

# Resistance Media in Lebanon: The Case of Al Manar and Al Mayadeen

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## Article info

**Received:** 13 January 2024**Accepted:** 18 March 2024

**Keywords:** Hezbollah Narrative,  
Media Control, Freedom of Speech,  
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Resistance &  
Occupation, Globalized Media Landscape

**How to cite this article:** Mrinalini Ghosh.  
(2024). IResistance Media in Lebanon:  
The case of Al Manar and Al Mayadeen,  
International Journal of Politics and  
Media, 3(1), 1-6 Retrieved from <https://ijpmonline.com/index.php/ojs/article/view/46>

## Abstract

This study focuses on a 2012 interview between Julian Assange and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, leader of the Lebanese resistance organization Hezbollah. The analysis explores how the interview platform, World Tomorrow, provided a space for Nasrallah to articulate his group's narrative regarding their resistance activities against Israeli occupation and their views on the Palestinian struggle. The conversation delves into the historical context of Hezbollah's emergence, the war in Syria, and the rationale behind the U.S. government's efforts to block Hezbollah's media network, Al Manar. This case highlights the tension between freedom of speech and state control of information, particularly when dealing with designated terrorist organizations. The backdrop for the interview is the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the concept of a "Greater Israel" envisioned by some within Israeli governance. The success of Hezbollah's resistance tactics in forcing Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon in 2000 and their further military resistance during the 2006 invasion solidified their image as a potent force against Israeli occupation. This stands in stark contrast to the portrayal of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization by Western powers. The analysis examines how Al Manar functions as a tool for Hezbollah's resistance efforts, specifically by countering the dominant narrative of Israeli invincibility and promoting a perspective of Palestinian liberation. The study contributes to the understanding of how media platforms can be utilized by non-state actors to challenge established narratives and garner support for their cause in a globalized media environment.

## 1. Introduction

In January 2012 Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, announced that he was about to launch a series where he would interview international figures who had emerged as "key political players, thinkers and revolutionaries" (Wikileaks, 2012). When the first episode of World Tomorrow or The Julian Assange Show aired on RT on 17th April of that year, the guest was Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, Secretary-General of Lebanon's resistance organization, Hizbullah (Hizb Allāh). The leader of this resistance organization that had emerged in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Nasrallah, joined Assange from an unknown location, with the interview being conducted through a video call.

The conversation covered topics ranging from the history behind the emergence and existence of Resistance elements in Lebanon, the war in Syria, the idea and vision for an independent Palestinian state and Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah's own background and ideological influences growing up in a multicultural community with a large presence of Palestinian refugees from the Nakba. About halfway through the interview, Assange touched upon the subject of Al Manar, the 'international media network' run by Hizbullah. He asked why the United States government was

blocking the airing of Al Manar in the US, the self-proclaimed "bastion of free speech". Nasrallah's reply pointed out the necessity on the part of the government of the United States to control the narrative on Hizbullah which they wanted to identify as a terrorist organization.

Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah and his organization Hizbullah emerged as a significant force in the resistance to the Zionist project in West Asia in 2000 when the activities of the resistance in Lebanon led to Israel ending their occupation of Lebanese territories. The Israeli military and its ally, the South Lebanon Army (SLA), a militia made of Christian Maronites in Lebanon, had jointly maintained the occupied territories as a security zone. This was also necessary to secure vital water reserves situated in Lebanon for the use of Israel. (Amery, 1998) Furthermore, as has been declared by many prominent members of Israeli governance, this move was aligned with the military-architectural project of Zionism, the establishment of a Greater Israel, a territory that is based on the kingdom built by the Biblical figure of David which includes apart from the whole of Palestine, parts of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The guerilla resistance led by Hizbullah however had turned this into a costly endeavor leading to great public debate within Israeli governance. The decision to end the occupation of Southern Lebanon came

at the back of domestic pressure since the unprecedented number of military casualties incurred by Israel in the guerilla war that they faced from the Resistance had led to questions being raised from within Israeli society as well as the government on the viability of what was turning into a costly war. The lives of Israeli soldiers were not deemed worth paying for the uncertain peace that the military was hoping to achieve. Occupying Lebanon had turned into Israel's "Vietnam". (Kaye, 2002-2003) However, it was the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon that firmly established Hizbullah as capable of resisting the military aggression of a Israeli army that was technologically and financially far superior to them. Israel invaded Lebanon for 34 days with the declared objective of eradicating Hizbullah and for the first time they were met with "a credible and determined resistance force". Israel in their policy of "disproportionate use of force" succeeded in destroying civil infrastructure in Lebanon, bombing hospitals, and homes, killing a thousand Lebanese civilians and displacing over a million people. However, at the same time the war "shattered the myth of Israeli invincibility and impregnability". (Hussain, 2007) The image of Hizbullah and its Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah had become synonymous with Lebanese resistance to Zionist aggression. While for Israel, the United States and other Western allies, the organization and its leaders were terrorists, for Lebanon, occupied Palestine and much of West Asian society, they were liberators. (Jaber, 1997) (Hussain, 2007) The television channel Al Manar TV, owned by Hizbullah, saw itself as part of the organisation's resistance against Israeli aggression and described itself as the "first Arab establishment to stage an effective psychological warfare against the Zionist enemy". (Fontan, 2004)

The Al Manar TV, meaning "beacon" in Arabic, was one of approximately fifty television channels that emerged as mouthpieces of the various factions involved in the civil war in Lebanon (1975-90). (Harmon & Bowdish, 2018) The channel which was the media arm of the Shiite Resistance group, started broadcasting in June 1991 from Beirut. (Alagha, 2013) At the time of the civil war, Lebanon did not have any broadcasting law since the only channel that had officially operated since 1952 was Tele-Liban, the state-owned television station. However, in response to the growing number of private channels, in October 1994 the government passed the first broadcasting law in Lebanon, possibly the first such endeavour in the Arab world, the Audiovisual Information Law. (Nasser, 1996) This law allowed the licensing of private television and radio stations, putting an end to the official monopoly of Tele-Liban. By 1997, Al Manar received its broadcasting license in April 2000, the channel was granted government permission to venture into satellite transmission. (Harmon & Bowdish, 2018)

The role of Al Manar in Hizbullah's strategy of resistance against Israel was acknowledged by Israelis as early as 1998 when the head of the Golani regiment serving in South Lebanon at the time, Gen. Kobi Maroum, wrote, "We are less qualified in one respect: the propaganda. They are trying to hit our weak points and we have to hit back." (Harb Z. , 2009) The legitimacy given to any statement put forward by the Israeli government or the military through their amplification by their Western allies had

long necessitated a platform for a counter-narrative from the perspective of the Lebanese Resistance and it had finally found it in Al Manar.

Researchers studying Hizbullah's media presence have identified the meticulous effort put into the development of media strategies on the part of the organisation. Muhammad Mohsen points out that since the early 1990s a clear media-related plan can be observed which coalesced and sharpened after the 1996 conflict with Israel when the Israelis launched Operation Grapes of Wrath intending to destroy Hizbullah's presence in southern Lebanon. The conflict ended with Israel unleashing massive destruction of civilian life and infrastructure in Lebanon. However, Hizbullah not only was not destroyed but also emerged as a resistance force that now resonated with the wider society. The military wing of Hizbullah, Islamic Resistance, was now the recipient of solidarity from "Lebanese of all religions, sects and classes" (Jaber, 1997). Hala Jaber points out that Hizbullah had found support even within the Christian Maronite community. According to Mohsen, faced with a wider audience that lay beyond their immediate members and earlier support base, a shift came in their approach to the media. In an interview with Zahera Harb in 2004, he stated, "They became more organized and precise in the content and style of the messages." (Harb Z. , 2009) Not only were they giving interviews to foreign reporters but they used French and English-speaking members to explain Hizbullah's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. (see Zahera Harb's work for a detailed study of Al Manar's role as part of a combined media strategy that would be employed alongside the military achievements of the organisation).

In 2000, Hizbullah's legitimacy as a political entity in Lebanon catapulted with the almost overnight retreat of the Israeli military from the territories it had occupied in Southern Lebanon for 22 years since the invasion in 1982. Lebanon was liberated and it had been achieved not by the Lebanese army but rather through the actions of the Resistance through a war of attrition. The withdrawal was celebrated as a defeat of the Israeli army at the hands of Hizbullah and Mohsen sees this as an almost climax of Hizbullah's media management. (Harb Z. , 2009) His sentiment finds resonance in a statement made by Hassan Eiz-Addine who served as the Head of Media Relations for Hizbullah from 2001 to 2004. In an interview to Harb, he said that the years between 1997 and 2000 that "preceded the liberation" were crucial and perceived as a "countdown to victory". (Harb Z. , 2009) Throughout this period, Al Manar remained an intrinsic part of this media strategy along with the newspaper, al-Ahed, which meant "pledge" and the radio station, "al-Nour, which meant "light". (Matar, 2015) The media plan was developed with the help of a team of experts in political propaganda and psychological warfare as revealed to Harb in an interview by one of the experts involved who chose to remain anonymous for security reasons. The team drew inspiration from the models of media strategies developed during the anti-imperialist struggle in Vietnam and Granada. Individuals such as Muhammad Haidar or Nayef Krayem who had served as head of Al Manar TV were closely connected to Hizbullah with Haidar being a member of the Political Bureau and Krayem having previously headed the "Education Mobilisation" program of the organisation. (Harb Z. , 2009) (Alagha, 2013)

By 2006, when Israel invaded Lebanon, the media had

become an integral part of the conflict with Israeli political analysts referring to the military invasion as “Israel’s first “media-tized” war”. (Harmon & Bowdish, 2018) The greater legitimacy that the Israeli narrative garnered on the international stage was upset by Hizbullah’s strategy which according to Zahera Harb, opted for “defensive as opposed to offensive, and integrative rather than subversive, forms of propaganda.” (Harb Z., 2009) One of the key elements of this was the use of what was described by the Al Manar and Hizbullah media personnel as “media traps”. (Harb Z., 2007) A “media trap” referred to the release of footage of actual military engagement captured by the cameramen working with the Resistance. The footage would be released to counter false claims made by Israel thereby clearly showing them to be lying especially when it came to admitting losses taken by the Israeli forces. This would not only erode Israel’s reputation as an invincible military power but also as a credible source of information. At present, the Palestinian Resistance are employing a similar strategy where both the claims made by Israel regarding what happened on October 7th, 2023 during the Operation Al Aqsa Flood as well as their declarations of military triumph in the Gaza ground invasion, have been consistently countered with actual camera footage released by Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, three of the several groups comprising the Palestinian Resistance that had launched the Operation Al Aqsa Flood. (El Internacionalista, 2023) (Harb H., 2023)

Apart from Al Manar, in June 2012, a second satellite television channel aligned with Hizbullah came into being which was named Al Mayadeen, meaning the “town square”. The channel was jointly founded by former Al Jazeera head in Lebanon, Ghassan bin Jeddou and Nayef Krayem, former head of Al Manar. According to Sayyid Ibrahim al-Musawi, head of Hizbullah’s Media Relations in 2013, Krayem had been earlier removed from the position of the director of Al Manar TV for publishing “without permission controversial material on the party”. (Alagha, 2013) While in the case of Al Manar TV, the ownership of the channel is very clear, the case of Al Mayadeen has been less so.

From its very inception, Al Mayadeen brought a more sophisticated and sleek presentation that had come to be associated with the Qatari-owned television channel Al Jazeera. Unlike Al Manar which has been branded as a terrorist propaganda outlet and banned in countries such as the United States, Canada, Germany and France, Al Mayadeen has so far enjoyed a wider reach despite being criticized by certain parties for giving a platform to “Hezbollah and Holocaust denial material” (Sacerdoti, 2022). It is often cited for news on regional developments and has on-the-ground reporters in countries outside the region such as in Russia, United States, Iran and Venezuela. One of its founders, Ghassan bin Jeddou had originally been part of Al Jazeera which he had resigned from owing to differences over the selective coverage of the Arab Spring on the channel. This had prompted the newly formed Al Mayadeen to be labelled as “anti-Al Jazeera”. (France24, 2012) While Al Jazeera had made its mark in the international arena by its journalistic line which at times stood in contradiction to the Washington Consensus, Al Mayadeen’s attention and coverage of radical movements and developments in the Global South, reveals an aspect of

international news which had remained ignored. Like Al Manar, Al Mayadeen too is available in English, French and Spanish apart from the Arabic version. The slogan of the channel is translated as “Reality as it is” and the channel identifies itself as a pan-Arab network with an audience in much of the Arab world. Their audience is not limited to Lebanon, where it certainly commands a considerable viewership but also has programmes that showcase developments in other parts of the world.

On Al Mayadeen’s website (<https://english.almayadeen.net/>), a statement on their public policy is laid out with great clarity. Apart from the expected avowals of commitment to professional ethics and rigour, certain statements reveal its ideological alignment with the Resistance against Zionism. For instance, the network states it “is keen on the solidarity of the Islamic world and communicates with the world from the position of affiliation.” (Al Mayadeen) Solidarity is extended to the oppressed “wherever they are.” (Ibid.) The network rejects discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion or sectarian grounds and then goes on to explain its perspective on the national liberation of Palestine.

“Our network sees the Palestinian issue as a title of national liberation, and its presence is central to our channel. Our network deals with the Palestinians as one people whether they are at home or in the diaspora, and perceives them as a whole, including the Palestinians of the forty-eight lands. The file of prisoners inside “Israeli” prisons has received constant attention and has been widely covered by Al Mayadeen.

Our network rejects any foreign domination and supports the right of people to resist occupation, especially the “Israeli” occupation of Palestine and the Arab lands.” (Al-Mayadeen, Al Mayadeen- About Us)

It should be noted that “Israeli” is mentioned within quotation marks that goes against the global trend of normalization of the continued occupation of Palestinian territories. Furthermore, this is in keeping with the awareness of the way language is employed that Media Relations arm of Hizbullah had demonstrated from a very early stage. Mouafaq Jammal, the Press Officer of the organization from 1996 to 2000, had told Harb in an interview in 2000 about the importance of language in countering Israeli propaganda.

“We were aiming to try to convince media organizations worldwide to change the term terrorists into fighters seeking to liberate their own occupied land, the word gangs into resistance groups, the phrase terrorist attacks into resistance operations. (Harb Z., 2009)

The news available on both Al Manar and Al Mayadeen covers events occurring across the globe with particular attention to resistance movements. Owing to this, videos released by the Palestinian Resistance or Ansar Allah in Yemen are regularly published on the websites of these networks. In Occupied Palestine, Hamas has a channel called Al Aqsa TV launched in 2006 ([https://www.elahmad.com/tv/alaqsa\\_tv\\_live.php](https://www.elahmad.com/tv/alaqsa_tv_live.php)) which broadcasts solely in Arabic. The videos of the Palestinian Resistance engaging with the Israeli army in Gaza that are first published on this channel are then picked up by Al Mayadeen, thereby reaching a wider audience. Speeches of Abu Obaida, the spokesperson of the Al Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, are



reported through Al Manar and Al Mayadeen. In the videos released by Hamas, they often use red triangles pointing downwards to mark out the Merkava tanks or Israeli soldiers that were attacked by Hamas fighters. These red target symbols have now become a symbol of resistance against the Zionist occupation in social media networks particularly in the Arab world. (Figure 1) Similarly, the Ansar Allah in Yemen has a website in Arabic (<http://ansarallah.com/>). They also had a spate of YouTube channels which were removed by Google in 2021. (Middle East Monitor, 2021) At present, Yemen has garnered a lot of attention owing to its principled stance related to blocking Israeli ships or ships headed for Israel as a deterrent to the Israeli genocide of Palestinian civilians in Gaza. It is through Al Mayadeen that statements from the Ansar Allah are published which are then picked up by other news networks.

Sebastian Morales in his study of the alternative media emerging from the Global South, has pointed out that increasing number of collaborations can be found taking place between news networks such as RT (Russia), CGTN (China), Telesur (Latin American network based in Venezuela) and Al Mayadeen (pan-Arab network based in Lebanon). (Morales, 2022) To this list can be added PressTV (<https://www.presstv.ir/>), Iran's first international news network broadcasting in English that was launched in June 2007. Such collaborations while still lacking the reach and credibility of news networks such as the British Broadcasting Corporation or Fox News, are fast becoming the foundation of a counter-hegemonic perspective that can frame international events beyond the influence of the Western powers. This was revealed in a farcical manner when the website X (formerly known as Twitter), newly-acquired by the billionaire Elon Musk, began to identify accounts held by news outlets from countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, as "State-affiliated media". Earlier this was done to news outlets from Russia or China alone. The uproar from Western news portals was such that NPR (United States) and CBC (Canada) even ended up suspending their accounts for a while. This label was later changed to "Government-funded" and then finally X chose to do away with such labels altogether, be it for Chinese or American news organisations. (Levenson, 2023)

Since July 2023, Al Mayadeen has entered an agreement with the Venezuelan television channel, VTV, whereby the Venezuelan show 'Con Maduro Mas' (With Maduro and More) is broadcast on Al Mayadeen as well. This is a weekly programme which has the Venezuelan president discuss issues of the day and where he addresses the people directly. (Al-Mayadeen, 2023) By streaming the show in the Arab world, Al Mayadeen would allow the audience to learn about the Latin American country and society from a perspective different from that of the United States and Europe.

In 2013, Al Mayadeen had participated in Cuba's Radio and Television Festival. In December 2023, the network has signed an agreement with Aleida Guevara whereby she would host a show called 'Simply with Aleida Guevara'. This show will cover current events as well as personal reminiscences. In a statement, the network declared, "Once

again, the pan-Arab channel Al Mayadeen offers its platforms to Cuba and its revolution.... the voice of the Cuban woman, internationalist and revolutionary will reach Arab and Latin American audiences through its screen, websites and social networks." (Al Mayadeen English, 2023)

Julian Assange in his interview of Hasan Nasrallah in 2012, had added almost as a provocation, "Why do you think the US government is so scared of Al Manar?" At the time, the Secretary General of Hizbullah had replied,

"They want to be able to tell people that Hizbullah is a terrorist... is a terrorist organisation, it kills and it murders, but they won't let people listen to us. For example, if there was a just trial then at the very least the defendant should have an opportunity to defend themselves, but the... but the US administration... We are accused but we don't even have that very basic right, which is to defend ourselves and to give our argument to the peoples of the world. So, they are preventing this voice from reaching." (Episode 1: Nasrallah)

At a time when the world is witnessing a shift in long-established power balances, Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah, recognized as leader of a terrorist organization in the United States and the United Kingdom, made a speech in early November after the launch of the Operation Al Aqsa Flood by the Palestinian Resistance. His much-anticipated speech was covered not only by Al Manar or Al Mayadeen, but news outlets such as the BBC and the CNN. While coverage of the speech in the West was framed by the Washington attitude towards the Lebanese Resistance, on the internet, users could live stream the speech or watch a recorded version on Al Mayadeen, Al Manar, Al Jazeera or PressTV. One can only speculate on how well the United States administration's efforts to block Al Manar are going.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Funding :** The author has not received any grant or financial support for this research.

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