employ its own staff.[35]

The station also sends correspondents to cover breaking news. Days after the September 11, 2001 attacks on America, the station dispatched its Tehran correspondent (also employed by Iranian television) and a crew to southwestern Afghanistan as well as to Pakistan's capital, Islamabad. Al-Manar's Afghan presence reportedly cost \$2,500 for each five-minute report, with the total bill running into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.[36] During Operation Iraqi Freedom, al-Manar employed two correspondents, one in Baghdad and one on the Iranian border.

But al-Manar became most famous for its coverage of Hizbullah's guerrilla war against occupying Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. Al-Manar broadcast dramatic news footage from camera crews wearing flak jackets and running alongside Hizbullah guerrillas during actual attacks. Cameramen were often in place in advance of guerrilla operations, demonstrating foreknowledge of the attacks and a high degree of coordination with Hizbullah's guerrilla units. Al-Manar's cameramen also coordinated with Hizbullah's "military media service" in order to assure the safety of cameramen and the best position to film the attack. It was reported that live footage and timely audiovisual material were sent from southern Lebanon to Beirut via a microwave dish.[37]

Who Watches?

While there are no formal statistics regarding viewership in the Middle East, it is clear that al-Manar's share has grown dramatically since its founding. The initial broadcast signal, using primitive equipment that cost as little as "a few million dollars," barely extended to Beirut's southern suburbs.[38] At first, the station only broadcast five hours a day. In 1993, al-Manar began to broadcast seven hours daily and extended its signal to the southern part of the Bekaa valley.

In preparation for the 1996 parliamentary elections, Hizbullah erected additional antennas in northern Lebanon and throughout the Mount Lebanon range. By the elections, al-Manar could be viewed throughout Lebanon, western Syria, and northern Israel. Broadcasting was increased to 12 hours daily in 1998 and to 18 hours in 2000. In early 2001, al-Manar went to 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week broadcasting. Lebanese television officials assert that al-Manar now ranks third in popularity within Lebanon (but number one when events heat up in southern Lebanon or the Palestinian territories).[39]

Al-Manar began to reach an entirely new audience when it followed the precedent of several other Lebanese television stations and began to broadcast via satellite. Al-Manar publicly announced its intention to launch a satellite station in March 2000. Muhammad Ra'd, a Hizbullah member of parliament and al-Manar's largest shareholder, officially submitted Hizbullah's request to the Lebanese government, [40] which swiftly approved it.[41]

Initially, the management of Arabsat, the satellite package company, was apprehensive about granting al-Manar a slot in its satellite package, fearing that the station might promote a Shi'ite sectarian agenda. Al-Manar explained that it had no interest in promoting such an agenda; as one of its programming directors explained, the station was "not thinking in terms of being a spokesman for the Shi'ite sect." [42] In fact, al-Manar is now vying for a much broader target audience: the (overwhelmingly Sunni) Arab-Muslim world. For this reason, al-Manar's terrestrial and satellite programming is not identical; sectarian programming of Shi'ite interest is broadcast terrestrially for local viewers in Lebanon, whereas more ecumenical content is broadcast on the satellite network.

While the satellite debut was originally set for July 2000, Hizbullah decided to move up the date to coincide with the Israeli redeployment from southern Lebanon, which was completed on May 24, 2000.[43] The timing was not lost on

al-Manar's viewers and Middle East analysts: al-Manar's satellite station came to epitomize freedom from Israeli occupation.

Al-Manar officials now believe that the station ranks among the top five most-watched stations throughout the Arab world and estimate that the station draws approximately 10 million viewers daily around the world.[44] None of these figures can be verified, but anecdotal evidence suggests that al-Manar is indeed one of the most popular stations in the Arab world. In tribute to this success, al-Manar won two gold and two silver awards in July 2001 at the eighth Cairo Television and Radio Festival.[45]

Al-Manar's second target audience is Palestinians and Israelis. Palestinians have ready access to al-Manar, and both Israeli and Lebanese sources report that al-Manar and al-Jazeera are the two most popular stations in the West Bank and Gaza.[46]

To reach most Israelis, al-Manar has had to bridge the language gap. In 1996, al-Manar began broadcasting Hebrew propaganda video packages addressed to the Israeli public, warning Israel of the dangers of remaining in Lebanon. [47] Al-Manar reportedly "employs Palestinians, who speak Hebrew and who were brought up in the occupied territories, but who left them or were expelled by Israel, to prepare and present Hebrew programs." [48] These same Palestinians are said to "have been managing the monitoring unit of Hizbullah, which listens to the Zionist occupation army's communications." [49] Other media sources report that many of al-Manar's Hebrew speakers are veteran Hizbullah operatives who served time in Israeli or Southern Lebanese Army jails where they picked up the language.[50]

By featuring "live video coverage of every operation carried out," al-Manar hoped Israelis would watch the death of its soldiers in real-time coverage.[51] Hizbullah officials stated that al-Manar "seeks to undermine the morale of the Israel Defense Forces [IDF]" and claimed that its own media coverage caused IDF soldiers to desert their posts.[52] Hizbullah also claimed that al-Manar programming led to an increase in the number of suicide attempts and drug abuse by Israeli soldiers.[53] Hizbullah's leaders maintain that al-Manar's programming, especially Hebrew videos, played a "very sensitive and important role" in causing Israel to eventually withdraw from Lebanon.[54]

In fact, the direct impact of al-Manar on Israelis has been more limited than these claims suggest. Al-Manar reaches a very small number of Israelis directly on a regular basis. Most Israelis subscribe either to Kavei Zahav (the Israeli equivalent of cable) or the satellite provider Yes, neither of which carries al-Manar. The only Jewish Israelis who have direct access to al-Manar are those who subscribe to Arabsat and those residents of northern Israel who live close enough to the Lebanese border to receive al-Manar directly via antenna.[55]

However, Israel's political and military analysts do watch al-Manar, and they in turn show footage and influence the Israeli public at large. Al-Manar knows that these analysts "watch our programming and comment on it, publish it in their papers, and show the coverage on their channels." [56]

Al-Manar officials have stated repeatedly over the last five years-especially after launching the satellite station-that the channel will begin broadcasting news and other programming in Hebrew. Hebrew news bulletins were slated to begin January 2001 but to date have been delayed for unspecified reasons.[57]

The Message

From 1991 to 2000, al-Manar's programming principally focused on events inside Lebanon, and especially the Islamic "resistance" to the Israeli occupation of the south. The station highlighted inspirational speeches and sermons by religious figures and clerics associated with Hizbullah. Al-Manar regularly aired stories filed by its correspondents in southern Lebanon and docudramas and programs dedicated to guerrillas "martyred" while fighting against Israel. Between programs, the station aired music videos devoted to the "resistance."

After the Israeli withdrawal from the south in May 2000, the station entered a self-congratulatory mode. It hailed Hizbullah's successful military campaign and harped at Israel's military weakness. But the Israeli withdrawal left a vacuum in the programming.

That vacuum was filled by the outbreak of the second intifada on September 29, 2000. In Krayem's words, "al-Manar Television has changed from a station of Islamic resistance to a television station of the Palestinian intifada." [58] Al-Manar had found a new cause, and thanks to the station's new satellite presence, it could take its message to a much wider audience. Al-Manar is devoted not only to the Palestinian cause but also to Palestinian "resistance" against Israel by violent means, especially by Islamist groups that openly seek the elimination of the Jewish state.

Hizbullah's secretary-general, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, highlighted the station's support of the Palestinian cause in a November 2000 interview:

Through al-Manar, we are offering moral and communication support dedicated entirely to the Palestinian issue. Hizbullah understands how important television is to the resistance in Lebanon as it is for the intifada, and so there are broadcasts in al-Manar from the morning till midnight, all of them on the Palestinian issue." [59]

When asked what operational assistance Hizbullah provides the Palestinians, officials generally demur or answer that it takes the form of al-Manar broadcasts. For example, the deputy secretary-general of Hizbullah, Sheikh Na'im Qasim, has declined to discuss actual military or monetary aid provided to the Palestinians, instead emphasizing that Hizbullah provides "national support to the Palestinians through al-Manar television." [60]

Beyond the news coverage, al-Manar frequently interviews leaders of Palestinian rejectionist organizations such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Al-Manar has regularly interviewed Ramadan Shallah (leader of the PIJ), Marwan Barghuti (Tanzim leader, now in Israeli prison), and Khalid Mish'al, Musa Abu Marzouk, and 'Abd al-'Aziz ar-Rantisi (all leaders of Hamas). In contrast, interviews with Palestinian Authority (PA) officials are rare.

Al-Manar has not broadcast programs that actually instruct viewers on how to assemble explosives. Nevertheless, al-Manar officials maintain that one of its aims is to promote what is "called in the West suicide missions," believing its job is to "inspire them." [61] Krayem states, "We do not create these acts but we do support any resistance acts through our media. We cover and promote any act of resistance on our programming." [62]

Al-Manar has also served as the preferred outlet for Palestinian rejectionist groups claiming responsibility for terrorist attacks against Israelis. Many of the claims of responsibility are received via telephone or fax; at other times, al-Manar cites the spokesmen of these organizations in providing details of various attacks. Krayem admits to having close contact with "all Palestinian groups" through e-mails, telephone calls, and faxes. Palestinians "do whatever is necessary to send us material." [63]

Groups that have taken responsibility for attacks against Israelis on al-Manar include: the Forces of 'Umar al-Mukhtar (a code name for the military wing of Fatah's Abu Musa faction), the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (affiliated with Fatah), the Jerusalem Brigades (affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad), the Forces of Badr (a cover name for a group closely connected to Hizbullah), the Brigades of Return (a code name for Hamas), the Brigades of Black Oslo, 'Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), and the Salah ad-Din Brigades.

Al-Manar itself has been involved in or possessed inside information regarding a host of Palestinian activities. A prominent example is a news bulletin from January 28, 2001, in which al-Manar reported that boxes of ammunition, including grenade launchers, were "floated" to Gaza from ships offshore and picked up by the Palestinian security services. This item was not reported by any other television station for a number of days, and when it was, PA officials vociferously denied it. But the fact that this incident actually took place was reported widely many weeks subsequent to the al-Manar report. The episode clearly demonstrated al-Manar's superior access to Palestinian officials.

Al-Manar has presented itself as a "war room" for Palestinian terror—a platform for reporting events, claiming responsibility for attacks, and discussing terror strategy. A number of al-Manar's own reporters are also involved with Palestinian groups. For example, 'Imad I'id, al-Manar's permanent correspondent in Gaza, has close ties to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and used to write for its newspaper. Dib Hawrani, al-Manar's reporter in Jenin, is very close to sources in Fatah. 'Issa Zawahara, who reports from the Palestinian territories, has been linked to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and, according to The Washington Post, has served terms in Israeli and Palestinian jails.[64] Fu'ad Hasin, al-Manar's correspondent in Amman, Jordan, identifies himself as an Islamist and is an activist in the Jordanian "committee against normalization with Israel."

Al-Manar's support for the Palestinians is not just a matter of slanted reporting. The advocacy spills over into every detail of programming. For example, programming times have been listed according to "Jerusalem Standard Time" instead of (identical) Beirut time. In December 2001, when Israel destroyed the buildings of Palestinian television, al-Manar broadcast the Palestinian television logo instead of its own for two days. Al-Manar officials stated that this step was taken within the framework of "solidarity with an Arab media organ." [65]

But the most blatant propagandizing takes place between programs in music videos that serve as filler. These video packages constitute up to 30 percent of al-Manar's satellite programming. According to officials in the art graphics department, the videos are meant to "help people on the way to committing what you in the West call a suicide mission. It is meant to be the first step on the process of a freedom fighter operation." [66]

These videos are powerful montages of incitement, combining graphic imagery and inspiring music. Al-Manar's variation on the genre features combined footage of Hizbullah attacks on Israeli military installations and Palestinian clashes with Israeli soldiers. The message: force worked for Hizbullah in expelling Israel from Lebanon, and it will work for the Palestinians, who must "Lebanonize" as well as Islamize their struggle. The effect of such programming should not be underestimated. For example, it was widely reported in April 2002 that Ayat al-Akhras, a Palestinian female suicide bomber, watched al-Manar incessantly before she committed her attack.[67]

Brent Sadler, CNN's former Beirut bureau chief, has described the impact of the news and video clips of al-Manar. They are a "drumbeat of carefully selected, dramatically composed, one-sided visual accounts of West Bank and Gaza violence beamed across Lebanon and, via satellite, to a vast regional audience, transmissions which incite the Arab world to mobilize popular support for the Palestinian cause." [68]

9/11 and Iraq

Al-Manar's coverage of the events of September 11, 2001, launched the station into a new role, as a purveyor of "resistance" against the U.S.-led war on terror. It began by manufacturing and spreading the most widespread of all calumnies about September 11.

In the Arab world, many accept it as fact that "Jews, Israel, and the Mossad" perpetrated the attacks and secretly warned Jews to avoid the World Trade Center. It was al-Manar that made the first claim of Israeli and Jewish involvement in the attacks in a report broadcast on September 17, 2001.[69] The Washington Post confirms that "the story of 4,000 Jewish survivors originated with a September 17 report by the Beirut-based al-Manar television network." The Washington Post quoted an al-Manar official saying that, "If we did not believe it, then we would not have published it." [70]

Al-Manar's report cited an obscure Jordanian newspaper al-Watan as alleging, "4,000 Israelis remained absent [on Sept. 11] based on hints from the Israeli General Security Apparatus, the Shabak." [71] In fact, no one has been able to trace such a statement in al-Watan.[72] In a December 2001 interview, Nasrallah was quoted stating that al-Manar "didn't make that story up...It just limited itself to reproducing what was being said, even if we're not totally sure that the theory is true. The point is, you have to look at all the hypotheses, because you can't rule out any option just yet

and neither can you clearly point to one movement as being responsible for what happened." [73]

With the start of hostilities in Iraq, al-Manar found a new theme: "resistance" to the United States. The station was again following the lead of Hizbullah, as expressed by Nasrallah a week before the war: "The people of this region will receive you with their rifles, with blood, with martyrdom, and martyrdom operations. Today, as the region fills up with hundreds of thousands of American troops, our slogan was and will remain 'death to America.'" [74]

Since then, talk shows and music videos have directed the message of hate against American leaders and its military campaign. In many ways, the language and images are indistinguishable from al-Manar's propaganda against Israel, or even from al-Qa'ida's propaganda videos calling for the expulsion of the United States from the Muslim world.

One of the videos shows dead Iraqi civilians and children, juxtaposed with fighter-bombers taking off from American aircraft carriers and cruise missiles exploding in Baghdad. This is followed by a speech given by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld in which he announced: "Weapons that are being used today have a degree of precision that no one ever dreamed of." The video package ends with cross hairs on a wounded child and a slogan reading: "truly considerable precision." [75] Another video package features a Bush speech in which the president says, "When the war in Iraq is won, all who have joined this cause will be able to say to the Iraqi people, we were proud to fight for your freedom." This is followed by grotesque images of death and destruction, and the segment ends with this conclusion: "This is freedom the American way." [76]

The conclusion drawn by al-Manar is that Iraqis must resist. A station broadcaster asserts,

"As the aggression continues, the brave resistance will continue. The brave Iraqi people know that if they give up, they won't only be giving up Iraq, but also giving up Palestine; if the aggression continues, the brave resistance will continue. The aggression, experts agree, symbolizes the highest level of American-Zionist strategic cooperation. This is what the Zionists prove by claiming that they are the first and only beneficiaries of a war on Iraq." [77]

In an explicit call for acts of "resistance" against U.S. forces in Iraq, one video lambastes U.S. troops in Iraq with the lyrics: "With our steadfastness we threaten [America]. Throughout all time we chant: America is the mother of terrorism. Let the mother of terrorism fall. America is the army of evil: an invading, aggressive, occupying army. There is nothing left but the rifles. There is nothing left but the martyrs." [78] The video ends with footage of a suicide bomber detonating his explosive belt.

Global Reach

Al-Manar is a television station with global reach for a political movement and terrorist organization with global reach. The "station of resistance" has lately taken to labeling itself "the station of the Arabs and the Muslims" (qanat al-'Arab wa'l-Muslimin), a sign of its growing ambition. Krayem maintains that the station aspires to give Arabs and Muslims a feeling that they "belong to something greater than themselves; something that is pan-human, pan-Muslim, and pan-Arab." [79]

Not only does it seek to achieve this for all Arabs and Muslims. It seeks to achieve this for the Shi'ites themselves. Shi'ites were marginal to the grand narrative of Arab awakening and nationalism for most of the twentieth century. Al-Manar is part of the attempt of Shi'ites to enter the narrative and to redefine it. Al-Manar's preoccupation with the Palestinian cause is an act of appropriation: it is an attempt to make the preeminent Arab and Muslim cause identical with the cause of Hizbullah.

Hizbullah seeks to erase the lingering stigma that has attached to Shi'ites and that still thrives among extreme Islamists in the school of al-Qa'ida and nationalists who are nostalgic for Saddam Hussein—all of whom are just as vociferous as Hizbullah in their rejection of Israel. The subliminal message of al-Manar is that only Hizbullah has ever dealt the Israelis a defeat, and that Hizbullah yields to no one in its ongoing support of the Palestinian struggle.

Al-Manar, as much as it is a project of solidarity with the Palestinians, is a project of Shi'ite self-legitimation.

To make Hizbullah's claims credible, al-Manar must out-jihad all other Islamists. This has turned the station into a platform for urging, inspiring, justifying, and celebrating terrorism first against Israel and more recently against the "occupation" of another Arab, Muslim, and Shi'ite land: Iraq. This could well place it on a collision course with the United States.

It would be a mistake to wait until that happens. This is a unique instance of a major mass media tool in the hands of a terrorist organization. The damaging effects of a station that emits powerful propaganda for violence, suicide bombing, and the killing of innocent civilians, pose a direct threat to U.S. interests and regional stability.

It is essential that the United States make al-Manar's operations far more difficult and costly, and it has several tools for doing so.

- The Treasury Department should add al-Manar to the terrorism sanctions list.
- The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control should designate Hizbullah's four Lebanese banks-and other banks with which Hizbullah does business-as institutions harboring accounts of terrorist organizations. Correspondent banks could then seize their U.S.-based assets.
- The Foreign Terrorist Asset Tracking Center (FTATC), the inter-governmental task force responsible for monitoring terrorist financing, should begin monitoring al-Manar's advertised bank accounts.
- Congress should pass legislation banning American companies from advertising on any of Hizbullah's mass media outlets, and prohibiting U.S. media sources from purchasing footage or programming from al-Manar.[80]
- The United States should persuade states hosting al-Manar bureaus to close them. Additionally, Washington should work to persuade the governments of states that host al-Manar correspondents to ban them from reporting. House cleaning, however, should begin at home: the United States should close down al-Manar's Washington bureau and consider taking legal action against the bureau chief-identified as Muhammad Dalbah- as an American citizen who, in the words of U.S. law, "knowingly provides material support or resources to a foreign terrorist organization." [81]
- The United States should encourage American and European satellite package providers to remove al-Manar from their packages.
- The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq should deport al-Manar's Iraq correspondents.

Al-Manar is not a legitimate news organization or the rough equivalent of al-Jazeera. It is the propaganda arm of a listed terrorist organization, complicit in the full range of Hizbullah's activities. Treating it as such is an important first step in rolling back the gains made by Hizbullah during years of U.S. neglect.

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Notes

[1] At <http://web.manartv.org/html/about.html>. [2] Author interview, Bilal Zarur, Beirut, June 27, 2002 (henceforth: Zarur interview). [3] Ibid. [4] Author interview, Nayef Krayem, Beirut, June 27, 2002 (henceforth: Krayem interview). Al-Manar's board of directors, chaired by Krayem, has nine members and forty shareholders, most of whom are members of Hizbullah. [5] Ibid. [6] The Washington Post, June 19, 1995. [7] Agence France-Presse, Jan. 23, 1996. [8] Krayem interview; Associated Press, Sept. 17, 1996. [9] Krayem interview. [10] Associated Press, Sept. 4, 2002. [11] Ibid., Oct. 28, 2002. [12] As-Safir (Beirut), Dec. 29, 1994. [13] Krayem interview. [14] The Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 28, 2001. [15] Krayem interview. [16] Robert Fisk "suspects that Iran provides much of the cash" for al-Manar. The Independent (London), Dec. 2, 2000. [17] Krayem interview. [18] Ar-Ra'y (Amman), May 31, 2000. [19] Radwan

al- Hamrouni and Adel al-Sahbani, "War Media and Resistance Media: Al Manar Television as Case Study," master's thesis, Institute of the Press and News Sciences, Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education, 2001-2002. [20] Ar-Ra'y, May 31, 2000. [21] The Calgary Herald (Ont.), Sept. 11, 1999. [22] Hamrouni and Sahbani, "War Media and Resistance Media." [23] An-Nahar (Beirut), Sept. 2, 1992. [24] Agence France-Presse, Feb. 5, 1995. [25] Krayem interview; Agence France-Presse, Feb. 5, 1995, Apr. 17, 1996. [26] Al-Manar television (Beirut) footage from terrestrial station, Oct. 2002. [27] Avi Jorisch, "Hezbollah Hate with a U.S. Link," Los Angeles Times, Oct. 13, 2002. [28] Krayem interview. [29] Agence France-Presse, Feb. 5, 1995. [30] The Independent, Dec. 2, 2000. [31] Zarur interview [32] As-Safir, Mar. 3, 1997. [33] Magda Abu-Fadil, "Hezbollah TV Claims Credit for Ousting Israelis," IPI (International Press Institute) Report, no. 4, 2000, at http://www.freemedia.at/IPIReport4.00/ipirep4.00_3.htm. [34] Author interview, Ibrahim al-Musawi, Beirut, June 27, 2002. [35] Krayem interview. [36] Magda Abu-Fadil, "Al-Manar TV: No Love for U.S. but No Help from Taliban," Poynter.org, Oct. 23, 2001, at <http://www.poynter.org/Terrorism/magda2.htm>. [37] Chicago Tribune, Apr. 13, 2000. [38] An-Nahar, Sept. 2, 1992. [39] Krayem interview; Los Angeles Times, May 11, 2000. [40] Al-Hayat (London), Mar. 9, 2000. [41] As-Safir, Apr. 6, 2000. [42] Ar-Ra'y, May 31, 2000. [43] Ibid.; Krayem interview. [44] Krayem interview. [45] Lebanonwire, July 12, 2002, at <http://www.lebanonwire.com/0207/02071201DS.asp>. [46] The Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 28, 2001. [47] Ibid. [48] Al-Istiqlal (Gaza), Nov. 18, 1999. (This newspaper is affiliated with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.) [49] Ibid. [50] The Independent, Dec. 2, 2000. [51] Al-Manar, Sept. 11, 1998; The Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 28, 2001. [52] Al-Istiqlal, Nov. 18, 1999. [53] Ibid. [54] Ibid. [55] Many Israeli Arabs and Palestinians residing in the West Bank and Gaza own satellite dishes that carry Arabsat. [56] Krayem interview. [57] Ibid.; The Christian Science Monitor, Dec. 28, 2001. [58] Daily Star (Beirut), Jan. 3, 2001. [59] Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Syrian television, Nov. 17, 2000. [60] Future Television (Lebanon), Dec. 31, 2000. [61] Author's interview with a member of al-Manar art graphic department, Beirut, June 27, 2002. [62] Krayem interview. [63] Ibid. [64] The Washington Post, Dec. 4, 2001. [65] Ash-Sharq al-Awsat (London), Dec. 14, 2001. [66] Author's interview with a member of al-Manar art graphic department, Beirut, June 27, 2002. [67] Newsweek, Apr. 15, 2002. [68] Frank Sesno and Brent Sadler, "Crisis in the Middle East: Al-Manar Airs Hezbollah's High-Tech Propaganda Campaign," CNN Newsday, Oct. 26, 2000. [69] At http://www.moqawama.tv/archive/drep_2001/sep/dr_0918.htm. [70] The Washington Post, Oct. 13, 2001. [71] Jews and Israelis are used interchangeably. After this initial report, al-Manar began referring to Jews directly. [72] Bryan Curtis, "4,000 Jews, 1 Lie-Tracking an Internet Hoax," Slate.com, Oct. 5, 2001, at <http://slate.msn.com/?id=116813>. [73] El Mundo (Madrid), Dec. 18, 2001. [74] Al-Manar video, Mar.-Apr. 2003. [75] Ibid. [76] Ibid. [77] Al-Manar, Mar. 24, 2003. [78] Al-Manar video, Mar.-Apr. 2003. [79] Krayem interview. [80] Twenty-two members of the U.S. Congress have urged the U.S. government to prohibit U.S. companies from advertising on al-Manar; Henry Waxman letter, Dec. 10, 2002, at http://www.house.gov/waxman/news_files/pdfs/news_letters_al_manar_12_10_02.pdf. [81] United States Code, Title 18, Part I, Chapter 113B, Sec. 2339B. ❖

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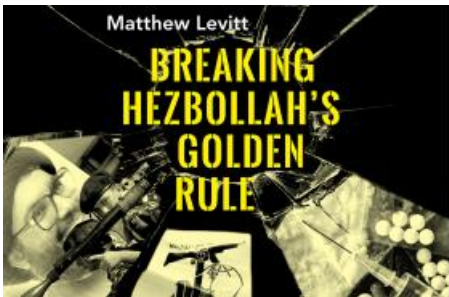
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