



1999

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## Recommended Citation

Kraidy, M. M. (1999). State Control of Television News in 1990s Lebanon. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76 (3), 485-498. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909907600306>

NOTE: At the time of publication, author Marwan Kraidy was affiliated with the University of North Dakota. Currently (March 2013), he is a faculty member at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

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## **Abstract**

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## **Disciplines**

Communication

## **Comments**

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## STATE CONTROL OF TELEVISION NEWS IN 1990s LEBANON

Marwan M. Kraidy

Since the official end of the war in 1990, Lebanese news media have been affected by several regulatory, political, and economic factors. This article analyzes state attempts to control television news and political programs in postwar Lebanon. Internal factors motivating control include media regulation and political struggles between the regime and its opponents, and between government branches. External factors include the strategic position of Lebanon's media in the Arab world, Lebanon's political and economic dependence on some Arab regimes, and the advent of pan-Arab satellite broadcasting. Direct and indirect forms of control are discussed.

As the financial and publishing center of the Middle East, pre-war Lebanon enjoyed a thriving press and numerous publishing houses. The Lebanese press has occupied a central role in the Arab world since the nineteenth century. It was at the forefront of the political struggles that rocked the Middle East such as the Arab struggle against the Ottoman empire, Arab nationalism, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was due to the fact that the Lebanese capital was a safe haven for Arab dissidents, since it was in Beirut that "most of the books the Arab world read were published under the protection of the only Arab government that allowed freedom of the press."<sup>1</sup>

The 1974-1990 war undermined Lebanon's role as a regional press center, but the country nevertheless witnessed a proliferation of unlicensed private broadcasting resulting in more than 100 radio stations and 50 television stations. In 1990, Lebanese legislators and warlords met in the Saudi Arabian city of Taef to bring the war to an end, under Arab sponsorship and backing from the United States. Among other measures to end the war, the resulting Taef Agreement called for the regulation of broadcasting.<sup>2</sup> Since then, numerous conflicts have opposed the administration and private media over state attempts to control news and political programs on television.

The central regional role the Lebanese news media have occupied since Ottoman times has now been given renewed vigor by the advent of satellite television. Because of their regional importance, Lebanese news media are subjected to various political, ideological, and financial influences, both from within Lebanon and from Arab countries. This paper analyzes state attempts to control television news and political programs during Lebanon's first postwar decade. It provides a case study of the mixed blessing enjoyed by news media—based in a small country with relatively high levels of media freedom— whose influence reaches beyond national borders into countries which impose stricter control over their media. After tracing the development of Lebanese news media from the seventeenth century into the 1974-1990 war, the impact of the war on news media is examined. Post-war official attempts to control news and political programs are analyzed and discussed.

This paper is based on research conducted by the author between 1992 and 1998, using three methods: (1) in-depth interviews with Lebanese journalists and broadcasters, (2) review of the Arabic, French, and English language Lebanese press, (3) review of research on Lebanese media and society, published in the United States, France, and Lebanon. In addition, recorded television programs from Lebanon complemented the results gleaned from the three sources mentioned above. No systematic monitoring services such as the BBC Monitoring Reports were used in this research because the emphasis is not on television programming content, but on events that determined the relationship between the state and the news media in Lebanon.

## Constitutional Protection of Press Freedom

After being part of the Ottoman empire for several centuries, Lebanon reverted to a French mandate after the First World War. It gained independence from the French in 1943, although the Lebanese constitution was passed in 1926. The 1926 constitution declared Lebanon a democracy, with separate government branches whose roles are defined as follows: legislative power lies within a unicameral assembly, the Chamber of Deputies. Executive power is held by the President of the Republic, elected to a nonrenewable six-year term by the Chamber of Deputies. Judicial power is exercised by independent judges in courts of different orders. All citizens aged 21 and older, male or female, are entitled to vote.<sup>3</sup>

The Lebanese constitution guarantees the rule of law, civil liberties, and religious freedom. Article 8 states that "individual liberty is guaranteed and protected," and Article 9 stipulates that "liberty of conscience is absolute ... the state respects all creeds and guarantees and protects their free exercise." Perhaps most significant is Article 13: "[F]reedom of expression by word or pen, freedom of thought, freedom of holding meetings and freedom of association are equally guaranteed within the framework of the law."<sup>4</sup>

## The Lebanese Press

The first movable type printing press was introduced to Lebanon by Christian Maronite monks in 1610, and the first newspaper, *Hadikat al-Akhbar* [The News Garden], was published in 1858.<sup>5</sup> European efforts to protect Lebanese Christians under nineteenth-century Ottoman rule gave the Lebanese press a relatively high level of freedom, since Christians were active in Lebanese journalistic circles. Consequently, a variety of newspapers and magazines reflected the religious, political, and cultural pluralism of the population. Between 1870 and 1896, Lebanon witnessed the birth of the first political, literary, and scientific magazine; the first children's magazine; and the first women's magazine in the Arab world.<sup>6</sup>

Lebanese journalists were instrumental in creating and sustaining an anti-Ottoman intellectual and political current in the Arab world. As a result, Ottoman repression made Lebanese journalists flee to Egypt in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. There, they resumed their professional activity with such vigor that by the early 1880s, two-thirds of Alexandria's press and one-third of the Cairo press were owned and operated by Lebanese journalists.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Lebanese expatriates launched several anti-Ottoman dailies in Paris, London, New York, and Sao Paolo.<sup>8</sup> Lebanese journalists worked freely in Europe and the Americas, but the Lebanese press community in Egypt was subjected to Ottoman-sponsored harassment. In 1892, for example, malcontents set fire to the offices of *Al-Ahram* [The Pyramids], a leading Arabic-language daily launched in Egypt in 1875 by Lebanese brothers Salim and Bishara Takla. Those who set the fire were probably angered by the newspaper's systematic criticism of Ottoman policies. To this day, *Al-Ahram* [The Pyramids] is one of the Arab world's most influential dailies.<sup>9</sup>

With the beginning of the twentieth century, a strong press activity returned to Lebanon. Khalidi writes that in the period between 1908 and 1914, the period when Arab nationalism emerged as an organized political movement, more than sixty newspapers were established in Beirut alone.<sup>10</sup> The advent of the First World War brought Ottoman persecution culminating in 1916 with the public hanging in Beirut of sixteen intellectuals and journalists, including al-

'Uraisi, *al-Mufid*'s 25-year-old editor.<sup>11</sup> These events testify to the important role played by the Lebanese press and Lebanese journalists in the Arab world.

After Lebanon gained independence in 1943, press restrictions diminished and newspapers and magazines multiplied. Many Lebanese publications were sponsored by foreign, mainly Arab, powers, and the proliferation of outlets reduced advertising rates to unsustainable levels.<sup>12</sup> This situation of foreign political patronage and poor commercial performance prompted legislation in the early 1960s to limit the number of publication licenses to twenty-five political dailies and twenty weeklies. The 1962 Press Law protected freedom of the press, but it also provided sanctions ranging from financial penalties to imprisonment of editors for abuses such as insulting heads of states or stirring sectarian upheaval.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1974-1990 war, some journalists and publishers were harassed for publishing material offensive to local and regional powers.<sup>14</sup> In 1980, two prominent Lebanese journalists were assassinated. Throughout the war, the Lebanese press was subjected to political and financial pressure. The pressure continued in the postwar period. At the same time, the provision of the press law limiting the number of publication licenses was rarely implemented. As a result, fifty-three dailies, forty-eight weeklies and four monthly magazines, all licensed, appeared in Lebanon in the early 1990s, in addition to more than 300 nonpolitical publications.<sup>15</sup>

### **Broadcasting in Lebanon**

Whereas radio in Lebanon was initially state-run, Lebanese television has been a private enterprise since its 1956 debut, unlike most other Arab television systems.<sup>16</sup> In 1977, the merger of two television stations formed half private and half state-owned *Télé-Liban*.<sup>17</sup> Unlicensed war-time Lebanese broadcasting was sustained by taxes levied by militias in the enclaves under their control and by the desirability of alternatives to unreliable state-sponsored media. Initially subsidized as political mouthpieces, some broadcasting outlets achieved commercial solvency because of a strong advertising market.<sup>18</sup>

### **State Attempts to Control War News**

Since the 1960s, the Ministries of the Interior and of Information have monitored television to keep information detrimental to national security off the airwaves.<sup>19</sup> This trend continued during the 1974-1990 war, when government officials instructed television executives to restrict information on the war.<sup>20</sup> This kept citizens uninformed of key events: the 1974 shooting of a Palestinian bus in a Beirut suburb by Christian Lebanese nationalists, one of the catalysts of the war, was not announced on the evening news of the half-private, half-government-owned television, nor on state-owned radio. The immediate result of this failure to report was the slaying of a Christian student who, unaware of the event, drove through a Palestinian camp where he was captured and murdered.<sup>21</sup> As a consequence of such incidents, the Lebanese turned to unlicensed radios and to the Arabic services of *Radio Monte-Carlo* and the *British Broadcasting Corporation*.<sup>22</sup>

### **Factors Affecting State Control of Post-War News and Political Programs**

Before the war, control of news was limited to national security issues such as sectarian tension, attacks on Arab heads of state, and information about Israel. During the war, official

authority disappeared as militias governed territorial enclaves like small states within the state. After the war, broadcasting regulation became a government priority and was closely followed by the media. It is at this historical juncture that state attempts to control news and political programs became official and systematic.<sup>23</sup> Control was motivated by internal and external factors.

**Internal Factors.** The necessity to regulate the chaotic broadcasting landscape in the country resulted in heightened control over media content, including news. This occurred simultaneously with attempts to control politicians opposed to the socio-economic policies of the al-Hariri Cabinet to receive a wide audience.<sup>24</sup> Another important internal factor consisted of political struggles between the executive and legislative branches of government, where Prime Minister al-Hariri and Speaker of the House of Deputies Berri fought for influence over broadcasting regulation.<sup>25</sup> In 1994, the Chamber of Deputies passed the "Audio-Visual Law" to regulate broadcasting in Lebanon.

**Regulating Chaos.** A plethora of unlicensed private media risked adding to wartime national disintegration because they might broadcast programming to stir sectarian tensions, or give news coverage a sectarian slant. Besides, unlicensed broadcasting was reminiscent of the wartime anarchy when the government relinquished control of all administrative, regulatory, and law enforcement activities to militia warlords. Furthermore, economic and technical factors prompted broadcasting regulation. Media proliferation reduced advertising revenues, caused interference on the airwaves, and posed a threat to aviation and navigation.<sup>26</sup>

**Controlling Opposition.** In 1993 and 1994, several newspapers from across the ideological divide were suspended for allegedly disparaging government officials, a punishable offense according to the 1962 Press Law. According to Middle East Watch, a division of Human Rights Watch, between 29 April and 28 May 1993, the government shut down three dailies and one television network.<sup>27</sup> On 23 March 1994, the Council of Ministers adopted a resolution prohibiting privately owned radio and television stations from broadcasting news and political programs. At the same meeting, the Council of Ministers outlawed the Lebanese Forces, the predominantly Christian political party and owner of the *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation*. The *LBC* was and remains the country's top private television station, and was critical of the Lebanese regime and of Syria's role in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup>

Following a 27 February 1994 church-bombing, *LBC* aired video clips branding the government as anti-Christian. The Council of Ministers banned the Lebanese Forces because of their alleged involvement in the bombing, although the Lebanese Forces denied the charges. At a press conference largely attended by the foreign press, the Lebanese Forces' leadership denounced what it called the "large set-up" mounted against its party. *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], Lebanon's leading French-language daily, revealed that the *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation* was threatened with a shut down by the Council of Ministers if it aired the Lebanese Forces' press conference. The television station was pressed to broadcast a statement expressing its support of "all decisions taken by the Council of Ministers to reinforce peace and security in the country."<sup>29</sup> The *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation* complied and issued a "communique" affirming its obedience to government decisions and its appreciation of Syria's role in Lebanon.<sup>30</sup> This signaled the fading of *LBC*'s overtly belligerent position towards the regime, while Lebanese Forces' leaders were subsequently cleared of the bombing charges.

**The Political Struggle over Broadcasting Regulation.** On 14 July 1994, the Lebanese House of Deputies unanimously voted against the 23 March 1994 Council of Ministers resolution banning news and political programs on privately owned broadcast media. A 15 July

1994 headline in *Nida' al-Watan* [The Call of the Nation], a Christian Lebanese nationalist daily, succinctly summarized the feelings of the press and media community: "House avenges broadcasting."<sup>31</sup> Prime Minister al-Hariri was accused of collusion and conflict of interest, since he owned substantial stakes in television and radio stations. He was at the same time instrumental in their regulation.<sup>32</sup>

*The Audio-Visual Law and Broadcasting Restructuring.* On 19 October 1994, the Chamber of Deputies passed the "Audio-Visual Law." This legislation provided a comprehensive regulatory framework for private broadcasting, reaffirmed freedom of information within the framework of the constitution, and established the National Council of Audio-Visual Media (NCOAVM) with the task of laying down technical conditions, monitoring broadcasting, and recommending sanctions when violations occur.<sup>33</sup>

The reaffirmation of freedom of information was a positive step. The law divided television and radio stations into four categories, restricting news and political programs to First Category stations. It also stipulated sanctions for the violation of its provisions and of other Lebanese laws, including the 1962 Press Law. The Audio-Visual Law provided other positive requirements such as the one mandating news bulletins to be objective and inclusive.<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the Audio-Visual Law was criticized by journalists and politicians for ambiguous wording in key provisions. The requirement that news and political programs could not disturb "public order, national defense requirements and the public interest"<sup>35</sup> was ambiguously worded. One of the law's most worrisome provisions was Article 47, which stipulated that "by request from the Ministry of Information, the National Council of Audiovisual Media practices censorship over television and radio stations."<sup>36</sup> Other critiques were leveled at the enhanced power of the Information Minister, since the NCOAVM was largely consultative.

On 2 February 1996, the Lebanese Council of Ministers restructured private broadcasting upon recommendations from the NCOAVM. Television stations were reduced from sixty to four, and radio stations from 150 to ten.<sup>37</sup> The Cabinet justified its decision by arguing that other stations did not meet "financial and technical criteria" that the Cabinet had not clearly spelled out, which led to charges of favoritism and unfair treatment by applicants that were denied licenses.<sup>38</sup> The Cabinet granted licenses to Prime Minister al-Hariri's *Future* television, Deputy Prime Minister's family's *Murr Television (MTV)*, and *LBC*, which had become the *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI)* after a capital expansion that brought regime officials onto its board of shareholders, and finally *NBN*, a station which did not exist at that time, owned by Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Nabih Berri. The *National Broadcasting Network (NBN)* began broadcasting in August 1997.<sup>39</sup>

The restructuring of broadcasting was not immediately implemented. All television and radio stations in Lebanon remained in operation for several months after the decision was announced. However, on 18 September 1997, unlicensed stations were ordered to immediately stop broadcasting news and political programs. The Council of Ministers granted an exceptional status to *al-Manar* [The Lighthouse] television, owned and operated by Hizbollah, an Islamic party. *Al-Manar* was allowed to broadcast news about anti-Israeli resistance in South Lebanon until Israel withdrew from the Lebanese land it occupied. This decision was motivated by the fact that Lebanon is officially in a state of war against Israel, and by the government's official support of Hizbollah's armed resistance activities against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon.<sup>40</sup>

**External Factors.** External factors also influenced state attempts to control news and political programs on television. The first was the influence of Lebanon's media in the Arab

world. The second was the advent of pan-Arab satellite broadcasting and the ensuing loss of control over broadcasting by Arab governments.

*Lebanon's Media in the Arab World.* As mentioned earlier, Lebanon's media have a strategic importance in the Arab world.<sup>41</sup> Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser was said to have read the Lebanese press before reading Egyptian newspapers, in order to gain insights into regional affairs on any given day.<sup>42</sup> More than twenty Lebanese dailies are read in Arab countries, and "seven or eight [newspapers] have for years distributed more outside the country than inside Lebanon."<sup>43</sup> Although the 1962 Press Law banned attacks on foreign heads of states, many Arab leaders were criticized in Lebanese newspapers. As a result, Arab governments frequently pressured Lebanese authorities to muzzle the press, and Lebanese newspapers were banned in Arab countries in times of political instability.<sup>44</sup>

Broadcasts from Lebanon's private television stations spilled over the borders of Jordan, Israel, Syria, and Cyprus.<sup>45</sup> Like the press, Lebanese television often scrutinized Arab leaders. Postwar Lebanese authorities feared a negative fallout of news and political programs critical of Arab regimes. Politically, Lebanese officials could not tolerate embarrassment by private media questioning the role played by Syria, the main power-broker in post-war Lebanon. Economically, dissenting opinions critical of government performance could have a negative impact on Arab and foreign investment in Lebanon's reconstruction drive. In this way, the regional success of Lebanese media paradoxically contributed to increased control on their activities, a trend also exacerbated by the arrival of satellite television broadcasting to the Middle East.

*Satellite Broadcasting from Lebanon.* Concerns about the impact of Lebanese media outside of the country dramatically increased with the advent of satellite television broadcasting in the Arab world. The *Middle Eastern Broadcasting Center* and the Egyptian government satellite channel started a booming satellite industry.<sup>46</sup> Competing governments and business interests, from the Arab world and beyond, rushed into a race to control and distribute information and entertainment beamed to more than 300 million Arabic speakers across the Arab world.<sup>47</sup>

In Lebanon, the 1994 Audio-Visual Law provided for television stations that "transmit via satellite and whose coverage exceeds the Lebanese territory."<sup>48</sup> On 12 December 1996, the Council of Ministers gave satellite licenses to *Future* television and the *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International*, allowing both stations to broadcast news and political programs after official clearance.<sup>49</sup> Both stations' broadcasts via ARABSAT-2A became popular throughout the region.<sup>50</sup>

Lebanon's two satellite stations had divergent editorial policies. Whereas *Future*, owned by the Lebanese Prime Minister, *de facto* opted for an editorial policy loyal to the Lebanese administration, *LBCI* remained critical of the regime.<sup>51</sup> *Future's* news programs focused on the perceived success of the regime's efforts to rebuild Lebanon's infrastructure and bring the country back to its pre-war financial, cultural, and intellectual regional preeminence. Optimistic prognostications painted a picture of a country briskly rising from the ashes of war. The clip that signaled the beginning of programs every morning, "al-Balad Mashi W'al-Shoghel Mashi" [The country's fine, and work/business is good] became associated with people's perspectives on the regime, which was perceived to be falsely pretending the country was in the best possible shape.<sup>52</sup>

*LBCI*, on the other hand, was critical of government performance. Its newscasts and programs highlighted Lebanon's socio-economic problems and criticized the regime's heavy-handed methods with the media and labor unions. When *LBCI* broadcast a March 1997 interview

with a legal expert who questioned media repression in the Arab world, security forces interrupted their satellite connection.<sup>53</sup> As of early 1998, official complaint against the government by *LBCI* with Lebanon's highest court, the Shura Council, is still pending.<sup>54</sup>

A live *LBCI* interview with Roger Tamraz, a Lebanese financier wanted in Lebanon for embezzlement and for contacts with Israel, triggered another crisis with the government. Tamraz, now a citizen of the United States, gained fame in the United States when Senate investigations in 1997 linked him to the White House campaign finance scandal. After the interview, *LBCI* executives were summoned for questioning by Lebanese judiciary authorities.<sup>55</sup> The judge in charge of the matter later declared that *LBCI* had not violated any laws because the interview was featured as a media scoop and was not meant to promote a Lebanese fugitive who collaborated with Israel.<sup>56</sup> Lebanese journalists and broadcasters told this author that the regime's main concern was that *LBCI*'s satellite programs were "harming Lebanon's image abroad."<sup>57</sup> Public statements by members of the regime indicated that they wanted *LBCI* to comply with the government's "unified political discourse" preserving a "balance between depicting Lebanon's democratic nature and not harming its relations with neighboring nations."<sup>58</sup>

A series of state attempts to control television news and political programs ignited some of post-war Lebanon's biggest controversies. A December 1997 attempt by the Information Ministry to ban *Murr-Television* from airing a live interview with opposition leader in exile Michel Aoun led to several days of civil unrest and massive student demonstrations.<sup>59</sup> To justify his action, Information Minister Bassem al-Sabaa invoked concerns for "civil peace, Lebanon's economic interests, Lebanon's relations with brotherly Arab countries," and for "public order and national safety."<sup>60</sup> Further attempts to ban live interviews with opposition politicians were carried out in 1998, and the Lebanese government banned the broadcasting via satellite of all news and political programs, while at the same time lifting all restrictions on news and political programs broadcast within Lebanon.<sup>61</sup> In other words, the regime allowed news to carry dissenting voices domestically in order to prevent them from reaching beyond national borders.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Lebanese wartime media anarchy necessitated regulation because of technical, political, and commercial reasons. However, a closer look at political and media events during the 1990s suggests that the Lebanese administration crossed the boundaries of law enforcement and became authoritarian in its dealing with the news media, violating articles in the Lebanese constitution that protect freedom of speech and of the press. Therefore, internal and external attempts by the state to control news and political programs in post-war Lebanon can be grouped into two categories: direct and indirect. Direct control involved explicit executive instructions to the news media from the Cabinet or the Information Minister, and direct technical intervention. Indirect control consisted of the convergence of political power and media ownership, which in effect narrowed the range of mass mediated public discourse on the country's airwaves.

**Direct Control.** Direct attempts included decisions by the Council of Ministers to ban news and political programs from private television and radio stations, such as the March 1994 decision. These decisions were often followed by campaigns of harassment against news media that did not comply with government instructions. Another form of direct control included direct intervention from the Information Minister. A case in point is the ban of Aoun's interview on *Murr Television* in December 1997. The Lebanese government also resorted to direct technical

intervention to block television stations from airing newscasts and political programs critical of the regime. The most flagrant example of direct intervention is when government agents physically interrupted *LBCI's* earth station link in March 1997. Direct attempts to control news and political programs thus ranged from intimidation to state-sponsored vandalism.

**Indirect control.** Indirect forms of control of news and political programs are perhaps more threatening to democratic life and public opinion in the country, since they are often not visible to the public. These include a political monopoly over the media and various levels of economic controls.

The political monopoly over Lebanese media is transparent. Three out of four licensed private television stations are owned by prominent members of the regime. Prime Minister al-Hariri owns *Future Television*, the family of Vice Prime Minister al-Murr owns *Murr Television*, and Speaker of the House of Deputies Nabih Berri owns the *National Broadcasting Network*.

*Future's* newscasts are favorable to the regime, and political programs aired by the station publicize and defend the Prime Minister's political and economic agenda. Satellite broadcasts are a systematic public relations campaign to persuade Arab business interests and members of the large Lebanese diaspora to invest in Lebanon's ambitious reconstruction drive. News bulletins and political programs on *Murr Television* and the *National Broadcasting Network* are not as subservient to the administration as *Future's*, but they usually avoid direct criticism unless their interests are immediately threatened, such as when the Information Ministry banned *MTV* from broadcasting Aoun's interview. News and political programs on all three stations are thus indirectly controlled by government interests.

Since its September 1996 capital expansion, the *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International* has been indirectly controlled by a variety of interests, including members of the current regime.<sup>62</sup> The presence of several prominent politicians on *LBCI's* board of shareholders explains the station's repeated challenges to state attempts to control its newscasts and political programs: such controls constitute a financial threat since news generates large advertising revenue. In fact, in its complaint to Lebanon's highest court against the state, *LBCI* did not invoke any political or ideological grievances. Rather, the station cited threats to its professional credibility and its inability to bring scoops as its main grievances.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the other three private stations, *LBCI's* editorial policy is affected primarily by economic factors, while political factors are sometimes relegated to second place.<sup>64</sup> This has the potential to lead to compromised reporting on political issues in order to preserve profits.

The Lebanese news media have opposed state control attempts with some success. Nevertheless, in 1998, eight years after the official end of the war, it appears that Lebanon's authorities have violated democratic principles in order to control news and political programs opposed to their policies. The election of Emile Lahoud to the Presidency of the Lebanese Republic in November 1998 has sparked positive developments concerning the media and freedom of expression. In his inauguration speech, President Lahoud vowed never to bring charges against journalists for criticizing the regime and affirmed that his regime will protect media freedom. No incidents of media harassment have been recorded, and the Cabinet, led by Prime Minister al-Hoss, has promised to reopen the "broadcasting file" and look into complaints of impartiality, even hinting that more television stations may be awarded licenses.<sup>65</sup>

Future research should investigate whether media control in Lebanon during the 1990s was a temporary consequence of the state of war, or a more permanent situation. If state control of the news media becomes permanent, Lebanon may eventually relinquish its position as the leading democracy and news media center in the Arab world. This would be unfortunate at a

time when some other Arab countries are experimenting with varying degrees of media freedom and democratic reform.<sup>66</sup>

## NOTES

1. Sandra Mackey, *Lebanon: Death of a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 9.
2. Marwan Kraidy, "Broadcasting Regulation and Civil Society in Post-War Lebanon," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 42 (summer 1998): 387-400.
3. George Bustros, trans. *The Lebanese Constitution* (London: Bureau of Lebanese and Arab documentation, 1973).
4. Bustros, *The Lebanese Constitution*.
5. Elias Elias, *The Arab Press* (in French) (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1993), 40.
6. Krikor Mouradian, *Mass Media Functions: Mass Communication Elements in Lebanon* (in Arabic and French) (Beirut: Lebanese University Press, 1981).
7. Elias, *The Arab Press*, 40.
8. Elias, *The Arab Press*, 45-46.
9. Elias, *The Arab Press*, 34.
10. Rashid Khalidi, "The Press as a Source for Modern Arab Political History: Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraisi and *Al-Mufid*," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3(winter 1981): 22-42, (23). Khalidi proceeds with an analysis of *al-Mufid*, a Beirut-based newspaper that attracted a regional audience with its Arab nationalist "stirring editorials" (27). Also see Khalidi's "The Role of the Press in the Early Arab Reaction to Zionism," *Peuples Méditerranéens* 20 July-September 1982): 105-123.
11. Khalidi, "The Press as a Source for Modern Arab Political History," 22-42.
12. Nabil H. Dajani, "Press for Rent," *Journal of Communication* 25 (spring 1975): 165-70. In the decades following Lebanese independence, various Arab regimes sponsored Lebanese newspapers to gain influence over Lebanese affairs. According to Dajani, "Press for Rent," these included Egypt, who was becoming the main regional power, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, Lebanon's neighbor to the North and East. Lebanese-Syrian relations were tumultuous after Lebanon's independence, which was seen by Syria as an imposition by the French. During the 1974-1990 war in Lebanon, some parties sought Syria's support while others opposed Syrian intervention in Lebanon. Syria is the main power-broker in postwar Lebanon, and, according to Iliyya Harik, Syria enjoys "complete hegemony" over Lebanese affairs. See "Pluralism in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (July 1994): 43-56. As a consequence, Lebanese-Syrian relations are treated with caution in the Lebanese press.
13. Baha Abu Laban, "Factors in Social Control of the Press in Lebanon," *Journalism Quarterly* 43 (autumn 1966): 510-18.
14. In *Disoriented Media*, Dajani records several of these incidents ranging from threats and other intimidation tactics to arson of editorial offices, to physical attacks by hired thugs, and culminating with some assassinations such as Salim al-Lawzi's, publisher of *al-Hawadess* [The Events], who was found murdered.
15. Nabil Dajani, *Disoriented Media in a Fragmented Society: The Lebanese Experience* (Beirut: The American University of Beirut Press, 1992),45.

16. Jean-Claude Boulos, *Television: What a Hi/story!* (in French) (Beirut: Fiches du Monde Arabe, 1996), 34. Whereas Lebanese television was initially a business-state partnership, a private company started television broadcasting in Morocco in the 1950s.

17. Boulos, *Television: What a Hi/story!*.

18. Boulos, *Television: What a Hi/story!*; Douglas Boyd, "Lebanese Broadcasting: Unofficial Electronic Media During a Prolonged Civil War," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 35 (summer 1991): 269-87; Kraidy, "Broadcasting Regulation." For exact advertising expenditure figures, see "Who spent what, where and how? *Arab Ad*, January 1994, 8. This article in *Arab Ad*, the leading advertising trade publication in the Arab world, reports that advertising spending in Lebanon alone amounted to one tenth, or U.S. \$60 million, of the U.S. \$600 million spent in Persian Gulf countries whose economies and populations are larger than Lebanon's.

19. Boulos, *Television: What a Hi/story!*; in the context of Lebanon, the vague concept of "national security" usually refers to information that has one of the following effects: (1) threaten economic stability, (2) incite sectarian, religious, or racial hatred, (3) attack Lebanese or foreign heads of state or (4) encourage contact with Israel. These concerns and others were formulated in the 1994 Audio-Visual Law in the following prohibitions: "Not broadcasting any matter or commentary seeking to affect directly or indirectly the wellbeing of the nation's economy and finances," "Not broadcasting and not transmitting any matter seeking to inflame or incite sectarian or religious chauvinism, or seeking to push society, and especially children, to physical and moral violence, moral deviance, terrorism, or racial and religious segregation," "Not broadcasting any slander, disparagement, defamation, or falsities about natural or juridical persons." For more, see "Lebanon: Restrictions on Broadcasting: In Whose Interest?" *Human Rights Watch*, vol. 9, no. 1. (New York: Human Rights Watch, April 1997).

20. Browne, "Television and National Stabilization: The Lebanese Experience," *Journalism Quarterly* 52 (winter 1975): 692-98.

21. Boulos, *Television: What a Hi/story!* The first armed conflicts of the war in Lebanon occurred between Palestinian militias and Christian Lebanese paramilitaries.

22. Boulos, *Television: What a Hi/story!*, and Boyd, "Lebanese Broadcasting."

23. The word "official" is used here to indicate that decisions to control the news media were made during meetings of the Lebanese Council of Ministers, therefore involving all ministers, rather than upon instructions from lower ranking officials in the Ministry of Information. The word "systematic" is used because officials' attempts to control the news media occurred repeatedly.

24. The Lebanese Prime Minister and sources close to him repeatedly justified attempts to control new reports critical of the government's neoliberal economic policy based on privatization of state assets and on luring foreign investments, by claiming that media criticism of these policies may negatively affect foreign investment and hinder the reconstruction drive. Another often-cited justification for control advanced by authorities is the alleged necessity to maintain a "unified political discourse," a vague term that could be used to justify clamping down on opposition voices. See "Censorship: LBCI Appeals to the Shura Council" (in French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 28 March 1997, p. 2, and "al-Sabaa: Compliance With A Unified Political Discourse and Allowing Télé-Liban to Broadcast Via Satellite," *As-Safir* [The Ambassador], 24 December 1997, p. 7.

25. This struggle is partly explained by the fact that al-Hariri, as the most prominent Sunni Muslim politician, and Berri, as the most prominent Shii Muslim politician, struggled over

the leadership of the entire Muslim community in Lebanon. A nonwritten rule in Lebanese politics stipulates that the President of the Republic always be a Maronite Christian, the Speaker of the House always be a Shii Muslim, and the Prime Minister always be a Sunni Muslim. In addition, the struggle of the two leaders was also motivated by their plans to secure broadcasting outlets of their own before the then-impending regulation of broadcasting. For more on this issue, see Marwan Kraidy, "The Struggle Over Media Freedom and Broadcasting Regulation Between Berri and Hariri in Lebanon" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the AEJMC, Washington, DC, 1995).

26. Economic problems mainly consisted of a temporary disarray in the Lebanese advertising industry because of dangerously low advertising rates. Technical problems included gridlock on the airwaves and interference with telecommunications. For a detailed analysis of these issues, see Kraidy, 1998, "Broadcasting Regulation."

27. According to a July 1993 Middle East Watch/The Fund for Free Expression report, the Independent Communications Network (ICN) television and the right-of-center *Nida' al-Watan* [The Call of the Nation] daily, both owned by Henry Sfayr, a Maronite Christian politician, were shut down because of critical coverage of the government; *As-Safir* [The Ambassador], a left-of-center daily and one of Lebanon's most influential dailies, was shut because of its critical coverage of Gulf regimes whose capital was needed for Lebanon's postwar reconstruction; and *al-Sharq* [The Orient], a pro-Syrian daily that was shut (only for two days) for publishing a cartoon poking fun at President Hrawi's family. See "Lebanon's Lively Press Faces Worst Crackdown Since 1976," *Human Rights Watch*, vol. 5, no. 2 (New York: Middle East Watch and The Fund for Free Expression, Divisions of Human Rights Watch, July 1993).

28. The *Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation* began broadcasting in August 1985 and was the first privately owned television station to broadcast nationally during the 1974-1990 war. Audience surveys have consistently given *LBC* the largest share of the Lebanese audience. The station underwent a major capital increase in 1995 for technology upgrades and expansion of its ownership to position itself as a serious contender for the licensing process mandated by the "Audio-Visual Law." See "Lebanon's Top Private TV Raises \$30 Million Capital," Reuters, Beirut, 6 September 1995.

29. "No More Newscasts On Private Media" (in French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 21 March 1994, p. 1.

30. "Communiqué by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) March 24, 1994," *The Beirut Review* 7 (summer 1994): 167.

31. "House Avenges Broadcasting" (in Arabic), *Nida' al-Watan* [Call of the Nation], 15 July 1994, p. 1. Lebanese broadcasting regulation was closely covered in the Arab press: see Samir Atallah, "The Ballot on Lebanese Media" (in Arabic), *Asharq al-Awsat* [The Middle East], 16 July 1994, p. 2. A detailed analysis of this political struggle is found in Kraidy, "The Struggle Over Media Freedom and Broadcasting Regulation Between Berri and Hariri in Lebanon."

32. Mark Dennis, "If You Can't Beat 'em Buy 'em: Lebanon's Hariri Tries Both," *Columbia Journalism Review* (May/June 1994): 17-18.

33. "An Audio-Visual Law at Last in Lebanon: But Are Key Aspects Still Missing?" *Arab Ad*, December 1994, 37 - 41.

34. "An Audio-Visual," 38.

35. "An Audio-Visual," 38.

36. "An Audio-Visual," 38.

37. "Lebanon to Slash Private Broadcasters," Reuters, Beirut, 7 February 1996.

38. These charges were most clearly spelled out and explained in a booklet published by *New Television* (NTV), initially affiliated with the Lebanese Communist party. Titled *New TV: An Identity for Lebanon* [In Arabic] (Beirut: New Television, 1994), the booklet contained direct accusations of collusion and conflict of interest against leading Lebanese politicians involved in broadcasting regulation, in addition to a review of NTV's editorial stand on various political and social issues, characterized by their general opposition to al-Hariri's policies.

39. Kraidy, 1998, "Broadcasting Regulation."

40. Media, *Future News* (September 1996) (<http://www.future.com.lb/future/news>).

41. See Iliyya Harik, "Pluralism in the Arab World," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (July 1994): 43-56. Also useful in this regard are Abu Laban, "Factors in Social Control"; Boulos, *Television: What a History*; Boyd, "Lebanese Broadcasting"; Kraidy, "Broadcasting Regulation"; Mackey, *Lebanon: Death of a nation*; and Rugh, *The Arab Press*.

42. Abu Laban, "Factors in Social Control."

43. Rugh, *The Arab Press*, 91.

44. Abu Laban, "Factors in Social Control."

45. Badran Badran, "Christian Broadcasting in the Eastern Mediterranean: The Case of Middle East Television," *Gazette* 47 (1991): 33-46.

46. See F. Hift, "London-Based TV Service Beams Up News in Arabic," *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 April 1993, p. 14; M. Barkey, "Satellite TV: On the Eve of Revolution," *Arab Ad*, January 1996, 12-14; J. Millichip, "Sand Castles: Special Satellite Middle East," *TV World*, April 1996, 45-50; and J. Tagliabue, "Tapping the Power of Satellite: Three Broadcasters aim for Arabic Speakers around the World," *New York Times*, 15 April 1996, sec. C, pp. 1 and 10.

47. Tagliabue, "Tapping the Power."

48. "An Audio-Visual," 39.

49. "Council of Ministers Agrees on Leasing Two Channels for Satellite Broadcasting" (in Arabic), *An-Nahar* [The Day], 12 December 1996, p. 3.

50. According to a Pan Arab Research Center-Gallup International (PARC-Gallup) study conducted in Saudi Arabia in December 1996 and January 1997, *LBCI* had six of the ten most popular programs there (see "Television-February 97," *Arab Ad*, June 1997, 118-24. Another 1997 survey found that the three most popular satellite stations in the Arab Middle East were *MBC* (first), *Future* (second), and *LBCI* (third). They ranked ahead of *Dubai TV*, *Orbit*, *Arab Radio and Television (ART)*, and Egypt's government service. Non-Arab services such as *CNN* and the *BBC* ranked respectively ninth and tenth (see Interwood Marketing Group Consumer Study, 1997). These studies indicate that Lebanon's two satellite stations are popular with Arab audiences.

51. H. Rizk, "Between Democratic Media and Media Democracy" (in Arabic), *An-Nahar* [The Day], 4 February 1997, p. 19.

52. As recorded by the author.

53. "And Now ... Preventive Censorship" (in French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 29 March 1977, p. 2.

54. "Censorship: LBCI Appeals to the Shura Council" (in French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 28 March 1997, p. 2.

55. Joe Saadé, "LBCI Faces Legal Quiz Over Tamraz Talk Show," *The Daily Star*, 11 November 1997 (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/11-11-97/art2>), and Sabine Darrous, "LBCI

Chairman Summoned to Face Addoum: Satellite Channel Head Faces Questions Over Tamraz Talk Show," *The Daily Star*, 12 November 1997 (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/12-11-97/art2>).

56. Sabine Darrous, "Tamraz Interview Is No Grounds For LBCI Prosecution," *The Daily Star*, 18 November 1997 (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/18-11-97/art6>).

57. Joe Saadé, veteran journalist, former director of the News Department, *Télé-Liban*, editor, *Lebanon Opportunities*, interview with the author, 8 August 1997; Joseph Khalil, director and producer, Murr Television, interview with the author, 14 December 1998.

58. "al-Sabaa: Compliance With A Unified Political Discourse and Allowing *Télé-Liban* to Broadcast Via Satellite," *As-Safir* [The Ambassador], 24 December 1997, p. 7. By "neighboring nations" or "friendly neighboring nations" government officials refer to Syria, the main power broker in Lebanon, and Persian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait who have some of most sizable investments in Lebanon's reconstruction projects.

59. Sabine Darrous, "MTV Pressured to Pull Plug on Aoun Interview," *The Daily Star*, 12 December 1997, p. 1; "Government Prevents Broadcasting of Aoun's Interview On MTV" (in French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 12 December 1997 (<http://www.lorient-lejour.com.lb/12-12-11>). Michel Aoun, former Commander of the Lebanese Army, was appointed interim Prime Minister of a military cabinet on 22 September 1988 by outgoing President Amin al-Gemayyel, because of the failure of the House of Deputies to elect a new president. Aoun refused to recognize the Taef agreement which he considered to be imposed by foreign powers and signed by corrupt politicians. In spite of popular support, the constitutionality of Aoun's cabinet was contested and on 13 October 1990 he was ousted into forced exile in France by forces loyal to the Taef regime supported by Syrian troops.

60. "al-Sabaa: No Censorship on Media Freedom and Satellite Issue Will Enjoy 'Home' Treatment" (in Arabic), *An-Nahar* [The Day], 22 January 1997, p. 4; "Confrontation Escalates Between Information Ministry and LBCI" (in Arabic), *An-Nahar* [The Day], 23 January 1997, p. 6.

61. "The Satellite Broadcasting Ban" (in French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 9 January 1998 (<http://www.lorient-lejour.com.lb/1-9-6>).

62. "Lebanon's Top Private TV Raises \$30 Million Capital."

63. "Censorship: LBCI Appeals to the Shura Council," p. 2.

64. The Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC, later the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International, or LBCI) has been run as a commercial enterprise alongside having been a mouthpiece for the now disbanded Lebanese Forces. For example, in spite of the fact that the Lebanese Forces had a declared Christian Lebanese Nationalist agenda, the station has offered special Ramadan programming during Islam's holy month, yearly. By doing so, the station built an audience among Lebanon's Muslim communities. In that sense, economic considerations (achieving the largest audience ratings possible) superseded strictly political considerations (catering to Christians and disseminating the Christian Lebanese Nationalist message).

65. In the first months of his mandate, President Lahoud repeatedly stated that his regime will fully protect media freedom and that he would personally not file libel complaints against journalists who attack him. See, for example, Nafez Kawas, "Lahoud Vows Never to Sue Press," *The Daily Star*, 30 December 1998, p. 1. The announcements that the government planned to open television and radio license applications were made amidst a more comprehensive administrative reform agenda that the Cabinet of Prime Minister al-Hoss is conducting, where several high-ranking officials from the al-Hariri administration have faced charges of corruption

and cronyism. See Nafez Kaway, "Cabinet Gets the Ball Rolling on Long-Awaited Reform Program," *The Daily Star*, 31 December 1998, p. 1; Marlin Dick, "Cabinet to Discuss Media Issues," *The Daily Star*, 30 December 1998 (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/30-12-98/art6>); and "Information Reform Concerns Broadcasting" (In French), *L'Orient-Le Jour* [The Orient-The Day], 24 December 1998.

66. See Orayb Aref Najjar, "The Ebb and Flow of the Liberalization of the Jordanian Press," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 75 (spring 1998): 127-42; and Harik, "Pluralism in the Arab World."