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A Look At The Arab Media Spectrum

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There's been a good amount of buzz in the media world lately about some of the less traditional, and ever more popular, ways of finding coverage of the Middle East conflict. YouTube video clips, for example, which carries footage from news reports from various Arab, Israeli and American outlets, are all the rage. Why is everyone so hopped up about this development?

A conversation about media coverage of the conflict on PBS' NewsHour might offer some insight. Lawrence Pintak, a former CBS News correspondent who covered the Middle East and currently teaches at the American University in Cairo, told moderator Jeffrey Brown that the American media smorgasbord doesn't offer nearly enough:

"We talk about this plethora of prisms now in the Arab world with this media revolution, but Americans in many ways still live in an information ghetto, because we are not seeing the images coming out of the Arab world.

Arabs, if I stood at home in Cairo, I have 300-odd stations. I

can watch Al-Jazeera. I can watch Al-Arabiya. I can watch Al-Manar. I can watch CNN, and the BBC, and FOX News, and MSNBC. So an Arab can surf across the spectrum. Americans can't."

Of course, many of those outlets aren't shy about promoting their agendas — Al-Manar, for example, is run by Hezbollah (The Wall Street Journal - subscription req. - has a detailed profile of the network today that is well worth a read.) But the existence of a breadth of different options is in itself an advantage for viewers. Donatella Lorch, a former NBC and New York Times correspondent said this:

"We also have to talk a bit about the uniqueness of this coverage, more so now because of satellite television, because of the plethora of satellite television available in the Middle East, and because of the access to both sides of the conflict, you have access, very, very good access on both sides, both Lebanon and Israel sides, very different from Iraq, very different from Afghanistan.

Jamal Dajani, the director of Middle East programming at LinkTV, which according to its



(AP Photo/ Mohammed Zaatari)

Web site, produces programs that "provide a unique perspective on international news, current events, and diverse cultures, presenting issues not often covered in the U.S. media," noted one other big difference between Arab and American media:

"... there is a major difference between the coverage on what we see here on American TV here and the amount of time that has been spent — camera time to the superstar anchormen there on the ground rather than the story itself, where the Arab networks focus on the story itself, and the damage that is caused by the war, and the stories of the individuals affected by that."