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United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors  
Office of Inspector General

# Report of Inspection

The Broadcasting Board  
of Governors'  
Middle East Broadcasting  
Networks, Inc.

Report Number ISP-IB-10-28, March 2010

## ~~IMPORTANT NOTICE~~

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## PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INSPECTION

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, as issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Department of State (Department) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

### PURPOSE

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the BBG, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and the BBG. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved; whether U.S. interests are being accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist; and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

### METHODOLOGY

In conducting this inspection, the inspectors: reviewed pertinent records; as appropriate, circulated, reviewed, and compiled the results of survey instruments; conducted on-site interviews; and reviewed the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, organizations, and activities affected by this review.



**United States Department of State  
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors**

*Office of Inspector General*

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel  
Deputy Inspector General



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## KEY JUDGMENTS

- The Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. (MBN) is a grantee organization of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG). Its Alhurra Television and Radio Sawa perform a vital function, providing accurate and objective news to the Middle East and explaining American foreign policy. Since its launch in 2004, the organization has hired staff and established a strategic direction and structure. It is evolving into a mature media organization, but there is still room for progress.
- MBN exercises tight control over what goes on the air at Alhurra and Sawa to maintain the editorial principles stated in the International Broadcasting Act of 1994. MBN management and interviewees mentioned no major incidents of inappropriate broadcasts or questionable treatment of material in the last two years.
- Communication in the newsroom needs improvement. Many staff feel that senior news management should improve responsiveness, decisiveness, and transparency.
- Radio Sawa has benefited from the recent arrival of a general manager. After the inspection closed, Radio Sawa also hired a managing editor. Despite intensive recruitment efforts, Radio Sawa had lacked a managing editor for over two years; that vacancy and physical separation from MBN headquarters presented a number of challenges.
- The MBN security program is managed effectively in spite of an apparent lack of resources.
- The public debate about MBN has focused on the effectiveness of Alhurra Television and Radio Sawa. The current audience research measures credibility and audience numbers. Expanding the research mix could enhance MBN's understanding of its impact and ways to be more effective in the region.
- MBN has initiated a number of improvements in its administrative operations, including strengthening financial management and internal controls. Many of the changes involved standardizing processes and procedures that had been developed under pressure of time as the network came into being.

MBN has made significant progress in organizing human resources management, solving numerous personnel-related problems, and beginning to establish standardized procedures, despite having vacancies in two key positions, which impedes progress.

The inspection took place in Washington, DC, between September 16 and December 3, 2009, and in Dubai, United Arab Republics, October 13-23, at the Broadcasting Board of Governors' Dubai production center.

## CONTEXT

MBN is a nonprofit grantee of the BBG that was created to provide objective, accurate, and relevant news and information to the people of the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> A multimedia corporation, it communicates through television, radio, and the Internet. Its brands currently include Alhurra (Television),<sup>2</sup> Radio Sawa, and Afia Darfur (a 30-minute shortwave radio program directed to the people of Darfur).

Alhurra began its buildup in 2003 and launched in 2004. It operates three 24-hour Arabic-language channels – Alhurra, Alhurra-Iraq, and Alhurra Europe. It broadcasts to 22 countries in the Middle East and Europe. Radio Sawa was originally launched in 2002 (formerly called the Middle East Radio Network). It broadcasts continuously on seven programming streams, i.e., region-specific versions, in the Middle East, and on [www.RadioSawa.com](http://www.RadioSawa.com). Its format provides an upbeat blend of mainstream Western and Arabic popular music mixed with more than seven hours of news and information each day. A significant portion of its audience is under the age of 30.

MBN's Arabic-speaking editorial staff in Springfield, VA, produce much of the news. MBN has bureaus and production centers in Baghdad, Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, and Jerusalem, with correspondents and stringers elsewhere in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States.

The BBG started both Radio Sawa and Alhurra quickly to respond to an urgent need to broadcast more effectively to the Middle East. Both start-ups were initiated in record time. Now that MBN is beyond the start-up stage, it is focusing on improvements that will firmly establish it as a respected U.S. broadcaster to the Middle East.

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<sup>1</sup> MBN was created pursuant to the Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2003 (P.L. 108-11) when the Congress appropriated initial funding “for activities related to the Middle East Television Network broadcasting to the Middle East and radio broadcasting to Iraq.”

<sup>2</sup> OIG issued a limited-scope report entitled *Alhurra's Programming Policies and Procedures*, Report No. ISP-08-45 (May 2008).

Although many describe the media environment in the Middle East as relatively free, the reality is that the media are not truly independent. They are strongly influenced by Arab governments, either directly or indirectly. Issues related to the rights of women, freedom of speech, or human rights are deemed too controversial to discuss comprehensively in the media. Alhurra and Radio Sawa provide a forum where experts and advocates can air these issues freely.

At the time of this inspection, MBN had approximately 382 full-time employees on board, of the 442 full-time domestic employee slots available. There were also 287 overseas staff positions and correspondents around the world. MBN's estimated budget in FY 2009 for salaries and operating expenses totaled \$115 million; its FY 2010 request is for \$113 million.

## Executive Direction

At the time of the inspection, the senior management team had been in place for approximately two years. The team consists of a president, a vice president for administration, and a vice president for news. (See Appendix A for the MBN organization chart.) They are responsible for the operation of both Alhurra and Sawa, which are housed in separate buildings in Northern Virginia, as well as for bureaus and production centers in Baghdad, Dubai, Beirut, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Washington, DC. The management team has offices in the Springfield, VA, building where Alhurra is headquartered. A general manager of the radio station is the senior management official located at Radio Sawa headquarters. He does not have responsibility for editorial oversight of the news operation. The physical separation between Alhurra and Sawa presents a number of challenges in terms of oversight and staff cohesion.

The president of MBN is an experienced and skilled administrator with a solid grasp of the issues facing a network that has gone through a start-up period and experienced turbulence and controversy. He is well placed to lead MBN. He has worked to establish and implement a strategic plan and vision for MBN, improve program planning, and strengthen program review.

MBN has initiated a number of improvements in its administrative operations. Many of these involve the regularization or standardization of processes and procedures that were developed under pressure of time as the network came into being. During MBN's start-up phase, the imperative need to get its programs on the air led to administrative decisions that were defensible at the time but not adequate for a fully functioning, mature organization.

At the time of the inspection, improvements in critical areas of administration were either completed or in process. Financial recordkeeping and financial planning, along with purchasing and contracting procedures, had been regularized. A system of employee performance appraisal had been instituted. MBN's mission and strategic plan were prominently displayed on the network's internal homepage.

The OIG team believes that MBN has made meaningful progress in improving its administration. While significant challenges remain, the managers appeared to be approaching them strategically with a realistic plan and timetable, and a clear sense of the areas in which progress is still required.

News operations had stabilized following a period of controversy. In 2006, Alhurra aired a lengthy speech by Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah, which the U.S. Government classifies as a terrorist organization. The episode took place during the stewardship of an experienced senior journalist, who was vice president of news at the time. It led to his resignation under pressure. The journalist was not an Arabic speaker. However, during his brief tenure he had instituted a number of changes in Alhurra's news operations that were viewed by some as making the organization more credible and effective. The issue of Arabic-language capability continues to present a challenge to MBN. The pool of journalists who have appropriate experience in the field, have adequate management experience, understand MBN's mission, and speak both English and Arabic is limited. At the senior level, the salaries MBN offers are reported to be noncompetitive with those of Arabic-speaking news networks, making the American network less competitive in its ongoing recruitment effort.

The incumbent vice president for news, the former managing editor for Radio Sawa, came to MBN in the wake of controversy. The incumbent, an Arabic speaker, has exercised tight control over what goes on the air at Alhurra and Radio Sawa to maintain the editorial principles stated in the International Broadcasting Act of 1994.<sup>3</sup> MBN management and interviewees mentioned no major incidents of inappropriate broadcasts or questionable treatment of material since he arrived.

Although the vice president for news has exercised much needed journalistic control at Alhurra, MBN needs to address a number of newsroom management issues that were reported to the inspectors to have arisen during his tenure or remain unsettled from an earlier time.

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<sup>3</sup> 22 U.S.C. Section 6201 et seq.

The incumbent provided oversight for day-to-day news operations at Sawa. The physical separation between him and the Radio Sawa headquarters inevitably meant he spent much less time with the radio news staff than with the television staff, where the pressing demands of managing the Alhurra news day-to-day operation are a full-time job. Radio Sawa's general manager is not a journalist, and he does not speak Arabic. His responsibilities are not editorial. They lie in technical, management, and administrative matters, as well as overseeing the process by which the station chooses the mix of music that it broadcasts.

Having the vice president for news delegate a certain amount of responsibility to the staff at Sawa was appropriate and sensible, and email and other technological means of communication reduced the negative impact of the dislocation. Nevertheless, Radio Sawa needs a responsible senior editorial manager on site consistently overseeing the news operation. MBN was still recruiting a managing editor for Radio Sawa.

At both Alhurra and Sawa the OIG team heard consistent reports of poor communication in the news operation. Numerous interviews and questionnaires at all levels painted a picture of a likeable manager who changes his mind frequently, or who would rather give no answer or a vague answer to an inquiry than one that is decisive. He explains his considered approach as both a way to handle cultural sensitivities and a necessity, given that higher management must approve important decisions. He notes that after the era of his two predecessors MBN has removed some decision-making authority from his position. While the incumbent's comments have some merit, the OIG team believes that they do not adequately account for the problems of indecision and lack of transparency identified in the survey. Given the centrality of the position he occupies, and the urgency of the issues a news organization faces, the vice president for news must be empowered to decide issues and resolve problems without excessive consultation. He must exercise that authority to make decisions quickly and transparently, and to communicate them clearly.

**Recommendation 1:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to delineate the authority of the vice president for news and implement a procedure to verify that the vice president for news exercises his authority decisively and transparently. (Action: BBG)

## MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

MBN and BBG managers have developed means to assess the performance of Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa as journalistic organizations, and yet they recognize the challenges inherent in gauging the impact of such work in terms of related attitudinal, behavioral, or systemic change. In addition to audience research, MBN uses feedback from listeners and viewers and other information, such as the number of times one of its stories is picked up by other news agencies or the number of important guests who agree to appear on its shows. MBN can provide a list of many American and international interviewees of stature.

## PUBLIC DEBATE

The public debate about MBN has focused on the question of the effectiveness of Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa. In that debate, views of the broadcasters' role vary considerably. Both inside and outside the government, some expect MBN to provide a counterweight to extremist propaganda and ideology. Others argue the need for a measured American voice speaking in Arabic. Some observers contend that MBN ought to be considered a public diplomacy activity. It should seek to portray aspects of America and Americans that are not otherwise to be found in the media in the Arabic world. Still others stress the primacy of presenting objective news.

In that public debate, media reporting and commentary have frequently cited heated opinions, often negative. Journalists and pundits alike make reference to audience statistics without analyzing them or providing a frame of reference. Similarly, in interviews it conducted, the OIG team found summary opinions on the effectiveness of the MBN broadcasters expressed with frequency.

## MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS, INC.'S MISSION

MBN's mission statement emphasizes the news and information function, which is consonant with BBG's standards and principles, and also with the International Broadcasting Act of 1994: "MBN's mission is to provide objective, accurate, and relevant news and information to the people of the Middle East about the region,

the world, and the United States. MBN supports democratic values by expanding the spectrum of ideas, opinions, and perspectives available in the region's media." Changing attitudes and opinions does not figure directly in the statement, although supporting democratic values could, by extension, have that effect. Given accurate information, and a wider range of views than they customarily consider, some hostile viewers and listeners could moderate their views, including their views of the United States and its policies.

## AUDIENCE RESEARCH

### Quantitative Research

To gauge the effectiveness of Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa, the BBG contracts with external research organizations. The research is of two basic types. The first measures the size of MBN's audience, as well as the audience's assessment of the reliability of the broadcasts and the extent to which the programming enhances understanding of current events. The second seeks to elicit audience members' evaluations of the programs' content and production values, as well as suggestions for enhancing MBN's ability to attract viewers and listeners.

According to the contracted research, in the past three years, Alhurra's audience has steadily grown from 21.1 million in 2006, to 25.8 million in 2007-08, and 27.7 million in 2009. However, Radio Sawa's audience has declined in recent years from 20.6 million in 2006, to 17.2 million in 2007-08, and 16.4 million in 2009.

InterMedia, an American media market research company, conducts BBG's research. At the time of the inspection, InterMedia was in the third year of a contract that can be renewed for a year at a time for up to five years; this was the second contract covering a five-year span that the company has had with BBG. BBG managers noted that InterMedia has developed extensive institutional capacity to work in certain difficult media environments, including some countries in the Middle East, and pointed to the usefulness of having consistent data from one year to the next as a means of establishing baselines and gauging changes. Tracking changes permits MBN to adjust its programming in response to dynamic media market conditions.

InterMedia measures the size of MBN's audience from surveys, which collect a wide range of data about media consumption and ask respondents if and when last they watched or listened to each of the major TV and radio stations available in their country. Subcontractors whose firms have a presence and expertise in a particular country conduct the surveys. InterMedia, consistent with standard practice in

measuring audiences for international broadcasting, counts any amount of watching or listening on a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual basis. BBG staff noted that this practice is common in recall-based media measurement surveys, both in the Middle East and elsewhere. BBG staff also pointed out that, according to research, Arabic-speaking viewers in the Middle East typically consult numerous (five and more) stations for news and information, and so many Alhurra viewers encounter the station first while searching through available channels. According to BBG, methodological changes made following the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) 2006 recommendations (see below) did not produce significantly different results, indicating that InterMedia's earlier methodology had not exaggerated audience size.

In 2006, a GAO report<sup>4</sup> criticized the extensive use of nonprobability sampling in InterMedia's surveys, specifically the use of purposive methods to select sampling units deemed to be representative of the population under study. The GAO study contended that nonprobability sampling produces "results that cannot be reliably projected to represent a broader population in the region." The GAO also criticized the method used by InterMedia to project national audiences, contending that projections involving areas outside the sampled areas were not necessarily accurate. Since the GAO report, BBG has taken steps to increase significantly the use of probability sampling in the InterMedia research. BBG said that it had adopted strict guidelines to ensure that survey results are projected only to those regions within the survey's sampling frame. BBG has also ensured that InterMedia takes the GAO's criticism into account when the company computes its audience projections.

InterMedia managers noted that the company follows the standards prescribed by the leading associations in its field. The company and its staff are members of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research, the World Association for Public Opinion Research, the American Evaluation Association, the Council of American Survey Research Organizations, and others.

InterMedia projects national audience figures for Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa from the results of its surveys. The BBG uses the national audience figures that InterMedia provides to calculate the weekly reach of its broadcasts – defined as the number of discrete individuals who have watched or listened to one of MBN's broadcasts at least once in the previous week. BBG staff noted that this metric constitutes the basic audience measure for all BBG services, and is also used by the other major public service international broadcasters, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, Radio France International, and Deutsche Welle.

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<sup>4</sup> Government Accountability Office, *U.S. International Broadcasting, Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved* (August 2006; Report No. GAO-06-762).

At the time of the inspection, Alhurra had a weekly reach of 27.7 million people, and Radio Sawa had a weekly reach of 16.4 million. MBN had a weekly audience of 35.7 million people, which includes the unduplicated audience of both Alhurra and Radio Sawa. For comparison, performance data provided from BBG's research contractor in September 2009 indicated that weekly television audiences for Al Jazeera were 74 million. Al Arabiya had 50 million, and Al Manar had 20 million. CNN and BBC World ranked at four and three million respectively.

The BBG's figures for MBN's reach vary significantly from country to country because of both technical and social or political factors. In Egypt, for example, Radio Sawa is not broadcast on FM frequencies because the government will not grant MBN a license to do so; FM radio is more important in the country than either medium or shortwave broadcasting. In Iraq, MBN consistently ranks near the top of the media market. The OIG team heard a number of explanations for the reported success of MBN in Iraq. According to one explanation, MBN broadcasts in Iraq were produced by Iraqi journalists for a specifically Iraqi audience and emphasized subjects of interest to Iraqis; the result was a valued and credible product.

## Qualitative Research

The second kind of MBN research that InterMedia conducts on the BBG's behalf seeks to elicit audience members' detailed assessments of the content and production quality of the broadcasts. At present, the company performs two different types of qualitative studies: in-depth one-on-one interviews and evaluative or monitoring panels. One such recent study took place in April and May of 2009 when InterMedia assembled a monitoring panel to review Alhurra television programming. The study chose 28 panelists, all of whom had regularly watched the station in the past year. They were residents of Egypt, Oman, Morocco, and Jordan. Consistent with industry standards, InterMedia included two control viewers who spoke Arabic, but were located outside the Middle East. The panelists and control viewers were asked to evaluate six daily programs. In addition to gauging the panelists' reactions, the study considered technical aspects of the broadcasts. InterMedia produced a report of more than 200 pages with detailed results, including an analysis of how the individual Alhurra television programs affected the panelists' perceptions. The report also contained a series of suggestions from the panelists on how to improve Alhurra TV.

## Other Surveys

Some other media surveys in the region take a different approach to measuring audience size than that taken by the BBG and other public sector international broadcasters. The media market, is by all accounts, crowded. Satellite television has proliferated, and more people get their news from television than from any other source, although the use of the Internet for that purpose is growing rapidly. Additionally, many of the radio stations in the region have matured and are producing higher quality programming. As a result, the weekly audience of Sawa and other established stations has gone down a little as people now have a wider variety of choices.

One frequently cited annual study was done by the University of Maryland in coordination with Zogby International, a polling and market research firm. While the survey was almost entirely focused on political topics, it did include one question asking respondents which television channel they turned to first for their news, and which they turned to second. The 2009 study concluded that about 70 percent of the respondents cited Al Jazeera, the Qatar-based pan-Arab broadcaster. In that same study, very few respondents cited Alhurra as their first or second choice of TV channels for news.

BBG believes the Zogby research has led to widespread confusion about Alhurra's effectiveness, because what Zogby seeks to measure is audience preference not audience reach (that is, Zogby research does not probe frequency of media use and thus does not derive an audience measure). This means, for millions of Arabs, Alhurra might not be their first (or second) choice for news, but they nonetheless watch the channel. BBG and Zogby/Telhami research efforts, therefore, are not contradictory. Zogby/Telhami can accurately cite that only two percent of Arabs interviewed say Alhurra is either their first or second choice for news and BBG can also accurately cite that Alhurra reaches 27.7 million people weekly across the Middle East with weekly reach rates ranging from 10 percent in Saudi Arabia to 64 percent in Iraq. In addition, the BBG points out that very rarely do international broadcaster rival indigenous media outlets in frequency or intensity of audience use; still, based on weekly audience reach, Alhurra figures among the top 20 TV channels in each of the 14 Arab countries where BBG research has been done, except Saudi Arabia, where it ranks 21st.

## JUDGING EFFECTIVENESS

The OIG team found that, as with all BBG services, defining the effectiveness of MBN broadcasts is a complex undertaking. InterMedia's research appeared to be scrupulously carried out in conformity with the standards of the industry. Especially since 2006, when InterMedia increased its use of probability sampling, the national "reach" estimates that the BBG uses are defensible numbers. Similarly, the qualitative studies that InterMedia carries out provide a wealth of information that MBN can use to improve its media products.

However, the OIG team believes that the concept of "reach," as defined by the BBG, does not fully answer the question of Alhurra TV and Radio Sawa's effectiveness, even when the valuable qualitative data are added to the mix. There are several reasons for this.

- The raw weekly reach figures include a wide variety of viewers with varying degrees of commitment to and interest in the programs' content.
- The participants in the qualitative studies must be drawn from within the relatively small group of regular watchers rather than being randomly selected citizens. While the seriousness with which those participants take Alhurra TV or Radio Sawa ensures a similarly serious engagement with the survey, their status as regular watchers suggests that they do not reflect the population as a whole.
- In addressing these concerns, BBG managers noted that total audience size, while important, was not the only criterion used to assess the effectiveness of MBN's broadcasts. As with other BBG services, they noted, research conducted on behalf of MBN measures audiences' assessment of the broadcasts' reliability (alongside that of other channels) and the extent to which viewers and listeners believe the programs have enhanced their understanding of current events, U.S. policies, and American culture and society. Thus, three broad indicators – reach, reliability, and understanding – are viewed in concert when considering the overall effectiveness of BBG programming. In addition, BBG staff noted that the InterMedia surveys contained a number of other measures that allow for more sophisticated assessment of audience engagement with MBN's programming. Radio Sawa listeners, for example, are specifically asked how much attention they pay to the station's newscasts, while all respondents are asked not only which stations they watch and listen to, but also which ones they regularly use as sources of news.

- Finally, BBG and MBN senior managers pointed out that MBN's goal is not to compete with Al Jazeera or other pan-Arab broadcasters, such as the Saudi-funded Al Arabiya. Rather, they seek to provide viewers an alternative source of news and information, and to cover stories that other broadcasters do not cover, at the same time offering an American perspective on events and issues.

Research will continue to play an indispensable role in determining how and how well MBN achieves its goals. Given the importance of the Middle East to the U.S. national interest, the relative newness of the MBN broadcasters, and the need to ensure their effectiveness, the OIG team believes that the BBG should consider additional, alternative approaches to the research currently being carried out by Inter-Media.

## ALTERNATIVE RESEARCH APPROACHES

Because the BBG's research budget is limited, choosing alternative approaches to research would have a cost. The OIG team acknowledges the importance of obtaining consistent data from one year to the next. Changes to MBN research could result in data gaps. Nevertheless, the OIG team believes that the tradeoff between continuity of data and a fresh look at measuring effectiveness warrants the BBG's giving this serious consideration.

Some options the BBG could explore include the following:

- Conduct a greater number of in-depth studies in a smaller number of countries. Increase the focus on judging the effectiveness of individual shows. With enough accurate data, MBN could eliminate underperforming shows and strengthen those that appear to be succeeding.
- Conduct evaluative panels with participants who are not regular viewers or listeners.
- Study the impact, role, and effectiveness of non-Arab international broadcasters in the region.
- Study the timing of the broadcast of individual shows.
- Study the audience demographics of the MBN in relation to individual shows. Which shows appeal to which demographic groups?

- Continue to develop more sophisticated measures of effectiveness.
- Study narrowly defined audience demographic groups, such as males under 35, or females who do not work outside the home; link these studies to individual shows, and also to broadcast times.

While some aspects of the suggestions noted above are covered, or partially covered, by the current research, enhancing the research mix might give the BBG increased ability to adjust its programming for maximum effectiveness. Enhanced options for audience research could improve understanding of the MBN broadcasters' impact in the region and its effectiveness.

**Recommendation 2:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should expand the forms and vary the focus of the research it conducts on the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. broadcasts, to include program-, theme-, and country-specific studies. (Action: BBG)

## MANAGEMENT OF PROGRAMS

MBN programs include Network News (for Alhurra and Sawa), *Current Affairs*, and the newest program, *Al Youm. Afa Darfur* is a 30-minute shortwave radio program directed to the people of Darfur. At the time of the inspection, MBN had websites for both Sawa and Alhurra. The divisions responsible for these programs are described below, with observations made by the OIG team based on MBN documents, personal questionnaires, and interviews. When inspecting the BBG and its entities, the OIG inspectors must “respect the journalistic integrity of all the broadcasters...and may not evaluate the philosophical or political perspectives reflected in the content of broadcasts.”<sup>5</sup> The OIG team did not evaluate philosophical or political perspectives.

### NETWORK NEWS

Alhurra’s pan-Arab channel has two one-hour news shows, and four one-half hour news summaries, as well as eight-minute updates at the top of the hour and three-minute updates at the bottom of the hour, 24 hours a day. Radio Sawa broadcasts over 370 newscasts per week, with updates twice an hour at 15 and 45 minutes past the hour. MBN says that Sawa’s flexible format permits it to respond quickly to developing news events.

Alhurra broadly categorizes its programming as illustrated in the table below:

	Alhurra Main	Alhurra Iraq	Alhurra Europe
News	22.23%	21.73%	22.02%
Iraqi News	N/A	8.33%	N/A
Current Affairs	58.03%	36.31%	57.35%
Iraqi Current Affairs	7.15%	24.40%	20.63%
Acquisitions	12.59%	9.23%	N/A

Figure 1. Categories of Alhurra Programming

Source: MBN

<sup>5</sup> 22 U.S.C. § 6203(a)(3)(B).

The OIG team discussed the achievements and challenges of the news division with management and staff. Some of these observations are reflected in the Executive Direction of this report. In general, people were working hard to put on the news. As expected, many were under the pressure of tight deadlines. A significant improvement was MBN's new studio in Washington, DC, which was more convenient to guests than the Springfield facility. For Alhurra, the greatest frustration was senior management's perceived reluctance or inability to make quick decisions. Other challenges came from a workforce of unequal skill and experience.

## CURRENT AFFAIRS

This division is responsible for the creative development and production for all in-house and regionally produced programs, other than news. See Appendix B for a listing of its programs. The mix includes political shows, four weekly magazine shows, and numerous social and cultural programs. It also produces occasional series such as the popular *Americans*. The director of *Current Affairs*, an Arabic speaker, said that his responsibility is to track the shows and make sure they are fair and balanced. The senior producers in his division are responsible for maintaining MBN standards. When they work on a show's format, they talk to their staffs about MBN's mission.

The *Current Affairs* director would like to expand the amount of current affairs programs. The OIG team also heard from others that well respected shows were put on by one or two people. According to the division director, the ideal is to have a producer, writer, researcher, associate producer, and anchor. Some people in the division expressed frustration at their inability to propose new programs or that popular shows were not supported adequately. The director said that there is yearly planning for the budgets for all shows since the president and vice president for administration arrived. According to MBN senior managers, *Current Affairs* has an overall annual budget that is broken down into show budgets. These budgets and plans define the workload for employees within the department. The director will submit new show suggestions and then use the budget and show plans to determine whether to create new programs and terminate other programs.

To keep Alhurra competitive, it is important to foster an environment of creativity, where people feel free to suggest new shows or ways of doing things. The OIG team heard the perception from many people that their ideas were not taken seriously or acknowledged. Some ultimately went to the MBN president to get a hearing for their ideas and found him receptive. Some interviewees and personal questionnaires expressed frustration that the director of this division was not forthcoming in providing answers or encouragement.

## AL YOUM

Earlier this year, Alhurra made the first major change in its program line-up since its launch in 2004. MBN said that *Al Youm* (“Today” in Arabic) is a “dynamic, innovative” three-hour program broadcast live from Dubai, Jerusalem, Beirut, Cairo, and Washington, DC, that provides the Middle East viewer a unique regional and American perspective on the day’s events. It represents 25 percent of Alhurra’s programming five days a week. MBN has assembled a broad range of talented, experienced broadcasters for the show. MBN will conduct research specific to *Al Youm* in the surveys going to the field in December 2009, which should yield information on which to base any changes.

The OIG team visited MBN’s Dubai Production Center where part of *Al Youm* is produced. Currently, the Dubai Center gets all of its editorial guidance from MBN in the United States. Staff agreed that it was in close touch with editors in Springfield, but would prefer having one leader present on the spot. There was overall appreciation for the talents of *Al Youm*’s senior managers.

## RADIO SAWA

Radio Sawa was launched in 2002 and used a new format to broadcast a mix of Western and Middle Eastern music to the Middle East over FM and to deliver news and information programming. (See a sample of Sawa’s schedule in Appendix C.) The target audience for the station is people under 30. The station has proven to be successful with this group and claims a large audience. Since its inception, its format has been copied by many other radio stations. Radio, however, is losing its audience in general because television is the preferred way of getting news and entertainment. This trend is consistent with the fact that while the audience figures for Sawa have gone down a little, the Alhurra figures have increased.

As mentioned in the Executive Direction section, Sawa has a general manager. He arrived in December 2008. Sawa had been without a managing editor since June 2007 when the managing editor was appointed to be vice president of network news, and has been looking for a replacement. MBN management says that it is hard to find the right Arabic speaker with the right journalistic experience and management skills who will accept the salary that MBN offers.

Currently, MBN's vice president of network news provides editorial guidance and oversight. He says that he is able to fulfill this function. However, in personal questionnaires and interviews, Sawa staff say that they feel left out, with limited editorial guidance. They rarely see the vice president of network news.

As mentioned earlier, Radio Sawa is actively pursuing recruitment for a managing editor.

The general manager said that he is looking towards growth and opportunities for improving management and making shifts more efficient. He said there are opportunities to make radio better, such as to appeal to audiences by making each stream more localized.

## AFIA DARFUR

*Afia Darfur* was launched in 2008 through funding provided via the BBG from the Department of State. The Department of State no longer funds the program and has turned over that aspect to BBG and MBN. There are four people on the staff who prepare 30 minutes of broadcasts a day, repeated twice, for distribution on shortwave radio to the people of Darfur. A question in the planning phase was what language to use. Arabic is a common language, but there are at least three tribal languages used by the target audience. After examining the situation, BBG management felt that Arabic was the only feasible option at this time.

## INTERNET AND NEW MEDIA

MBN reorganized in 2009. It put all new media initiatives under a single director, in part to facilitate the use of new technology. Currently there are two separate websites – one for Sawa and one for Alhurra. There is one news team that creates the news for both sites, however, and is based at Sawa. MBN is in the process of designing a new site that will be for both Sawa and Alhurra. An OIG inspector attended a planning meeting for this project. It was still in the initial stages, with many issues

to be decided. The hoped-for result, according to a manager, is one comprehensive Arabic-language news site that will be the destination for all Arabic-language news seekers. MBN hopes to have the site completed by the end of Fiscal Year 2010.

The Pan Arab Web Awards Academy Jury Committee awarded the Radio Sawa's Web site ([www.RadioSawa.com](http://www.RadioSawa.com)) first prize for Web site excellence in its fifth annual competition of Pan Arab Web sites. RadioSawa.com won first place in the Media-TV and Radio category that recognizes excellence in Web design and development. The criteria for the award included creativity, user friendliness, content, visual design, and interactivity. The awards were presented on April 25, 2009, in Dubai.

MBN is also working on a number of new media initiatives, including an iPhone application for Radio Sawa. It also uses Internet streaming, currently streaming seven of the Sawa signals. Alhurra original programming is streamed on the Alhurra sites for both Alhurra and Alhurra Iraq.

MBN has a presence on various new media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. These new media sites are monitored weekly and sometimes even daily. According to the Sawa general manager, the sites include:

- Facebook account pages for Alhurra i-TECH and Al Youm. These are the “regular” Facebook pages. There are also “Fan” pages for Alhurra, Radio Sawa, Al Youm as well as other Alhurra programs.
- MBN uploads video on its Alhurra YouTube channel page.
- There are Twitter accounts for Alhurra, Al Youm, Radio Sawa and Alhurra Iraq through which MBN distributes RSS feeds of its headlines.
- MBN uses a regional version of Twitter in the Middle East called “WatWet.”
- MBN uses a regional version of YouTube in the Middle East called Maktoob. The OIG team heard that this is a well established and fairly powerful brand in the Middle East. MBN is uploading some video from some of its Alhurra programs there and is getting a decent response.
- MBN also uses a regional version of Facebook in the Middle East called Jeeran.

~~**SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED**~~

~~**SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED**~~

## MBN SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

Sawa and Alhurra require much behind-the-scenes support. For this purpose, there are departments for production and broadcast operations, programming, design, communications, marketing and promotion, and program review. The offices report to MBN's president.

### PRODUCTION AND BROADCAST OPERATIONS

This division provides all production support for the three Alhurra networks. The department is made up of engineering/information technology, network operations, international production, and production operations. In addition, it provides broadcast technicians for all studios, control rooms, master control, and field news-gathering. It maintains, installs, repairs, and operates all equipment for MBN. The general manager was brought on as a regular employee in May of this year, along with another 25 contractors from an outside vendor. The remaining contractors were replaced by fulltime employees in December 2009.

MBN appointed the director of engineering in February 2009, and moved the information technology (IT) division to his area. Some felt that previously engineering and IT were not working toward a common goal. The OIG team was told that the new organization seems to be working. The director has also looked at equipment life cycles and made a replacement schedule. IT is now looking at its equipment. The need for attention to equipment was mentioned by several people in their personal questionnaires.

In an attempt to improve the technical infrastructure, MBN will replace its broadcast automation software. Its many defects resulted in on-air problems. A new contract was let this fall and MBN hopes to have a new system in place in the spring. The contract includes training for Dubai and the other bureaus. MBN anticipates saving money on satellites by using the new system. The general manager predicts that it will change everything they do at MBN, including the work flow.

The general manager said that things are going "fast and furious but good." The challenges are communication, accountability, and planning. The president has recently established a planning committee with representatives from all parts of

MBN in order to enhance communications and to facilitate working together. Although the committee is new, initial reports are that it is filling a void and should produce smoother operations.

In personal questionnaires and interviews, employees in production and broadcast operations say that their morale is good and that they are proud of their work. Some comment on the status of old equipment, but that is becoming a BBG priority.

## PROGRAMMING

This area plans the monthly schedules (grid) for all three television networks. It is headed by an acting manager. A new manager is expected to arrive by the end of the year. A major concern, as mentioned previously, is inadequate communication with other departments. The new planning committee is already improving communication.

## DESIGN

The graphics department creates and procures Alhurra's on-air image and collateral material and maintains the Alhurra on-air brand. Since Alhurra was created quickly, some of the people in the department did not have skills for television graphics. Since then, additional Arabic speakers have been hired and the earlier employees have received training. As in the programming section, a significant complaint was the lack of timely communication with other areas. According to an interviewee, some people do not feel graphics are needed or feel that they can be done fast. Once again, the planning committee is proving to be a step in the right direction.

## COMMUNICATIONS

The person who leads this group came to MBN in 2004 when it began. The unit is responsible for managing all outside communications regarding MBN to ensure the correct information is being disseminated about the company. It also prepares press releases, responds to press inquiries, and satisfies external requests for information. It updates and maintains Alhurra's programming schedules on the website and works closely with BBG's director of congressional liaison.

## PROGRAM REVIEW

MBN runs an annual program review process to evaluate the technical and journalistic aspects of its programs. Program reviews have been conducted in 2007, 2008, and 2009. The process is modeled on that used by the International Broadcasting Bureau, which conducts reviews for the Voice of America language services, and by other grantee organizations of the BBG. The 2009 program review included analysis of both production and content, the results of research conducted by Inter-Media, and the results of a monitoring panel like those described previously.

At the time of the inspection, the review process appeared to be crystallizing, but it had not yet had a sustained impact on the staff working on the various programs. Awareness and understanding of the program review process among the journalists at MBN appeared to be spotty. The OIG team believes that the review process will become a more effective means of improving the broadcasters' products as the system is formalized and action plans for improvement are implemented.

BBG reported in an update that the 2009 program review of Alhurra was completed by holding two meetings where the review results were presented. One meeting consisted of senior BBG and MBN managers and the second meeting included Alhurra news and current affairs producers. MBN has received positive feedback on the programs review process from all levels of Alhurra.

## MARKETING AND PROMOTION

MBN's marketing and promotion unit consists of a director of on-air promotion who leads six producers, each of whom develops video material in support of specific programs. Some cross-pollination takes place whereby Radio Sawa promotes Alhurra TV programs and vice versa. In interviews, some staff expressed the view that more should be done along those lines. Those same people also expressed their belief that Radio Sawa and Alhurra are separate enterprises in more than just a physical sense.

MBN created an advertising campaign to promote its new daily magazine show Al Youm, which it modeled on American morning talk shows. The advertising included billboards in selected countries in the region and radio spots.

The OIG team believes that both on-air and external marketing efforts would be more effective if MBN had more information about individual programs. Having program-specific information about audience demographics and the effectiveness of the broadcast schedule would allow MBN more accurately to focus its promotional efforts. The need for this kind of information is addressed with an informal recommendation in the section on research. According to MBN senior managers, this year's 2009 audience survey will collect viewer feedback on some specific programs.

## OIG'S 2008 REPORT ON ALHURRA'S PROGRAMMING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

In May 2008, OIG prepared a limited scope inspection of the journalistic procedures of Alhurra.<sup>6</sup> During the current inspection, the OIG team reviewed whether Alhurra had further strengthened its editorial procedures or had taken other steps to ensure controls for quality journalism. The OIG team found that Alhurra was still offering live streaming of its original programs on its website. It also had posted translations of samples of its programs on BBG's website ([www.bbg.gov/pressroom/arabictranslations.cfm](http://www.bbg.gov/pressroom/arabictranslations.cfm)). This procedure was done by an outside contractor who translated a random sample of programming each month. The program was not funded in FY 2010.

The contract that BBG signed in September 2007 with the University of Southern California, Annenberg School for Communication, for an assessment of Alhurra's journalistic standards, was issued in July 2008.<sup>7</sup> It found that the principal challenges for Alhurra were "those related to the fundamentals of journalism, not the exigencies of politics." Based on the results of the report, MBN provided training that was directly responsive to the conclusions.

Beginning in 2007, the MBN president launched an effort to enhance internal understanding of MBN's mission and how that translates into programming. He created an ongoing series of mandatory editorial training courses for MBN's news staff. Professors at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism designed and presented the courses. Dates and locations for recent trainings were:

September 2007 - Alhurra headquarters

April 2008 - overseas correspondents at Alhurra headquarters

February 2009 - Alhurra headquarters staff

June 2009 - MBN overseas correspondents in Dubai

September 2009 - Sawa headquarters staff

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<sup>6</sup> Report No. ISP-IB-08-45 (May 2008).

<sup>7</sup> The USC report may be found on <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com>.

MBN posted an Arabic translation of the basic reference for the course on its intranet, along with the mission statement and strategic plan.

Alhurra made additional progress. It updated its audience research figures for reach. It also put into place and carried out performance reviews in 2007, 2008, and 2009.

The one informal recommendation from the OIG's 2008 report was for MBN to make plans for delegations of duty for the vice president of network news and the director of program review and research. At the time of the inspection, MBN recently filled the position of coordinating newsroom manager. MBN senior managers stated that this position will be designated the back up for the vice president of network news. In addition, the BBG's International Broadcasting Bureau has made available to MBN a language qualified, experienced, program reviewer for those times the regular reviewer is not available. These positions are critical to overseeing and maintaining journalistic standards.

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

MBN has a strategic plan with a mission statement, long-term strategic goals, and mission and enterprise objectives. As mentioned above, the strategic plan is posted on MBN's intranet. There were varying degrees of understanding of the mission. MBN's president has personally presented and explained MBN's mission to small groups of editorial staff as part of the recent mandatory editorial training sessions. BBG reports that MBN is in compliance with matching its plans to BBG's umbrella strategic plan. In accordance with the President's Management Agenda of the previous Administration, MBN's strategic planning is linked with its budget and performance.

The performance plan is well developed, but its goals basically measure output and not how MBN has impacted its audience. It would help MBN plan or improve performance if it could measure impact. Some of the questions in InterMedia's yearly research come close to measuring at least an aspect of impact. BBG points out that it is difficult to measure the impact of its broadcasts. It would help to know, for example, the extent to which programs are changing perceptions, supplying news not available elsewhere, teaching other cultures about America, serving as an example of independent journalism, or any other impact that MBN would like to address. The OIG team left an informal recommendation on this. MBN senior managers believe that the annual audience survey research does measure impact by capturing those viewers who say watching Alhurra enhances their knowledge of America and its foreign policy.



## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

MBN's FY 2009 estimate budget was \$115 million. Staff includes:

Domestic/American Fulltime Employees	442
Locally Employed Staff <sup>8</sup> /Personal Services Agreements	287
Part time Employees	3
Contractors	175

### ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

MBN Administration provides sufficient support to MBN headquarters and its overseas offices. Led by the vice president for administration, and supported by a staff of 28, the section provides the full gamut of administrative services to MBN. These include financial, human resources (HR), procurement, property management, security, and facilities. Since arriving in 2006, the VP for administration has focused on overall improvement of administrative operations. The section provides sound support to MBN, but continues to work through the growing pains associated with its quick start up phase of operations in 2004, including improving processes and procedures and attracting qualified staff. To strengthen controls and oversight, most administrative functions are centrally managed from headquarters. This structure does not appear to hamper operations. MBN management has placed high priority on building an administrative team, improving customer service, fine tuning and standardizing procedures, and strengthening internal controls, with positive results. High turnover and staffing gaps have made these efforts even more of a challenge. Nonetheless, work is getting done and morale among the staff is generally good. Customers are generally pleased with the support it provides.

MBN's greatest resource challenge is hiring qualified staff to fill its vacant positions. Of the 28 authorized positions, eight positions are currently vacant. Much of the staff is relatively new, including several section heads. Because staffing levels in the administrative office are thin due to gaps, senior management in the section has to take on extra duties. The day-to-day work is completed but attention to other important initiatives sometimes takes a back seat.

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<sup>8</sup> Previously referred to as Foreign Service Nationals.

Current top management made numerous positive changes. For example, a production and IT contract previously provided through a 3rd party contract was integrated into MBN through a competitive process. The new structure allows MBN to provide better oversight of the staff, and has also achieved efficiencies, according to MBN. Plans are underway to integrate positions from a similar contract into the MBN workforce. Another successful initiative involved asking the business managers and coordinators to liaise with the program offices and administration. This facilitated requisitions and payments for the program offices.

While MBN administration staff performs well, some improvements are needed. The OIG team made informal recommendations about human resources.

## HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The MBN president and the vice president of administration have worked hard to move MBN from the start-up phase to the operations phase. HR made major strides in organizing the operation and establishing standardized procedures. They are hampered by the fact that 8 of 28 positions in the management area are currently vacant, of which two are key human resources positions. OIG inspectors left an informal recommendation that the vice president of administration establish as a top priority the filling of the vacant positions, especially the ones in human resources. This is a key step to ensure that all areas of HR have proper standardized procedures and written documentation and to free up the vice president to focus more on the overall management operations of MBN.

### Recruiting/New Employees/Orientation

Recruiting staff for MBN is complicated because of the need for candidates to have Arabic and English language skills as well as television or radio experience. Approximately 70 percent of all staff are recruited from overseas under the J-1 visa program.

When MBN was first started, it needed to hire staff quickly, and often hired acquaintances or relatives of existing employees. In the past three years MBN has established a more professional approach, as described in the following paragraphs. However, existing employees are encouraged to recommend candidates they know who might be qualified.

When a vacancy occurs, the HR staff works with the respective section manager to ensure the job description for the position accurately describes the duties and responsibilities. HR then prepares a job posting and distributes it as widely as possible. It posts all positions internally on the intranet so that existing MBN staff can apply. Since the major recruiting effort is focused overseas, it posts openings on appropriate websites, places ads in newspapers and publications, and utilizes specialized job boards, recruitment agencies, and even Craigslist. HR has focused on areas in the U. S. with large concentrations of Arabic speaking residents, such as Detroit and surrounding areas, Los Angeles, and Washington, DC.

According to HR officials, the HR staff will review the files of all applicants and separate qualified from unqualified. They forward the files of qualified applicants to the hiring manager. The hiring manager makes the decision of how many and who to interview. HR will take the manager's selection list and arrange interviews in person or by phone. For certain jobs, candidates take an examination to evaluate job skills and experience.

An interview panel, usually consisting of the hiring manager, perhaps a senior manager in that section, a representative from HR, the business manager for that section or an appropriate program representative, conducts the interview(s) and scores the applicants on candidate evaluation forms. The panel asks about relevant experience, education, salary history, and Arabic and English language skills. (Though Arabic is actually more important, the candidate must be able to function at work and outside work as well as do a security interview in English.) The candidates are not given the answer on the spot. The panel recommends a selectee, subject to top management approval for senior positions.

HR will call the successful candidate to solicit the information required for the actual job offer letter. The processing for the J-1 visa, which usually takes from two to six months, begins next. The selectee is sent the paperwork for the J-1 visa and the forms for the security clearance. The numerous steps for obtaining the J-1 are quite involved. MBN has worked hard to streamline the process and assist new employees with the process, and is working toward delineating a standard procedure for the J-1 immigration processing. Before the candidate can begin work, an interim security clearance is required.

Now the MBN relocation coordinator enters the scene. Fluent in Arabic and English, she helps the successful candidate with paperwork, travel arrangements, and temporary housing. The relocation specialist meets the arriving candidate (and family) at the airport, introduces them to the neighborhood, and provides them with shuttle and bus schedules, information on obtaining a driver's license, and descriptions of company benefits. She helps them set up a bank account, purchase a cell

phone, sign up with the Social Security Administration, and find a realtor, as needed. OIG inspectors regarded the services of the coordinator to be an excellent investment in employee productivity, morale, and good will.

Orientation for new employees is usually a one- to three-hour process. Since most information about the choices and decisions has previously been forwarded to the new employee, the orientation time is spent answering specific questions and signing forms for medical coverage, life insurance, etc. Also, the employee gets fingerprinted, obtains a security badge, and has a security briefing. HR is currently developing a more expansive power point presentation to facilitate transparency and improved communication. The welcome manual (which OIG inspectors found to be already rather thorough, and notably presented in English and Arabic) is being expanded. To assist in improving the orientation and in-processing activities, OIG inspectors left an informal recommendation that new employees fill out a detailed evaluation survey of the process. The inspectors noted that some employees, who apparently had come aboard early with MBN, noted in their personal questionnaires that they experienced little to no orientation, while a number of respondents who may have joined more recently had positive comments about the orientation.

## Performance Management and Evaluation

New employees undergo an introductory or probationary period of three months, as noted in the offer letter which they sign. During this period, both sides can evaluate if there is a good fit between the employee and the company. If the employee is not working out, and there is no clear indication for success in the position, MBN terminates the employment.

Once employees pass the introductory period, they are evaluated annually. HR told inspectors that if problems arise in the work environment, especially between employees and managers, HR often tries to resolve them or find creative ways around them.

The MBN offer letter to new employees does note that their employment is “at will” and could be terminated at any time by either side, for any reason within the law, with or without cause. OIG inspectors received a number of comments in the personal questionnaires and in personal interviews that there was a fear of possible retribution (e.g., summary firing) if they raised issues with (or about) upper management or even with the inspectors. (See Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) section.)

MBN management said that it has worked to improve the annual performance evaluation process. For 2009, all employees received and signed copies of their written and numerical evaluations. This contrasts with earlier years when, as numerous employees noted in their personal questionnaires, they had not seen or received copies of their evaluations. These evaluations are obviously of critical importance to the staff because the numerical evaluation drives their salary increase and possible bonus for the year. In interviews the week that evaluations were distributed, several employees told the inspection team of their frustration that the scores they received were lower than their supervisors had told them to expect. This happened because supervisors had given employees' their scores prematurely, before reviewing officers had approved them. In many cases, reviewing officers had to lower the scores because supervisors had not followed instructions on the range and spread of numerical scores they gave.

Although MBN management said that it made extra efforts to communicate how the performance evaluation was to work, perceptions of some employees interviewed were that the system was not transparent, especially as regards the numerical ratings. The OIG team left an informal recommendation urging further efforts to improve transparency, especially as regards the "scale" of the numerical evaluations and what they represented, and to provide a more detailed written narrative to explain (and back up) the evaluations given. Management said that it has tried to make clear that high evaluations (and thereby bonuses) are on a pay for performance basis, fairly distributed, not automatic, and not merely a means of rewarding favorites. The OIG team reviewed the performance evaluations of a large number of employees and found them to be generally well distributed, but noted that some managers were giving the same rating to almost all employees, despite instructions from management to the contrary.

OIG inspectors noted that the performance evaluation process culminates in September at the same time everyone is coping with fiscal year end closing procedures. The OIG team left an informal recommendation that the performance process be moved earlier, to the April to June period, to preclude the conflict with fiscal year end closing.

The inspectors reviewed a cross section of the current position descriptions for MBN and found them to be generally well written and appropriately reflective of the duties of the positions.

## Compensation and Benefits

MBN has a detailed salary scale with salary ranges comparable to USG scales. Based on the numerical portion of an employee's annual evaluation, he or she can receive an annual percentage increase in salary, plus a bonus based on a division of the bonus pool for that year. (See Performance Evaluation.)

The MBN benefit package is quite attractive, with generous medical and dental provisions. There is a discount for the vision program and a flexible spending account program for medical or dependent expenses. MBN provides and pays for life insurance, accidental death and dismemberment insurance, and disability coverage. MBN makes a generous contribution and matching payment to the 401K retirement program. Annual leave, sick leave, and holiday benefits are flexible and expansive.

## Nepotism

OIG inspectors learned from the personal questionnaires and interviews that some employees are concerned about nepotism, based on the fact that there are fourteen married couples working at MBN. MBN said that none were hired in violation of MBN's nepotism policy. The concerned employees said that it affected professionalism, the work environment, and staff morale. The employee handbook briefly addresses nepotism, stating "...If you are related to another MBN employee (parent, child, spouse, or in-law), you and your relative shall not directly or indirectly supervise or manage each other. Employees who marry must promptly notify their supervisor(s), and may not directly or indirectly supervise or manage one another." MBN also tries to ensure that husbands and wives do not report to the same person (interposing an alternate line of authority). In January 2009, MBN decided that no more spouses will be hired. Another situation to address is when a supervisor and subordinate develop a personal relationship, in which case a change in the supervisory chain would be appropriate. MBN, as a private company, does not have the same requirements for personnel policies as BBG. However, as a good business practice, the OIG team left an informal recommendation that MBN should further clarify and then publish its policy on nepotism.

## Training Programs

MBN has initiated a number of training programs and budgeted for significantly more training in the next fiscal year. They recognize the need to expand training in three major areas: job-related skill set training; managerial training; and, EEO training.

MBN has made a good start with the skills set training and plans to expand it. It recognizes the need for managerial training, especially for first line managers, and is working to expand that. It held mandatory sexual harassment prevention training in 2006 and 2007 and plans more for next year. (See EEO section.)

OIG inspectors noted that HR has good ideas for training and a top-down training plan. They counseled HR to work as well towards a bottom up training plan, with the ultimate goal to have individual training plans for each employee.

MBN recognizes the need for team building. They have planned two major efforts in this area for the next year.

## Awards

The OIG team left an informal recommendation that, in addition to the bonus program, mentioned above in the compensation and benefits section, MBN consider instituting an employee awards program. This would be aimed at more immediate recognition of the extra efforts or individual achievements of employees. These awards could range from small cash awards, gift certificates/gift shopping cards, and certificates of appreciation or recognition, similar to the State Department's Franklin (\$50 cash) and extra mile awards of cash and a certificate. These awards could be part of a semi-annual awards/recognition ceremony, conducted by the president (and possibly webcast to the other parts of MBN domestically and overseas due to the difficulty of getting large numbers of employees together while also running a 24-hour operation). This would be the opportunity to spotlight exceptional achievement and efforts by employees and to demonstrate management's commitment to excellence.

## Communications/Transparency

MBN has recently instituted an intranet website with useful information for employees. The OIG team received comments from the personal questionnaires and in personal interviews that employees, especially those not located at the MBN headquarters, feel left out and would benefit from the president's presence. In furtherance of communication and transparency, the OIG team counseled the MBN president to conduct periodic town hall meetings at the various MBN locations, supplemented by digital video conferences or webcasts, to disseminate information, emphasize the corporate mission and how to achieve it, review corporate progress toward goals, answer questions, and listen to employees.

## Equal Employment Opportunity/Conflict Resolution/ Morale

MBN is clearly committed to ensuring and promoting an environment of equal employment opportunity free of harassment and discrimination. Indeed, in the first few pages of the employee handbook, MBN emphasizes its commitment to EEO, prohibition of offensive behavior and remarks, prohibition of sexual harassment, zero toleration of violations, prohibition of favoritism based on sexual relationships, and prohibition of retaliation for reporting conduct in violation of these policies.

Employees who feel they have been a victim of any type of discrimination or harassment are urged to report that immediately to the director of human resources or the general counsel. Employees also have the right to file a complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Virginia Council on Human Rights, or the Fairfax County Human Rights Commission. The General Counsel informed the OIG inspectors that there had been 14 complaints to the EEOC since 2004, of which seven had been dismissed. The remaining seven are still pending resolution.

A number of personal questionnaires indicated that some employees felt a fear of retribution for bringing up problems to or complaining about their direct management or even of talking to the OIG team. Personal interviews confirmed that a number of employees indeed felt that way. In some cases, employees even asked for the possibility of off-site interviews with the OIG team. The “at will” nature of employment at MBN may have contributed to these fears. MBN said that no employee had cited a specific example of retribution. Management believes there is no foundation in practice or policy for this perception. The OIG team made an informal recommendation on this subject.

The OIG team counseled that reaffirming and underscoring MBN’s commitment to EEO and nondiscrimination could be an important topic for the president to stress in his town meetings and on the intranet. He could also forcefully remind his managers about the prohibition of retaliation against anyone asserting their rights. A few personal questionnaires and personal interviews brought up issues of perceived favoritism based on ethnic, religious, or geographic background. OIG inspectors had no way to verify anecdotal accounts of favoritism. They discussed with HR the need to have upper management stress MBN’s intolerance of any favoritism.

As noted in the training section, MBN has conducted (and plans to continue) mandatory training sessions on prevention of sexual harassment. The OIG team left an informal recommendation that MBN pursue more training opportunities in the

areas of conflict resolution and diversity awareness. MBN is already committed to major team building exercises and training. This should be a means to help reduce some of the negative perceptions among the employees and to build more of a team identity and environment, with people working to support and achieve the mission.

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND PROCUREMENT

The chief financial officer (CFO) oversees financial management, specifically financial reporting, budgeting, accounting, procurement, and travel. The CFO's office is responsible for domestic and overseas financial management activities, including supervising the accounting and payroll activities and staff. The CFO office has sixteen positions but currently six are vacant.

MBN manages all aspects of MBN's budget process, including preparation of the financial plan and meeting reporting requirements to BBG in accordance with the grant agreement. The CFO staff coordinates closely with MBN's business and program managers to ensure adequate oversight over the budget process, which increases its ability to analyze budget levels and recommend adjustments to the financial plan, when necessary, during BBG's quarterly reviews of MBN's budget.

While operations are generally good, the greatest challenge for the CFO has been coping with the high turnover in the accounting section. The controller position turned over twice in 2009, as did five additional staff over the past two years. This contributed to a temporary backlog of payments and the delayed completion of the 2008 annual audit. While the salary it offers is competitive for the Washington, D.C., area, MBN management noted the difficulty in finding someone to fill the controller position with the requisite technical expertise, management skills, and experience with financial techniques and practices appropriate for a grantee organization with the federal government. It is in the process of hiring a new controller. However, the backlog has been eliminated, the section is now current, and the audit near completion. A review of a sample of MBN's purchase orders, budget documents, and travel vouchers found that financial transactions appear to be properly conducted, maintained, and reported. The OIG team noted teamwork among all of the staff and cooperative relations with the program offices. One financial management initiative is to launch an international payroll system to eliminate high volumes of electronic funds transfers to overseas staff. The OIG team recommended informally that MBN develop a report mechanism to provide information on payments processed to assist overseas offices in verifying the timeliness of payments.

The procurement section, led by a director with a staff of two, provides the full range of acquisition functions for MBN, including administering MBN procurement policies and procedures. Based on a limited review of contract and purchase order files in Washington and in Dubai, the section performs its work adequately. Coordination and teamwork with the other sections appears to be good. Initiatives to perform procurement and financial management work more efficiently include the use of purchase and travel cards. MBN management has established adequate procedures for control and oversight over purchase cards and petty cash for both domestic and overseas use. It also revised procedures for the use of phone cards. Planned initiatives for the procurement section include automating processes to increase efficiencies, including a web rather than paper based requisition process.

## PERSONAL PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A limited review of supplies and inventories process found procedures in place or being developed, duties separated, and safeguards in place over inventory. No major issues were noted by the team.

## INTERNAL CONTROLS

MBN has worked to implement management controls in the organization in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-133, a process continuing to evolve. MBN management has focused on establishing policies and procedures for procurement, financial management, and property management to strengthen oversight over these functions. Appropriate attention is given to separation of duties. MBN Management is attentive to issues of waste, fraud, and mismanagement and has recently hired a full time internal controls officer to oversee its management controls program and annual audit requirement.

## OPERATIONS AT THE DUBAI PRODUCTION CENTER

MBN uses the Dubai Production Center primarily to produce its new three-hour program, *Al Youm*. The center has been producing a portion of the five-country show for less than a year. It attracts media professionals in the region and makes it easy to have important regional guests on its shows. Some interviewees expressed the need to improve local program leadership for *Al Youm* in Dubai. Currently, senior managers based in Springfield, VA, supervise the *Al Youm* regional hubs.

OIG inspectors conducted extensive interviews in Dubai with the three administrative staff and with a cross section of other employees, especially those who requested interviews. MBN Dubai experiences many of the same administrative challenges that MBN Springfield faces.

The Dubai operation has its own special circumstances for hiring employees. Dubai labor law asserts that contractors are in effect employees and have a number of benefits accordingly (such as vacation, sick leave, termination payments, health benefits, etc.) MBN's work force is made up of third country nationals living in Dubai; they pay no income tax. MBN utilizes a global legal advisor familiar with Dubai laws and regulations to assist with crafting employment contracts.

The Dubai operation coordinates recruiting. Managers in Springfield make final decisions on hiring, performance evaluations, and compensation.























## INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

### Strategic Plan

MBN's strategic plan lacks performance measures to assess the impact of its broadcasting.

**Informal Recommendation 1:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to include in its performance plan one or more measures to assess the impact of its broadcasting.

### Financial Management

All payments are made through MBN Washington but some require payment through the field offices, for example, when vendors require local currency or cash. These payments are approved by headquarters, reconciled monthly, and recorded to MBN's financial system. Ensuring timely payments requires periodic tracking by field office and Washington staff. This can sometimes be a time consuming process as there may be problems with invoices that require follow up. Also the time and workweek differences between Washington and the field offices may further lengthen the payment process.

**Informal Recommendation 2:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to develop a mechanism to provide information on payments processed so that overseas offices can verify the timeliness of payments.

## Human Resources

Eight of 28 positions in the MBN management area are currently vacant, of which two are key human resources positions.

**Informal Recommendation 3:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks to fill vacant positions this year, beginning with those in human resources.

MBN HR is currently developing a more expansive PowerPoint presentation for new employees to facilitate transparency and improved communication. The welcome manual is being expanded.

**Informal Recommendation 4:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to develop and circulate to new employees a detailed evaluation survey of the orientation and new employee in-processing programs, to assist in improving and better focusing these activities.

Although MBN management said that it made extra efforts to communicate how the performance evaluation was to work, there is still confusion about the scoring system and its application.

**Informal Recommendation 5:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to improve transparency in the performance evaluation process.

The MBN performance evaluation process culminates in September at the same time everyone is coping with fiscal year end closing procedures

**Informal Recommendation 6:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to move the performance evaluation process earlier to preclude conflict with fiscal year end closing.

MBN currently employs an annual bonus program to reward exceptional achievement by employees.

**Informal Recommendation 7:** The Broadcasting Board of Governors should require the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. to institute an employee awards program, in addition to the bonus program, aimed at immediate recognition of the extra efforts or individual achievements of employees.









## MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Arrival Date</b>
President	Brian Conniff	06/06
Vice President for Administration	Kelley Sullivan	08/06
Vice President for Network News	Daniel Nassif	06/07
Chief Financial Officer	Ravenna Bohan	06/07
General Counsel	Anne Noble	05/04
Director of Communications	Deirdre Kline	03/04
Radio Sawa General Manager	William Sabatini	12/08
Radio Sawa Managing Editor	Maha Rabie	01/10
Alhurra Coordinator for Network News	Mohamed Lemine	10/09
Director Alhurra Programming, Acting General Manager Broadcast and Production Operation	Beth Smith Lawrence Ryefield	01/04 05/09
Director of Program Review & Research	Vatche Sarkisian	02/07
Dubai Center Director	Paul Koenig	06/09
Dubai Branch Manager	Imad Haj	10/08



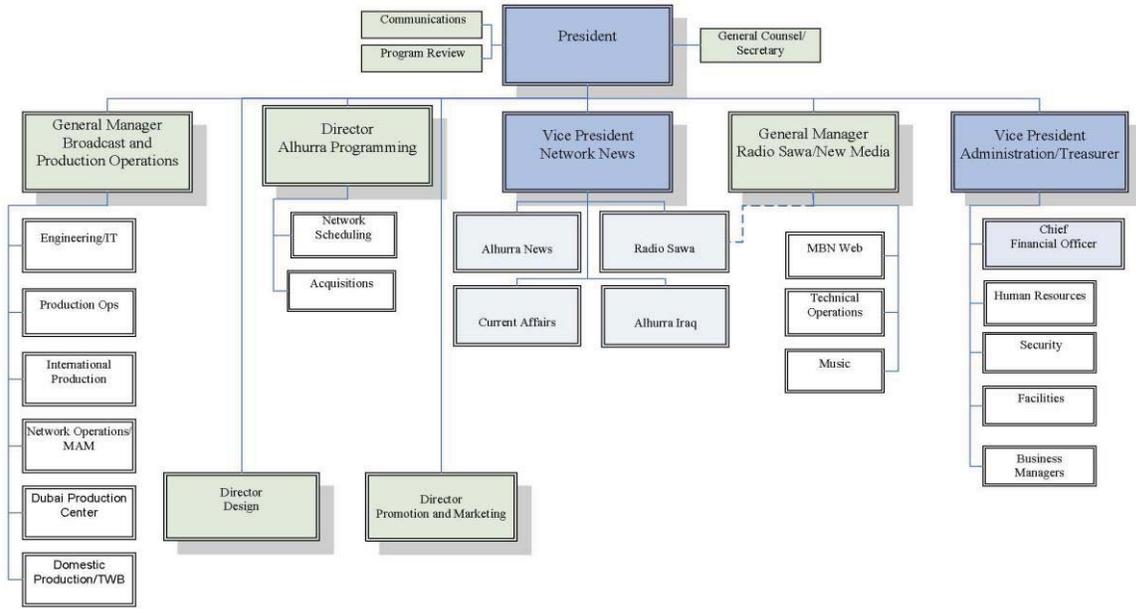
## ABBREVIATIONS

BBG	Broadcasting Board of Governors
CCTV	Closed-circuit televisions
CFO	Chief financial officer
DS	Diplomatic Security
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
FE/BR	Forced-entry and ballistic-resistant
FEL	Forced-entry lock
GAO	Government Accountability Office
HR	Human resources
IT	Information technology
MBN	Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc.
OIG	Office of Inspector General



# APPENDIX A: MBN ORGANIZATION CHART

## MBN, Inc.





## APPENDIX B: ALHURRA PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS PROVIDED BY ALHURRA

#### CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMS

- **Al Youm (“Today”)** — A three-hour live daily program that originates simultaneously from five countries in three continents including Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem and Alhurra’s headquarters in Springfield, Va. The three-hour program provides viewers a window to the world through its coverage of the latest news from the Middle East, the U.S. and the world; as well as topics such as health, entertainment news, sports, technology, social and cultural issues. Al Youm presents straightforward news in a relaxed, engaging environment. The program also includes interviews with everyone from politicians to athletes; leaders in business and the arts. Located in Dubai’s Media City, Al Youm is co-anchored by Engy Anwar and Ahmed El Naggar, who are joined by Mona Wehbi in Beirut, Amr Khalil in Cairo and Eman Haddad in Jerusalem, along with news updates from Alhurra’s headquarters outside of Washington, D.C.
- **Hunna (“Women’s Views”)** – An hour-long program that brings together four lively, engaging women to discuss social and political issues that are largely regarded as sensitive in the region. Each of the hosts brings her unique perspective when they address issues such as sexual harassment, women in prison, discrimination of women, the psychological impact on women who marry at an early age and domestic violence against women. Hosted by Buthaina Nassr, Asma Bin Othmane, Jasmine Taha and Julia Kas-sar.
- **Musawat (“Equality”)** – A weekly talk show that takes an in-depth look at the rights of women in the Gulf region of the Middle East. Equality is hosted by Saudi journalist Nadine Al-Bdair and includes expert guests for analysis and debate.

- **Qarib Jeddah (“Very Close”)** – A two-hour long interview with a cultural figure each week in front of a studio audience, including poets, writers and entertainers. Hosted by Joseph Issaoui.
- **Hadith Al-Khalij (“Gulf Talks”)** — A weekly talk show that examines the most important political, social and educational issues facing the Gulf. The program tackles controversial topics and goes beyond the headlines to discuss the impact that different issues have on the region. Hosted by Sulaiman Al-Hattlan.
- **Amerikeiyoun (“Americans”)** – Profiles of men and women who embody the American spirit. This documentary series produced by Alhurra, is a captivating look into the heart of America. Alhurra takes viewers inside the daily lives of Americans and examines their beliefs, their struggles and their perseverance. “Americans” is a look at true America. Hosted by Mohammed Mokhtari.
- **Min Wall Street (“From Wall Street”)** – This weekly program features investment news and informs viewers of developments within financial markets around the world. It is the first live business program that broadcasts in Arabic from the New York Stock Exchange. Hosted by Mohamed El Hussein Nassar.
- **Alhurra Tukaddem (“Alhurra Presents”)**—A weekly hour-long interview program with prominent newsmakers from the Middle East.
- **Ramia Hurra (“Sports Weekly”)** – A weekly program that highlights the week’s top news in the world of sports. Hosted by Tarek Ahmed.
- **i-TECH** – A weekly technology news hour that features the latest in computer and information technology with expert guests and updates from technology expos around the world. Hosted by Toufic Gebran.
- **Cinemagazine** – Weekly program that provides the latest entertainment news from around the world. Hosted by Ashia Aldouri.
- **High Speed** – This weekly program profiles the fastest modes of transportation from around the world and provides an inside look at the latest car exhibitions. “High Speed” brings together the past and present through interviews with racing engineers and drivers to learn about the history of planes, trains and automobiles. Hosted by George Choueiry.

## POLITICAL PROGRAMS

- **Ainon Ala Addimokratya (“Eye on Democracy”)** – This weekly program highlights the most important issues challenging freedom and democracy in the Middle East and North Africa. Hosted by Mohamed Al-Yahyai.
- **Al-Jihat Al-Arbah (“All Directions”)** – A weekly talk show providing analysis, discussion and review of the previous week, with the newsmakers and experts on the issues. Hosted by Sam Menassa.
- **Dakhil Washington (“Inside Washington”)** – A weekly program that gives viewers an in-depth look at the political process in Washington. The show highlights the political issues in Washington and the people that impact U.S. policy. Hosted by Robert Satloff.
- **Sa’aa Hurra (“Free Hour”)** – Alhurra’s flagship talk show examining latest news and issues of the day, with expert analysis and debate. “Free Hour” airs five times a week. Hosted by Hussein Jradi, Mohamed Haidari and Michel Ghandour.
- **Taqrir Khass (“Special Report”)**— Takes viewers behind the headlines of the most important political issues in the region. Through comprehensive reports and in-depth interviews, “Special Report” focuses on a single topic and examines the impact it has on the economy, society, international reaction and the ripple effect throughout the world. “Special Report” highlights aspects of the story not seen on other news programs and gives viewers the complete story. Hosted by Sayed Hussein.

## NEWSCASTS

- **Al-Alam Alaam (“The World Now”)** — Extensive news updates providing the latest news from the Middle East, U.S. and around the world. (News updates throughout the day)
- **Al-Alam Al-Yaoum (“The World Today”)** – A daily hour-long newscast providing accurate, objective and comprehensive reports from the Middle East, U.S. and around the world (airs at 17:00 GMT)

- **Al-Alamiah (“The Global”)** – A daily hour-long newscast providing accurate, objective and comprehensive reports from the Middle East, U.S. and around the world (airs at 21:00 GMT)
- **Thalathoun Daqiqa (“Thirty Minutes”)**—A weekly program giving in-depth coverage of top news stories of the week. Hosted by Ahmed Sanad.

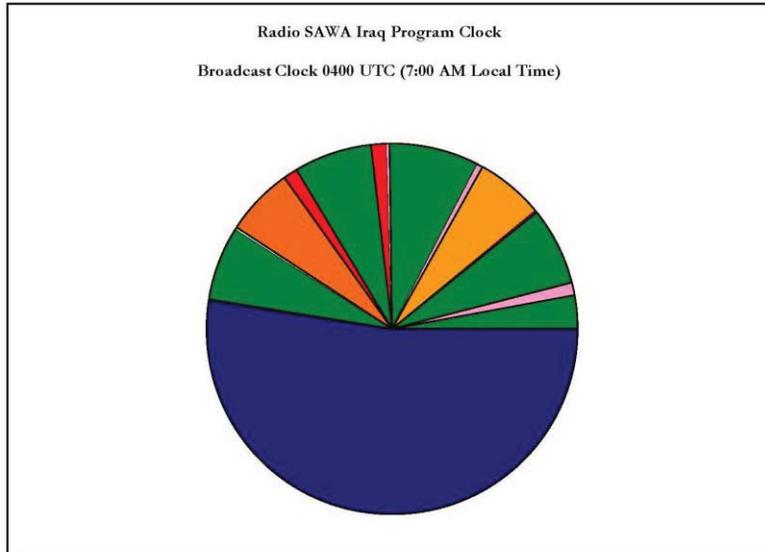
## ALHURRA IRAQ PROGRAMMING

- **Al-Iraq Al-Youm (“Iraq Today”)** – A daily newscast on the events happening in Iraq.
- **Attabaa Alakhira (“Final Edition”)** – A weekly program that takes an inside look at how the media in the Western world is reporting on the events in Iraq. Hosted by Omar Said.
- **Beliraqi (“In Iraqi”)** – A talk show that airs weekdays, examining the latest news and issues of the day in Iraq, with expert analysis and debate.
- **Hadith Annahrayn (“Talk Of Two Rivers”)** – Weekly talk show that provides in-depth analysis of the previous week’s events in Iraq. Hosted by Falah Thahabi.
- **Sabaat Ayyam (“Seven Days”)** – A weekly program that takes an in-depth look at the major political events that occurred during the previous week in Iraq, with expert guests and analysis. Hosted by Ali Kazem.
- **Seirat Mobdeh (“Achievers Biography”)** — A look at the lives and works of Iraqi achievers in all fields of life, especially in the arts and poetry. The program intermixes interviews the most prominent people in their field along with interviews of their friends and close associates to get a complete understanding of these Iraqi achievers. Hosted by Arif Al-Saidi.
- **Studio Arriyadah (“Sports Studio”)** – A weekly round-up of the latest sporting news from Iraq. Hosted by Husam Dhumed.
- **Abwaab (“Doors”)** – A weekly round up of the cultural events in Iraq, with the latest news and interviews on exhibits, theater, gallery openings and film festivals. Hosted by Eman Alaa.

- **Alhan Assamaa (“Divine Chanting”)** – A weekly program that profiles a different sheikh and examines their different styles of chanting the Koran. The program looks at the influences in their lives and the impact they have had through their chanting. Hosted by Maytham Al-Tammar.
- **Daw’e (“Light”)** – A weekly documentary series that profiles individuals who struggled and were persecuted under Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq.
- **Thakeet (“Reportage”)**—A weekly documentary series that sheds light on a topic impacting the Iraqi people, including historical, cultural, political and social issues.



## APPENDIX C: RADIO SAWA IRAQ PROGRAM CLOCK



In Time	Out Time	Length	Event Description
7:15:00	7:46:30	31:30	Newscast
7:46:30	7:46:37	00:07	Newscast Close
7:46:37	7:50:32	03:55	ARABIC SONG: Current Superhit
7:50:32	7:50:38	00:06	Morning ID
7:50:38	7:54:12	03:34	WESTERN SONG: Current Superhit
7:54:12	7:54:57	00:45	Program: What's New
7:54:57	7:59:02	04:05	ARABIC SONG: Current Hit
7:59:02	7:59:51	00:49	Program: SAWA CHAT Iraq
7:59:51	8:00:00	00:09	PROMO: Artist Promo
8:00:00	8:04:43	04:43	ARABIC SONG: Gold
8:04:43	8:05:00	00:17	PROMO: Music Promo
8:05:00	8:08:34	03:34	WESTERN SONG: Current Superhit
8:08:34	8:08:40	00:06	Morning ID
8:08:40	8:12:45	04:05	ARABIC SONG: Current Superhit
8:12:45	8:13:25	00:40	PROMO: Alhurra Promo
8:13:25	8:15:00	01:45	ARABIC SONG: Gold

Note: All Sawa clocks start at XX15 due to programming and automation requirements. For example the 2:00 clock actually begins broadcast at 2:15PM and ends at 3:15 PM. Generic Sawa promos and ID's are inserted between songs when special promos or programs are not in place.



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