

UAE PRINTING INDUSTRY SET TO REACH Dh. 10b

DUBAI — Gulf Print 2007 will be held from April 2 to 5 at Dubai International Convention and Exhibition Centre as the UAE has emerged as the regional hub for publishing, printing and advertising.

The thriving printing industry in the UAE has an approximate annual growth of 20 per cent and its value is estimated to reach Dh10 billion by 2008 according to research.

Shuaa Capital Research estimates that the printing and publishing sector within the Middle East will be worth approximately \$1.7 trillion by 2008.

Moreover, in 2005, expenditure in the Gulf on advertising alone grew by 15 per cent, exceeding \$4.5 billion and this rate of increase is expected to continue to reach \$5 billion by 2007.

Lina Alousta, sales director of Gulf Print, commented, "A major contributor to the success of Gulf Print is the continued growth within the advertising, publishing and printing industries, in conjunction with the evolving hardware and software packages entering the market. Gulf Print is the largest event of its kind within the region and guarantees to bring the latest innovations to the region to support this fast growing industry."

The participants at Gulf Print will include Heidelberg, a one-stop shop supplier of every category of printing solutions, from pre-press solutions to a wide range of products for printing and finishing processes. 2007 will be the third consecutive year they will be exhibiting at Gulf Print.

Layout Middle East, who has witnessed the fast paced growth of Gulf Print over recent years, will be presenting the following software packages: QuarkXPress and ArabicXT version 7 — the world's most popular publishing software.

Source: Khaleejtimes

WEAPONS OF WAR: OPEN SEASON ON JOURNALISTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

After the carnage of this past weekend, they would seem to fade almost into insignificance — and that's understandable, but they bear noting.

The Israeli destruction of TV transmission towers in Lebanon and an attack on a media convoy in south Lebanon are emblematic of a grim fact: the media have become targets — and weapons — of war.

The pen may be "mightier than the sword," but in recent years, the sword has left a trail of spilled ink — and blood. It is time for an international law banning targeted attacks on the media.

In the Middle East, the conscious targeting of journalists appears to have become an accepted part of war. The Israeli destruction of the transmission towers of several Lebanese channels, including that of Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV, and the convoy attack carry the markings of the ongoing campaign against news organizations by virtually all of the protagonists of the region's many conflicts. Its precedent was the 1999 NATO/US attack on Radio Television Serbia, which killed 19 staffers.

The targeting of "enemy" broadcasts is nothing new. It dates back at least to World War II. Nor are reporters around the world strangers to retribution. The history of journalism in Lebanon itself is littered with the bodies of reporters who angered the powers-that-be. Even foreign reporters sometimes fall victim.

As a Beirut-based correspondent in the 1980s, I had to leave the country for a year after death threats from a pro-Syrian militia; one of my cameramen was literally blown in half, the sound technician killed and the driver crippled by an Israeli tank shell fired directly at them; and several of my friends ended up hostages of Hezbollah or its allies.

What has changed in recent years is the degree to which the media as a whole has specifically and systemically become a "legitimate" target of war. In Beirut in the 1980s, we were kidnap targets because we were the last Americans in town. Now, reporters are targeted because they are reporters.

Further complicating the situation is the nature of live televi-

sion itself. Real-time broadcasts from the battlefield can compromise military operations and endanger troops. Yet that argument can also provide convenient cover for darker motives. Silencing reporters from independent – or semi-independent – news organisations because they are inconveniently showing the bloody outcome of war or refusing to parrot the official line is a dangerous development – for reporters and for democracy.

In the Middle East, this new era can be traced to the U.S. bombing of Al Jazeera's bureaus in Kabul and Baghdad. At its root is the power of satellite television. Warts aside, the reality is that until Al Jazeera came along in 1996, the term "television journalism" was an oxymoron in a region where all television and most of the print media was controlled by governments. Arabs depended on Western broadcasts for their "independent" information.

Al Jazeera changed the rules of the game. Suddenly, Arabs were seeing their region through an Arab prism. Many protagonists found that very inconvenient.

The US destroyed Al Jazeera's Kabul bureau at the beginning of the Afghan war when the channel was one of the few news organizations in the Afghan capital. Al Jazeera was providing footage that directly contradicted US claims that civilians weren't being harmed. The same thing happened during the Iraq invasion, but this time other Arab broadcasters were hit as well. As Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ron Suskind reports in his book about the secret war, in the aftermath of the Kabul bombing, "Inside the CIA, and the White House, there was satisfaction that a message had been sent to Al Jazeera."

Countless similar messages have been sent in the years since. Whatever the source – whether governments or insurgents of various stripes – the central theme has been the same: Report the way we want you to or you will not be allowed to report at all.

That attitude was summed up by the top US military spokesman on Iraq, Maj. Gen. Mark Kimmett, who told reporters during the invasion, "The stations that are showing Americans intentionally killing women and children are not legitimate news sources."

The question, of course, becomes: Who decides what is "legitimate?" Just last year, Syrian President Bashar Al Assad was fulminating over coverage of anti-Syrian protests in Beirut. Not long after, a leading Lebanese TV anchor had her arm and leg blown off in an assassination attempt and the country's top editor was killed.

Today, there is – as the International Federation of Journalists put it – "the appalling perception" that journalists from many of those same news organisations are in Israel's gun-sights.

The Israeli government said it bombed three sets of telecommunications towers deep in the Christian heartland to cripple Hezbollah cell phone communications. But the attacks, which killed one technician and injured another, came just days after Israeli helicopters rocketed the Beirut headquarters of Al Manar, the controversial Hezbollah television station, wounding seven people.

At about the same time, a convoy of reporters from several Arab satellite channels was attacked by Israeli jets. "Their cars were clearly marked 'Press' and 'TV,'" Nabil Khatib, executive editor of Dubai-based pan-Arab channel Al Arabiya, told the Committee to Protect Journalists. Israel says it was "targeting the roads because Hezbollah uses those roads."

Al Manar is a mouthpiece for Hezbollah, but several of the other Lebanese and pan-Arab channels affected in these incidents have taken strongly anti-Syrian and anti-Hezbollah positions over the past year. Their initial coverage of the crisis condemned Hezbollah's actions, but as the Israeli response intensified, their reporting, complete with graphic images of the carnage, has become strongly critical of the Jewish state and what is widely seen as America's cynical support for the Israeli assault.

There is no doubt; south Lebanon's roads have become highways of death. And cell phones have become a strategic tool. But the incidents must be seen in the context of what the International Federation of Journalists has called a "pattern of targeting" of journalists in recent weeks.

Al Jazeera has long operated with relative freedom in Israel (the dirty little secret of this conflict, which the US media rarely talks about, is that all reporters in Israel are subject to strict military censorship). But since the conflict began, its correspondent has twice been detained by the Israeli military and one of its camera crews was fired on.

There has also been a string of other incidents in both Lebanon and Gaza. The "appalling perception is of soldiers opening fire on unarmed journalists and of intimidation of Arab journalists to keep them from covering the news in the Palestinian territories and in Lebanon," says IFJ General Secretary Aidan White.

The latest incident came Thursday, when a cameraman for Palestine TV was seriously wounded when his team was fired on with rubber bullets.

"We were wearing vests indicating that we were media workers," said one of those involved. "But an Israeli army tank located 150 meters away began firing towards us. We began to run but the shots continued."

Meanwhile, threats from various Palestinian factions likewise make journalism in the Occupied Territories treacherous for Westerners and Arabs alike. In Lebanon, where Hezbollah dictates where the media can and cannot go, few are likely to forget it was Hezbollah itself that elevated the kidnapping of journalists to an art form. "The Party of God has a copy of every journalist's passport, and they've already hassled a number of us and threatened one," Time freelancer Christopher Allbritton recently revealed on his weblog.

War is dangerous. Journalists know the risks. But there is a big difference between being hit by a piece of shrapnel or catching a stray bullet and being purposely bombed, kidnapped or beheaded, the fate of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl at the hands of Islamist militants in Pakistan. In Iraq alone, some 74 media workers have been killed since the invasion, many in targeted assassinations. Even Arab channels like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya can no longer operate there because of attacks on their staff by various armed groups.

Journalists themselves bear some responsibility for this weaponization of the media. Flag-waving by the US media in the wake of 9/11 and a mirror-image mobilization among Arab journalists mean news organizations on both sides are seen to be part of the war effort. The historic concept of an independent media, reporting all perspectives without bias or distortion, was squandered. But that does not mean journalists deserve to die.

Reporters without Borders has called for an investigation of whether the Geneva Conventions have been violated in Lebanon. But there is plenty of wiggle room in current international laws. A Pentagon legal directive states, "Civilians and civilian property that make a direct contribution to the war effort may also be attacked..." In an age when satellite television transmits real-time images from the battlefield, and when media drives public opinion which itself drives policies of war and peace, clearer legal protections for journalists are required.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has in his hands a proposal for an international law that would make it a war crime to specifically target journalists. Events now unfolding in the Middle East underscore the urgency of its passage. Let's not be naive. The UN hasn't been able to protect itself – its Baghdad headquarters was leveled by a car bomb, four UN peacekeepers were killed last week in an Israeli attack on their base in south Lebanon, and the UN offices in Beirut and Gaza were sacked over the weekend. Besides, even mass murderers rarely face international justice. A UN resolution is not going to stop attacks on journalists by governments or non-state actors – but it will at least send a symbolic message back to those seeking to muzzle the press.

As Al Arabiya's Nabil Khatib, who has seen 11 of his staffers killed in Iraq alone, recently told me, "This, with time, could build momentum where insurgents or military will be less violent. Now they feel they have a free hand."

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