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## ***Lebanese journalists defy Israeli threats to expose the truth***

Despite constant death threats and targeted airstrikes, Lebanese journalists Ali Mortada and Amal Khalil continue reporting from the frontlines, determined to share the reality of the battlefield, expose Tel Aviv's crimes, and challenge the narratives set by the occupation

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**If the Israeli army wants to stop my work and my voice with missiles, they will. But I will not stop my work because for me this war is a just cause.**

— Lebanese journalist Ali Mortada speaking to *The Cradle* on ۲۴ September

While reporting from south Lebanon for the past year, Mortada has received many threats, including directly from the Israeli army's Arabic language spokesperson, Avichay Adraee. "He put a tweet on his X account saying I'm not a journalist. I am a spy working for Hezbollah on the border," says Mortada, the *Al Mayadeen* field correspondent in south Lebanon, where Hezbollah fighters are fiercely resisting Israel's ongoing ground invasion and mass bombing campaign.

**The Israelis started to make online polls, asking people whether they should kill me today, or tomorrow. It was hard because we know they are not joking. There is a big probability they will do something.**

### **Hello my enemies**

The charismatic *Al Mayadeen* correspondent has become better known to western audiences recently due to his trademark greeting and informal, satirical social media videos directly addressing Israelis, including the army spokesman Adrae.

“Hello, my enemies, may you have a very, very bad day,” he says at the beginning of each video, at times filmed while lighting a cigar or walking on the beaches of the war-torn southern Lebanese city of Tyre (Sur).

Just one day after speaking to *The Cradle*, the occupation army murdered three journalists, including two of Mortada’s colleagues at *Al Mayadeen*, with an airstrike as they slept at a media guesthouse in southeast Lebanon.

“The 3 am airstrike turned the site – a series of chalets nestled among trees that had been rented by various media outlets covering the war – into rubble. Cars marked ‘PRESS’ were overturned and covered in dust and debris, and at least one satellite dish for live broadcasting was totally destroyed,” the AP reported.

The strikes killed camera operator Ghassan Najjar and broadcast technician Mohammed Rida of *Al Mayadeen TV*, and camera operator Wissam Qassim, who worked for Hezbollah-affiliated *Al Manar TV*.

Mohammad Farhat, a reporter from *Al Jadeed TV*, says everyone awoke in a panic and rushed outside in their sleeping clothes. “The first question we asked each other: ‘Are you alive?’”

“The journalists thought they were safe because this south Lebanon area wasn’t in Israel’s evacuation zone,” PBS journalist Leila Molana-Allen wrote on the social media site X.

Molana-Allen, who is also currently reporting from Lebanon, said the journalists had given details of their movements to UN peacekeepers to send to the Israeli military.

“Turns out the IDF [Israeli military] used that info to bomb them while they were all inside asleep,” Molana-Allen reported.

Lebanon’s Minister of Information, Ziad Makary, called the Israeli attack “an assassination, after monitoring and tracking, with premeditation and planning, as there were 14 journalists present at the location representing seven media institutions.”

### **Bombing *Al Mayadeen* HQ**

Just one day before Mortada's conversation with *The Cradle*, the Israeli air force bombed the *Al Mayadeen* headquarters in the Bir Hassan area of Beirut.

"Thank God no employees were there. We knew it was a high probability they would hit our offices, so we had a security strategy and thank God we didn't have any casualties in that attack," Mortada says.

Almost exactly one month before the journalists' guesthouse was bombed, Israel killed another *Al Mayadeen* journalist, Hadi al-Sayyed. He died from his injuries on ٢٤ September, one day after an Israeli airstrike on his house in Srifa in the Tyre district.

Sayyed's home was hit as part of a massive terror bombing campaign launched by Israel on ٢٣ September.

Israeli warplanes dropped bombs, killing ٤٩٢ people, including ٣٠ children and ٠٨ women while wounding ١,٦٤٠ others in just one day.

According to the AP, it was a "staggering one-day toll for a country still reeling" from Israel's pager and walkie-talkie terror attacks targeting Hezbollah members, primarily from its civilian wing, the week before.

### **Journalists under Israeli fire**

Lebanese journalists had already been working for almost a year under the shadow of Israel's killings of *Reuters* video journalist Issam Abdullah on ١٣ October ٢٠٢٣ and *Al Mayadeen* journalist Farah Omar, her cameraman Rabih al-Maamari, and their assistant Hussein Akil on ٢١ November ٢٠٢٣.

All four were killed reporting from the Lebanon-Israel border area after the war between Hezbollah and Israel began on ٨ October, the next day after the launch of the Palestinian resistance Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and Israel's ensuing war on Gaza.

A *Reuters* investigation concluded that Abdullah was killed and six others injured when Israeli troops fired two tank shells directly at a group of journalists from *Reuters*, AFP, and *Al Jazeera* who were filming at an open spot one kilometer from the border.

*Al Mayadeen's* Omar, Maamari, and Akil were killed by an Israeli airstrike while reporting from Tayr Harfa, an area about ١,٦ kilometers from the Israeli border.

"It was a direct attack, it was not by chance," the outlet's director Ghassan bin Jiddo said, noting that the Israeli government had blocked the channel from broadcasting in Israel one week before.

An Israeli warplane fired two rockets on the journalists' location just after they ended a live broadcast giving updates on the latest Israeli bombardment in south Lebanon.

“I cried with overwhelming sadness at the enemy’s treachery because Farah, Rabih, and Hussein were in an open area that I had reported from in the previous month and a half,” Lebanese journalist Amal Khalil informs *The Cradle*.

“Their car was clearly marked showing they were from the press and there were no fighters or military men with them,” explains Khalil, who has worked at Lebanese newspaper, *Al-Akhbar*, as their south Lebanon field correspondent for the past 11 years.

### **Killing to control the narrative**

A week before her three colleagues were killed, Khalil herself survived an Israeli attack. She was in a compound for journalists in the village of Yaroun when it was targeted by two rockets from an Israeli drone. One of her colleagues was injured when they were showered with dust and pieces of rock from the explosion, as Khalil reveals:

**Whether we were targeted or saw our colleagues Farah or Issam killed, we did not stop our work or take any time off. We consider it a tribute to Farah and Issam and Rabih and a spite to Israel that we continue our work. Israel’s goal is to kill journalists and force them to leave the south. They want to empty it of journalists so there are no pictures so they can control and manipulate the narrative just as they did after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood in Gaza.**

“Of course, Israel kills journalists in Lebanon because they want to hide their crimes against women and children and civilians and their destruction of homes and burning of farmers’ fields. They don’t want their crimes confirmed in words and pictures. They want the world to believe they are targeting military sites, rather than civilians,” Khalil adds.

Like Mortada, Khalil has received direct, personal threats from Israel to intimidate her into stopping her reporting.

On 20 August of this year, she received a message sent to her phone from an Israeli number saying:

**We know where you are, where you and your family live. If you want your head to remain attached to your body, you must leave Lebanon.**

Khalil asserts to *The Cradle* that:

**Israel threatened me because my work is a challenge to them and is proof of the crimes they have committed since the first day of the attack that began on 7 October on the south. For the past year, I was present in the field. I kept publishing stories of resilience and challenges to the Israeli enemy from the border villages and front lines. I published pictures from my own camera of how the Israelis were destroying and burning houses and killing children and women.**

## **The making of a war journalist**

Khalil displays remarkable courage in reporting from the warzone despite never wanting to be a war journalist.

When the ۲۰۰۶ June War erupted between Hezbollah and Israel, she was living a comfortable life in cosmopolitan Beirut, writing for *Al-Akhbar* about women and social issues.

**On the first day of the war, I decided at that moment to return to my village in south Lebanon. Shortly after, Israel began bombing all of the bridges and highways to cut the connections in the region. But I had decided to stay in the south no matter what, both to be with my family and to do humanitarian and human rights work with the displaced. I did these things in addition to my work as a journalist.**

When the ceasefire was announced ۳۳ days later, the *Al-Akhbar* editor made her the paper's south Lebanon field correspondent.

“So it was the June war in ۲۰۰۶ that determined my fate that I would become a war journalist. I did not make the decision to become the field correspondent in south Lebanon. I only made the decision to become a journalist and a writer in Beirut,” she tells *The Cradle*.

She has remained in that post ever since, allowing her to gain an intimate understanding of the geography, history, and people of the area. Her relationships across south Lebanon help her navigate the danger, document the aftermath of Israeli bombing, and find leads for the most compelling stories.

## **Unwavering commitment to reporting**

*Al-Mayadeen*'s Ali Mortada also has years of experience reporting from warzones.

When asked by *The Cradle* what motivates him to keep reporting even after so many colleagues have been killed, Mortada says, “First of all, it's my job; I did that in Syria, I did that in Iraq, I did that in Beqaa when the fighting was against terrorists [ISIS, the Nusra Front]. And I did it now in this mission against Israel.”

While Israel has invaded Lebanon many times directly before now, including in ۱۹۷۸, ۱۹۸۲, and ۲۰۰۶, it also attacked Lebanon and Hezbollah indirectly using proxies, including militant groups linked to Al-Qaeda.

As part of the covert US-led war on Syria starting in ۲۰۱۱, Israel supported so-called “rebels” seeking to overthrow the Syrian government, including the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and the Al-Qaeda offshoots, the Nusra Front and ISIS.

Nusra and ISIS sought to infiltrate and invade Lebanon through areas in Lebanon's eastern Bekaa Valley but were defeated by Hezbollah and the Lebanese Army.

Mortada adds that the second reason he continues reporting from south Lebanon now is because:

**It's my country, it's my people, those are the houses of my relatives. I've lived here all my life. I am Lebanese, so I have a duty to report until the last breath that I take. Especially because we have a big problem of how to put the story out to the world. We have so few journalists and channels that report the reality as it is and don't spread Israeli propaganda. So, it is a national duty. It comes with the job.**

#### **Losing the propaganda war and on the battlefield**

According to Mortada's assessment of the ongoing war between Hezbollah and Israel in the south, he tells *The Cradle* that Tel Aviv has not been able to achieve either of the goals Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has declared:

**Netanyahu made it a goal to take the towns south of the Litani River, and he wants to return the settlers to Israel's north. But the fact is that he has been fighting for ۳۰ days and he is stuck in the first line of defense that Hezbollah made in the south.**

Mortada says the Israeli military has no good options and is being dragged into the "quicksand of Lebanon" as their losses in dead and injured soldiers and destroyed tanks mount.

Israel has failed to return the settlers, while Hezbollah's rocket, missile, and drone attacks on Israeli military bases and infrastructure have forced even more to evacuate, including from as far south as Haifa.

"On top of that, Lebanon has hit the bedroom of Netanyahu," Mortada says, referring to the bold Hezbollah drone attack that successfully hit the Prime Minister's residence in Caesarea.

#### **Even Netanyahu cannot sleep in his own bedroom now after the military operation in Lebanon.**

"So this gives us an idea that Hezbollah took a blow to the head," when its leader Hassan Nasrallah and other top commanders were assassinated, "but it is still standing and is hitting back and its situation is very, very good on the battlefield," he concludes.

Regarding the ongoing war, Khalil was also optimistic, despite the many painful losses Lebanon is now enduring.

She recalls what she witnessed first-hand in ٢٠٠٦, when “Hezbollah fighters were victorious against the invading and occupying forces. They are sons of the land who know its terrain and know how to fight and execute operations.”

**Hezbollah is the resistance in southern Lebanon. It has once again succeeded in defeating Israel on the ground. Israel is superior to us in the air; they are always bombing us with artillery and airstrikes. But in direct confrontations the soldiers of the Israeli enemy are weaker when confronting the men of the resistance and the people of the region.**

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