



MSNBC 'Nachman' for Sept. 20 (partial transcript)

Guests: Jamal Dajani and David Michaelis

ANNOUNCER: He's been everywhere. He knows everybody. And he rips the big stories wide open. And, oh yes, he's more than just another pretty face. He's Nachman, Jerry Nachman.

JERRY NACHMAN, HOST: Welcome to volume one, edition 49.

On page one this Friday: The showdown with Saddam, it's must-see TV in Arab countries, too. We'll show you Iraqi TV, Egyptian TV, Palestinian TV, and how they look at us.

Well, the winner of "American Idol" got a recording contract. The winner of "American Candidate" gets to run for president. We'll look at the new reality show that promises to produce a candidate in the year 2004.

And candidates for political office in one Southern state revealed their platform and a whole lot more.

My name is Nachman. And, ladies and gentlemen of North America and all the ships at sea, let's go to press.

It's the top story in America: whether the U.S. will go to war with Iraq. And with the saber-rattling and the war of words, we wondered how the story is being reported in the Arab world.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: The daily news program from WorldLink TV presents a selection of news reports from independent and state-controlled broadcasters from throughout the Middle East.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

NACHMAN: ... (Joining us are David Michaelis) and Jamal Dajani, who have been monitoring and retransmitting those broadcasts at WorldLink, gentlemen thanks for being with us.

JAMAL DAJANI, WORLDBLINK TV: Thank you for having us.

NACHMAN: David, I'll start with you.

Your station is providing a show that people who have DirecTV can pick up as part of their programming menu, right?

DAVID MICHAELIS, WORLDBLINK TV: Right.

It's a free channel, public service, to connect Americans to the world. We believe that Americans should know much more than they know right now about the world, because what they don't know will probably hurt them.

NACHMAN: All right. I would like to hear from both of you on this, but I'm going to go over to your partner, Jamal.

Jamal, do you produce any editorial filter of what is being transmitted by these various Arab-language networks?

DAJANI: Well, our show is really a raw-material show. We don't put in our own editorial input in it. We just pick the stories, the most watched stories in 22 countries that over a quarter-of-a-billion people are watching all over the Middle East.

And we believe that the American viewer, our viewers at WorldLink TV, they are intelligent enough to understand and decide for their own about the content of the story.

NACHMAN: Well, let's see, for example, how Lebanese TV covered a big story here in the U.S. And that was the Intelligence Committee hearings, with Donald Rumsfeld testifying.

If we can roll that tape.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, AL MANAR TV)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: For his part, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld accused Iraq again of...

(END VIDEO CLIP)

NACHMAN: OK, I noticed gentlemen that when a demonstrator attacked verbally the defense secretary, that seemed to be the only cut that Lebanese TV thought was important enough to transmit.

DAJANI: That was big news for the Arab world, especially for the Islamic world, to show that there is a voice of opposition in America, because everyone in the Middle East, they watched Bush's speech. And they have pretty much determined or pretty much came to the conclusion

that Bush is determined to invade Iraq. And so it was very important to show that there is some opposition in the United States.

NACHMAN: But, David, journalistically, isn't it co-equally important to show what the defense secretary actually had to say?

MICHAELIS: Well, we assume that our viewers go and look at WorldLink to see the foreign point of view. So the context of the Al Manar TV, for example, that you just showed to your viewers is Islamic voice as it's presented in Lebanon. So we believe that people can compare, themselves, the Middle East context to what they see on MSNBC.

NACHMAN: Jamal, your programming, this program "Mosaic" is dubbed in English. Is there somebody monitoring the translator to make sure it's a true rendition of what the Arab broadcasters are saying?

DAJANI: Yes, we do.

We actually-we air both. We air transmissions in English that these networks produced themselves. And then some of the networks who just have Arabic transmission, like the piece that you mentioned from Arab News Network, this is in Arabic. So we translated. I have a team at our production studio that translates it here. And then we put the voice-over and air it.

But at the same time, we watch the news that is aired in Arabic to compare if there is a difference in it. And, usually, it's just a condensed news report, lacking the local-a lot of the local happenings there. So they don't really give one news report for the American or the English-speaking viewer and one for the Arab world. It's pretty much the same story going all over the networks.

NACHMAN: David, the question I had when I first learned of this program-and I was a viewer of your network when I had satellite TV-was, do you include Israeli broadcasts in the Middle East feed?

MICHAELIS: Well, we are in negotiation with IBA, the Israel Broadcasting Authority. And we do include sometimes Israeli TV. We have a right to broadcast one minute, because, when you compare news, you can do it. But we hope, within the next few weeks, to have a full service of Israeli news.

NACHMAN: And I think, in addition to the issue of the propaganda value, it's probably very helpful to understand how the Arab world not only views us, but views its own internal issues.

I want to show a clip now that's from the Arab News Network showing the first day of school in Iraq. Watch that with me, please.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP, ARAB NEWS NETWORK)

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE (through translator): Iraqi schools open their doors to welcome students...

(END VIDEO CLIP)

NACHMAN: As we see, the kids come into school, presumably in Baghdad, on the first day of school. And we're going to see somebody holding up maybe a Kalashnikov rifle. And it turns out that that person is the teacher. There she is. And this is how kids start school on day one in Baghdad. And the track tells us that it's very customary at this school to accompany the flag-raising with rifle shots being fired in the air.

Am I retelling that correctly?

DAJANI: Yes, you are.

It's actually-when I saw this piece, I was really fascinated by it, because, for one thing here, we have all the rhetoric and the talk about the removal of Saddam Hussein or the Iraq regime. And very seldomly on our American media here there is any reporting about the civilian lives that are going to be lost, the children, and the way of life in the different Arab worlds.

And one thing I would like to point out, when people, if you want to call it surf the satellite television there in the Arab world, they are really flipping between countries. Unlike here in the United States, where you go from different networks, every time you flip that channel, you are either going to Iraq; you're going to Palestine; you're going to Syria; you're going to Egypt. And this is really something that most Americans don't understand.

NACHMAN: Well, it's interesting, Jamal. You got out of that what might happen to innocent civilians in Iraq. I got out of that, that that's an awfully militaristic country, where young kids are greeted at school by someone firing an automatic weapon in the air.

DAJANI: Well, it's actually both ways, because I look at it that I'm kind of like seeing, unfortunately to say, the future victims. But at the same time, I agree with you. The children are being used. They're being used as a propaganda campaign. This is how I look at it.

NACHMAN: A lot of people would say-without getting into a debate, Jamal-that their victimization may be at the hand of their leader, Saddam Hussein, as much as anyone else.

DAJANI: They're going to be victims. The victimization eventually is going to be the innocents. And this is how I look at it, whether, obviously-and even from the Arab-world perspective, no one is lining up in support of Saddam Hussein.

NACHMAN: OK, "Mosaic" on WorldLink Television is viewable at 3:00 and 11:00 Pacific time every day on your channel out there in San Francisco, which is 375 on your DirecTV clicker, right?

DAJANI: That's right.

NACHMAN: David Michaelis and Jamal Dajani, thanks for talking with us.