

DOSSIER: THE MEDIA IN TIMES OF WAR

**Censorship?**

*Michael Grade, Executive Chairman, Pinewood and Shepperton Film Studios, UK*

2

**War and ethics**

*Michael Jermey, Director of Business Development, ITN International*

5

**Uneasy bedfellows**

*Morand Fachot, Communications Service, EBU*

8

**US media offensive in the Muslim world**

*Peter Feuilherade and Dave Kenny, Media Analysts, BBC World Service*

12

**Winning Arab hearts and minds**

*Morand Fachot, Communications Service, EBU*

18



# Censorship

Michael Grade

Executive Chairman, Pinewood and Shepperton Film Studios, UK

## Is censorship ever justified?

The obvious knee-jerk response must of course be an emphatic no. Just as commercial markets can't function effectively and efficiently without freely available information between buyers and sellers, so democracy cannot flourish without a free flow of facts, ideas, opinions and beliefs.

Citizens can only make up their minds on any issue, large or small, if they live in an environment of unrestricted information, offering the widest range of potential input. Of paramount importance for any society, politicians can only be called to account, and tyrannies prevented, if serious failures and improper uses of power can be made known to all citizens. That is the core justification of a free press, for all its manifest imperfections.

That is precisely why dictators, oligarchs, juntas, emperors and tyrants through the ages have sought to censor debate, and to stifle the free dissemination of opinion and information. Selective secrecy, as much as widespread fear, is the key tool of tyranny and dictatorship.

If it were as simple as that, there would of course be no debate. Who

but an enemy of freedom and democracy would stand up for censorship if that were an end of it? We could all sign up to it, and smugly walk away. The real world is more difficult.

### Security, protection

There are two perplexing areas where censorship is routinely advocated and defended by those who claim to be the friends of democracy: they are security, and the protection of public morals. These are the two exceptions to the free flow of information and opinion which muddy the pursuit of absolute rights and freedoms, and which make the fight against censorship more an endless series of skirmishes than a single glorious war to be won. The health of our democracies owes as much to past victories in the name of freedom of thought and expression as it does to the defeat of armies. In later medieval societies – especially after the invention of the printing press – censorship was the blunt instrument used by temporal and spiritual powers alike to enforce and extend control. It was a necessary – and often more potent – instrument than physical force.

Now, the tide of democracy, accompanied by its philosophical and material emphasis on the rights of the individual, has rolled back the defence of censorship to those two issues of national security and public morality. Of the two, the security issue – though complex – is easier to address. Clearly it would be absurd to allow real and potential enemies to threaten our society, by reckless publication, say, of information that would endanger national defence. After 9/11, the probability of further terrorist attacks must be a powerful argument for restricting information that would assist such attacks, by identifying targets, or revealing plans to combat them.

### Scrutiny

I hope that self-restraint and common sense in the media will be the first line of defence here. Beyond that, if we agree that governments must proscribe any category of information, it should only happen under proper democratic scrutiny by our elected representatives. And that scrutiny must not be perfunctory, or offer blanket excuses for a creeping culture of secrecy. It must be specific, and it must be continuous.

# Orship?



# Orange Index Debates for free expression

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We know all too well how governments of quite different stripes find it difficult to resist opportunities to conduct business away from the glare of public and media attention. When we agree – reluctantly and through the proper democratic process – that some censorship is necessary in the national interest, then we must remain vigilant that these exceptions do not expand beyond absolute necessity, and that they are ended as soon as possible. Censorship loves nothing better than mission creep in the stifling of ideas and information. The question of public morals is more difficult. How legitimate are they? If so, how are they to be circumscribed and not encroach on areas where they are – in ascending order of danger – unnecessary, inappropriate and a threat to freedom?

The other matter, the protection of public morals, also creates blurred edges to any absolute defence against censorship. Pornography may be the cause of actual physical harm, in its making, or by those who would mimic it. We all share a particular horror of harm done to children. But even more than is the case with national security, we must constantly be on our guard to ensure that whatever safeguards we erect for

these specific purposes are not hijacked by those who would be the moral police of innocent activities innocently pursued.

The Roman Republic invented the censor, who regulated public morals as well as conducting the census from which he got his name. The Romans saw the inherent danger of the office, and posed the very pertinent question – *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (who guards the guards?). Many battles have been fought in the past against minorities who have sought to impose their own narrow standards of taste and decency on the rest of society. We have specific laws concerning defamation, blasphemy and obscene publications. We have film certification boards. We have regulators opining on the tastefulness or otherwise of radio and television programmes.

## Control

They should all be subject to permanent scrutiny. Above all they should all be required to fit the mores of contemporary society, and not used to apply the supposed standards of an earlier age, no matter how vociferously small lobbying groups demand it. In the age of the Internet and 24-hour news services, we see

and hear things from which we were protected even 20 years ago. Some of it is disturbing. Some of it perhaps does do harm, and justifies calls for state intervention. But most of it has added to the richness of our information environment. It makes us wiser, better citizens, and is an asset to be cherished. In a mature democracy there will always be debate about the role of censorship.

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*This essay was part of the Orange Index Debates for Free Expression. The issue "The end of freedom: does a civilised society need censorship?" was debated in London on 3 February 2002. Michael Grade has chaired Index on Censorship since 2000.*

# War

**Michael Jermey**  
*Director of Business Development, ITN International*

**and ethics**

## As the prospect of war in the Gulf looms...

... issues of censorship and what the media does about censorship are very much in mind as people in television news plan war coverage.

A free media, we all accept, is vital for the functioning of democratic society, and I think it's especially important at times of conflict, and perhaps in terms of this conflict especially so, when the population is split about the rights and wrongs of an impending war.

Times of war, however, are all too often times when free reporting is most under threat. In varying degrees, democratic governments and undemocratic governments want to influence the media at times of war, put pressure on the media, censor it, and I'm afraid, in far too many cases around the world, use bullying tactics, violence and even murder to silence it.

### Multiple forms

There are several central issues that concern public opinion. Censorship comes in many forms and those

working in Western democracies, or reporting on the military from Western democracies, are likely to face several forms of censorship over the next few weeks, some of which are more obvious than others.

Arrangements are being put in place in the United Kingdom for 'embedding' (to use that awful piece of Pentagon jargon) British media teams with units of the UK military. The arrangements for censorship haven't yet been discussed. I think what we'll see more British media pool teams with the British military than was the case in 1991. There will also be a very conscious sense on the part of the military that they have a public image that they want to get across, and they'll be very conscious about what the British media are doing.

I think when the British media decide to take part in pools, there's a compact – using the terms of trade – that there will be some form of censorship, they will have what I think a lot of our viewers would consider to be legitimate reasons for censoring details of military operations that could affect the safety of troops.

I think there are perfectly legitimate reasons why journalists taking part





American soldiers in Afghanistan

in pools should agree that there are circumstances in which their reports will be censored. I think it's important, however, that this is restricted to things which do affect the operation or the lives of those concerned. I think it's important that censorship isn't for all time, but only while that operation is going on and that people are free to talk and write about what happened after a conflict. I think also, crucially, it's important that the viewers know what's going on, so reporters can say "we haven't been free to give you all the details of the operation, this is what I can tell you".

## Acceptable?

I think in that sense the compact is a reasonable one to enter into. I wouldn't argue with journalists who say they want to have nothing to do with that, they want to operate outside the pool system but I also think there are justifications for

agreeing to that form of censorship, as long as everybody's very open to it and as long as the viewers know about it. And, in a sense, that sort of censorship is acceptable because it is open, because there is a reason for it, and because viewers aren't, in any sense, fooled. But it's important that the media is aware that the military and the Ministry of Defence also have a PR function, and that we don't allow that censorship to be used for promoting their public image, rather than that very much more restricted issue of operational security, or people's lives.

So, there are reasonable arguments for accepting that form of censorship. A much more interesting part of the debate, I think, is the less explicit but more damaging censorship involved in restricting access, restricting the movement of journalists and generally making the job of the media much more difficult to carry out.

The forms of this have changed from war to war. We saw this form of censorship in the restriction of material coming back from the Falklands War. It took 10 days to ship the material back to London, the material was shipped back under military auspices. It meant that things like the bombing of the *Sir Galahad* weren't seen on British screens for 10 days, and I think that sort of use of logistics to suit the military probably had an impact on how that conflict was perceived.

In the Gulf War I remember that the UK military, the French military and the American military were absolutely delighted at the Saudi restrictions on travel within the country. Again, there were journalists who headed off across the northern Saudi Arabian desert and got some very interesting material.



## News pools

Saudia Arabia had restricted a lot of movement in the months leading up to the war, journalists did not get much beyond Dhahran and Riyadh and then an awful lot were corralled into pools thereafter. And I think the British military were delighted that there weren't more satellite dishes coming in to the country. I think it's vital for the media to explain that to viewers if this is going on, and to do all that can be done to resist it.

This experience should prepare us for the onslaught I suspect there will be on the professionalism of journalists, if anything goes wrong.

Governments of all colours over the last couple of decades have rapidly turned on journalism and blamed the journalists when things aren't going as smoothly as they want. During the Falklands War the BBC was accused of being treacherous.

More recently, during the conflict in Kosovo, the then foreign secretary, Robin Cook, called for journalists to leave Belgrade, and the government absolutely bridled at any questioning in the media of the effectiveness of the campaign in Kosovo. After the war, Alastair Campbell (Tony Blair's director of communications and strategy) launched a broadside at the media accusing it of three things: underestimating Serb propaganda, underplaying the refugee story and overplaying civilian casualties. Well, I think that any serious analysis of media coverage during that period would show that the media weren't guilty on any of those three counts. But it doesn't stop the accusations being made.

Now governments are obviously free to criticise the media, as free as anybody else is, but I think actually what the public needs is honest reporting, not government spin in times of conflict. And, whilst government criticism isn't a form of censorship, it is important for all of us to be alert to those sorts of pressures we will all receive from all directions, and be very ready to resist them, whatever quarter they come from, and to stand up for our independence.

## Right to information

There are many more forms of censorship that will be to the fore of people's minds over the next few weeks. They are issues that, thankfully, can be debated in a democratic society. Governments will be tempted to push the barriers of censorship in time of war much further than lots of us would feel legitimate, and it's right for the media to stand up for their rights. We should be very wary of the government using excuses like operational security to extend beyond what I think our viewers would consider legitimate limits.

## Violence

I'd like to raise a very real issue in conflicts around the world: the use of extreme violence and often murder as a form of censorship.

In 2002, more than 65 journalists were murdered while reporting the news around the globe. The vast majority were simply targeted because they were journalists, because they were trying to inform people of what was happening. And in almost every single one of those 65 cases, there's been no proper investigation and no attempt at prosecution. If you go back over the past decade, you'll find a similar pattern in every one of those years. In too much of the world it's possible to kill a journalist with absolutely no consequences.

And those of us who believe in media freedom should press our own governments and, as far as we can, foreign governments to pursue those who kill media workers. Where there is any form of stable regime, no government should be allowed to participate in murder, condone it or turn a blind eye. And our own government should raise this issue in every appropriate forum. Countries within the European Union and organizations like the OSCE should play a part in the process of persuading the appropriate authorities to take murder and the intimidation of journalists seriously.

Armies and paramilitaries will only stop killing journalists when they actually believe there are consequences for doing so. Together, we can make progress in stopping censorship by murder. Let's hope that this doesn't become an issue if war is declared on Irak as it will mean that the freedom of expression is at risk.



# Uneasy

**Morand Fachot**  
*Communications Service, EBU*

As the US and British military build-up in the Gulf region was gathering pace...

...media organizations throughout the world were gearing up for another conflict whilst politicians and the military in both camps were considering ways of managing the news agenda for their own benefit.

Once more, the interests of the media on one side and, on the other, those of politicians and of the military in particular may well clash if the history of media coverage of conflicts in the last 30 years or so is anything to go by. The Pentagon, however, has announced a new media policy which could help ensure greater independent reporting in future conflicts.

## Global

New telecommunication and information technologies – such as the digitization of data (text, sound, moving or still pictures) and their immediate transfer via satellites or cable networks – have made possible the instant exchange of news throughout the world, leading to a

Global Media Environment in which the way news and information are collected, packaged, circulated and accessed has been completely transformed.

A unique feature of this environment is that it directly affects international relations and the way conflicts are being managed. Most people in developed countries and, increasingly, in other parts of the world get their news through the electronic media, television in particular. The public perception of international events is now being essentially shaped by television pictures which carry a considerable greater emotional weight than words (based also largely on the general delusion that “pictures, unlike words, don’t lie”). In this picture-driven news environment no (TV) pictures means no news.

## “CNN effect”

Security policies in most countries have traditionally been mainly dictated

by national interests, these obviously vary greatly from country to country and largely determine the readiness of governments to embark on conflicts.

The media have, for a long time, played an important role in shaping public opinion in the international domain, often conveying government’s policies to the public and/or pushing their own agenda. Television pictures, with their potent emotional content, have completely transformed the general public’s relation to news and its perception of international affairs. The media have become major actors in international relations.

It is often argued that military or humanitarian interventions are now being mainly triggered (or ended) by emotional reactions on the part of a

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© Photo R. D. Ward, Department of Defense



*Pentagon press conference*

# dfellows

public distressed by television pictures rather than by well-informed opinions or the defence of national interests. This phenomenon has been called the “CNN effect”.

The term “CNN effect” has often been used to depict a number of concepts. The most widely accepted is that given by Prof. Steve Livingston of George Washington University of “a loss of policy control on the part of policy makers because of the power of the media, a power that they can do nothing about”.

Many observers argue, however, that the “CNN effect” is not as far-reaching as is generally assumed. What can be misleading is the fact that as a situation in a country or region worsens, it may attract not just increased attention on the part of the media, but on the part of governments too, and decisions taken by the latter may wrongly be attributed to the influence of the media.

## Contrasting priorities

All conflicts involve three central players: government, the military and the media. And every single one needs the other two, but for very different reasons. As a result, their relationship is a difficult one.

CNN effect or not, the media dimension is now central to the news management of any conflict, as NATO Spokesman Jamie Shea observed after the Kosovo conflict when he said: “winning the media campaign is just as important as winning the military campaign... The media is not an optional add-on; it is key.”

Having to decide whether to intervene abroad and possibly commit the country’s forces to combat, governments in liberal democracies use the media to convey their policies and to seek and sustain

public support for these. The main challenges they face in their relationship with the media are mostly connected with the shortened news cycle and the need to respond to (or make the best use of) the “CNN effect”.

However, the media may have a different agenda as they feel bound to express misgivings and report opposition to government policies, leading sometimes to rifts between the two.


By definition the priorities of the media and of the military are often at odds. The attitudes and philosophies of the two camps often differ causing mis-understandings and frictions, making them, in the words of the distinguished British journalist and war reporter Max Hastings, “uneasy bedfellows”. By nature the military is highly disciplined, journalists are not... Both military and media have a time-sensitive – but conflicting – approach to information: the military is reluctant to release quickly information which could jeopardize operational safety. For the press, speed is vital: old news is no news, especially in today’s real-time global media environment.

Furthermore, the military places a great deal of importance on secrecy and the control of information for obvious reasons. By contrast the media’s task is to disclose information.

Because of these differences, relations between the press and the military can often be awkward and even stressed. The tense nature of this relationship was exacerbated in the USA more than anywhere else by the Vietnam war which made the military wary of the unrestricted reporting of a war turning public opinion against it. As Marshall McLuhan noted in 1975: “Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America – not the battlefields of Vietnam.” In fact, the Vietnam war was the first major conflict in modern history to be fought without some form of censorship.

## Media pools

The various military establishments tend to deal differently with the media at times of crises according to their own experience and that of others. Vietnam proved a turning point in the way journalists were able to cover wars freely. In recent years, the tendency in NATO countries has been to try to control, to a certain extent, the media during conflicts.



The system in favour over the past 20 years or so has been that of the media pool in which representative journalists are included in a pool and their reports/pictures made available to the rest of the media. Many journalists resent this system – first introduced during the Falklands War – as it greatly restricts their access to the battlefield, and as the military may control what pool reporters can cover.

The system, however, makes sense for the military when one considers the ever growing number of journalists covering conflicts in which Western forces are involved: 27 reporters took part in the Normandy landing on D-Day; some 50 journalists were in the field during the 1968 Têt offensive in Vietnam; 1,600 reporters and media support crew were in Saudi Arabia to cover Operation Desert Storm. More than 1,000 accredited journalists (plus their drivers and translators) crossed into Kosovo with NATO forces on 11 June 1999 with 350 more reporting the war from NATO headquarters.

However, for the military, the pool system is effective under certain conditions only,

that is when geographical, logistical or political reasons make it difficult or impossible for reporters to operate easily, such as in the Falklands, Panama or the Gulf. As regards personal safety, journalists operating within pools are less at risk than those doing so on their own as the deaths of many journalists in the former Yugoslavia or Afghanistan show.

## Embedding

The US military establishment has now realized that restricting media coverage of conflicts to official briefings, the supply of video footage and closely monitored pool reporters is counterproductive. In a departure from a policy dating back to Vietnam the Pentagon has recently announced that it would allow hundreds of journalists to be “embedded” in US forces in future military operations.

What is widely presented as a fresh approach is not so new: when the Office of War Information was formed during World War II to inform the American people, it “embedded” journalists within ground units.

The “Public Affairs Guidance on embedding media during possible future operations/deployments in the US Central Command’s area of responsibility”, issued in February 2003, says that: “Media will have long-term, minimally restrictive access to US air, ground and naval forces through embedding.”

This new policy is largely dictated by self-interest, “what better way to combat disinformation on the battlefield than to have you report objectively about what the situation really is?”, the Pentagon’s deputy spokesman asked journalists.

US military commanders also believe that independent reporting will serve them well when it comes to two crucial issues likely to arise

from a war.

Firstly, the world needs to be convinced, through reliable reporting, of the veracity of any discoveries of banned chemical and biological weapons, should these be found by US forces. Secondly, US commanders believe that Saddam Hussein may very well order his troops to perpetrate atrocities against civilians and blame these on US forces. The Pentagon believes independent reporting would help disprove such claims.

According to the *Marine Corps Times* from 3 March 2003, “about 800 members of the press – including 20 per cent from non-US media – will be assigned slots in specific ground units, aviation units, ships and headquarters throughout the combat zone. They will remain ‘embedded’ with those units as long as they wish and are supposed to have what these Pentagon ground rules describe as ‘minimally restrictive’ access to US forces throughout their stay.”

Furthermore, another 140 journalists are also expected to be embedded in British forces.

However, clouds are already appearing on the horizon with a number of journalists expressing concern that this policy of “embedding” reporters with the military might be tantamount to being in bed with the military, and some in the military believing that allowing journalists in their midst would lead to more negative reporting while others in frontline units are worried that operating with untrained civilians will represent an additional burden.

These misgivings on both sides indicate that the relationship between the military and the media is likely to remain an uneasy one.





US media

# offer

Peter Feuilherade and Dave Kenny  
*Media Analysts, BBC World Service*





# nsive

in the Muslim world



# US efforts throughout 2002...



... to step up radio broadcasts to the Middle East and the Muslim world at large have culminated in recent months with the launch of new services directed at Iraq and Iran.

The US government's media offensive in the Muslim world got under way even before the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, but it was given a new impetus in recent months.

As a result, the nature of US international broadcasting is being completely transformed with services to Eastern and Central Europe, and the former Soviet Union being ended or drastically curtailed.

## Tarnished image

The results of a study\* published in December 2002 suggest that the image of the US in Muslim countries has been badly tarnished over the past three years. It found that 3 out of 4 Jordanians and 7 in 10 Egyptians had an unfavourable view of the US.

The good news for America is that majorities in 35 of the 44 countries held a favourable impression: the bad news is that the majority was marginal and decreasing in most of these.

Commenting on the research, President Bush said he had not read

it, but added: "We'll do everything we can to remind people that we've never been a nation of conquerors, we're a nation of liberators."

## New radio stations

On 12 December, the US stepped up psychological operations against President Saddam Hussein with the start of radio broadcasts transmitted from US planes flying over Iraq and targeted at military commanders as well as civilians. The broadcasts, prepared by a specialist US 'psy-ops' unit, aim "to dissuade the Iraqi military from supporting Saddam," said a Pentagon spokesman.

© Photo USAF, Department of Defense



Commando Solo: broadcasting from the air

As the Clandestine Radio Watch website notes, Iraq is already targeted by approximately 27 clandestine radio broadcasts in addition to the handful of Arabic-language international outlets aimed at the Middle East.

“At least three broadcast stations, Al-Mustaqbal [The Future], Voice of the Brave Armed Forces and Radio of the Land of Two Rivers [Radio Mesopotamia], have been tied to a covert American-run transmitter in Kuwait,” CRW recalls. But in recent months the State Department has reportedly axed funding earmarked for the resumption of a radio station that the Iraqi National Congress coalition of exiled opposition groups was hoping to launch.

In spring 2002, America launched Radio Sawa (Together), intended as a replacement for the Voice of America’s Arabic service and targeting 17–28-year-old listeners in

the Arab world. The station describes itself as “an upbeat mix of Western and Arabic pop music along with up-to-the minute news two times each hour, news analysis, interviews, opinion pieces, sports and features on a wide variety of political and social issues”.

For listeners in Iran, Radio Farda (Tomorrow), a new Persian-language station aimed at an under-30 audience, went on air in December, based on the Radio Sawa model. It broadcasts a combination of popular Persian and Western music mixed with news and features around the clock.

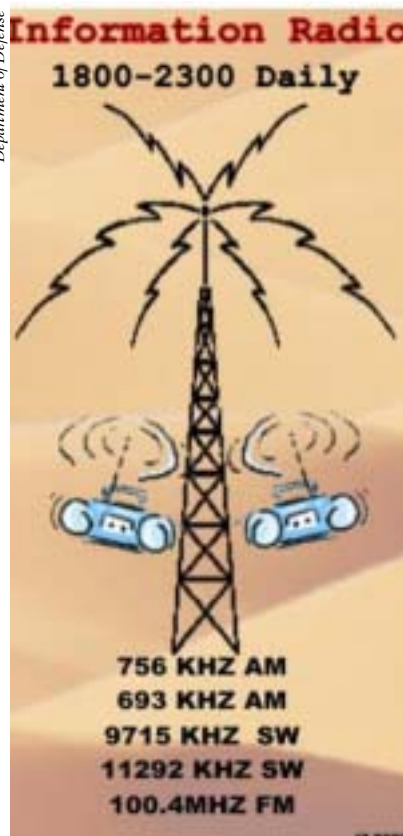
## Reactions

America’s new broadcast ventures have had a mixed reception from the target audiences. Radio Sawa began broadcasting from Washington via relay stations in Kuwait, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates in March 2002 and plans to expand operations.

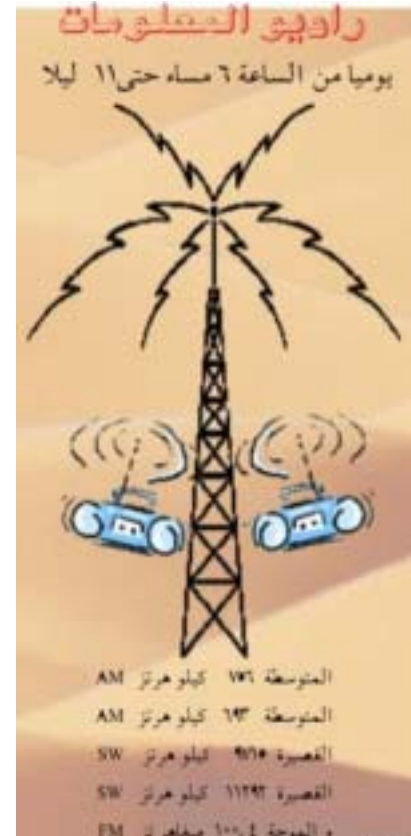
Joan Mower, spokeswoman for the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) which oversees all non-military US international broadcasts, says that Radio Sawa is gaining respect. And Norman Pattiz, chairman of the BBG Middle East Committee, speaks of Radio Sawa’s “overwhelming success in attracting audiences and new listeners”. A survey of Radio Sawa’s target audience of 17–28-year-old listeners in Amman in November 2002 found that the station was the most listened to for news, and was also rated as having the most accurate and trustworthy news, the BBG reported.

But Hazim Ghurab, an Arab media specialist, said any success Sawa enjoys now will fizzle out once “the United States takes its next aggressive step in the Middle East . . . The US government has a legacy of anti-Arab policies . . . Media won’t change people’s attitude toward an issue like this, but a change in policies would,”

Department of Defense



© Photo TDF



he said in an interview in December 2002 with Associated Press.

A commentary in the Syrian government-owned newspaper *Al-Thawrah* on 4 December said that the US “is committing a grave mistake if it believes that it can change the Arab people’s hatred for it through the establishment of media organs like Radio Sawa, and if it wants to end this hatred it must change its policies toward the region”.

## Image building

On 16 December 2002, the White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, acknowledged that there was widespread recognition throughout the Bush administration that the United States had to work harder “in better

communicating America’s message of hope and opportunity”. An editorial in the *Washington Post* on 26 December surveyed the importance of public diplomacy and the approach taken by the Bush administration in meeting the challenge. “So far, the job has been left mainly to the State Department and its revived Office of Public Diplomacy, headed by Charlotte Beers. Known as Madison Avenue’s ‘queen of branding’ for her success at rescuing Uncle Ben’s Converted Rice, she is now charged with doing the same for Uncle Sam,” the paper commented.

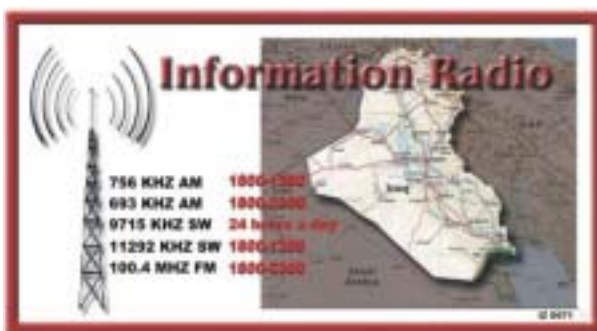
## Video diplomacy

The autumn saw a campaign of US ‘public diplomacy’ by video in Indonesia and other Muslim

countries. The intention, said State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher, was “to tell about American Muslims and their life in America, and the values of our society. It is part of a bigger picture, though, of telling our story overseas, telling our story in many different ways at different levels, telling first basically who we are and what we are about.” But in December, Lebanon’s state TV refused to allow the screening of paid advertisements aimed at improving the US image in the Islamic world.

“In the spots, US citizens of Arab origin talk about the freedom and opportunity of living in America, and the respect shown by Americans toward the Muslim faith. Information Minister Ghazi Aridi said he

Department of Defense





rejected the spots because the reality for Arabs living in the United States after the 11 September attacks was very different,” United Press International news agency reported.

## Public opinions

In the most significant set of changes to US external broadcasting ever seen, the BBG is redirecting efforts from Eastern Europe to the Middle East and Indonesia. It is adding new TV and radio output to its new key target areas. It has given details of its 2004 budget request to Congress. According to a BBG press release, “the president is asking for an appropriation of 563.5 million dollars – a 9.5 per cent increase” over the 2003 budget request.

The BBG release states that programming increases are targeted at the Middle East and Southeast Asia “to bolster efforts in the war on terrorism”:

- \$2.9m for audience development and to place programmes on popular local and regional stations beyond the limits of shortwave technology.
- \$30m are being earmarked for a new Middle East Television Network in Arabic with “accurate news and the message of freedom and democracy”;
- \$3.4m to double Voice of America’s (VOA) Indonesian radio programming to five hours daily;
- an increase in Indonesian TV programming to five hours a week;

As a result the BBG is to reduce output in Eastern and Central Europe and administrative and management costs. Nine Eastern European services are being disbanded and other services at both VOA and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) are being cut and Radio Free Asia (RFA) is to reduce its operational costs.

## Challenge

In explaining the reductions, BBG’s Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson says: “The budget means an end to most Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) broadcasting to the democracies of Eastern Europe where free speech is practised and where the process of joining the NATO alliance is under way . . . But we should remember at the same time that the goal these services struggled and sacrificed for has been achieved, and they should take great pride in the role they played in this historic mission.” He concludes: “. . . 11 September 2001 changed the way we must approach international broadcasting – and the president’s budget reflects that change. This institution’s task now is to draw upon our previous success in the Cold War, to go forward with

the new war of ideas as we offer democracy, tolerance and self-government as the positive alternative to tyranny, fanaticism and terror. An extraordinary challenge lies ahead.” As the US seeks new means by which to air its message and to circumvent regional media which resist or decline to accept US-supplied programming or paid advertising, it accepts that the role of surrogate media is largely complete in Europe. The BBG continues to expediently adapt the external media mix under its control to reflect US foreign policy as closely as possible.

\* *The Global Attitudes Project, by the US-based Pew Research Centre, questioned a total of 38,263 people in 44 countries between June and October 2002.*



VOICE of AMERICA

# Winning Arab hearts and

**Morand Fachot**  
*Communications Service, EBU*

For nearly 70 years now,  
people in the Middle East . . .

. . . have been targeted by external broadcasts aimed at influencing them in the regional and global games of power politics.

As countries of the region gained their independence in the 1940s and 1950s they set up their own – state-run – broadcasting organizations.

Once restricted to listening local and international radio broadcasts on the medium- and short-wave bands and to watching a handful of government-run terrestrial TV channels, people in the Middle East have, since the early 1990s, been gradually exposed to a growing number of outlets thanks to direct-to-home satellite TV, the licensing of commercial operators and local relays of foreign stations. They can now access an unprecedented number of media sources from both the region and further away.

At a time of mounting tension in the Gulf region, broadcasts from and to the Arab world take a special significance with broadcasters vying for Arab audiences for political or commercial considerations.

## Radio wars

Italy was the first country to broadcast to the Middle East with clear political objectives. Radio Bari, as it was known after the transmitter location in south-eastern Italy, started radio broadcasts in Arabic in 1934 in support of Mussolini's imperial designs on North Africa and the Horn of Africa.

Alarmed by the success and the increasingly anti-British tone of Radio Bari's Arabic broadcasts, London considered starting Arabic broadcasts. The BBC Imperial Service, broadcasting English-only external radio broadcasts since 1932, was asked to introduce Arabic programmes. These went on air in January 1938, marking the start of the first radio war between Western countries (and of the first one in the Middle East).

Following the signing of the Anglo-Italian Pact in April 1938, Rome tuned down the anti-British tone of its broadcasts only to be replaced by Berlin which started its own Arabic radio broadcasts the same month.

During the war both London and Berlin were actively engaged in radio propaganda to the Middle East.

Britain had the significant advantage of being able to broadcast domestic programmes via the Palestine Broadcasting Service (PBS) in Jerusalem. It also launched a regional station, Sharq al-Adna (Near East Arab Broadcasting Station), in the early 1940s, as part of its information effort aimed at influencing Arab public opinion.

German broadcasts, of an anti-Jewish and anti-British nature, and making use of prominent Arab exiles proved quite popular with Arab listeners. Berlin also launched a clandestine station to the Arab world, The Voice of the Free Arabs.

After World War II, many countries started Arabic broadcasts. VOA, the US international broadcaster, launched its Arabic service in January 1950.

# minds

Britain and France, in support of their colonial undertakings in the Middle East and North Africa, increased propaganda broadcasts to these regions in the 1950s.

Britain moved Sharq al-Adna to Cyprus shortly before the end of its mandate over Palestine, upgraded its transmitters to allow it to reach much of the Middle East and to counteract broadcasts from Cairo's Voice of the Arabs. The station disappeared in March 1957 after a crude attempt to turn it into an obvious propaganda tool during the Suez crisis backfired and most of its Arab staff resigned or was sacked.

For its part, France, embroiled in a colonial war in Algeria and increasingly concerned by the impact in that country of broadcasts from Egypt's Voice of the Arabs and Voice of Free Algeria, launched its own broadcasts

specifically aimed at Algeria. The service, financed by the Foreign, Defence and Algerian Affairs Ministries, was distinct from those operated in Algeria by France's public broadcaster RDF.

Listeners and viewers in the Middle East now enjoy a much wider choice of broadcast media sources than they did up to early the 1990s.

## International

The Arabic-language services of major international broadcasters still command sizeable audiences.

The most popular are the BBC's Arabic service, France's Radio Monte Carlo (RMC) Moyen-Orient and the US Radio Sawa.

The BBC's Arabic service is well established and listeners tend to turn to it at times of crisis as a trusted source of news. It is available throughout the region on SW and MW and satellite, and is also relayed on MW and FM in a number of countries. Audience surveys indicate that the BBC has at least 11 million listeners in the region (excluding countries where surveys cannot be conducted).

RMC Moyen-Orient was set up in 1972 as a commercial station. It has

been part of Radio France Internationale since 1996. Its main target audience is in the Middle East, particularly the Levant and surrounding areas. The station broadcasts on MW from Cyprus and is also available on FM in a number of countries. Its mix of news, music, magazines and features is popular showing in its audience of some 15 million.

Radio Sawa (Together) was launched in March 2002 to replace the VOA's Arabic service. Aimed at the under-30s it broadcasts a mix of Western and Arab music, news, analyses, interviews and features on a variety of political and social issues in five regional Arabic dialects. It is distributed by MW and local FM relays.

Sawa has so far proven very popular, mainly for its music content according to many Middle East experts who claim that its news content is not trusted as the station is largely perceived as being a US government mouthpiece.

The US government also operates a surrogate station, Radio Free Iraq, and is reported to be behind a number of clandestine stations broadcasting to Iraq.

It also appropriated funds to start an Arabic TV service.

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BBC Arabic TV, a commercial operation by BBC Worldwide Television, was launched in 1994 and collapsed within two years. The BBC was responsible for the channel's programming, but it was entirely reliant for its transmission on the Rome-based pay-TV operator Orbit Communications, owned by a holding company controlled by a brother-in-law of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd. After the channel aired programmes deemed negative by the Saudis, Orbit unilaterally terminated its contract with the BBC in 1996.

Iran launched an Arabic-language satellite news channel in February 2003. Al-Alam (The World) should be available worldwide in the near future.

## Arab satellite TV

The 1991 Gulf war saw the arrival of satellite TV in the Middle East after the Egyptian and Saudi governments decided to relay CNN broadcasts.

Private pan-Arab satellite television channels launched soon after, sharing two significant features:

- The dividing lines between commercial and political interests were often blurred.

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BBC World Service Headquarters

- Operators based their operations in Europe to bypass local laws limiting terrestrial television to state monopolies.

Al-Jazeera, although not the first Arab satellite TV to launch, has achieved a greater notoriety than many of its rivals. Set up in November 1996 with a loan from the Qatari government, the channel has not yet achieved financial independence.

It benefited from the collapse of BBC Arabic TV, recruiting several of its journalists. A channel official admitted in 1997 that it had "indeed adopted the style of the BBC in its accurate and straightforward coverage of the news".

Al-Jazeera soon established itself as a popular channel thanks to its inquisitive and aggressive style. However, several Arab states have closed down its bureaus and denied accreditation to its journalists. The channel claims a regular audience of at least 35 million in the Arab world and 7 to 10 million in the USA and Australia.

Middle East Broadcasting Centre was the first Arabic satellite TV channel to launch from London in 1991. Its owner is a brother-in-law of King Fahd. MBC moved its headquarters to Dubai Media City in 2002. Together with Lebanese, Kuwaiti and other Gulf interests, it launched an English channel in January 2003 and, shortly after, an Arabic news channel, Al-Arabiya. Many see the latter as an attempt by the Saudi authorities to provide an alternative to Al-Jazeera.

Abu Dhabi Satellite Television, relaunched in early 2000, is

providing highly professional news programmes.

Arab Radio and Television started from Italy in 1993. One of ART's joint owners is a nephew of King Fahd. ART is a pay-TV service.

Arab News Network is a news service launched in London in 1997. ANN's main owner is Syrian businessman Somar Rifaat Al-Assad, nephew (and political challenger) of Syria's late president Hafez Al-Assad. ANN is facing serious financial problems, but is still considered one of the major Arab news channels.

Several of these channels have managed to establish themselves as well-run professional organizations, others are seen as mere mouthpieces for local political interests.

There are now some 45 major Arab satellite TV channels.

Several Arab operators have launched (or are planning to launch) English channels to offer a perspective different from that of the main US and British networks to international audiences.

To quote US Ambassador and Special Coordinator for Public Diplomacy Chris Ross, "on the whole, the advent of Al-Jazeera and other Arab satellite stations has been a great step forward in opening up the intellectual and cultural life of the Arab world."

And the large number of media outlets broadcasting to and from the region show that the battle for Arab hearts and minds will be raging in the future too.

