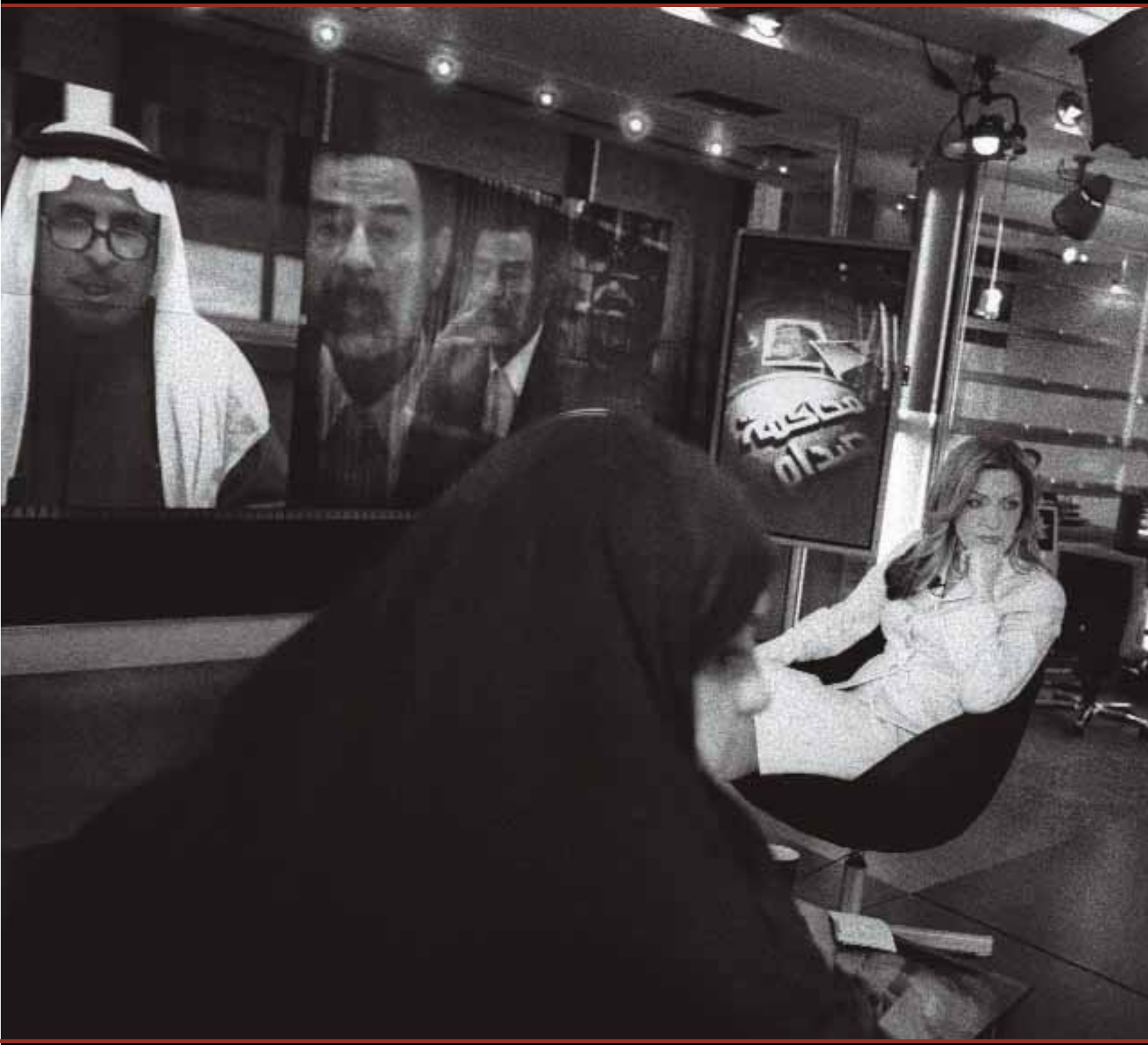
24/7

The Rise and Influence of Arab Media



A radio documentary from the Stanley Foundation
in association with KQED Public Radio

The dramatic expansion of open media in the Arab world is changing the political landscape of the region. For better or worse, the Internet and scores of Pan-Arab radio stations and satellite television channels are fostering the free flow of information and opinion in ways unthinkable two decades ago.

How does this rapidly changing spectrum impact the United States, the Middle East, and the world? Will it lead to greater understanding or fuel tension, fear, and hatred?

"24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media" examines these questions with reporting from across the region and analysis from a wide range of political and media experts.

Cover Photo:
Studio and newsroom at Al Arabiya television station. Dubai, UAE, March 2006. Antonin Kratochvil/VII for The Stanley Foundation

"24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media" is a one-hour radio documentary originally released nationwide in April 2006. The program is a production of the Stanley Foundation in association with KQED Public Radio. "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media" is hosted by David Brancaccio, host and editor of the PBS weekly series *NOW*, and produced by Simon Marks, Kristin McHugh, and Keith Porter. Full audio of the program is available at *http://www.stanleyfoundation.org/initiatives/oam*.

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Palestinian student surfs the Internet at Amman University, Jordan, February 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Unlimited Potential

BEHIND THE SCENES OF PAN-ARAB BROADCAST NEWS

by Kristin McHugh

The information revolution that swept the Western world over the last two decades is now transforming the Arab world. New radio stations, Web sites, and text messaging are just a few of the mediums breaking down cultural barriers and challenging the hardened old order.

But none of these innovations is having more of an impact than hundreds of Arabic language satellite television stations. They come directly into homes, and even the most repressive governments in the region find them almost impossible to block. And because they are easily available at low or sometimes no cost to the viewer, rich and poor alike now have a dizzying array of TV choices.

The living room in the home of Najwa Kharadsheh in Jordan illustrates the scale of this brave new world. No fewer than five remotes are laid out on a table to control the eight separate satellite dishes that bring more than 500 channels into her home. The Kharadsheh family can watch HBO and CNN as well as Nile TV from Egypt, Future TV of Lebanon, and even Hamas TV—a station operated by the radical Palestinian group with a long history of terrorism.

Satellite distribution has given even the tiniest network regional reach—and has brought Arabic language newscasts, talk shows, and no-holds-barred political debates that were unthinkable ten years ago.

"After 9/11," says Najwa, "Al Jazeera was the only station.... I don't know how they got those tapes, but everyone was watching."

Most Americans have probably heard of Al Jazeera. Yet most of us know very little about it or the station's many news competitors in the Arab world. Al Jazeera is headquartered in Doha, Qatar—a tiny country on the shores of the strategically vital Persian Gulf. The Gulf is also home to Al Jazeera's main competition, Al Arabiya, a 24-hour news channel broadcasting from the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

Control room at Al Jazeera station, Doha, Qatar, December 2005. Photo by Kristin McHugh/The Stanley Foundation

May Sharbinee at anchor desk of Al Arabiya television station, Dubai, UAE, December 2005. Photo by Kristin McHugh/The Stanley Foundation

Beyond the State

May Sharbinee is an anchor with Dubai-based Al Arabiya News. Owned by a wealthy Saudi businessman, Al Arabiya is the second most-watched satellite news channel in the region. Wearing crisp khaki pants, a pink oxford, and a fashionable brown blazer as she drives to the studio, May represents the modern face of Arab media.

"Sometimes I work in the morning," Sharbinee says. "We have a shift that starts at six and finishes at two."

Nabil Khattib, Sharbinee's boss, is the executive editor of Al Arabiya News. He has been in the news business for years and has taken notice of the change the media has undergone.

"Until 1991 all the broadcast media in the Arab world used to be government controlled and government owned and none of the programs used to be live," he says. "All this media used to be away from professional standards."

Khattib is referring to so-called "state-run" radio and television news channels. Many still exist, but they are no longer the first and only option. Today viewers across the region have their choice of hundreds of satellite television news, entertainment, and sports networks.

A Shifting Landscape

The roots of the rapidly expanding media landscape in the Arab world can be traced to the end of the Cold War and the start of the first US Gulf war.

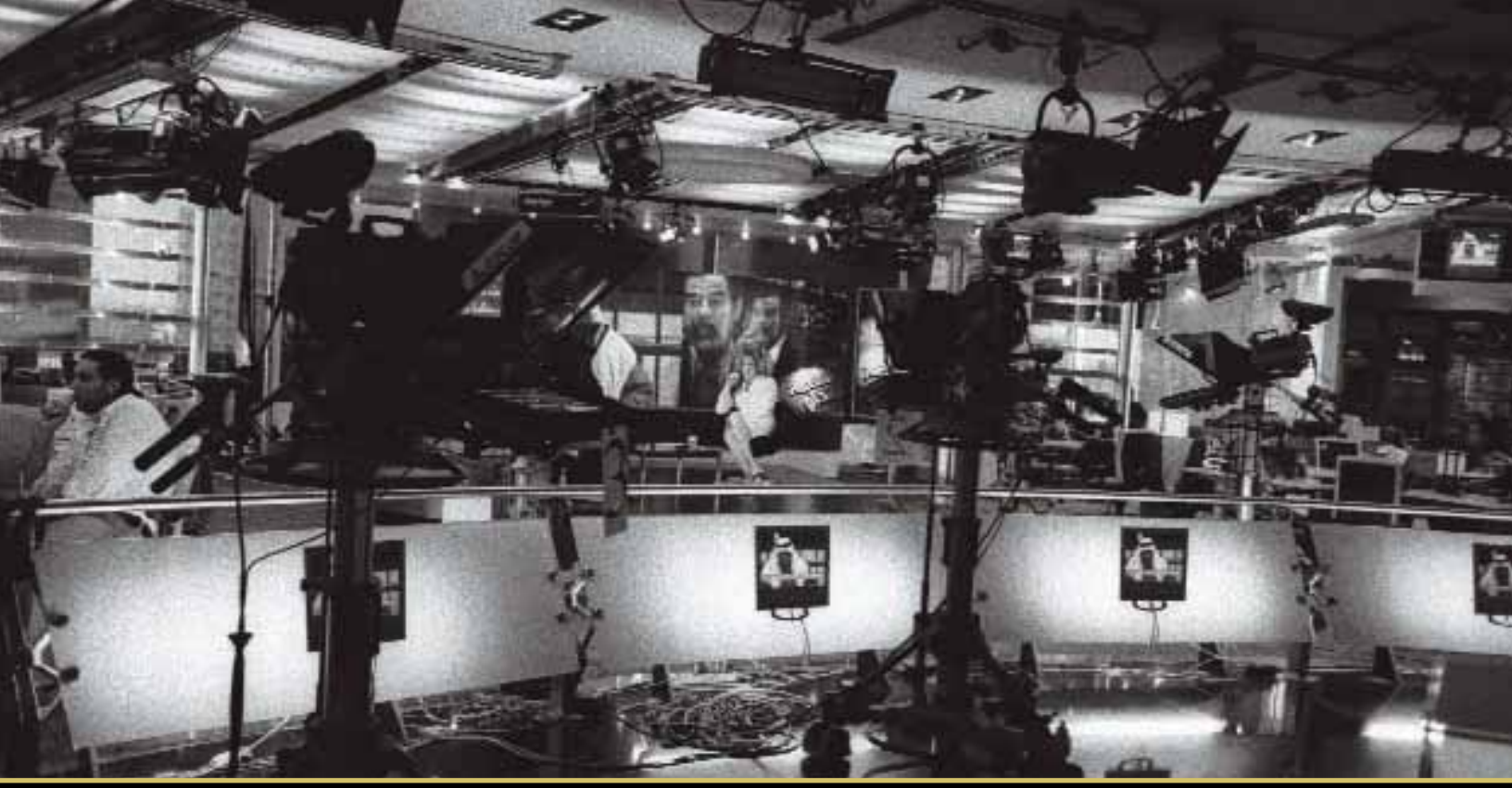
In 1991, for the first time, new consumer satellite technology beamed CNN's live coverage of events in Kuwait and Iraq to the Arab region unfiltered. This radical departure gave the Arab region an entirely new perspective.

"Lots of Arabs realized that all the information they were getting from Arab sources—whether government or from Iraqis or from Kuwaitis or from their own media about the war was fake," Khattib says. "I mean, most of the information was not true."

Winding her way through Dubai's seemingly endless road construction, May Sharbinee recalls her own reaction when she discovered CNN.

"I remember when I was studying, when CNN was aired to the Middle East, it was very, very new and you would never think about watching news 24 hours."

CNN's approach to news, and that of other Western outlets such as the BBC, not only influenced May Sharbinee's career path, but they also shaped the look, sound, and image of today's Arab satellite news channels.



Studio and newsroom at Al Arabiya television station. Dubai, UAE, March 2006. Antonin Kratochvil/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Ahmed Sheik, editor in chief of Al Jazeera news, has also reflected on the shifting media environment.

"Now, Arab TV stations and even newspapers and radio stations realize that if they are to survive or retain some of their audience, they will have to become more objective," he says.

"Now they realize that the audience is not really stupid. They understand. There is another example in front of the audience which can tell him: 'Look, why are those people doing the story in a different manner?' So, I think before Al Jazeera, you had a very sort of stagnant Arabic-speaking media in the Arab world."

Skeptics and Critics

Sheik's office overlooks the newsroom of Al Jazeera's recently expanded headquarters in Doha. The sleek, colorful, high-tech newsroom is a direct reflection of the network's success. Al Jazeera, which is financed by the royal family of Qatar, is the most watched and best-known Pan-Arab satellite news channel. It is so successful that in 2004 advertising executives ranked the network the fifth most powerful brand in the world. But Al Jazeera is also highly controversial—in both the United States *and* the Middle East.

"Initially a lot of governments in the Arab world did feel very skeptical about Al Jazeera," says Wadah Kanfar, Al Jazeera's managing director. "And then they started criticizing Al Jazeera; their intelligence agents started accusing Al Jazeera of many [things]. When we started, we were accused initially as a Mosad Israeli conspiracy or a CIA American tool for creating some kind of disturbance in the Arab world. Bureaus were closed down and a lot of correspondents were arrested, and on many occasions we were dealt with in a very bad way."

Countering Arab Media

Al Jazeera—whose motto is "the opinion and the other opinion"—began broadcasting in 1996. In a few short years the network expanded its daily news programming from six hours to around-the-clock coverage. Today, Al Jazeera boasts tens of millions of daily viewers and more than 25 news bureaus worldwide.

The network also operates a number of separate channels. These include Al Jazeera Sports and Al Jazeera Live—similar to the United States' C-SPAN. There is also the Al Jazeera Children's Network. Al Jazeera International, the network's first English language news channel, will be broadcasting live daily from Kuala Lampur, Doha, London, and Washington by the end of this year.

But as Al Jazeera continues to expand, the network faces sharp criticism—especially in the United States—that it gives voice to dangerously inflammatory views.

Army Captain Eric Clark works for the US Central Command's Media Engagement Team in Dubai and is responsible for presenting the American point of view to the Arab media.

"There's no question that we track Al Jazeera coverage," he says. "We do editorial content analysis of Al Jazeera on a daily basis—not only what's being broadcast from their television networks but also their Internet sites. We use that to counter their lies and propaganda or a simple misreport, so we use that as a tool to engage them."

News or Propaganda?

Al Jazeera's critics argue the network is simply anti-American. Others contend the station is pro-Al Qaeda or, at a minimum, is being used by Al Qaeda and other extremist organizations since the network frequently receives and broadcasts taped messages from Osama bin Laden and other Al Qaeda leaders.

"THERE ARE A NUMBER OF THINGS THAT AL JAZEERA IS LEARNING AS THEY'RE MATURING."

"Al Jazeera is the poster child for a form of radical, political media that's emerging in the Arab world," says Ilan Berman, vice president for policy at the American Foreign Policy Council in Washington.

"Al Jazeera is a propaganda outlet as well as a news agency," he says. "And it's one that promotes ideas that are very inimical to American interests. There are many outlets that operate as honest brokers for the news that's out there. Al Jazeera in many cases is not one of them. And it's not one of them because it's inherently more ideologically proximate to Al Qaeda and to other regional radicals."

But Wadah Kanfar, Al Jazeera's managing director, is adamant: "Al Jazeera is not anti-American."

"From all points of view as journalists, an Osama bin Laden tape does carry news and is news worthy," Kanfar says. "And I think for any professional journalist, a tape from Osama bin Laden or Al Qaeda leaders is important to news, that he can deal with it. The issue is how do you deal with it?"

In the newsroom, editor Ahmed Sheik says Al Jazeera handles any and all tapes received from Al Qaeda or others in the same manner it treats all news—according to the network's 10-point code of ethics.

"When we receive a tape by bin Laden, we acknowledge that we edit it," Sheik says. "We choose certain quotes that we believe are newsworthy and we put it on air. And we drop out all the other things that we believe are just propaganda. So, we are not a mouthpiece for Osama bin Laden. And for God's sake, we did not divide the world into two camps. It is not Al Jazeera who installed Osama bin Laden as the head of the camp of evil."

High Profile, High Price

Al Jazeera is paying a high price for its high profile. The network isn't allowed to officially operate in some Arab countries. Several reporters and cameramen have been killed, detained, or jailed. US missiles destroyed Al Jazeera's Kabul, Afghanistan, bureau in 2001 and the network's Baghdad operation in 2003. And late in 2005, allegations surfaced in the British press that President Bush discussed bombing Al Jazeera's headquarters—allegations the White House vigorously denies. In fact, the US government strongly denies Al Jazeera *is* or *has been* specifically targeted.

But even America's point man for Arab media in Dubai, military spokesman Captain Eric Clark, acknowledges Al Jazeera news is changing.

"There are a number of things that Al Jazeera is learning as they're maturing," he says. "They've instilled this code of ethics. They have a new way of approaching Al Qaeda video. They no longer show beheadings and things that would turn the stomachs of a normal person on the street of the Pan-Arab community or America or Europe. So there are a number of things that we're seeing in terms of Al Jazeera reacting to the marketplace and reacting to their viewership."

Welcome to Dubai Media City

The rapid rise of Arab media is front and center in Dubai's Media City. Five years ago there were only three buildings in this industrial complex built to attract media companies. Today this government-sponsored "censor-free" zone houses bureaus for Reuters, CNN, CNBC, and other news operations from around the world.

Media City's former desert landscape is now populated with scores of buildings—even skyscrapers—as far as the eye can see. And demand has outpaced supply. Workers can't construct buildings fast enough. Companies hoping to rent space here must join a waiting list. All current and future planned space in Dubai Media City is already under contract.

"What's amazing is just to watch the media growth—the number of media outlets has grown exponentially," says Eric Clark, who believes this is just another of many changes to have come to the Arab media. "I think one of the interesting things to see is that if you take a look at the demographic breakdown of a Pan-Arab press, they do have a Western influence. They worked for CNN or BBC. They worked for print outlets."

Western influence, it seems, cannot be underestimated.

"They go to journalism schools across America," Clark says. "They emulate Western press. They emulate the journalism programs there. So they bring those skill sets back the Pan-Arab community and put that across their coverage and their approach, their professionalism."

The Same But Different

In Dubai, Al Arabiya anchor May Sharbinee arrives at her network's cutting-edge studio located in Dubai Media City for her midday shift. She scrambles for a parking place in the packed lot of Al Arabiya.

Her first stop of the day is Al Arabiya's makeup studio. Stylists work around the clock here applying makeup and setting hair for the network's on-camera personalities. Sharibinee then turns her attention to the newsroom.

Media City, Dubai, UAE, December 2005. Photo by Kristin McHugh/The Stanley Foundation

Jihad Ballout, Al Arabiya's director of corporate communications, believes that while a certain similarity to the West has extended across Pan-Arab newsrooms, there are also significant differences.

"I think newsrooms have become universal throughout the Arab world and it's very similar with what's been happening in the West," he says. "I think the difference lies in the audience's preferences. I don't think CNN shies away from the fact that it's culturally American and that it targets American audiences, although it's called international. Our organization is called Al Arabiya, which is Arabic—it means 'the Arabic One.' So you can't get more clear than that."

Rising Professionalism

Rami Khouri is editor at large for *The Daily Star* of Beirut, one of the largest newspapers in the Middle East. He closely tracks Pan-Arab satellite television channels, their coverage, and their perspectives.

"The reality," he says, "is that there are about 250 or so satellite stations now. They keep expanding, literally, every week. A lot of them are very, very narrowly focused. The ones that deal in general public affairs and news, political issues—there's probably about a dozen sort of serious ones. But really you're only talking about four or five that have major regional and international impact, and I would argue they're actually doing very high quality journalism. They're very, very professional in their motivation, and I think increasingly professional in their conduct."

Khouri believes this change in professionalism has been on display during the Iraq War. In fact, he argues channels like Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera are providing the best war coverage anywhere.

"There's absolutely no doubt in my mind it's the only place where you could hear an official American speech by Rumsfeld or Bush or somebody, and then hear the Arab reaction. You would hear the American military people and then see pictures on the ground from Iraq showing the impact of what the Americans were doing. You really saw both sides of the picture live, simultaneous, in color, and in Arabic."

Giving Voice

Increasing professionalism or not, critics of Al Jazeera and its competitors have a serious list of complaints about the channels. Near the top of the list is a sense that specific outlets or individual political programs fuel anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli hatred in the region. Ariel Cohen, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation in Washington, is one of those concerned.

The Daily Star newspaper office, Beirut, Lebanon, March 2006. Gary Knight/VII for The Stanley Foundation

"It doesn't matter if it's reflecting the street or not. The norms and standards of responsible journalism, for example, call to have both sides of the story presented. But I went over scripts and transcripts of AJ coverage, which gave currency to lies and myths. Only the Palestinian sources were quoted; no Israelis were interviewed for those stories whatsoever. And it has been done repeatedly. I think anyone who cares about coexistence between Christians, Muslims, and Jews should denounce Al Jazeera for consistently giving voice to the most radical, most hateful representatives of Jihadi Islam."

But regional observers of Al Jazeera, such as Rami Khouri, argue that the network's editorial tone reflects perceptions that are widely shared in the Middle East.

"There are some shows that certainly can be criticized at some levels for being critical of Israel, of Zionism as such, but I don't think there is a systematic anti-Semitic streak. Absolutely not. You do have shows that play on the Arab broad criticism of Israel, which is natural, because there's a battle in the region between Zionism and Arabism. This is a fact of modern history. It's been going on for more than a century now."

The Pan-Arab media broadly defined, Khouri believes, looks beyond this.

"I think there are some people in the Arab world who do make anti-Semitic statements, as there are in the United States and in Europe. This is a fact of life and unfortunately we have to fight against it. But it is certainly not systematic. I think they're providing a consistent level of news, analysis, and opinion that really gives you both sides of the story. You get Arabic-speaking stations interviewing Israelis. This is unheard of. [Al] Jazeera and [Al] Arabiya have correspondents in Palestine and Israel. They're extremely aware of and sensitive to the dictates of good, professional journalism, and they go out of their way to try and meet those professional standards."

Another major critique of these Arabic news channels is that they misrepresent US policies and American intentions in the Middle East. But Khouri says the problem may be the message, not the messenger.

"There's a huge misanalysis, wrong analysis, in the US government with the idea that, 'Well, the Arabs don't really understand our values. They don't understand our policies.' That's nonsense. I think American policy is explained very well to the Arabs by Arab television stations in Arabic, translating the speeches and statements of Americans in press conferences. So it's not a question of misunderstanding the Americans; it's a question of disagreeing with American policy. And this is not just the Arabs who disagree. It's almost the whole world.

Satallite Dishes in Damascus, Syria, December 2005. Feature Story News

VIEWERS AND LEADERS COPE WITH THE NEW ARAB MEDIA

by Simon Marks

In the center of Amman, the Jordanian capital, construction crews have been hard at work putting the finishing touches on one of the region's newest broadcast facilities.

You might think that with more than 250 satellite stations already on the air in the Arab world, there isn't much room for anything new.

But the backers of Jordan's *Al Ghad* newspaper disagree. They're preparing to launch the country's first privately owned television station later this year. As they see it, the battle for the dominance of the Arab media landscape is by no means settled yet.

The 8 O'Clock News

A few seconds before eight on a weekday evening, Dana Jordaan is getting ready to go on the air. In her mid-twenties, she's Western-educated, charismatic, and lively. And hers is the new prime-time face of Jordanian television news.

"The 8 o'clock news is actually the main news bulletin at Jordan television," Jordaan explains after the broadcast. "It concentrates on the local news more than on national news. Anything related to the king, the prime minister, or any ministers or any events happening in Jordan whether they're economic or sports or political events—you can find that they are concentrated in this news bulletin."

What happens in Studio 1 of the government-run Jordan Television every night was once the envy of the Arab world. Back in 1968, JTV was one of the first television networks established in the Middle East. It went on to become one of the first broadcasters to offer viewers two channels of programming—and one of the first to shift from black and white to color. But today JTV is under pressure, losing audience members and experienced employees to the Pan-Arab satellite channels that have come to dwarf it.

Jordanian media experts estimate that close to 60 percent of the country's households own satellite dishes with access to more than 400 stations.

Facing this tremendous competition, JTV is not throwing in the towel. On the day this reporter visited the station, JTV Chief Executive Moustafah Hermaneh insisted that by retooling the network, he was positioning it for a comeback. And George Hawatmeh, former editor of the government run *Jordan Times* newspaper, says that illustrates the dilemma in which JTV finds itself.

"It's a new world for the media," Hawatmeh says. "I'm not sure it has fundamentally changed though. The government might well feel that television station is its television station, that there is still a vertical relationship with the people who operate it."

And so Jordan Television's reporters focus relentlessly on the local beat. Heading off from JTV's newsroom, one reporter briefs his cameraman about their story for the day: the drought and when the local weather bureau expects it to rain. JTV is still wholly owned by the government here, and the weather story—like many others on the 8 p.m. news—will include an interview with a government minister.

But Hermaneh says the network realizes it now must challenge authority if it is to rebuild credibility with its audience.

"In the past, reporting was more international than domestic, because you didn't want to get involved in the domestic scene. It was very difficult and almost impossible to report on issues about the environ-

Dana Jordaan, anchor at JTV. December 2005. Feature Story News

Mohamed K. Alayyan, chairman of Jordanian newspaper Arabic Daily, playing at home with his wife and three children. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation

ment, political parties, congresses, discussions with the government, disagreements on certain issues, corruption. It's covered now on the 8 o'clock news and it's happening and people are watching it."

Speed, and Accuracy

To understand what JTV is up against, you only have to visit the Wihdat refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman. It is not a refugee camp in the classic sense of the phrase; it has been here since 1955 and looks increasingly like a permanent settlement for more than 45,000 Palestinians whose families sought refuge in Jordan during and after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

In the living room of a spartanly decorated home, three generations of the Al Akhras family gather around the television. Khalid Al Akhras and his wife Liqa moved here in 1967 after fleeing Jericho. Khalid believes accuracy and speed are directly related when it comes to news.

"I trust the channel which is the fastest: Al Jazeera. Because it has many correspondents and it conveys accurate news faster than the other channels."

Their son Jamal is a doctor in the Wihtad camp. While he says he occasionally watches Jordan Television like his mother and father, he is more likely to be found tuning in to Al Jazeera.

"It gives you immediate and detailed accounts of the event," he said. "That does not mean that the other stations do not cover the events themselves, but there is more detail in Al Jazeera's coverage."

Before TV, the BBC

Also popular in this overwhelmingly poor neck of the Jordanian woods are the channels that transmit readings from the Koran 24 hours a day. Several are available from various satellite distributors—and like Christian television and radio in the American Bible Belt, you can hear them echoing through neighborhoods.

Wael Kharadsheh lives at the other end of the economic and social spectrum. A retired Jordanian diplomat, he is a prominent figure on the political circuit in Amman. And like many Jordanian intellectuals he refuses to watch Al Jazeera, accusing the network of pandering to the radical political sensibilities of its mass audience.

"They have certain programs that are obnoxious, unfortunately, and they disappointed us," Kharadsheh said. "I really get upset and say 'why attack Jordan, why say this and that?' I change sometimes now to Al Arabiya, which is new, and I find more moderation and more realism...not prejudice or attacking. In my old days, before TV, it was BBC."

Breaking From State Control

It is that sense of viewer dissatisfaction that Jordan Television and its new private competitor hope to capitalize upon. *Al Ghad* is already Jordan's most successful, privately owned newspaper. Now it is getting into the broadcasting business, building two six-camera studios with picture windows overlooking downtown Amman.

Mohammed Alayyan owns *Al Ghad* and believes he can make money by running a commercial, locally focused television station in Jordan.

"There's no more loyalty to certain TV stations," he said. "There is only loyalty to content and to specific programs."

He argues that the government-run JTV has done well wooing viewers back from the satellite stations. And he says Al Jazeera in particular is vulnerable to allegations of bias.

"A lot of people perceive it as being independent. But my argument has always been, how can you have independent media if it [is not financially viable]? You just cannot. If you are subsidized and you keep losing money—50, 60 million dollars every single year, year on year—basically you are obliged to follow the agenda of the person who is subsidizing you, whoever that person is. So, therefore, you cannot really say that it is independent."

That there is even a discussion about the independence of media in Jordan

is a testament, in part, to the influence of the Pan-Arab satellite channels. Had they not come along, Alayyan acknowledges, it might still be impossible for a private businessman to own newspapers and television stations in a part of the world where the media has traditionally been under state control.

Pride and the Media

This is certainly true in neighboring Syria, which only now is beginning to experiment with a loosening of the government reins.

In the twelfth-century Souk Al Hamadiyah—the market in the center of the Damascus where one can buy everything from strong Arabic coffee and spices to the latest fashions imported from Paris—a decidedly old-style scene was recently filmed by government-run Syrian television. Patriotic songs rang from loudspeakers, and a Syrian cameraman was gingerly hoisted above a crowd whose members are waving the country's flag.

To the anger and frustration of the Syrian television director sent to acquire enough footage to create a music video, the crowd had not learned the words. Several takes were ordered before they got them right. The director, Mohammed Skiyah, insists that this was a spontaneous outpouring of national pride in the country's achievements.

"We are directing a message to all the people of the world—that Syria is a country of proud and courageous people," Skiyah says. "It is more than a song. It is a presentation for the whole world to see that we have millions of people, from 2-year-old kids to 70-year-old men—so that we can show the world Syria is not what they think it is. Syria is a peaceful country."

This, despite the fact that Syria has been defensive of late—particularly after the United Nations accused it of involvement in the assassination of several prominent figures in neighboring Lebanon.

In the "Free Zone"

Syrian television dutifully broadcasts music videos and other government-inspired programming not just inside Syria but also on a satellite channel that is viewed across the Middle East.

Despite that seemingly heavy-handed control of the media and the message, the liberalization under way in Damascus is, in its own way, transforming society even here.

"We're writing [about] a lot of sensitive issues, and sometimes we are really surprised that we passed the censorship, says 27-year-old Kinda Kanbar, managing editor of *Syria Today*, a glossy English-language magazine produced from a newsroom in the so-called "free zone" in downtown Damascus.

The "free zone" was established by President Bashar Al Assad to encourage foreign investors to build manufacturing plants on territory that is officially "free" from Syrian government taxation and control.

Sensing an opportunity, Kinda Kanbar opened her news magazine on "free zone" territory—effectively producing it as a foreign publication. After the magazine is printed, she must submit it to government censors. But to her amazement, she says, not a single article has ever been changed.

"We do not know exactly what our red lines [are]—meaning there are no guidelines or laws to tell you 'do not talk about this issue' or not. It's a gray area. And sometimes you draw your red lines, and if you are really pushy and brave enough and take responsibility in a professional way, you can push it."

New Freedoms

Those red lines are being tested at Syrian Television as well. The nightly news, broadcast from an imposing building in the heart of Damascus, now carries live coverage of events that in the past would have been considered too hot to handle. When the United Nations discussed allegations that the Syrian government was behind the string of assassinations in Lebanon, it did so live on Syrian Television.

Dianna Jabbour, Syrian TV's chief executive, now oversees the network. She is not a member of the ruling Ba'ath Party, but was appointed after writing a newspaper article critical of the Syrian regime. Asked about how much freedom her reporters now have, she laughs.

"The difference," she said, "is that they have more freedom than they're taking advantage of. The funny thing about this situation is that we are given more freedom now, but as editors and individuals we still don't have the courage to push things to the limit."

"...SO THE PACKAGE IS VERY FANCY. THE PACKAGE IS VERY MODERN. BUT THE CONTENT IS STILL VERY TRADITIONAL."

Jabbour says the journalists working in her newsroom would never have won the relative freedoms they now enjoy had it not been for the legalization of satellite dish ownership in Syria. Everywhere you go in Damascus, there are dishes crowding the rooftops. And the presentation of news on the Pan-Arab satellite stations has, she believes, changed everything there.

"I cannot market an image of Syria that does not exist," Jabbour said plainly. "That would be stupid. It would be stupid for me to think that my viewers are stupid, because they know the truth. They know the reality, and they will not watch my channel. They'll switch off. Therefore, I go with the truth even if it has its faults. Maybe we're not as competitive as we want to be, but you have to be honest with what you have instead of pretend."

"Life Is Changing"

The Syrian government also points to satellite ownership as a key factor in its decision to liberalize local media laws and make Syrian journalists more competitive. Until recently, Mehdi Daklallah was Syria's minister of information. The former editor of the ruling party's hard-line newspaper *Al Ba'ath*, even he has bowed to the inevitable.

"Any Syrian today can watch over 300 Arab satellite channels," Daklallah said. "And they have a variety of sources for information. This makes directed media impossible. One hundred percent impossible. And public opinion is pressuring the government for more liberalization of media."

Will Daklallah be Syria's last minister of information? "Inshallah," he answers. With God's help.

But Daklallah did not get his wish. A few weeks after this interview, he was replaced in a Cabinet reshuffle. But Syrian journalists, like Kinda Kanbar of *Syria Today*, say the changes already instituted are unlikely to be reversed.

"What [can] the government actually do?" she asks. "You're going to keep this country shut? We have to look around us. Jordan, for example, three hours away from us by car with the borders. One hour and a half from Lebanon. [The government] can't do anything. Life is changing."

Modern, Fancy, Traditional

"Al Jazeera's in Doha, Qatar. Al Arabiya is in Dubai, the UAE. And you never see them covering stories from the Gulf," says Khalwa Mattar, deputy editor in chief of *Al Wachten*, a daily newspaper in Bahrain. She believes that Al Jazeera and Al

Man making a call from the balcony of his apartment in the Dummar area east of Damascus, Syria, March 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Shahir Idriss, reporter for Future TV, Beirut, Lebanon, March 2006. Gary Knight/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Arabiya honor "red lines" of their own when it comes to avoiding coverage of controversial issues in their respective backyards.

"You never see them raising issues of concern to Gulf citizens," Mattar said. "If you close your eyes and just listen to Al Jazeera, many times you wouldn't think that Al Jazeera is in Qatar. For example, they attack the American foreign policy in the region. They have a position that is very clear. Everybody who watches Al Jazeera can feel that Al Jazeera has a position towards the American foreign policy, which might be a reflection of its viewers. Because the majority of the Arabs have that feeling."

For Mattar, it all boils down to a question of who owns the two largest Pan-Arab networks, and therefore who subsidizes the enormous financial losses. There are no reliable audience ratings covering the entire Arab world. But public opinion polls clearly and consistently show Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya as the most-watched news channels in the region. Al Jazeera is financed by the royal family of Qatar and Al Arabiya is owned by a Saudi businessman with links to the Saudi royal family. Khwala Mattar says both are reluctant to bite the hands with the cash.

"I think that this Pan-Arab media is highly modern," she says. "They use all the fancy equipment, but it's still very conservative when it comes to social issues. And that's why they shy away from these issues, because the ownership is very conservative. So the package is very fancy. The package is very modern. But the content is still very traditional."

To support her argument, Mattar singled out the coverage of women's issues on both networks. The Saudi-backed Al Arabiya, she says, never discusses the repression of women's rights in the Kingdom. And Al Jazeera fences in the debate over the role of women by consigning it to a special weekly program, she says. This lack of coverage, or lack of broader coverage, worries Mattar.

"Al Jazeera is so much open for political discussion when it comes to political issues, and when it comes to women's issues they just package it in that program. And they called it "Only for Women." Really [it is] produced by a very conservative wife of a clergyman, a woman who gets all the conservatives' views about women in Islam, the treatment of Islam, and all of this...and how women should wear the veil, and if they don't wear the veil they go to hell, and things like this. And you get one feminist in a group of ten women who are veiled.... I'm not against the veil. I'm just trying to say that there are other views in this region that are not heard. These are the views of the secular population in the Arab region that are not heard."

Single mother watches television with her children. Beirut, Lebanon, March 2006. Gary Knight/VII for The Stanley Foundation

The View From Washington

AMERICA'S EFFORTS TO COMPETE WITH NEW ARAB MEDIA

by Sam Litzinger

Despite the hundreds of television channels available across the Middle East—channels that broadcast a heavy dose of American programming—the cultural gap between Arabs and the West remains wide. In Washington, DC, the explosion of media in the region is being watched with fascination, marvel, and dread by the foreign policy community.

Al Jazeera began showing up on television sets throughout the Arab world in 1996. Following its launch, American officials praised the network's potential for spreading democracy and free expression across the region. These same officials set out on what amounted to a charm offensive, appearing frequently on Al Jazeera and other Arab media outlets to add a US perspective to the mix of coverage. Then came 9/11 and the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

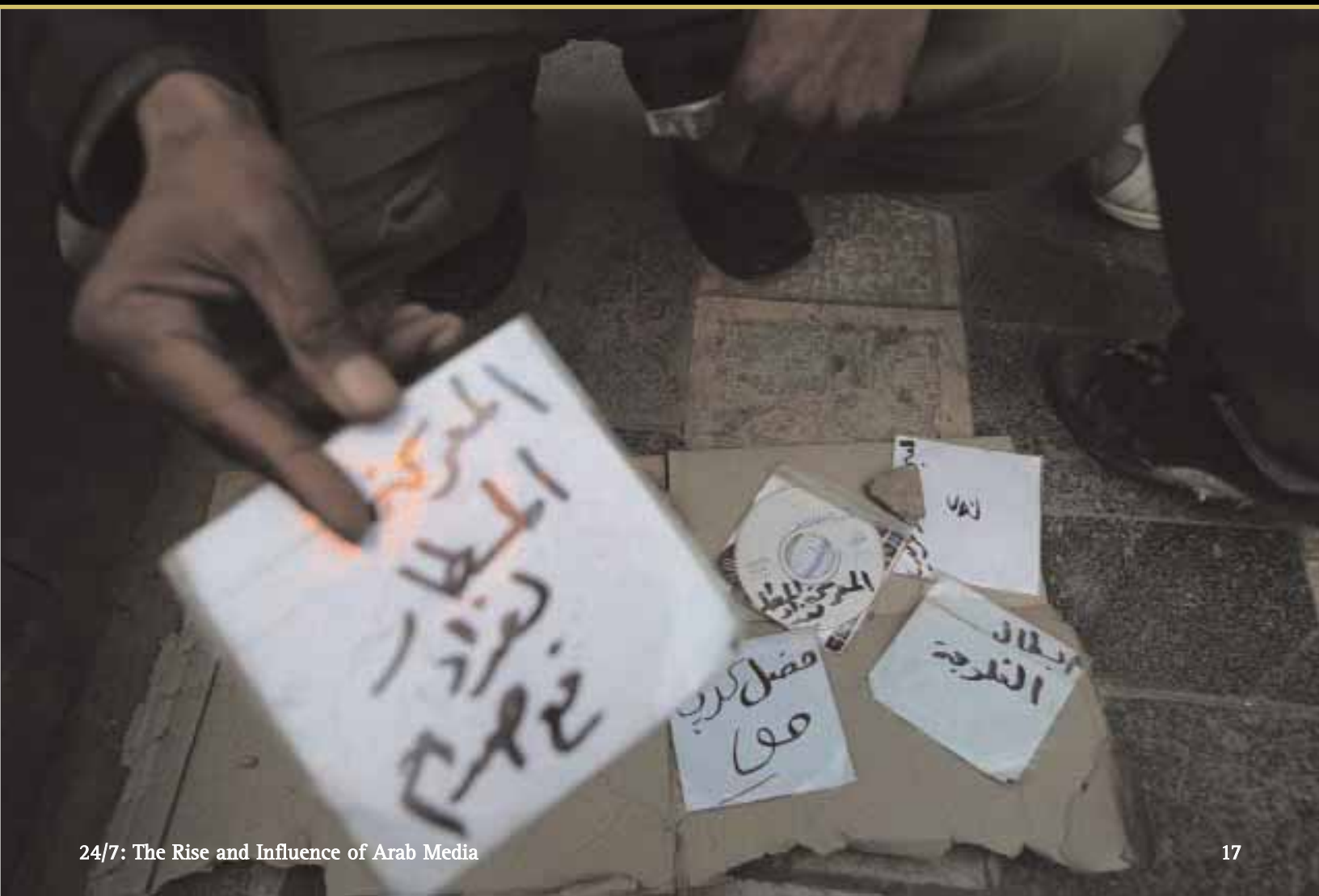
Arab media outlets covered both conflicts, though often in ways President Bush and, indeed, many other Americans found troubling. Images of dead American soldiers or hostage beheadings were broadcast. Osama bin Laden and other enemies of the United States garnered airtime. And the US charm offensive turned into a war of words.

Beyond Stiff Diplomacy

For decades, relationships between the United States and Arab nations were forged on a diplomatic level—leader to leader—in meetings similar to the historic Camp David peace talks of 1978.

But this show of stiff diplomacy, tailor-made for state-run media outlets in the Middle East, lacked the "people-to-people" approach the United States employed during the Cold War with the former Soviet bloc. Then, the

On a street in Damascus, an Iraqi refugee sells CD-ROMs that include pictures of prisoners tortured at Abu Ghraib, the battle of Fallujah, and the battle for the Baghdad Airport. Syria, March 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation



United States reached out to the Soviet people through scientific and cultural exchanges, Radio Free Europe, and Voice of America—all in addition to high-level political summits.

"The US, for many years—for decades, in fact—thought that the way to deal with the Arab world was to deal with the leaders," says Marina Ottaway, a senior associate with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. "In other words, it never felt that it had to deal with the Arab publics—the so-called 'Arab Street,' essentially."

But now, more than ever, formal meetings between American and Arab leaders (such as the one between President Bush and Jordan's King Abdullah earlier this year) are just one of the many ways the United States reaches out to the Arab world. This new perspective, Ottaway believes, is reflected throughout Arab society.

"Now since 9/11, because there is doubt about the capacity of Arab leaders to deal with their own populations, the US has decided to reach out to the population directly," she says. "It's the reason for Radio Sawa. It's the reason for Al Hurra."

New Windows?

Radio Sawa—headquartered in Washington, DC—is a 24/7 Arabic-language news and entertainment network owned by US International Broadcasting and funded by the US government. Its eclectic mix of Western pop and Arabic music is one way the US government is trying to win over the Arab audience. The other is Al Hurra TV.

Al Hurra's own promotional video proudly proclaims (in English, ironically) that "on March 14, 2004, a new window opened for Arabic-speaking television viewers all over the Middle East. A window on accurate, objective news reporting. A window on the free marketplace of ideas. A window on a better future." Based in a nondescript industrial park in Springfield, Virginia, Al Hurra beams news, documentaries, and entertainment shows—all in Arabic—to viewers in 22 Middle Eastern countries.

Bert Kleinman is president of the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, the government-funded agency that runs Al Hurra and Radio Sawa. He believes these US-sponsored media outlets are extending a positive message to the Arab public of the Middle East.

"Al Hurra is about *you can*, not about *you can't*," he says. "Our message is one of empowerment, of positivity, of hope for the future, of self development, of self actualization.... This is what America is about. And that's what people love about America."

"I'M NOT SURE THAT POP MUSIC ON RADIO SAWA IS GOING TO INFLUENCE TOO MANY PEOPLE...."

Politics and Pop Music

But not everyone agrees with Kleinman. The United States spends $90 million annually to keep Al Hurra and Radio Sawa on the air. And the Broadcast Board of Governors, which overseas all government-owned broadcasting services, is seeking a 13 percent budget increase next fiscal year.

Marc Lynch, a political science professor at Williams College and author of the book *Voices of the New Arab Public*, has found that the political message of these US-sponsored media networks is often lost.

"From almost the moment that Sawa was launched, I heard it being played in Jordanian taxicabs and the like," Lynch said. "[But] there's nothing political about it. I don't think people really paid much attention to the news, and I don't think that it had much of an impact at all on political attitudes. But hey, it was nice to be able to get good pop music on the FM band."

Jim Philips, a policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation in Washington, has similar thoughts on Radio Sawa.

"I'm not sure that pop music on Radio Sawa is going to influence too many people," he says. "It may bring them to the broadcast, but I'm not sure how valuable that would be from the standpoint of US foreign policy.

But Phillips does believe Al Hurra's television programming is meeting the needs of the US government.

"I think there is a great need to get American viewpoints—and especially US government viewpoints—out there to a Middle Eastern audience," Phillips says. "Once people see it, I think they would grow to trust it because it's not a mouthpiece of the US. It provides different views and even some views—many views—critical of the US government. It earns credibility that way."

Downtown Amman, Jordan, February 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation

News "As It Is"

Proponents of Al Hurra agree with Phillips, arguing that the networks are key to national security and the US war on terrorism. But critics see a problem here too. They argue Al Hurra parrots the Bush administration's foreign policy line and, consequently, few in the Arab world are paying attention. Marina Ottaway is one of these critics.

"Al Hurra, I would argue, is a very unprofessional propaganda machine. And this is the great paradox: that while the US is trying to promote an independent press..., Al Hurra really does not cut it as an independent TV station."

"You know, I have participated on programs on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya and Al Hurra and so on," she adds. "And while I have never considered not participating on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya again, I have really debated whether or not I should continue accepting invitations by Al Hurra. And I say this very deliberately because they are so unprofessional. They ask leading questions all the time. They have a very definite idea of what they want, and they try everything they can to say it."

Al Hurra executives stand by their objectivity, however, and say they report the news "as it is."

Knowing Your Audience

So who is watching Al Hurra? Audience surveys can be difficult to conduct in the Middle East, but a University of Maryland/Zogby poll conducted in October 2005 suggests that l*ess than 1 percent* of people in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates watch Al Hurra as their first choice of television—compared to the 45 percent who pick Al Jazeera.

Marc Lynch sees a conflict between what people want and what the station wants and is able to broadcast.

"To really establish its credibility with Arab audiences, it needs to cover news and host political opinion which, if translated and shown to Congress, would immediately get them into a lot of trouble," he says. "Again, because they're ultimately accountable to Congress, they have to be very careful about the kind of things that they put on the station. But by doing so, it then undermines its ability to reach out to these Arab audiences. And that, I think, is one of these fundamental problems with government-funded television stations."

Al Hurra Studio, Springfield, Virginia. Feature Story News

Try, and Try Again

But if Radio Sawa and Al Hurra aren't the answer, how do we engage the Arab public? Marc Lynch believes the United States shouldn't fight against the Arab media, but instead work with it.

"I think that the argument there is simply 'deal with the Arab public as it actually exists.' You've got this enormously competitive media market. You've got a politically attuned population who are deeply skeptical of the United States, but who really want to see change in the region. And instead of setting up Al Hurra, Radio Sawa, those sorts of things, and trying to leap over what actually exists, why not take advantage of what's actually there?"

Both Sawa and Al Hurra remain key parts of the US government's Middle East outreach efforts. But Bert Kleinman, Al Hurra and Radio Sawa manager, says the ideas of pluralism and democracy—unrelated to any particular US administration—have their limitations.

"Do we try?" he asks. "Or do we just give up and say, 'Ah, people don't like our policies, so let's just shut everything down?' I'm too American and too optimistic to just quit and run from the engagement process, trying to engage our audience. And so I can't walk away."

Media and the Market

After six weeks of trying, the State Department declined our requests for an interview with Karen Hughes, the under secretary of state responsible for selling US policy to the Arab world, saying scheduling would not permit. We spoke instead with Shibley Telhami, the Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland.

Telhami has researched the impact of satellite television on the Arab world and believes that if the United States wants to influence hearts and minds, it needs a different strategy.

"If the aim of American television and radio is to change people's opinion of the United States in a big way, I think it can never work."

Telhami's own research has demonstrated no real correlation between television and political attitudes.

"In my own research over the past four years, I have found no statistically significant relationship between what people watch on television and their attitudes at least toward the United States, toward core issues," he says. "The most important thing that we found is exchanges—student exchanges, business exchanges, cultural exchanges. All data show that those people who have interactions with America have a significantly better view of the United States than the people who didn't and vice versa."

But Professor Telhami acknowledges that it is not just TV news that has changed in the Arab world over the past two decades. Major changes have also occurred in the region's entertainment industry, with Arab movie, music, and lifestyle channels all proving popular. Radio and the Internet are also ubiquitous, but it is the television industry that he says is poised to scale even greater heights in the years ahead.

"When I go to the Middle East now and watch television there or watch it here on satellite, and I contrast it with the media 20 years ago, there is no question in my mind that this is far better, far more diverse, far more open, far more informative, far more responsible at some level.

"When you have an open market, of course you are going to have a lot of irresponsibility. But the marketplace has a way of actually punishing those who tend not to be credible over time. And I would be far more prepared to rely on the marketplace than any dictator determining what should be on the air."

Newsroom at Al Jazeera television station. Doha, Qatar, December 2005. Kristin McHugh/The Stanley Foundation

Personal Essay

THE MURKY WINDOW OF SATELLITE TELEVISION

by David Brancaccio

I'll tell you who started all this: a smart guy named Arthur C. Clarke who would become the legendary science fiction author. It's October 1945, Clarke is still in Britain's Royal Air Force, and he publishes an outlandish idea in a magazine called *Wireless World*. It's the concept of the satellite. In space. Synchronized to the earth. For the purpose of *television*.

Clarke's article is but four pages long, but it includes this line: "A true broadcast service...at all times over the whole globe would be invaluable, not to say indispensable, in a world society."

Satellite TV's become indispensable, all right. But just how far we've made it toward the other part of Clarke's line, the part about "world society," remains a question. This, despite economic globalization. We now know that fancy communications technology does not lead in a straight line to shared values and a shared vision of the world.

Word of European political cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed flew across the earth via satellite, yet the technology didn't seem to help many deeply offended Muslims understand why the Danish newspaper printed them. Nor did satellites do enough to explain to many non-Muslims the world over why the cartoons were seen as such a big deal. Lives have now been lost over this.

Here is the irony: TV satellites are global in reach, but the messages on those satellites—as we've tried to show in this program—cater to regional tastes, regional bias, regional politics. This confounds and frustrates world leaders who can no longer use television to deliver the party line intact.

It also aggravates those of us who want the mass media to be a more consistent force for peace, tolerance, inclusiveness, democracy.

Peering through the window, Dubai, UAE, March 2006. Antonin Kratochvil/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Anchor desk at Al Jazeera television station. Doha, Qatar, December 2005. Kristin McHugh/The Stanley Foundation

In the documentary "24/7: the Rise and Influence of Arab Media," we brought you some of the complexity being handed to us as Arabic language television catches fire. Some see this rich and unruly marketplace of ideas pumped onto TV screens as ultimately healthy for the region. Others will still choke on the fact that a portion of what gets onto those screens can breed intolerance and violence.

That very same Arthur C. Clarke was asked not long ago about the flood of information that his ideas helped unleash, including satellite TV. He readily acknowledged that so much on TV is awful, and as a window on the world, it is often a "murky window." Yet to Clarke, stopping the flow isn't the answer. Here's his quote: "Because we frequently suffer from the scourge of information pollution, we find it hard to imagine its even deadlier opposite—information starvation."

This may be something US officials are learning. Who was that visiting Al Jazeera headquarters in Doha this winter? Karen Hughes, close advisor on these matters to President Bush. In Doha that day, there were two hours of discussions and a televised interview. Hughes' title is under secretary of state for public diplomacy and public affairs, and she was doing what diplomats are supposed to do: finding a way to engage a global player too powerful to ignore.

David Brancaccio, host and editor of the PBS weekly series *NOW*, hosts and reports for this special one-hour documentary. "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media" is produced by Simon Marks, Kristin McHugh, and Keith Porter.

About the Photos

In January 2006 the Stanley Foundation commissioned the world-renowned photography agency VII to accurately portray and highlight Arab media and the modern, day-to-day life of people living in the Middle East. VII photographer Alexandra Boulat traveled to Jordan and Syria. Photographer Gary Knight captured images in Lebanon and Egypt. Photographer Antonin Kratochvil traveled to Egypt and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Photographer Joachim Ladefoged captured images in Kuwait and in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The images showcased in this document represent a small portion of the prints Alexandra, Gary, Antonin, and Joachim brought back from the region. *www.viiphoto.com.*

To learn more about this photography project and the radio documentary special "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media," visit the special Web feature from the Stanley Foundation: "Security in an Era of Open Arab Media," *www.stanleyfoundation.org/initiatives/oam,* containing a wealth of resources including original articles, expert interviews, in-depth policy analysis, photojournalism, and material from the public radio documentary.

Dubai, UAE, March 2006. Joachim Ladefoged/VII for The Stanley Foundation

About The Stanley Foundation

The Stanley Foundation brings fresh voices and original ideas to debates on global and regional problems. It is a nonpartisan, private operating foundation that focuses primarily on peace and security issues and advocates principled multilateralism. The foundation's concept of principled multilateralism means working respectfully across differences to create fair, just, and lasting solutions.

The Stanley Foundation's work recognizes the essential roles of the policy community, media professionals, and the involved public in building sustainable peace. Its work aims to connect people from different backgrounds, often producing clarifying insights and innovative solutions.

The foundation frequently works collaboratively with other organizations. It does not make grants.

Stanley Foundation reports, publications, programs, and a wealth of other information are available on the Web at *www.stanleyfoundation.org*.

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