



## AWOL in the War of Ideas

[Clifford D. May](#)

Colaboraciones n° 774

January 30, 2006

It is one thing to tell the truth even when it damages your friends. It's another to tell untruths in order not to offend your enemies. It's one thing to give the devil his due. It's another to do the devil's public relations.

How else to explain a dispatch from the Associated Press referring to Osama bin Laden as "an exiled Saudi dissident"? Such spin may not be inaccurate but it's like calling Jeffery Dahmer an "eccentric gourmet." It rather misses the point, don't you think?

Similarly, a recent report on National Public Radio discussed how dangerous Iraq is for journalists. The blame was placed on "the nature of this war" and "the security situation." No criticism of Militant Islamist cut-throats and car bombers was voiced.

And, of course, Reuters, the British wire service, has decreed that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." In Reuters corporate eyes, even the attacks on the World Trade Center can not be called terrorism.

Such relativism is common in academia as well as in journalism. The other day, on a BBC radio show, I debated Dr. Hooshang Amirahmadi, a professor from Rutgers University. His argument: The way to settle the conflict with Iran is for the U.S. to re-open full diplomatic relations. If President Bush would only reach out to the regime in Tehran, he'd find there have been misunderstandings, that both sides have made mistakes, and that there is ample room for compromise.

In response, I began to read verbatim quotes from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and other

Iranian rulers about their lethal intentions toward the U.S., their genocidal plans for Israel, their hostility toward "Anglo-Saxon civilization."

Professor Amirahmadi objected that scholars and journalists must not take such remarks seriously. He suggested it was either unsophisticated or unfair of me (maybe both) to repeat such statements on the air.

It's tempting to dismiss such attitudes as simply the foolishness of the chattering classes. But the West is in the middle of a World War of Ideas -- a conflict as consequential as the war of arms. For intellectuals to retreat to a Switzerland-of-the-mind will have consequences. And their declaration of neutrality comes at a time when the enemies of the Free World are bringing out the big guns.

Take, for example, al-Manar, an elaborate Lebanon-based satellite television station owned by Hezbollah (the terrorist organization second only to al-Qaeda in number of Americans it has killed) and financed by the Militant Islamists of Iran. Every day, al-Manar blatantly incites terrorism against Americans, Israelis and Jews.

As one al-Manar official was candid enough to tell terrorism expert Avi Jorisch, the station attempts to "help people on the way to commit what you in the West call a suicide mission."

A concerted effort by the Coalition Against Terrorist Media (CATM), an association of Muslim, Christian, Jewish and secular groups, working

in partnership with the U.S. and European governments, has succeeded in removing al-Manar from eight satellite providers -- ending its broadcasting to North America, South America, Asia, Australia and parts of Africa, all regions where Hezbollah terror cells are known to have a strong presence.

But two satellite providers continue to broadcast al-Manar to Europe and throughout much of the Middle East and North Africa. One is owned by the Egyptian government -- the recipient of billions of dollars in U.S. aid. A second satellite company has as its largest shareholder the Saudi government -- which spends millions of dollars to run television ads in the U.S. proclaiming itself America's "ally against terrorism."

Hamas, the Palestinian terrorist group backed by Iran, also is launching its own television station, one that is meant eventually to reach target audiences around the globe. And Qatar-based al-Jazeera -- moderate by contrast to al-Manar but always the first to broadcast al-Qaeda's messages -- is now employing such media stars as Dave Marsh, until recently a regular on ABC News' Nightline, and the veteran British journalist, David Frost. Marsh and Frost are lending their credibility to the cause of Militant Islamism -- whether they admit that or not, whether they understand that or not.

"If you hamper the war effort of one side, you automatically help out that of the other. Nor is there any real way of remaining outside such a

war as the present one. In practice, 'he that is not with me is against me.'"

It wasn't George Bush who said that. It was George Orwell.

*[Clifford D. May](#), a former New York Times foreign correspondent, is the president of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies a policy institute focusing on terrorism.*



<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/>