

courier

PROVOKING THOUGHT AND ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE ABOUT THE WORLD



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ZOOMING

On The Modern Arab World

Inside this issue:

- Fresh Faces of the Middle East
- Your Guide to the Modern Arab Media
- What DC Policymakers Should Know

PLUS: An essay on Arthur C. Clarke and the "murky window" of satellite television

Editor's Note

Breaking With Tradition

Open media changes the face of the Arab world

Surprising change in the Middle East is being driven by remarkable developments in Arab media.

The most well-known Arab television network, Al Jazeera, is just the tip of the iceberg. For better or worse, the Internet and scores of pan-Arab radio stations and hundreds of pan-Arab satellite television channels are fostering the free flow of information and opinion in previously unthinkable ways.

For the last several months, the Stanley Foundation has been working to better understand this phenomenon...and explore what it means for the region, the United States, and the world. In this issue of *Courier* you'll find just a sampling of the fruits from this effort.

Policy Talks in Dubai, DC

Policy dialogues on open Arab media were held in Dubai, UAE, and Washington, DC, bringing together experts and leaders from the Middle East and the United States. Michael Kraig, foundation director of Policy Analysis and Dialogue, summarizes the results of those discussions on page 18.

The foundation continued its string of widely aired public radio documentaries with "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media." The program, produced in association with KQED Public Radio and hosted by David Brancaccio, provided material for several of the articles included in this issue.

The media revolution is just one of the developments challenging American misperceptions of the modern Arab world. To draw the new Middle East into more clear

focus, the foundation commissioned the world-renowned photography group VII to take pictures across the region. Four photographers visited six countries, and nearly every photo you see in this issue of *Courier* is the result of their intrepid labor.

Even more material on this topic can be found on our Web site: www.stanleyfoundation.org. Look under the special resources section titled "Security in an Era of Open Arab Media."

The Promise of Greater Good

Developments in the Arab world have obvious—and sometimes more subtle—effects on the United States. As Americans, we should welcome more open media infiltrating previously closed societies. But, as in our own country, freedom of speech and press can bring discomfort, even pain, along with its promise of greater good.

Professor Marc Lynch, author of *Voices of the New Arab Public*, summarizes the problem this way: "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."

—Keith Porter

Find Out More

Learn more about "24/7: The Modern Arab World" photography exhibit and the VII Photo Agency on page 22. Also visit www.viipphoto.com.

"I would be far more prepared to rely on the marketplace than any dictator determining what should be on the air."

Cover photo.

Shopping mall arcade games.

Dubai, UAE,

March 2006.

Joachim

Ladefoged/VII for

The Stanley

Foundation

Opposite page.

Amman University.

Jordan, February

2006. Alexandra

Boulat/VII for The

Stanley Foundation





Behind the Scenes

The Sky's the Limit

Arab media thriving amid controversy both in the United States and Middle East

The five remote controls layed out on the living room coffee table are used to access more than 500 channels beamed in from satellites orbiting in space and captured by the eight satellite dishes up on the roof.

In her home in Amman, Jordan, Najwa Kharadsheh has the technology to 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.

“After 9/11, Al Jazeera was the only station,” said Kharadsheh, the wife of a retired Jordanian diplomat. “I don’t know how they got those tapes, but everyone was watching.”

Most Americans have probably heard of Al Jazeera, the news channel headquartered in Doha, Qatar—a tiny country on the shores of the strategically vital Persian Gulf.

But 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.

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 beginning of the first US Gulf war.

Prior to then, all broadcast media in the Arab world were owned and controlled by governments—and journalists working in the region contend that much of the information viewers were getting from official Arab government sources was simply false.

But 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—a radical departure that gave the Arab region an entirely new perspective.

If Arab media outlets were to keep their audiences and survive, it was clear that a much greater degree of objectivity was required.

“Now they realize that the audience is not really stupid. They understand,” said Ahmed Sheik, editor in chief of Al Jazeera news. “Before Al Jazeera, you had a very sort of stagnant Arabic-speaking media in the Arab world.”

Skeptics and Critics

Al Jazeera, 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.

Wadah Kanfar, Al Jazeera’s managing director, said most Arab governments were initially skeptical about Al Jazeera.

“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,” he said. “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 the 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, including 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, is scheduled to be broadcasting live daily from Kuala Lumpur, Doha, London, and Washington by the end of this year.

But Al Jazeera is paying a high price for its high profile. The network isn’t allowed to officially operate in some Arab countries.

“...the audience is not really stupid. They understand.”



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

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.

News or Propaganda?

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 said. "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."

Some Al Jazeera 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.

"Al Jazeera is the poster child for a form of radical, political media that's emerging in the Arab world," said 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...and it's one that promotes ideas that are very inimical to American interests.

But those working for Al Jazeera insist they are not anti-American,

but just doing their jobs as professional journalists.

Al Jazeera editor Ahmed Sheik says the news channel handles tapes received from Al Qaeda 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."

—Kristin McHugh,
based on reporting for "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media."

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

"It is not Al Jazeera who installed Osama bin Laden as the head of the camp of evil."





*Girl watching television. Luxor, Egypt, March 2006.
Antonin Kratochvil/VII for The Stanley Foundation*

What's on in Damascus?

New stations popping up 'every week'

Unlike local television outlets (known as terrestrial broadcasting), new pan-regional stations send their signals to satellites in geosynchronous orbit above the earth. The signals are then beamed back to the ground where they can be received by viewers across a vast area. Pan-Arab broadcasters largely use two space satellites, Arabsat and Nilesat. Broadcasts from either of these can be seen across the entire Arab region, from Morocco to Oman.

How is this different from US television?

The majority of viewers in America get their television via cable. Cable operators pull together packages of channels—some local, many from satellites (such as CNN or HBO)—and sell those packages to viewers for a monthly fee. Other Americans simply view over-the-air, terrestrial television broadcasts. And a growing number of Americans receive television from satellite distributors (like the DISH Network or DIRECTV) that work much like cable operators—they package together a number of channels and sell access to subscribers for a monthly fee.

In the Arab world, the situation is often much more chaotic. Viewers buy satellite dishes (often more than one) and receive whatever signals they can find. Dealers—some authorized, others not—sell various helpful components including decoders if needed to watch scrambled premium or pay-per-view channels.

The necessary equipment is relatively inexpensive. One person with a receiver may sell access to a number of viewers. Some families may share equipment. The price and the underground nature of the business ultimately means that hundreds of channels are available to viewers in almost every economic class.

All in all, “satellite TV” is a much different operation in the Middle East than it is in America. Here, middlemen at the cable companies or at distributors like DISH and DIRECTV control which channels are offered and what each channel or group of channels will cost. There, people are directly viewing the raw broadcasts from the satellites and new channels added to each satellite are instantly available.

What's on these channels?

Every kind of television programming you can imagine...and more: sports, weather, movies, cartoons, music, variety shows, game shows, cooking shows, even reality shows. News channels carry live news events, documentaries, and political debate programs. Some religious channels broadcast readings of the Koran and prayers all day. And many channels from the United States, Europe, and Asia are easily available as well.

What are Arab viewers watching?

Audience ratings across all Arab nations are incredibly difficult to gather. But public opinion polls and reliable feedback indicate that entertainment programming, especially movies and music videos (referred to as music clips in the region) are very popular.

The program *Superstar*, a regional version of *American Idol*, is highly watched. More than 30 million votes were cast for various competitors. Music clip channels often have on-screen scrolls generated via text messaging from viewer's cell phones. These programs claim to receive thousands of messages an hour.

Twenty-four-hour news channels generate sizable audiences. Recent surveys show that Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are easily the two most watched news sources in the region.

Who pays the bill?

Many of the channels sell advertising and try to support themselves that way. Industry observers, however, say very few of the most popular entertainment channels are likely to be profitable at the moment. Most channels fall short of breaking even.

Some stations are government supported. Others are funded by wealthy individuals or families for political purposes or personal prestige factors.

—Keith Porter

In the Arab world, the situation is often much more chaotic. Viewers buy satellite dishes and receive whatever signals they can find.

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How many of these channels are available?

No one really knows. Experts we spoke with in researching the public radio documentary “24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media” gave us answers ranging from 250 to 400. But all agreed that new stations are going on the air every week.

More about individual channels

A sizeable list of pan-Arab satellite television networks is available on the Web.

www.mebassociation.com

www.middleeastmediaguide.com



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

On the Ground

Who Do They Believe?

Arab viewers show little loyalty to particular TV channels

“It’s a new world for the media. I’m not sure it has fundamentally changed though.”

In the center of the Jordanian capital of Amman, 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.

Retooling for a Comeback

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 nearly 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. Executives insist that by retooling the network they are positioning it for a comeback.

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.

George Hawatmeh, former editor of the government-run *Jordan Times* newspaper, said that illustrates the dilemma in which JTV finds itself.

“It’s a new world for the media,” Hawatmeh said. “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.”

Speed and Accuracy

A visit to the Wihdat refugee camp on the outskirts of Amman shows what JTV is up against. Wihdat 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, who moved here with his wife Liqa in 1967 after fleeing Jericho, believes accuracy and speed are directly related when it comes to news.

"I trust the channel which is the fastest: Al Jazeera," he said. "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 several channels that transmit readings from the Koran 24 hours a day.

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.

—Simon Marks, based on reporting for "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media."

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



Nafisa Nasser (center), cousin of Jordan's King Abdullah and Mohamed K. Alayyan, chairman of the Jordanian newspaper Arabic Daily, playing at home with their three children and Filipino nurse. February 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation



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

Man praying. Abu Dhabi, UAE, March 2006. Joachim Ladefoged/VII for The Stanley Foundation



*Cairo, Egypt,
March 2006.
Antonin Kratochvil/VII
for The Stanley
Foundation*



The Great Pyramid. Cairo, Egypt, March 2006. Antonin Kratochvil/VII for The Stanley Foundation



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







Sporting club. Beirut, Lebanon, March 2006. Gary Knight/VII for The Stanley Foundation



Mother watching her children and husband bathing in Dead Sea. Jordan, February 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation



A Christian girl and her friend, a Muslim refugee from Iraq, both 7, visit a cosmetics shop in Amman's Mecca Mall. The shopping center is so secure, says the father of one girl, he drops them off there for a few hours nearly every day. February 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Playing in snow on the hills near Bloudan, near Damascus, Syria, March 2006. Alexandra Boulat/VII for The Stanley Foundation





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



*Man reading in Abu Dhabi, UAE,
March 2006. Joachim Ladefoged/VII
for The Stanley Foundation*



*Men praying/girl waiting.
Abu Dhabi. UAE, March 2006. Joachim
Ladefoged/VII for The Stanley Foundation*



*Kids playing soccer. Dubai, UAE, March 2006. Joachim Ladefoged/VII
for The Stanley Foundation*

What Should Washington Do?

US leaders must cope with savvy, sophisticated Arab audiences

Trying to influence the Middle East by using typical American public relations spin will not bridge the gap between the United States and the Middle East.

Nor will restricting Middle Easterners' access to sources and networks, setting up new US government-backed information sources, or using other such efforts to force change from the outside.

Audiences are too savvy and have too many other sources from which to gather information. Not only are these sorts of tactics bound to fail, they run counter to what the United States says are its policy goals for the region. The obvious conflict between US words and actions is driving the United States and the Middle East further apart by making it even harder for regional players trying to facilitate peaceful change.

The complexity of the expanding Middle East media landscape and transitioning societies in the Arab world—which affect issues such as the US presence in the region, regional stability and growth, democratization, and transnational terrorism—needs to be better understood by US policymakers if more productive security policies and solutions are to be developed.

External, Internal Forces Driving Change

Much of the impetus for this new media era derives from the coverage of regional wars and civil conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s.

Lebanon's civil war led to the development of an entrenched media infrastructure in order to promote the ideas of competing militias—which laid the groundwork for a diverse post-war media industry.

CNN's coverage of the 1991 Gulf War opened Arab eyes to the way conflicts can be covered while creating frustration at the predominance of Western perspectives on a regional event. In response, Saudi elites started BBC-Arabic. Though eventually shut down, it paved the way for Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya—a transition made possible in part by the hiring of regional talent by the BBC.

Direct credit for today's media era belongs to wealthy regional elites, though foreign pressure and influence continue to drive dynamic and fresh media in the region. Small states such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Lebanon lead the media revolution. Their willingness to embrace globalization rather than suppress it is due to their wish to compete for prestige—cultural, if not military—with their bigger neighbors.

The United States impacts regional media directly with its programming on satellite television and its foreign policy efforts, particularly in the area of public diplomacy. Paradoxically, it is the commercial, free-market components of US media—not strategically placed US government propaganda—that has the strongest affect on Middle East culture and society.

Openness Does Not Apply Equally

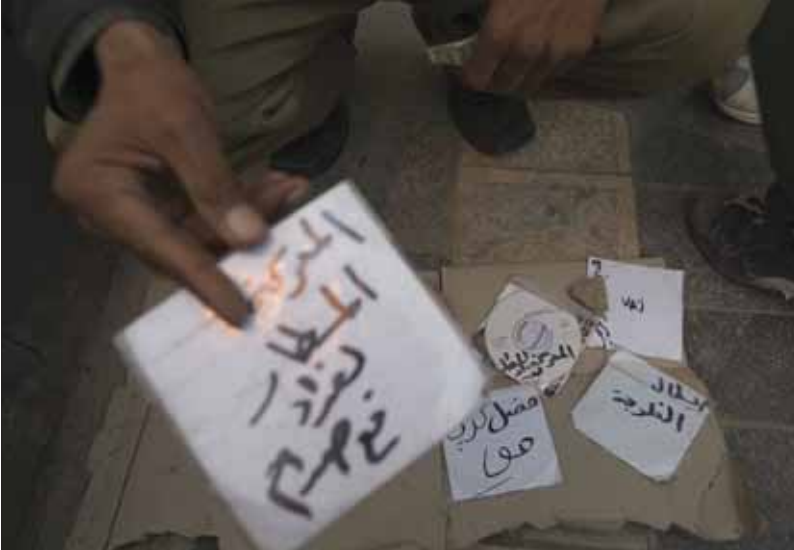
The effects of foreign pressure and influence are not felt equally in all states or in all types of media. The “openness” of the regional media varies across the region due to the ability of regimes to censor content. Most local broadcast stations and print media are still under the control of state regimes and can be stifled and shut down more easily than satellite and Internet sources.

And while it is far easier to censor local outlets—especially print sources—the transnational outlets also operate under significant constraints. Self-criticism of

The obvious conflict between US words and actions is driving the United States and the Middle East further apart....



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



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

regimes is rare and editorializing on these stations tends to focus on transnational religious, social, and moral questions, including Islam and Arabism, or on foreign policies of outside powers such as the United States.

Audiences Love Entertainment

Of the more than 200 Arab satellite channels, only ten to fifteen are on the ratings radar and seven to nine are news channels. Western international news channels, including the BBC and CNN International, are available as is Western entertainment programming. There is relatively little data on how the viewing audience and this deficiency, along with the lack of an advertising culture, contribute to regional difficulties in attracting advertising dollars.

In spite of the West's emphasis on the potential effects of news channels like Al Jazeera, most satellite channels offer thematic entertainment programming covering topics such as religion, music, and cooking. LBC—a channel that is profitable, unlike many others—presents entertainment programming. As in the United States, mass audiences gravitate toward entertainment.

New Vs. Traditional Sources

The mediums used to gather information vary, with traditional sources being used alongside “new” media. Two influential “traditional” sources are the mosque and the tribe/family. Seventy percent of Arabs receive their news from television, while only 1 percent uses print media. Access to the Internet is transitioning, and although its use is still most prevalent among the elites, the growth of Internet cafés is making the medium more available to the masses. Radio, in contrast to the others, is a medium mainly taken advantage of in the car.

Information is also being packaged and repackaged—content from different mediums (such as the photos from

Abu Ghraib) can be picked up and magnified via other communications mechanisms. Thus there is an inability to shut anything down—the shutdown itself sends a message.

English-Language Outlets Dominate

The English-language market is the largest linguistic market in the world even though it only accounts for around 12 percent of the world's population. English-language speakers control approximately 66 percent of the world economy, which explains why the English language dominates the mass media. Foreign direct investment (FDI) will be critical in the Middle East's move toward globalization, meaning that the region's governments, media, and publics need a better understanding of how to communicate effectively with English-speaking markets.

Growing Gulf Between US, Middle East Viewers

Media influence predominantly flows from the United States and Great Britain toward the Middle East. Most Americans are not very interested in news, let alone news from a Middle Eastern outlet.

Further exacerbating the situation is government control of stations and messages by regional governments and the United States. US efforts are perceived by Arabs as unidirectional. There is a need for two-way discussions that incorporate American officials learning about Arab culture, answering questions, and increasing the regional media's access to sources.

The United States has the opportunity to use its foreign policy to augment the region's own prevalent modernization and globalization trends. These policies should support better understanding between US and Middle Eastern audiences, encourage outside investment and advertising in stable Middle East countries, and work within the existing regional media establishment to change Arab misperceptions about US objectives (and vice versa). US policies need to align not only with positive regional trends but also with each other.

—Michael Kraig

There is a need for two-way discussions that incorporate American officials learning about Arab culture....

Find Out More

The Stanley Foundation report “Open Media and Transitioning Societies in the Arab Middle East” is available to order on page 23 or online at www.stanleyfoundation.org.

Are We Getting the Full Picture?

Experts say US media often falls short of providing context, history, and analysis

What kind of picture are American readers, listeners, and viewers getting on the Middle East? Are they getting the whole picture?

Two experienced journalists—one from the United States and one based in Lebanon—addressed that question recently on a public radio program called Global Journalist, hosted by University of Missouri journalism professor Stuart Loory.

Jon Sawyer, who reported from more than 60 countries during a three-decade career at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, is the director of the newly established Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting in Washington, DC. Habib Battah is managing editor of the Beirut-based Journal of Middle East Broadcasters and has been a print and broadcast journalist for some of the Arab world's leading news organizations including Qatar-based Al Jazeera.

The two journalists met during a journalism training workshop in Beirut last fall, an initiative cosponsored by the Reuters and Stanley foundations. Below are excerpts of their interview on the Global Journalist program. Full audio of the interview is available online at www.globaljournalist.org.

Global Journalist: President Bush and his administration are embarked on major programs to convince the American public that the right things are being done in Iraq and that the news business has it all wrong. What do you think?

Habib Battah: I think coverage of the Middle East is primarily negative and focused on violence. No matter what Bush might be saying, the message that I'm seeing on

American airwaves is very close to the administration's message. Most of the sources we see, the pundits, are actually American officials or former military officials. I feel many news outlets—MSNBC, CNN, Fox—have become a retirement program for American military officials, where they are often featured as so-called analysts.

The use of sources is often coloring the coverage to the extent where the Middle East seems to be a big strategic map with a big question mark over it—and the question is primarily, "How can we stop this breeding ground of terrorists?" So the coverage to me is very one-dimensional.

Jon Sawyer: I think it's ironic that we've had this criticism from the administration at this stage in the war given the role that the media played in the run-up to the war—at which point I think the media did us a grave disservice. It's basically cheerleading for the administration and the acceptance of administration claims as to weapons of mass destruction, the ties to Al Qaeda in Iraq, and that war was inevitable and necessary and that we had to fight. I think if we had had a different media, a more challenging media back three years ago, we would have seen a very different sequence of events since.

GJ: Is the same kind of reporting being done by the Arab press in the Middle East?

Battah: There aren't that many journalists today going out to the fields and really investigating the whole story. The Dubai ports story, for example, seemed to be framed once again by the official US viewpoint. There seemed to be a certain number of congressmen—such as

Representative Peter King of New York—saying that Al Qaeda has a strong presence in Dubai, and another congressman saying it has a serious and dubious history as a transit point of terrorism. So this became the main focus of the story. I was just hoping, at a minimum, for a Google search of Dubai: what is this country, and why, out of 30 countries being taken over by Dubai Ports World, was the United States the only one to reject this takeover? Dubai is one of the most fascinating cities in the world today. It's really a country that is open to investment, though a lot of pundits said it was an authoritarian country with a closed economy. We also have a 100,000 British people living in Dubai. These are all angles we didn't see explored.

GJ: The implication of what both of you are saying is that the American news business is out of touch when it comes to really covering the Middle East, because it doesn't understand the Middle East. It hasn't backgrounded itself well on the culture, the religion, the history. Is that so? And if it's so, is it too late to do something about it?

Sawyer: It's true all over the world. It's a function of the rapidly declining numbers of correspondents we have out in the field. Right now there are many in Iraq because that's the big story. Of course, most of them are confined to the Green Zone or areas where they can't get out and report. So you have the classic situation where a bunch of reporters are chasing the same story and they can't actually get out and do classic reporting. In most of the world, there are hardly any reporters left.

"I think if we had had a different media, a more challenging media back three years ago, we would have seen a very different sequence of events since."



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

GJ: Habib, you said you thought the American news business was not doing a good job covering the war in Iraq and you say they are basically being spokespeople for the United States government. The US government also says the news business is not doing a good job. They say it is not reporting all of the positive developments—the rebuilding of the infrastructure, educational system, and police force. Who's right?

Battah: When you watch the American coverage—for example, on Fox News, when they have this graphic that says, “Iraq: A Nation Reborn”—I can see they’re trying to push an agenda that says things are actually not that bad. If you watch Fox News, the economy is good and there’s progress in Iraq. When you watch international news outlets like BBC or even CNN International you see that there is a terrible hell going on in

Iraq today. It’s kind of hard to force a few positive developments onto that. I believe Iraq is the most dangerous country in the world today for a journalist, and that’s been documented. There’s no sense in giving a rosy picture of this.

GJ: Actually I think we have hundreds of American reporters in Iraq at any time. Most of them are embedded with American forces. Does that help to get the administration’s view across to the American public? Is the embedding process responsible for this?

Sawyer: I think that was very true in the first months of the war. I think embedding was one of the most brilliant, slickest media manipulations ever conceived and executed by an administration. It had the effect, as one writer said, of a thousand straws of coverage. Where you had a thousand individual straws, each straw in one unit

where you were writing very vivid, poignant stories about heroic young American men and women trying their hardest, fighting, risking their lives—and yet learning nothing about the overall context. And so you have the entire media’s investment of tens of millions of dollars, which didn’t really tell you anything important about what was going to happen three months, six months down the road.

A recent Zogby poll—the first extensive poll done of American servicemen and women in Iraq—showed that 65 or 70 percent said there is no good conclusion in Iraq, that we should simply leave in the next year, and that we were not going to be able to prevail. Those are our men and women who are fighting there, so I don’t think there’s a way you can arrange American media coverage to make that story look better than it is.

—Loren Keller

“I believe Iraq is the most dangerous country in the world today for a journalist.... There’s no sense in giving a rosy picture of this.”

24/7: The Modern Arab World

Through the lens of VII Photo Agency photographers

In January 2006 the Stanley Foundation commissioned the world-renowned VII Photo Agency to highlight modern, day-to-day life in the Middle East with the ultimate goal of dispelling the myths and misconceptions of the region.

The photographers who took part in this project sought to document the rise and influence of open media in the Arab world, the Western influence on local life, and the daily life experiences of Arab communities in the Middle East.

The images included in this issue of *Courier* represent a small portion of the prints VII photographers Alexandra Boulat, Gary Knight, Antonin Kratochvil, and Joachim Ladefoged brought back from the region.

VII derives its name from the number of founding photojournalists who, in September 2001, formed the collectively owned agency. The work of VII photographers has appeared in *National Geographic*, *Time*, *Life*, and numerous other publications.

But as VII photographer Gary Knight's biography reads: "Like practically every other photographer whose biography you will have read, his work has been published by many auspicious publications all over the world, he has contributed work to several books, exhibited in many museums, and is the recipient of numerous awards but as far as he can see none of them have made a significant impact on the conditions in which the people he photographs lives. Nevertheless, he remains optimistic that this situation may be reversed."

This photography project is a companion to the Stanley Foundation's recently released radio documentary special "24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media." This issue of *Courier* includes reporting and other materials from the program.

These photos were also part of a month-long exhibition at the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. A related panel event kicked off the exhibit, featuring WDET Public Radio reporter Quinn Klinefelter; anchorwoman Ghida Fakhry of the soon-to-be-launched English-language Al Jazeera International; VII photographer Antonin Kratochvil; and Osama Siblani, publisher of *The Arab American News*.

The Stanley Foundation is working to bring panel discussions and the photography exhibit to other museums in the United States. Please contact the foundation if you are interested in hosting a similar event in your community.

"Our goal is to counter common American misperceptions about the Arab world, and the images produced by VII are a great way to start," said Jeff Martin, executive vice president of the Stanley Foundation. "And we're eager to have a lot of people see these pictures."

—Loren Keller

Resources

Stanley Foundation Publications

These reports and a wealth of other information are available at reports.stanleyfoundation.org

PUBLICATIONS

A Critique of the Bush Administration's National Security Strategy *by Lawrence Korb and Caroline Wadhams*

After more than five years in office, the Bush administration still has not produced an achievable national security strategy that has a realistic chance of gaining the support of the American people on a bipartisan basis. This brief examines the particular failings of the 2006 strategy document. June 2006 analysis brief

Open Media and Transitioning Societies in the Arab Middle East: Implications for US Security Policy

The growth of Middle East media raises questions about the impact of this new era on policy, both regionally and internationally. This report summarizes dialogues between regional and Western media and policy elites and offers recommendations. May 2006 report

Ensuring a Well-Managed United Nations **37th United Nations Issues Conference**

The UN has been trying to maintain momentum for renewal since the 2005 summit. This report summarizes the deliberations of a group of UN diplomats on the challenges reform faces and how the UN can best move forward in implementing internal reform. February 2006 online report

A Grand Strategy to Reinvigorate US Leadership **46th Strategy for Peace Conference**

September 11, the invasion of Iraq, and the subsequent war have raised critical questions about the security of the US and its role in the world. This brief reflects a discussion of alternatives to the 2002 US National Security Strategy. October 2005 dialogue brief

United Nations Reform in Context

by David Shorr

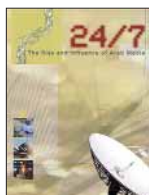
The reforms proposed at the United Nations' 60th anniversary summit pointed the way forward for stronger action on global issues. This brief examines the challenges to reform and the opportunities to build a more secure world. February 2006 analysis brief

Beyond Preemption and Preventive War: Increasing US Budget Emphasis on Conflict Prevention

by Dr. Cindy Williams

The United States has vast but limited resources for assuring national security. This brief recommends a shift in funding toward nonmilitary forms of leadership in the world as well as a new balance between offensive, defensive, and preventive military tools. 2006 analysis brief

RADIO DOCUMENTARY



24/7: The Rise and Influence of Arab Media

A new public radio documentary hosted by David Brancaccio. As a part of the Stanley Foundation's Security in an Era of Open Arab Media project, it examines the dramatic expansion of open media in the Arab world and the security implications this phenomenon has for the United States.

EVENT IN A BOX

The Stanley Foundation is seeking student and community groups interested in showing films related to peace and security issues to their campuses, members, and communities in an effort to open a discussion about the most urgent global issues. The films and additional materials are free of charge. We now have two films available:



Last Best Chance

Last Best Chance is a docudrama showing the threat posed by vulnerable nuclear weapons and materials around the world and spells out what is at stake. If you would like your organization to show the film, find out how by contacting us at info@stanleyfoundation.org.



The Peacekeepers

The Peacekeepers is a documentary exploring the work and experiences of the United Nations Mission to Congo from 2002 to 2004. For more information, contact us at info@stanleyfoundation.org.

OTHER RESOURCES



Our United Nations

In August 2004 photographer Judah S. Harris was commissioned to capture the daily happenings of the United Nations in photos. *Our United Nations* is a collection of these photos, accompanied by historic thoughts on the United Nations and further resources.

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The Murky Window of Satellite Television

Dubai, UAE, March 2006.
Antonin Kratochvil/VII for The Stanley Foundation

Who started all of this? A smart guy named Arthur C. Clarke, who later became a legendary science fiction author. In October 1945, while still in Britain's Royal Air Force, Clarke published an outlandish idea in a magazine called *Wireless World*: the concept of the satellite, in space and synchronized to the earth for the purpose of *television*.

Clarke's article was just four pages long, but included 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 television has certainly become indispensable. 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 cater to regional tastes, regional bias, and 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, and democracy.

As Arabic language television catches fire, some see this rich and unruly marketplace of ideas pumped onto television 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.

The very same Arthur C. Clarke was recently asked about the flood of information that his ideas helped unleash, including satellite TV. He readily acknowledged that so

much on television 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: "Because we frequently suffer from the scourge of information pollution," he said, "we find it hard to imagine its even deadlier opposite—information starvation."

"Because we frequently suffer from the scourge of information pollution, we find it hard to imagine its even deadlier opposite—information starvation."

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This may be something US officials are learning. Karen Hughes, close advisor on these matters to President Bush, visited Al Jazeera headquarters in Doha for a day last winter that included 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.

—Essay by David Brancaccio,
host of "24/7: The Rise and
Influence of Arab Media"