

Al-Manar and the War in Iraq

by [Avi Jorisch \(/experts/avi-jorisch\)](#)

Apr 1, 2003

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

[Avi Jorisch \(/experts/avi-jorisch\)](#)

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



Articles & Testimony

While Western commentators frequently fulminate about the Qatari satellite station Al-Jazeera and its pernicious impact on Arab public opinion, few have taken notice of a potentially lethal media offensive emanating from the south of Beirut by Al-Manar, a Lebanese television station run by the militant Shiite group Hezbollah. Like Al-Jazeera, Al-Manar endlessly broadcasts scenes of Iraqi suffering attributed to the invasion of US-led coalition forces to millions of Arab viewers via satellite. Unlike its Qatari counterpart, however, Al-Manar (the Arabic word for "beacon") broadcasts these images with voiceovers calling for death to America.

In contrast to the West, there are few in Israel who do not know the name of Hezbollah's savvy propaganda machine. Established as a modest outlet for Hezbollah communiqués in 1991, Al-Manar increased its daily broadcast hours from four to 24 in the months following the September 2000 outbreak of the Palestinian intifadah and intensified a concerted campaign of terrorist incitement against Israel, broadcasting impassioned pleas for "martyrs" to massacre Jews. The scale and intensity of the intifadah, which has claimed over 750 Israeli lives and 2,000 Palestinian lives, is partly an outgrowth of this incitement.

Following the same paradigm, Hezbollah has recently begun a campaign to incite opposition to American forces in Iraq that bears an eerie similarity to its war on the airwaves against Israel. While this second media offensive has not yet proven to be a decisive factor on the ground in Iraq, Al-Manar officials are confident that their campaign to turn hearts and minds against the United States will be a slam dunk.

Al-Manar and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

While the destruction of the Jewish state has been a cornerstone of Hezbollah's ideology since its foundation in the early 1980s, the group's armed struggle against Israel was portrayed as a national liberation war until the withdrawal of Israeli forces from south Lebanon in June 2000, and its sporadic cross-border attacks against Israeli forces in the Shebaa Farms area of the Golan Heights continue to be justified in such terms. However, Hezbollah's Arabic mass media organs, which include Al-Manar, al-Intiqad newspaper, and al-Nur radio, cast its victory over Israel as a model for a broader Arab-Islamic struggle to destroy the Jewish state.

Al-Manar

Al-Manar, which is accessible throughout the Arab world (and much of the United States and Europe) via satellite,

was used to export this idea to the Palestinians, instructing them that the only way to achieve total liberation is through armed opposition that leads to a complete victory, rather than a negotiated peace. For example, in a video entitled "Death to Israel," Hezbollah Secretary-General Nasrallah pledges "full-fledged support to the intifadah, with guns and bullets and martyrs' blood. Death to Israel." He continues, "No one has the right to give up one grain of Palestine's sand, or one letter of Palestine's name . . . Israel is evil and illegitimate. She is a rapist, violent, occupying, terrorist, cancerous entity that has no legitimacy or legality whatsoever and never will."

The lyrics to the accompanying music video included the following:

"Strike with the spilled blood, death, death, death to Israel . . . Strike with the exploding body, death, death, death to Israel. From the wounds of Durra, Ayash and Ezz-el-deen, we create the days of victory against the occupiers. From the angry land of Jerusalem, strike the rapist occupier, kick out of your house that Zionist intruder. Return the favor' like they deserve it. Do not have mercy on the army of violence, which wears the outfit of militarism and colonialism. Strike them with the stone, sling, or knife, day and night. Chase them, for the will is strong. Like an erupting volcano. Shake the betrayer's existence. Do not mind that the enemy's armor is heavy." [1]

On a much smaller scale, Al-Manar also began broadcasting propaganda in Hebrew. One video broadcast frequently during the first year of the intifadah shows footage of Palestinian suicide bombings, accompanied by the following warning in Hebrew: "Zionists, there is no security for you in Tel Aviv - for your own safety we advise you to return to Europe and to the United States, from where you came." [2]

Resistance is one of Hezbollah's most powerfully articulated visions, and al-Manar is the main vehicle for the dissemination of this ideology to a broad and diverse audience throughout the Arab world. The meaning of the term in the context of Hezbollah is complex and can only be understood properly only if the words "oppression" and "occupation" immediately follow. Hezbollah will oppose any entity that it classifies as an oppressor or occupier. The group's litmus test involves assessing a prospective adversary's attitude towards Zionism and the West - the United States in particular, which Hezbollah considers the world's supreme oppressor.

The United States

According to Hezbollah's worldview, the United States is a demonic menace threatening not just the Middle East, but the entire planet: "The main source of evil in this world, the main source of terrorism in this world, the central threat to international peace and to the economic development of this world, the main threat to the environment of this world, the main source of evil and war, and terrorism, and killing and turmoil, and civil wars and regional wars in this world is the United States of America." [3]

American involvement in the region is often portrayed in stark imperialist terms. The United States intends to "enslave the governments and people of the region and steal their resources," said Nasrallah in one Al-Manar broadcast. [4] Hezbollah's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Sayyid Mohamed Hussein Fadlallah, mirrored this view, asserting that the United States has come to the region in order to "confiscate people's liberties, strategic locations, natural resources, and economic markets." [5]

In addition to such traditional material objectives, the United States is said to be waging a war against "Islam as a belief." [6] According to Nasrallah, the West is intent on proving that Islam is a "religion of terror, hate, destruction, evil, barbarism, a religion against peace, civilization, and modernity," while portraying the Quran as the "source of hate and terrorism," [7] with US President George W. Bush's reference to the war on terror as a "crusade" cited as definitive "proof" of US intentions. [8] Hezbollah contends that first America "stole our land in Palestine, now they are coming to destroy the essence of our religion." [9] The group therefore "see[s] America as being the enemy of this umma [community of believers]." [10]

One of the most powerful anti-American videos broadcast by Al-Manar prior to the conflict with Iraq offers an altered image of the Statue of Liberty - her head is portrayed as a skull with hollow eyes; her gown is dripping in blood, and instead of a torch she holds a sharp knife. As ominous background music plays, a list of US conflicts over the past fifty years scrolls onto the screen (e.g., Somalia, Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Lebanon), coupled with images of nuclear war, bloody massacres, and carpet bombing. The video ends with the slogan, "It [the United States] has interfered in the affairs of most of the world's countries . . . The US owes blood to all of humanity." [11]

Despite Al-Manar's dissemination of such hateful anti-American propaganda, Hezbollah's leadership had until recently intimated that it was not interested in opening a second front in Iraq. "Outside this fight we have done nothing," said Nasrallah in December 2002, referring to the conflict with Israel. "Everybody knows where Hezbollah's arena is, where Hezbollah's battle is." [12] "We see America as being the enemy of the umma but we did not enter into direct confrontation with it," he stated around the same time, adding, "It is the Americans who brought war upon us in the past and today they want to engage in war and want to choose the time and location for it . . . So let it be." [13]

As the American-led war in Iraq became imminent, Hezbollah's language became more threatening. "The people of this region will receive you with their rifles, with blood, with martyrdom, and martyrdom operations," declared Nasrallah a week before the onset of hostilities. "Today, as the region fills up with hundreds of thousands of American troops, our slogan was and will remain 'death to America.'" [14]

Hezbollah Incitement during the War

Once the war began, Hezbollah began explicitly calling for acts of "resistance" against US forces in Iraq in a series of videos, powerfully produced and geared towards an already agitated audience, that have since made up around 25-30% of Al-Manar's programming. One recent video lambastes US troops in Iraq, with the following song lyrics:

"We are not for it [America] With our steadfastness we threaten it [America] Throughout all time we chant it 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."

The video ends with footage of suicide bombers detonating their explosive belts. [15]

Another propaganda video, mirroring the station's frequent use of Nazi imagery in portrayals of Israeli leaders, features President Bush and Adolf Hitler side by side in a split-screen comparison. Both appear to wave and salute in the same fashion, make the same speeches, and order the same massacres. The video ends with the slogan "history repeats itself." In another video, entitled "Beauty and Beast," beauty is depicted as a picture of the earth from space, while Bush is cast as the beast, eating away at the earth with a fork and knife, using an American flag as a handkerchief. The earth then becomes a burger platter, and the background changes into a stream of tanks and jets heading toward the Middle East. The video ends with the words "the real beast" printed next to Bush. [16]

Conclusion

Hezbollah's efforts to incite Palestinian terrorism against Israelis were accompanied by the provision of arms, training, and logistical assistance to suicide bombers in the West Bank and Gaza that have had a decisive impact on the scale of violence in the intifadah. It is likely that the group's campaign of anti-American incitement will also be accompanied by the provision of operational material assistance to those who are willing to fight US forces in Iraq. Indeed, there have already been scattered reports of Hezbollah operatives crossing the Syrian border into Iraq. [17]

The regional scope of Hezbollah's calls for resistance against American intervention in Iraq gives the movement's propaganda a striking similarity to al-Qaeda's declared goal of driving US forces out of the Middle East. Moreover, as a result of the Bush administration's campaign to destroy Osama bin Laden's international terrorist network, it is now Hezbollah, not al-Qaeda, that is most capable of pursuing this objective. In fact, prior to the September 11

attacks, Hezbollah was responsible for the deaths of more Americans than any other terrorist group. As Deputy US Secretary of State Richard Armitage noted last year, Hezbollah is "the A-team of terrorists." [18] In the next phase of the American war on terror, it will no doubt rank high on the list of possible targets.

Notes [1] Al-Manar television, numerous broadcasts beginning in April 2002. [2] Yaroslav Trofimov, "Hezbollah Tests Resolve of War on Terror," The Wall Street Journal, 17 December 2001. [3] Hassan Nasrallah, Al-Manar, 21 March 2002. [4] Hassan Nasrallah, Al-Manar, 27 September 2002. [5] "Lebanese Shi'i Leader Says USA Wants to Subordinate the Entire World," Financial Times Information, 1 February 2002. [6] Hassan Nasrallah, Al-Manar, 14 March 2002. [7] Hassan Nasrallah, Al-Manar, 14 March 2002. [8] Ibid. [9] Ibid. [10] Hassan Nasrallah, Al-Manar, 23 November 2002. [11] Al-Manar, numerous broadcasts beginning in September 2002. [12] Neil MacFarquhar, "Hezbollah Becomes Potent Anti-US Force," The New York Times, 24 December 2002. [13] Hassan Nasrallah, Al-Manar, 24 December 2002. [14] Al-Manar, 13 March 2003. [15] Al-Manar, numerous broadcasts beginning in late March 2003. [16] Al-Manar, numerous broadcasts beginning in late March 2003. [17] A Syrian volunteer quoted by one newswire report ["Some Arab Volunteers Returning Home, Disillusioned by Jihad in Iraq," The Associated Press, 10 April 2003] said that there were 200 Hezbollah members in Iraq. The London-based daily Al-Hayat reported on April 12 that coalition forces in Iraq had captured six members of Hezbollah. [18] Reuters, 6 September 2002. ❖

Middle East Intelligence Bulletin

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆

Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

Podcast: Breaking Hezbollah's Golden Rule

Feb 9, 2022



Matthew Levitt

(/policy-analysis/podcast-breaking-hezbollahs-golden-rule)

TOPICS

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)

Lebanon (/policy-analysis/lebanon)

Syria (/policy-analysis/syria)