

Shifting Sands: The Impact of Satellite TV on Media in the Arab World

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Deborah Horan

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**National Endowment
for Democracy**
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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

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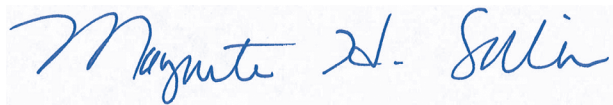
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Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study of satellite television broadcasting in the Middle East and North Africa. The report examines the positive effect satellite television has had on the media environment and explains why nevertheless the region still lacks media freedom.

CIMA is grateful to Deborah Horan, a veteran journalist with extensive experience reporting from the Middle East, for her research and insights on this topic.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance efforts.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marguerite H. Sullivan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marguerite H. Sullivan
Senior Director
Center for International Media Assistance

Executive Summary

Media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are freer than they were a decade ago, with a proliferation of satellite television news channels leading the way. Arab newscasts cover events in real time, sometimes scooping their Western competition with spot news coverage of regional conflicts. Talk shows regularly stir controversy by airing contentious views, breaking social taboos, and giving regional platforms to political opposition groups. Government-run media have been forced to compete or lose audiences. Yet most governments in the MENA region have managed to retain a tight grip on media, whether through the arbitrary application of restrictive and vague press laws, limits on media production, or a kinship, political, or business relationship with media owners. There are exceptions, and transnational news channels generally operate under fewer constraints than local broadcasts. But only three Arab countries, for instance, were ranked “partly free” for media by Freedom House in its 2009 *Freedom of the Press* index; the rest remained “not free.”¹ Similarly, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), in its 2006/2007 *Media Sustainability Index* (MSI) for the Middle East and North Africa, found that media freedom in a majority of Arab countries had worsened

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or remained stagnant since a 2005 survey; only in five of the 18 countries surveyed had media freedoms slightly improved.²

Equally worrying to some observers, all but two ministers of information signed an Arab League resolution in 2008 designed to regulate Arab satellite news channels.³ Arab governments, meanwhile, continued to temporarily close satellite broadcast news bureaus and detain and harass broadcast journalists, and several governments sought

to silence print and Internet journalists as well, arresting and intimidating bloggers in particular. Media laws in most countries remained ambiguous and arbitrarily enforced, creating an uneasy environment and compelling journalists to censor their own work. Governments cracked down on journalists who dared to cross

“red lines” in their reporting—covering taboo subjects that a government deems too sensitive for coverage, often because the issues call into question the legitimacy of the ruling regime.

Yet these measures belie what many Arab journalists and other observers say is a loosened media atmosphere in the age of transnational satellite television. The proliferation of satellite channels, they say, has opened up space for debate of issues once considered off-limits: everything from Israeli points of view on the conflict with

the Palestinians to discussion of American airbases on Qatari soil has been broadcast on cutting-edge shows such as al-Jazeera’s *The Opposite Direction*. Spot news coverage of regional conflicts has conferred legitimacy on Arab news once dismissed by audiences across the region as official propaganda. But while the satellite television revolution has raised the bar, generating higher-quality production as well as freer speech, the greater freedom enjoyed by a few transnational satellite channels has not always translated into greater freedom for journalists working in-country, particularly for local or state-owned outlets. Moreover, the satellite revolution has not prompted significant change in media laws in most MENA countries. With few exceptions, governments in the region continue to curb media freedom as it suits them.

This report explores the television landscape in the MENA region more than a decade after the rise of Arab satellite news channels. It examines both the positive effect satellite coverage has had on the media environment and the reasons why the region still lacks media freedom. The report focuses on television broadcast coverage but also considers the impact of satellite television on print, radio, and the Internet. Among its findings:

- The political landscape of individual countries, including their level of internal legitimacy and perceived vulnerability to political extremists, influences the level of media freedom enjoyed in that country at any given moment. In many MENA countries, media freedom is a privilege bestowed by monarchs and dictators, not an immutable right enshrined in law, despite the
- existence of press freedom clauses in some constitutions. Therefore, Arab broadcast channels can be “unmade” as easily as they were made.⁴
- The absence of media company consolidation in the region suggests that owners want to broadcast their own choice of content, including news content, which in turn suggests that media in the region are not viewed as a business venture but as a political tool.⁵
- Television viewers in the MENA region are generally aware of broadcast ownership, particularly of the bigger stations, and expect a political slant to the news. The general expectation is that no one is broadcasting just for the sake of informing the public, so it is assumed that all the owners have agendas.
- Private television, whether terrestrial or satellite, is much more threatening to ruling elites than private newspapers, which are easier to censor in advance and to physically disrupt. Thus, governments have been very careful to vet owners prior to granting licenses to private television stations.
- The expense of producing high-quality news reports in the MENA region is often prohibitive and has led some smaller satellite television channels to scale back ambitious reporting projects that had competed with big channels, such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya.
- Despite the continued absence of legal protections for media in most MENA countries, the breadth of political debate and accuracy in news

reporting is greater than before the rise of satellite news, and this improvement is attributable in part to satellite news.

- Satellite channels can often cover sensitive issues with greater freedom than local broadcasters because of their transnational nature. The model of freer reporting that satellite television has introduced has not meant that local media can easily follow suit, either due to a lack of resources or because local media are constrained by restrictive laws. At the same time, the rise of satellite news has put pressure on state-owned television stations to compete or lose audience share.
- The rise of satellite news channels has provided better coverage of regional news—such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, inter-country disputes, and the war in Iraq—but has not always provided better television coverage of local news in a particular country. Local news is still often left to state-owned and private terrestrial or satellite channels that operate under media constraints.
- While new media—such as online newspapers and blogs—have gained in popularity in the MENA region, Web outlets still rely heavily on Arab satellite news channels: A survey by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School found that the most common link found on the Web sites of 35,000 Arab blogs (except YouTube and Wikipedia) was to al-Jazeera, followed by BBC Arabic Television, with al-Arabiya close behind.⁶
- Lack of training and low salaries in the MENA region compel the best journalists to seek work at al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya, and other big satellite channels. The result is often a marked disparity in the quality of news between the large satellite channels and local producers of news.
- Because most Arab countries are not democratic, even if media coverage of a particular issue compels people to push for change, there are few—and often no—political avenues available to make that change happen.⁷ Nonetheless, more access to reliable news sources for more of the region’s citizens can only advance the cause of democracy, however incrementally, and there are examples of politicians and public figures being compelled by the media spotlight to answer for their actions.

Historical Background: Media as an Arm of Government

Until the 1990s, television news in the Arab world was a dry affair. Nightly newscasters recounted what heads of state did without much detail and recited government press releases verbatim. Television stations were arms of government run by ministries of information, and journalists were bureaucrats who didn't ask too many questions. With a few exceptions, the production quality was poor, and audiences learned to distrust the information. Instead, Arabs turned to outlets

such as Radio Monte Carlo, BBC Arabic Television and Radio, and their neighborhood coffee shops. While many MENA country constitutions safeguarded press freedom on paper, vague and restrictive press laws, arbitrary enforcement of those laws, and courts beholden to governments led to

little freedom in practice. Though the level of freedom ebbed and flowed depending on various internal and external factors, journalists ultimately toiled at the behest of the rulers, who often dictated the news and jailed journalists who flouted their wishes.

That isn't to say that there was no media freedom. In the early 1990s in Jordan, for instance, Rami Khouri, director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, moderated a political

talk show called *Encounter* on government-owned TV. The few times the Jordanian government interfered with the programming, Khouri said, were due to social, not political, considerations. (Khouri declined to name specific instances, but social issues might include references to gender issues, family law or other subjects considered taboo in conservative Islamic societies). The fact that the show was in English with Arabic subtitles limited its appeal and thus its

potential to unnerve the government.

Khouri attributes the relative freedom he and others had to produce such shows largely to the fall of the Soviet Union, which had prompted calls for democratic reform in the Arab World.⁸ Indeed, in 1992, Freedom House ranked five MENA countries “partly free” for media, and

the number eventually crept to six. But by 1998, the number of countries ranked “partly free” had shrunk to three.⁹ “There was a whole liberalization moment ... a massive expansion of Arab media in the 1990s,” Khouri said. “Then it closed up again.”

Yet changes were already afoot. In 1994, Rome-based Orbit, owned by a private Saudi investment company, became the first satellite channel to offer Arabic-language news from a public source, the BBC. Two years later, Orbit's Saudi owners pulled the plug on the

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BBC's Arabic service following controversy over its airing of interviews with a Saudi dissident in London and a documentary about capital punishment in Saudi Arabia. But filling the void—and altering the face of news in the Arab world—was al-Jazeera, launched in 1996 by Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani. His initial investment was roughly \$140 million.

Since then, dozens of channels have followed. Egyptian businessmen launched the private stations Dream TV and al-Mehwar, which offer news and political talk shows. Lebanon's many terrestrial stations expanded to satellite, including Hezbollah's al-Manar. The Lebanese Broadcasting Corp. is a popular Christian-owned channel. Nabih Berri, leader of Lebanon's Shiite Amal Movement, launched the National Broadcasting Network (NBN), and Maronite Christian leader Michel

Aoun launched Orange TV. In London, an estranged uncle of Syrian President Bashar Assad runs the Arab News Network (ANN). Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), a privately owned Saudi network, launched al-Arabiya in 2003. Palestinians have several local independent television stations, including Wattan TV, al-Mahd TV, al-Majd TV, and al-Nawras.¹⁰ In 2009, Palestinian state television began airing political satire a la *Saturday Night Live*, featuring spoofs of politicians by Palestinian comedians—without interference from government censors. In 2000, Abu Dhabi launched Abu Dhabi TV, which built a reputation for news. In neighboring Dubai, al-Aan TV caters to Arab women. But obstacles remain: In Jordan, ATV, the first privately owned terrestrial channel in that country, has been waiting for a license to broadcast news since 2007.¹¹

Today: News in Real Time

What al-Jazeera did was different from its predecessors on two important counts. First, it introduced real-time news coverage of major news events to Arab audiences who were accustomed to disinformation or silence while leaders scrambled to secure the ranks or spin an event to their advantage. In 1998, al-Jazeera was the only Arab news network broadcasting live from Baghdad when the United States and Britain launched

Operation Desert Fox, providing the channel with a scoop that would launch it the way the Persian Gulf War had catapulted CNN into the international spotlight seven years earlier. Since then, al-Jazeera has covered a string of Middle East conflicts—in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, and Gaza—building its reputation across

the region, though not without controversy. The channel has come under harsh criticism for its coverage of Osama bin Laden, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and Iran, with Bush administration officials leading the charge that its reports were anti-American; it has also been criticized in the West for showing graphic violence. Yet al-Jazeera also was the first (non-Palestinian) Arab channel to air interviews with Israeli officials at a time when few Arabs outside

the Palestinian territories had ever seen an Israeli live on television. Its coverage of clashes in the West Bank town of Jenin in 2002 contradicted the Palestinian claim that hundreds of civilians had been killed by Israeli soldiers. With multiple news crews operating in Iraq during the U.S. invasion in 2003, al-Jazeera covered many developments in that country, arriving at bombing sites so quickly that Bush

administration officials accused the channel of having received information in advance. Most Arab audiences came to trust al-Jazeera's reporting (in Iraq, the channel has been criticized—and kicked out of the country—for its perceived support of Sunnis over Shia in the country's recent civil unrest), even as the reporting

rattled governments and redefined the way news in the MENA region was covered. "It has had a significant impact," Khouri said. "Once the [government-owned] TV services knew that people could turn on al-Jazeera and get factual coverage, they couldn't use their old tricks of giving people doctored news, or incomplete news, and they couldn't ignore a story like they used to. Every [Arab] journalist feels that effect."

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Who's Who in Middle East Broadcast News

2M Maroc: Partially state-owned satellite channel offering news, sports, and entertainment; launched by a private business conglomerate in 1989 and later sold to the government.

Abu Dhabi Satellite TV: State-owned general news, sports, and entertainment channel launched in 2000; made a name for itself during the U.S. invasion of Iraq, when it briefly aired as a 24-hour news channel.

Al-Arabiya: Launched in 2003 by the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), Lebanon's Hariri Group, and other Gulf investors, it is part of the MBC network; features 24-hour news and talk shows.

Alhurra: U.S.-funded news channel launched by the Bush Administration in 2004 as a response to a perceived increase in anti-U.S. sentiment in the Middle East.

Al-Jazeera: Founded in 1996 by Qatar's emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani; now a 24-hour independent news channel with bureaus around the globe; launched an English-language channel in 2006.

Al-Manar: Private Lebanese channel owned by the Hezbollah, or Party of God; offers 24-hour news and entertainment; founded in the early 1990s as a terrestrial channel and launched as a satellite network in 2000.

ANN: Privately owned channel founded in London in 1997 by Syrian President Bashar Assad's uncle, Rifaat Assad, a former vice president of Syria who opposes the Assad regime.

Dream TV and al-Mehwar TV: First and second privately owned Egyptian channels launched in 2001 and 2002, respectively; Dream TV is owned by Egyptian businessman Ahmad Baghat; al-Mehwar is owned by Hassan Rateb and the state-run Egyptian Radio and Television Union.

Egyptian Satellite Channel and Nile TV: State-owned satellite channels featuring news, drama, sports, religion, and entertainment; Egypt Satellite Channel was launched in 1990 by the Egyptian Radio and Television Union; Nile TV began in 1993 and is the first Egyptian station to broadcast in Arabic, English, French, and Hebrew; expanded in 2000.

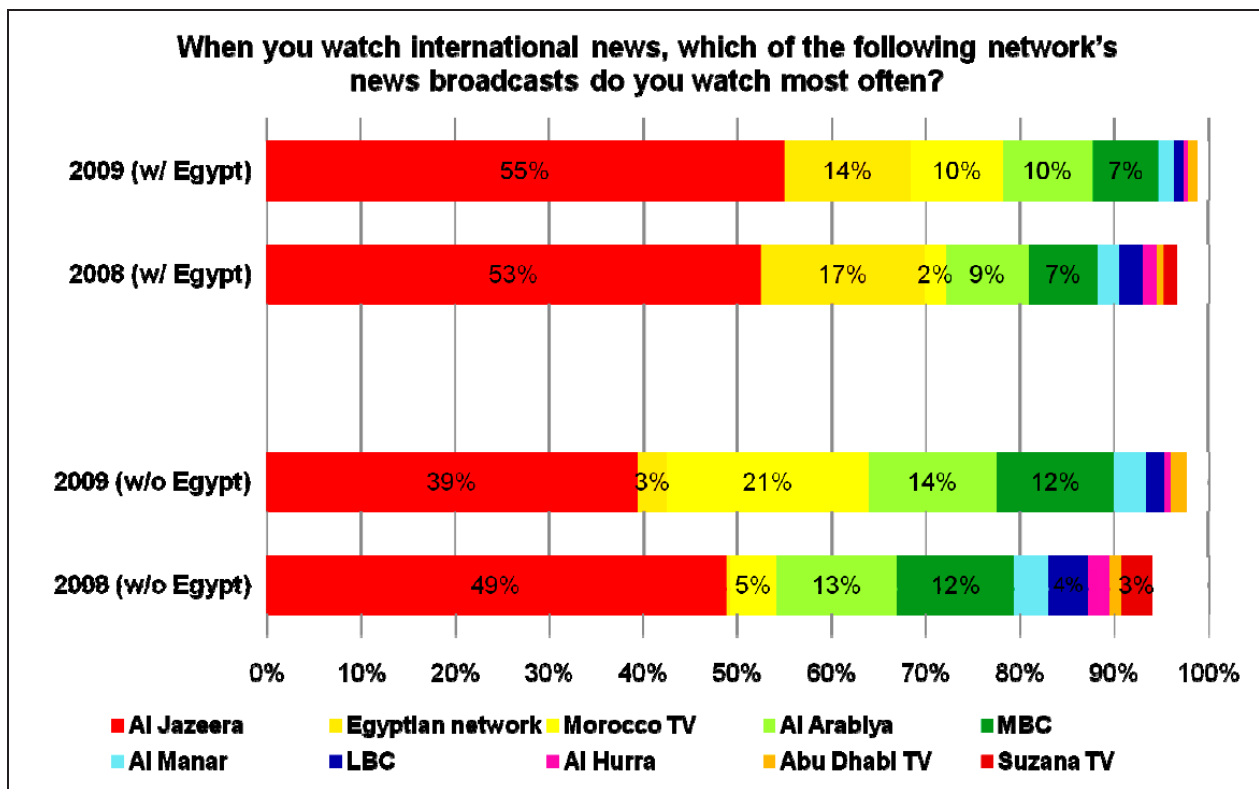
Future TV: Private Lebanese news and entertainment channel founded in 1993 with the backing of the late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and still owned by the Hariri family; launched a satellite channel in 1994.

Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation: Private Lebanese channel launched in 1985 by Maronite Christian leader Bashir Gemayel; started satellite broadcasting news and entertainment in 1996.

Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC): Privately owned Saudi channel offering news, sports, and entertainment; launched a satellite channel in 1991.

Second, al-Jazeera's talk shows broke nearly every social and political taboo by broaching subjects no one had dared to broadcast. *The Opposite Direction*, in particular, gained fame as a raucous platform for debate. Several others dropped jaws as well, including *Religion and Life* and *Without Borders*. Today, dozens of channels have copied al-Jazeera's

style, albeit in a more subdued vein, most notably MBC's al-Arabiya and Abu Dhabi TV, expanding the space for a freer media and eroding state control over the press.¹² While al-Jazeera is by far the most watched channel [see table on adjoining page], more than a dozen news channels compete for viewers, including the Lebanese channel al-Manar, which is



Source: University of Maryland with Zogby International, 2009 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey, April-May/2009, conducted in six Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates), margin of error, +/- 1.6%. The polling numbers are computed with and without Egypt because Egypt's population is so comparatively large that its numbers can obscure opinions in the other countries.

operated by the Shiite Muslim group Hezbollah and which ranks among the 10 most popular satellite channels in the region, according to the 2009 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey. To compete, some state-run news channels have changed their formats, parroting al-Jazeera's format and adding political talk shows to their mix of programming. Politicians have had to change too, even if only to learn the art of the sound-bite. Gone are the days when a leader's speech was dutifully aired in full, no matter how long or how fatuous or irrelevant the subject matter. Investigative pieces, such as some hard-hitting exposés by Iraqi journalists who won awards for their work last year, have forced greater accountability—though sometimes at a high price: One Iraqi journalist who exposed corruption in the president's office survived an assassination attempt following publication of his story.

The Media Explosion

There are today more than 500 satellite television channels offering news, entertainment, religion, sports, documentaries, children's programming, and music video in Arabic. Though many offer regular news updates, most of them are not news channels, and many cater to Arabs living outside the Middle East, such as France 24 and China Central TV, which launched an Arabic service in July 2009.¹³ A few are dedicated solely or primarily to news. With all these new satellite channels (and dozens of new privately owned newspapers and radio stations), the glaring question remains: Why do MENA countries still get such dismal marks for media freedom, both from organizations that monitor press freedom and from Arab journalists themselves?

The short answer to that question is simply that the advent of satellite television has not heralded political reform as quickly as proponents of free media might have expected. Consider these recent examples of government interference in broadcast, print, and Internet news:

- In Egypt, an appellate court upheld the conviction of an al-Jazeera journalist charged with harming Egypt's reputation for her work on a documentary about torture.¹⁴ In a separate incident, police confiscated equipment from a local news company after it broadcast al-Jazeera footage of protesters tearing down posters of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.¹⁵
- An Iraqi court imposed a fine of roughly \$125,000 on the Iraqi satellite channel al-Sharqiya as a result of a lawsuit by an Iraqi army officer alleging defamation for quoting him saying that Iraqis released by U.S. forces would be re-arrested by Iraqi authorities.¹⁶ Press watchdog groups have expressed alarm at government proposals to impose new licensing requirements and vaguely-worded rules on media outlets.¹⁷
- In Tunisia, the home Internet connection of an al-Jazeera correspondent was cut, and police prevented him from meeting with a human rights activist in Tunis following al-Jazeera's coverage of Tunisian exiles in Geneva.¹⁸
- In Yemen, security forces raided the offices al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya in March 2010, seizing equipment after the channels broadcast footage of clashes between police and protesters. In 2009, al-Jazeera's bureau chief received death threats after a ruling party official called the channel's coverage of clashes between the government and armed activists in the south "hostile to the unity and security of Yemen."¹⁹
- Al-Jazeera's bureau chief was beaten in January 2009 by Jordanian anti-riot police while covering protests against Israeli air strikes in Gaza; police described the incident as "isolated," but it was not the first time authorities had curbed al-Jazeera's reporters: In 2005 Jordanian authorities confiscated the camera equipment of an al-Arabiya correspondent who was filming the aftermath of a suicide bombing in Amman.²⁰
- A Moroccan court imposed fines on three independent dailies for "publicly harming" Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and "injuring his dignity." Authorities confiscated copies of two publications after they printed results of an opinion poll on King Mohammed VI's decade in power. In the past 10 years, Moroccan journalists have been sentenced to a total of 25 years in prison and news media have been fined a total of nearly \$3 million.²¹
- Saudi Arabia arrested a 25-year-old Syrian blogger living in Saudi Arabia after he criticized both countries on Internet forums and called for the release of bloggers detained by Saudi Arabia.²²

The Media Environment

The Middle East is still ruled by monarchs and dictators. Vague media laws remain in place in most countries.

The absence of political parties and effective nongovernmental organizations results in a lack of avenues for political change. As Hugh Miles, a British journalist born in Saudi Arabia who has written for the Sunday Times of London, states in his book, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel that is Challenging the West*, if media coverage of a certain issue did change minds, there is yet no effective political procedure in most MENA countries to do anything about it.²³

“The mechanisms [for change] are weak,” said Edmund Ghareeb, an expert on Arab and American media at the American University’s School of International Service in Washington, D.C. “I’m not saying they don’t exist at all, but they are weak.”²⁴

Ghareeb is one of many analysts, journalists, and others who have predicted satellite television would force Arab governments to accept a greater degree of media freedom and democracy than has developed so far. The freedom afforded to satellite news channels by their transnational nature would, the theory went, force governments to loosen media restrictions and usher in democratic reforms. “I thought we were going to bring about much more rapid change,” Ghareeb said. “I wonder maybe are we expecting too much, too fast.”

Initially, governments nervous about their inability to control the flow of information shut down satellite channels, particularly

al-Jazeera, by closing offices, arresting journalists, and appealing to Qatar’s emir, who politely ignored them. In one famous instance, Algeria’s government caused a city-wide power outage in the capital, Algiers, to prevent viewers from seeing a documentary on the country’s civil war. Some governments still would like to prevent much satellite broadcasting, but for technical reasons, jamming the airwaves is not possible for more than short periods of time. By now, most rulers have realized that satellite news does not pose an imminent threat to their political survival. They have sought instead to contain its potential impact through such measures as remaking state-owned television news to

attract larger numbers of viewers. “These regimes have been extremely efficient at recasting themselves,” said Marwan Kraidy, associate professor of global communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

“They’ve moved from propaganda to public relations.”²⁵ For instance, though his victory was never in doubt, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak ran for president in 2005 like a Western politician, replete with made-for-television campaign promises. In other instances, news coverage has forced political leaders to answer for their actions, whether to refute allegations against them or to try to sway public opinion. The greater openness has often made for riveting television, and though it may not yet have ushered in democracy, satellite coverage has fomented the kind of the debate over issues that democracy is meant to engender.

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Steps in the Right Direction

The longer and more complicated answer to the question of why media in the MENA region are not freer includes the paradoxical conclusion that they are, in fact, freer in a few ways. Despite the disappointing pace, there is much change afoot in Middle East media. There have been impressive gains in the range of views presented on newscasts and talk shows and a wider margin for dissenting opinions. Regional conflicts are well-covered, and journalists report on sensitive political and social issues in many countries. Freedom House, while still categorizing most MENA countries as “not free” for media, acknowledges that most countries have logged steady progress toward freedom—just not enough to warrant a “free” ranking. “There has been an improvement in scores,” said Karin Deutsch Karlekar, senior researcher and managing editor of the organization’s *Freedom of the Press*. “It’s just that they still end within the ‘not free’ category. It’s because they are starting out from such a low base.”

Arab media observers note important, though nuanced, signs of change in many places, from a trend toward private ownership to an increased number of female correspondents and news anchors, even in countries such as Saudi Arabia. “The trend or trajectory is unmistakable,” said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, the MENA

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program coordinator at the Committee to Protect Journalists.²⁶ “They are freer than before.” Cases in point:

- More than a decade after al-Jazeera’s *The Opposite Direction* led the way with feisty programming that initially shocked viewers, political talk shows are a television staple. Al-Arabiya has several talk shows about politics, and a fifth, *Death Industry*, that deals with global terrorism; Qatar TV airs *The Decision is Yours*, a debate program between senior officials and Qatari students; in Egypt, Dream TV’s *Ten PM* questions public figures about Egyptian current affairs; Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation’s *Talk of the People* focuses on Lebanese politics but draws audiences outside Lebanon.²⁷
- Spot news, particularly coverage of conflict in Iraq, Lebanon, and the Palestinian territories, provides immediate coverage of events. Al-Jazeera, in particular, is known for arriving quickly at world hot spots. Live coverage of Israeli officials—not seen in many Arab countries before the rise of al-Jazeera—is now common, though Israelis don’t receive the same degree of coverage as their Arab counterparts.
- Satellite news is the most common denominator among some 35,000 Arab blogs. According to Harvard’s

Berkman Center for Internet and Society, more Arab blogs link to al-Jazeera than any other website except YouTube and Wikipedia. BBC Arabic is the fourth most linked, and al-Arabiya is seventh.²⁸

- The Internet has served as a creative news venue for more than bloggers. A Jordanian women's radio station called Zahrat al-Gor in the Jordan Valley, is being heard by listeners even though Jordanian authorities denied the station a license. The way it works: The women produce news reports and give them to an Amman-based radio station called Radio Al Balad, which uploads them onto its Web site. A Palestinian radio station in the West Bank town of Jericho downloads the reports and broadcasts them at a frequency accessible to listeners in Jordan—thus circumventing the government's refusal to issue the women a broadcasting permit.
- Media laws passed in several MENA countries, including Kuwait, Qatar, and Egypt, have allowed for the establishment of privately owned television stations and newspapers.²⁹ News outlets maintain Web sites that provide space for reader comments. One Arab journalist cited this as a step toward increased public debate, and also an opportunity to correct journalists' mistakes, leading to greater accountability.³⁰
- Journalism awards laud investigative work and stories that highlight social problems. The Arab Journalism Award, established by the Dubai

Press Club 1999, this year singled out journalists covering issues such as AIDS in the Arab world and the smuggling of medical waste in Egypt.³¹

Additionally, in the last decade, some Arab governments, such as Qatar, have moved to abolish ministries of information, and several have set up “free zones” for media to attract foreign news organizations, including Arab satellite channels based in Europe or other Arab countries. The idea—sparked in Jordan—was to entice European-based Arab outlets to set up shop in the Middle East by offering tax incentives in the zones. In 2000, Egypt set up a licensing system for broadcasters in a free zone near Cairo.³² Saudi-owned private company ART created a free zone in Jordan that was inaugurated in 2002.³³ Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the UAE also set up similar zones, and Lebanon's is under discussion. By 2006, the free zone in Dubai had more than 50 regional and international broadcasters. Syria also opened a zone for free media, but Arab journalists don't appear to take it seriously.³⁴

In a number of the media zones, however the media were not necessarily freer to report the news than journalists based in-country working outside the zones. Most governments applied codes of ethics to the zones that parroted existing censorship laws.

And in the case of the ministries of information, the functions of the ones that were abolished were often transferred to other government bodies. The UAE's ministry of information, for instance, was abolished in 2006 but replaced by the National Media Council, whose functions were similar.³⁵ Notably, Qatar's minister of information became a top employee at al-Jazeera.

Faced with fierce competition from satellite news channels, state-owned broadcasts underwent makeovers aimed at attracting increasingly sophisticated and fickle audiences. They created talk shows that imitated al-Jazeera's, albeit without the flamboyance or explosive subject matter that has helped al-Jazeera attract so much buzz, such as a now-famous episode of *The Opposite Direction* that pitted an Iraqi Baathist who ran a television station in favor of Iraq's insurgency against an Iraqi opposed to Saddam Hussein's regime. There were also subtler transformations. Female correspondents in Saudi Arabia, a country counted among the least free in the MENA region, now often accompany news crews to interview people on the streets—something that never would have happened a few years ago. “They are small steps, but the changes are there,” said an Arab journalist working for a Saudi-owned satellite channel.³⁶

Methods of Control

Despite these examples of progress, many of the old obstacles to media freedom—as well as some new ones—remain in place across the MENA region. From voting to regulate satellite television channels to retaining vague language in revamped media laws, governments in the MENA region continue to exert a high degree of control over the media. Often that control is less overt, relying instead on business associations and family ties, diplomatic maneuvering, or withdrawal of advertising dollars.

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Other obstacles exist as well. Besides the durability of Arab kings and dictators (and their state security apparatuses), and an absence of clear press laws, Arab journalists and media analysts point to several other impediments to greater press freedom. These include ownership structures that impede independent journalism; commercial non-viability that leaves most outlets in the hands of government, businessmen close to government, or political parties; and conservative societies that are unaccustomed to, and sometimes suspicious of, the media.

Regulating Satellite

In 2008, Saudi and Egyptian ministers of information caused a stir when they introduced a charter to the Arab League to regulate satellite television channels. Called the “Principles for Organizing Satellite TV in the Arab World,” the document aimed to

curb broadcasts of material that “damage social harmony, national unity, public order or traditional values,” among other restrictions.³⁷ The proposal was brought in response to the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, said Kraidy, the Annenberg professor. Egypt and Saudi Arabia were upset about satellite news coverage that had aired their criticisms of Hezbollah during the war, which made them appear to be defending Israel. “These countries had already been thinking about how to control these anarchic satellite channels,” Kraidy said. “When [the channels] started insulting Saudi and Egypt for siding with Israel, the [governments] decided to move against them.”

Every country in the Arab League except Lebanon and Qatar adopted the charter—precisely because the charter sought mainly to curb al-Jazeera and al-Manar, an indication of how media battles have come to mirror regional political fault lines. Following the vote, some Arab analysts said the charter amounted to little more than the oversight that governs other broadcasting networks, such as the BBC’s, and was meant to ensure that responsible journalistic standards were maintained.³⁸ Media freedom watchdogs groups, however, blasted it as an attempt to “muzzle the main source of independent news in the region.”³⁹

It’s unclear what impact, if any, the charter has had on broadcast media to date. Jonathan Wright, managing editor of the Cairo-based *Arab Media and Society*, a journal that analyses Arab media and its effect on Arab government and culture, characterized it as an “insurance policy” for governments to hold in reserve in the event that traditional avenues of media control fail. Some analysts argue that the unspoken inter-Arab agreement not to lambast each other through the media was broken during Hezbollah’s 2006 war with Israel, when both al-Jazeera and al-Manar criticized Arab governments’ inaction during the month-long conflict.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the charter is not enshrined in law in any MENA country, so it is unclear how it might be enforced. Khouri, of the Issam Fares Institute, doubted it would carry much significance. “If [Arab governments] want to stop media, they can take them to court, shut them down,” Khouri said. “They don’t need a charter.”

Kraidy agreed, but added that the charter did not bode well. “It’s just a text,” he said, “but it makes it very clear that there is [political will] to expand these states’ oppressive regulations to satellite television and that is not a good sign.”

Qatar’s Local-Regional Divide

Qatar may be the headquarters of al-Jazeera Satellite Channel, but the country’s local media continue to receive low marks for journalistic excellence. Eight journalists, including one from al-Jazeera, participating in an IREX panel described a dismal level of professionalism and journalistic standards practiced at the local level, and a near-total dependence on foreign Arab journalists to cover domestic issues.ⁱ The panel found “astonishingly low activity in civil society concerning media development.” Yet al-Jazeera received consistently high grades in newsgathering and production, including coverage of Qatari issues such as the al-Udeid air base maintained by the U.S. military in Qatar. The difference in resources, training, and skill level among journalists in Qatar illustrates the regional-local media divide in quality of news coverage that exists in many countries in the MENA region.

Qatari journalists on the panel faulted themselves for failing to go after important stories, blaming a conservative culture as well as a lack of training. Panel participants complained of a dual system that gives al-Jazeera freedom that local journalists are not sure they can also enjoy. Qatar’s restrictive press law remains on the books, and political parties are still outlawed. Local journalists said they encountered resistance to giving out information from government employees unused to media freedom.

Several panelists said that the emir remains more progressive than his people on issues such as media freedom, as evidenced by his moves to create an independent satellite channel. Qatari society, they said, remains deeply rooted in traditions that often stifle journalism, and public pressure for media reform is virtually nonexistent. It remains unclear how far the local Qatari media could push for media freedom if they tried.

ⁱ IREX, “Qatar,” *Media Sustainability Index 2006/2007 – Middle East and North Africa* (Washington: IREX, 2008), http://www.irex.org/programs/MSI_MENA/2006/MSI-MENA06_qatar.asp.

Legal Restrictions

The constitutions of many MENA countries give lip service to media freedom, but in reality most continue to have restrictive and vague press laws that make it difficult for journalists to know what is legal and what is not. Laws include fines or prison sentences for journalists who insult heads of state or jeopardize national security. Each country has its own sensitive issues that journalists in that country generally know not to touch, but the line delineating what is permissible, and what is not, often shifts. Islam, national unity, and social morals are also often accorded an undefined protected status.

A further impediment lies with courts that are often influenced or controlled by the regime, resulting in little or no independent judicial review.⁴¹ Steps touted by governments as improvements to existing media laws have fallen short of expectations:

- In Egypt, a 2006 press law hailed as a step forward failed to abolish prison sentences for journalists for dissemination of “false news,” criticizing the president, and attacking the honor of an individual, among other alleged crimes. In fact, the law increased fines for libel and defamation, which are loosely defined.⁴²
- In Morocco, problems persist with political control over trials targeting independent newspapers. In one case, thousands of copies of two newspapers were destroyed after they published editorials critiquing a speech made by King Mohamed VI.⁴³
- Jordan’s parliament passed a freedom of information act, but it contained articles that hamper the right to publish the information. Parliament also barred the detention of journalists but the State Security Court, a tribunal set up by the prime minister, can still try journalists. Promisingly, the editor of the opposition *al-Majd* weekly was acquitted of slander charges in a court ruling that stated that “the press has the right to criticize the executive power as part of the democratic process.”⁴⁴
- In Syria, despite statutory free speech guarantees, journalists must toe the government line and cannot freely report on the presidency, the army, or issues related to national security or minorities. Controls are so tight that the media did not report a 2007 Israeli air strike on a target inside Syria.⁴⁵
- Saudi Arabia’s Basic Law does not provide for press freedom, and journalists face fines, detention, threats of arrest, interrogation, job dismissal, and harassment for crossing red lines.⁴⁶
- The UAE’s 1980 media law provided for firing, prosecution, high fines, and suspension of advertisements as punishment for violations against the law.⁴⁷ The new law, passed in 2009, was not much of an improvement, though it was drafted the National Media Council, a body established after the Ministry of Information was dismantled. The law includes penalties for “disparaging government officials” and “harming the nation’s image.”⁴⁸
- Bahrain’s monarch has promised to amend the 2002 press law, which delineates 17 categories for which a journalist can be imprisoned for up to five years, in ways that would ease restrictions on journalists and encourage a freer media.⁴⁹

Wright of Arab Media and Society notes that the laws as written are not a journalist's only concern. "It's not so much the laws on the books that stifle them as the arbitrary and unpredictable hand of the state, which operates without any effective judicial review," Wright said in an e-mail correspondence. "The authorities have in fact used the laws to intimidate, rather than to punish. The usual pattern is that an editor is sentenced, stays free during the appeal process, and later receives a lesser, non-custodial sentence."

Self Censorship

The legal ambiguity of media laws often forces journalists throughout the MENA region to guess which red lines cannot be crossed at any given time, which creates an incentive for them to self-censor their reports. Journalists must weigh the importance of a story against the risks of provoking the government by airing or publishing it.⁵⁰ One journalist in the UAE told a panel convened by IREX that "there is a censor within every journalist and every newspaper writer. He knows the line that he cannot cross."⁵¹

In practice it appears the line may not be clear, even in some of the more restrictive states. Syrian journalists participating in a separate IREX panel on media freedom insisted the list of taboo subjects had shrunk. Yet all of them participated in the panel only on condition of anonymity.

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A corollary to self-censorship concerns what might be termed a "gentlemen's agreement": When countries' leaders call verbal truces on political disagreements, once-negative news coverage of the other country often suddenly turns positive, according to journalists interviewed for this report. One journalist recounted being commissioned to write op-ed pieces for publication that were held in the queue and never published after the ruler of the country suddenly made nice with the leader whose policies the op-ed had criticized.⁵²

The Local-Regional Divide

While satellite news journalists have been jailed, fined, and deported for their coverage of sensitive issues, local media often work under greater constraints than transnational outlets because satellite news reports can be produced anywhere and viewed across the MENA region. If a news show is reporting on a controversial topic, for example Algerian insurgents or Saudi

dissidents, people in those countries can tune in to watch programs produced in studios in London. Controversial guests can appear from locations beyond the reach of the governments that seek to silence them. Journalists covering Morocco, for instance, can report both sides of the dispute over Western Sahara—a topic considered treasonous in Morocco—by interviewing Saharan separatists in neighboring Algeria.

Abu Dhabi Satellite TV's 24/7 News Experiment

Launched as a general satellite channel in 2000 featuring entertainment and sports in addition to news, Abu Dhabi TV made a name for itself almost immediately by following al-Jazeera into the West Bank and Gaza Strip to report on the Palestinian uprising at a time when few other Arab television channels would enter the Israeli-occupied territories.

Three years later, the channel made its mark again by covering the U.S. invasion of Iraq—this time as a 24-hour news channel. Figuring their audience would go for “all-news-all-the-time” on the conflict brewing in the heart of the Arab world, the channel’s directors stationed 80 people in Baghdad at the height of its war coverage. The channel’s reporting from the early days of the war remains iconic. But after the fall of Baghdad, Abu Dhabi TV gradually pulled back and returned to its previous eclectic programming, which includes six hours of news a day as well as political talk shows.

In a 2003 interview, Abu Dhabi TV director Ali al-Ahmed said that the station never intended to remain a 24-hour news channel.¹ The station viewed the Iraq war as a singular event, he said, that would capture enough audience attention—temporarily—to warrant round-the-clock coverage.

Nart Bouran, then director of Abu Dhabi TV’s news center, said at the time that the station might consider returning to 24-hour news. It never did—possibly, some analysts surmised, because producing news 24-hours a day is expensive. But the experiment made a lasting impression on Arab viewers and burnished Abu Dhabi TV’s reputation for balanced news.

¹ Abdallah Schleifer, “Less News is Good News for Abu Dhabi TV,” interview with Ali al-Ahmed and Nart Bouran, *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 11 (2003), http://www.tbsjournal.com/Archives/Fall03/Ali_Bouran.html.

Journalists working for local outlets, by contrast, don’t always enjoy such mobility. They are typically local citizens with nowhere to run or foreign workers who fear deportation. Local news organizations can be permanently shut down, fined, or driven out of business. They often lack the political and financial support that comes with working for a major satellite channel, and governments may be less likely to jail foreign nationals than their own citizens.

Still, many journalists working for local outlets in both print and broadcasting have pressed for greater media freedom, tackling issues that have landed many of them in jail. In July 2009, Morocco began court hearings against a journalist charged with “insulting God.” In September, journalists in Iraq demonstrated against creeping curbs on media freedom.⁵³ Often the formal charges against the journalist have nothing to do with journalism: in October, Tunisian authorities charged a journalist with assault but media watchdog groups allege the arrest was due to the journalist’s criticism of the reelection of President Ben Ali.

The Trend Toward Private Media

Even as satellite channels proliferated, government monopolies on terrestrial news broadcasting continued into the new millennium. Aside from Lebanon, which began licensing private broadcasters in 1994, governments continued to control terrestrial airwaves until 2002, when Morocco and Jordan became the first states to allow private ownership (the Palestinian Authority allowed private broadcasters after the Oslo agreement in 1993).⁵⁴ In 2003, Kuwait joined the list, licensing three channels. Oman followed suit in 2004, and

Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Libya came next. Even Syria, one of the least free countries for media, tested the waters in 2005 with Sham TV—but notably the owner decided to operate the channel from Dubai pending new legislation.⁵⁵

While the stations are private, they are subject to the same laws that govern other media. They also are typically owned by members of the ruling regime, relatives of the royal family, or businessmen with close ties to government. Syria’s Sham TV was started by the brother of a member of parliament. Al-Arabiya was created by a brother-in-law of Saudi King Fahd. Lebanon’s many satellite channels are funded by politicians or political parties. In Egypt, a friend of President Hosni Mubarak launched Dream TV in 2001, and a business partner of the grandson of former president Gamal Abdel Nasser opened OTV in 2007.⁵⁶

Al-Jazeera, billed as “independent” but not private, was launched by Qatar’s emir in 1996, and the emir continues to finance it.

Some media analysts say that rather than provide a mechanism to promote greater media freedom, the rise of so many satellite channels has become useful for the region’s ruling elites by creating a valve to release public frustration at the lack of political reform. Collectively, Arab satellite channels lose billions of dollars annually, according to a report issued this year by

the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research. The study found that 510 satellite channels operate at a cost of almost \$6 billion but have a combined income of less than \$700 million.⁵⁷ Many of them continue to operate not for profit but to push political agenda, some media analysts said.

Mamoun Fandy, an Arab analyst, goes a step further, calling al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera “tools of the state” used to promote Saudi and Qatari foreign policy agendas. In his book *(Un)Civil War of Words*, Fandy says the guests invited to appear on the channels

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— Tony Badran, research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies

mirror the dueling politics promoted by these desert monarchies. Al-Arabiya will dwell on issues designed to embarrass Qatar, such as its relations with Israel, he says, while al-Jazeera gives platforms to talk show guests opposed to the Saudi regime.⁵⁸

Other analysts agree. “You should put very serious limits on the idea that these are free outlets,” said Tony Badran, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. “Certainly there is an element of [freedom], but these are tools of regimes in their [political] warfare or their bid for regional influence.”⁵⁹

A common criticism of al-Jazeera in particular is that it doesn’t cover news from Qatar, but Miles, the author of *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story*, contends this is not entirely true. He points to instances in which al-Jazeera covered events potentially

embarrassing to Qatar, including the trial of followers of the deposed emir, during which they accused Qatar's government of torture, and the sensitive issue of whether Qatar should host American air bases.⁶⁰ Detractors say more Qatari issues could be covered, such as the fact that elections for a 35-member "advisory council," a parliament of sorts, have been repeatedly postponed. Al-Arabiya, meanwhile, maintains enough editorial independence to station correspondents in Jerusalem, despite the lack of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

The fact that broadcast outlets are typically owned by ruling elites and their associates sets limits to the level of freedom journalists enjoy. It also compels broadcast news audiences to view the news through the kaleidoscope of politics. Viewers typically know who owns each channel—and often even the nationality of the reporter—and take the ownership into consideration when weighing the veracity of the news report. "The general expectation is that no one is broadcasting just for the sake of informing the public," said Wright, the AMS director. "All the owners have agendas, so it's worth knowing who they are."

Print and Radio

The trend toward privatization has included print and radio as well, despite laws requiring large sums of money to launch

new publications that can constitute a considerable barrier to market entry. Last year, Egypt licensed five new independent or privately owned newspapers. Kuwait has at least two independent online publications in addition to 17 privately owned newspapers. In Morocco, the vast majority of the dozens of newspapers in the country are privately owned, and journalists there report independent newspapers are enjoying greater impact as party-owned newspapers decline. Saudi Arabia has 10 privately owned newspapers, and by 2009, Qatar had six.⁶¹

However, like television, the newspapers were launched mainly by businessmen with ties to the ruling regimes. Private radio's

experience has been the same, with Morocco a case in point: in 2005, there were 49 applications for private radio licenses, including one from the son of the prime minister.⁶² One notable exception to this rule has been Radio al

Balad, often referred to as a Jordanian C-SPAN, which, after stops and starts, is once again broadcasting Jordan's parliamentary sessions.

Politics Matters

Because most countries in the MENA region are not democratic, the freedom given even in relatively liberal realms can be revoked at the whim of the monarch or dictator, though reversing some trends could prove difficult in some countries. The consequence is that the political

"The general expectation is that no one is broadcasting just for the sake of informing the public. All the owners have agendas, so it's worth knowing who they are."

— Jonathan Wright, managing editor of the Cairo-based Arab Media and Society

situation in each country, particularly the level of internal legitimacy enjoyed by the government, as well as its perceived vulnerability to political extremists, greatly influences the level of freedom enjoyed by the media. The three Arab countries deemed freest for media in 2009 by Freedom House—Egypt, Lebanon, and Kuwait—all have political conditions that typically allow the media slightly more room to maneuver than other countries in the region, though this ability should not be exaggerated. Still, the individual politics of the country matter. “You have to look at the total political system, not just the media,” Khouri said.

In Egypt, where the government is sensitive to its image and aware of its position as ruler over a large urban population with a history of political opposition, journalists are allowed a measure of freedom depending on internal and external factors present at that moment. In Kuwait, a lively parliament regularly challenges the government, which is reflected in the media coverage. In Lebanon, sectarian divisions preclude a monopoly on media coverage, and journalists have been generally free to report the news since Syria’s departure from the country in 2005. However, two prominent Lebanese journalists known for their anti-Syrian stance, Samir Kassir and Gebran Tuani, died in car bombings in the months following Syria’s withdrawal.

Saudi Arabia, under pressure to moderate its educational system and forced to acknowledge sensitive issues such as terrorism, launched a series of “national dialogues” on issues that include education reform, women’s rights, and unemployment, conversations that have led to some easing of press strictures, though many remain in place. In Morocco,

the young King Mohammed VI has allowed political parties and opened a national dialogue on abuses committed during the reign of his father. But coverage of separatists in Western Sahara is strictly forbidden.

In Bahrain, where a minority Sunni Muslim government presides over a majority Shiite population and people fear the secret police, there is little press freedom, despite some movement in that direction in the first half of the past decade. In Yemen, where the government feels vulnerable to rebels in the north and secessionists in the south, journalists tread carefully when covering these conflicts and self-censorship and an absence of coverage is common.

The U.S. Weighs In

In 2004, Congress launched Alhurra satellite television to compete with al-Jazeera and other Arab-language satellite stations. Patterned after Radio Sawa, a news and music station that went on the air in 2002, the 24-hour Alhurra was created to “cut through the barriers of hateful propaganda,” in the words of then-President George W. Bush.⁶³ But since its inception, the Arabic-language news channel has been criticized by media analysts and members of Congress for its poor quality and dismal ratings. In 2008, the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School conducted an evaluation of Alhurra for the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the independent federal agency that supervises the channel and all other U.S. government-supported civilian international broadcasting. The Annenberg School’s report called the channel a “failure” for its inability to “distinguish itself from second-tier Middle Eastern broadcasters” or to develop a “distinctive style...that might attract a substantial audience.”⁶⁴

Arab journalists who worked at the Virginia-based station said in interviews for this report that a main problem rested with the quality of the programming and inexperience of the staff, some of whom lacked both English skills and a familiarity with the American values they were meant to impart. One journalist described Alhurra as an entry point for novice journalists to gain experience.⁶⁵

A report issued by the Congressional Research Service in 2005 described the Congressional debate over whether to continue to fund Alhurra as a “microcosm of a much larger debate over public diplomacy tactics in the Middle East.” Supporters of the channel favor a U.S. station that can counter what they consider anti-U.S. views offered by other Arab news channels, while detractors dismiss public diplomacy efforts as useless as long as the U.S. maintains an unpopular foreign policy agenda in the MENA region.⁶⁶

Regardless, Alhurra doesn’t appear to be popular among viewers in the MENA region. While a poll commissioned by the channel’s regulator found that 26.7 million people had watched Alhurra in the seven days prior to taking the poll,⁶⁷ a separate 2008 Zogby International poll conducted in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United

Arab Emirates that asked about viewer preference found that Alhurra commanded about 2 percent of audience share. The 2009 poll found Alhurra faring even worse: its share had dropped to 0.5 percent—below the poll’s 1.6 percent margin of error.⁶⁸

Two Steps Forward . . .

There is little doubt that broadcast news in the MENA region has changed drastically in the last decade in content, structure, and ownership. The sheer number of satellite channels has given viewers far more choice, and privatization laws signal a potentially positive trend. But the process of liberalization has been achieved with two steps forward, one step back. While satellite channels’ spot news coverage and talk shows have expanded the realm of political debate and forced taboo subjects on air, real media freedoms have not been secured in most MENA countries. Instead, a delicate dance exists between rulers seeking to remain in power and journalists seeking to cover government and politics. Countries that have experimented with greater media freedom—as part of what one Brookings Institution scholar called a “kinder, gentler autocracy”—still do not have a truly free press, but rather have governments that have taken the “minimum steps necessary to appear responsive to domestic and international pressures.”⁶⁹

Recommendations for Policymakers, Funders, and NGOs

Provide micro-grants to innovative broadcast journalists—Since most broadcast media in the MENA region is concentrated in the hands of a few elites, empowering ordinary journalists with good ideas can bring new voices to the mix. Journalists such as Radio al Balad’s Daoud Kuttub in Jordan have made a difference armed only with an idea and an entrepreneurial spirit. Others are out there, but lack the money to put their plan to action.

Fund a well-crafted talk show or news hour on an Arabic-language station—Just as the BBC airs news on American cable networks for a half-hour a day, an American-funded Arabic-language talk show or news hour could air on Arab satellite channels, such as al-Arabiya, that audiences already watch. If audiences don’t regularly turn to a U.S.-funded news channel such as Alhurra, they may tune in to watch a talk show on a channel they know. It’s a cheaper and more flexible alternative to funding a separate channel.

Fund documentaries and investigative reports—Documentaries and investigative reporting are two media genres that remain weak in the MENA region. Funding these types of broadcasts would give journalists the means to pursue these critical but underrepresented forms of news and allow them the flexibility to shop the shows to different channels.

Train in neutral settings—In countries with little press freedom, a change of venue could help to create an atmosphere

in which serious training could take place. Neutral countries—such as Cyprus, which is nearby—could be ideal settings that remove journalists from a restrictive climate.

Support university journalism programs—Several MENA countries’ journalism schools lack training in the fundamentals of the trade. There is little emphasis on basic skills. Establishing journalism programs and upgrading existing ones is imperative to increasing the quality of journalism across the region.

Endow journalism scholarships at universities in the MENA region—Even if a university does not have a formal broadcast journalism program, endowing journalism scholarships would create an opportunity to learn the craft. The scholarships could go to a “team” of student journalists who learn each facet of television news production using university resources and equipment provided by the scholarship fund.

Endow journalism positions that bring Arab journalists to the United States—In 2002, the Knight-Wallace Journalism Fellowship at the University of Michigan began to award one chair annually to a Muslim from the Middle East (and one to an Israeli). Endowing chairs at the nation’s journalism programs would give journalists from the MENA region a chance to learn about U.S. journalism firsthand.

Create a paying journalism award—The Dubai Press Club hands out the Arab Journalism Award, an annual prize that encourages excellence in journalism.

Creating a broadcast news award could focus on political coverage in spot news and investigations categories to encourage journalists to push the envelope of media freedom as they seek out political stories.

Support journalism workshops and press clubs—The Dubai Press Club also holds an annual Arab Media Forum and provides training workshops and seminars for would-be journalists. Al-Jazeera has training courses in Qatar. Supporting these activities as well as programs that train journalists would greatly improve the quality of the craft.

Endnotes

¹ Freedom House's annual *Freedom of the Press* index assigns each country surveyed a score from 0 (best) to 100 (worst) on press freedom, based on questions assessing the legal, political, and economic environment for media. Countries scoring 0 to 30 are classified as having "free" media; 31 to 60, "partly free" media; and 61 to 100, "not free" media. To view Freedom House's rankings for the Middle East and North Africa, see its 2009 "Map of Press Freedom" page and select the region: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009>.

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¹⁷ IFEX, “New media rules reflect return to authoritarianism,” February 5, 2010, http://www.ifex.org/iraq/2010/02/05/new_government_plan/.

¹⁸ Reporters Without Borders, “Government wages smear campaign against Al-Jazeera,” August 7, 2009, http://www.rsf.org/spip.php?page=article&id_article=34123.

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²⁰ Jordan Times, www.jordantimes.com; Sakr, *Arab Television Today*, 44-45.

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²³ Miles, *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story*, 328.

²⁴ Telephone interview with Edmund Ghareeb, expert in Arab media at American University’s School of International Service in Washington D.C., 10/14/2009.

²⁵ Telephone interview with Marwan Kraidy, associate professor of global communication at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, 9/23/2009.

²⁶ Dayem, in interview with the author, April 17, 2009.

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