

An Evaluation of Alhurra Television Programming

Conducted for the Broadcasting Board of Governors
by the USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School
University of Southern California
July 31, 2008

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based primarily on the content analysis, with secondary reinforcement from the discussion group proceedings, the research team sees the principal issues affecting Alhurra as being those related to the fundamentals of journalism, not the exigencies of politics.

This is not an esoteric matter related to an idealized journalism, but rather goes directly to the issue of Alhurra's fulfillment of its legislative mandate and its responsibilities deriving from the Middle East Broadcast Network Journalistic Code of Ethics.

Section 303 of the International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (as amended) calls for, among other provisions, United States international broadcasting to "be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism" and "to be designed so as to effectively reach a significant audience." These broad requirements coincide with the more specific standards prescribed by the MBN code of ethics.

Within this framework, the challenges facing Alhurra as it seeks to attain excellence in carrying out its mandate are those that must be addressed by all news organizations:

- Ensuring comprehensiveness of coverage; providing the breadth that the audience expects.
- Imposing discipline in producing the news product to protect against personal and institutional biases that can infect a news product.
- Offering diverse viewpoints about important issues from sources whose backgrounds and expertise contribute to a balanced news product.
- Avoiding rumor and other unsubstantiated material.
- Thoughtfully and thoroughly addressing the topics of greatest interest to the target audience, such as religion and local democratization efforts.

Add to these Alhurra's additional duty to reflect and promote U.S. policies and it is clear that the task for this news organization is exceptionally difficult. For each of these

duties, our diagnosis is that Alhurra is not performing at the level that it needs to reach to be successful.

To fulfill Alhurra's mission requires being able to compete effectively in the Arab news marketplace. That will require expanded and more proficient coverage, and to reach this higher level will necessitate a significant budget expansion to enable broader reporting and more professional management. It will also require grappling with political issues involving journalistic independence and the realities of establishing the credibility needed to gain and keep an Arab audience.

Primary Conclusions:

- **A lack of news and topical programming tailored to the interests of the Arab audience:** Our study found that Alhurra's programming was perceived as being similar to traditional, state-funded broadcasting in the region. Not only has Alhurra done little to distinguish itself from second-tier Middle Eastern broadcasters in terms of its news agenda, but it has also failed to develop the distinctive style, format, and breadth of coverage that might attract a substantial audience. Even Alhurra's reporting of U.S. policies and American life is seen by Arab viewers as undistinguished. This opinion ran through the discussion group sessions and was supported by the content analysis. In short, Alhurra has failed to become competitive.
- **Weak Journalism:** The quality of Alhurra's journalism is substandard on several levels. Its technical presentation is not as proficient as that of the best Arab channels. The study's content analysis found that Alhurra's news stories lack appropriate balance and sourcing. Discussion group respondents noted journalists' apparent lack of experience and flawed presentation of news, including the poor use of graphics and a lack of standardized Arabic language. The content analysis found that Alhurra relied on unsubstantiated information too often, allowed the on-air expression of personal judgments too frequently, and failed to present opposing views in over 60 percent of its news stories.

- **Perceived bias:** Given Alhurra’s association with the U.S. government and polices, there exists a natural skepticism among Arab audiences regarding the broadcaster’s ability to report objectively about issues in the region. Our content analysis found several factors that could further such impressions of bias, including:
 - **Alhurra’s news was likely to promote Western perspectives at the expense of Arab perspectives.** When Alhurra was critical of a particular view of issues, it was six times more likely to be critical of the Arab/other perspective than the Western viewpoint. Moreover, it was twice as likely to praise the Western outlook rather than the Arab/other perspective.
 - **When personal judgments were expressed, they were likely to be pro-West or anti-Arab.** Rarely were opinions expressed that were critical of a Western perspective or supportive of an Arab position, particularly on such sensitive topics as the Israeli-Arab conflict and Arab human rights issues.
 - **The use of unsubstantiated information was often associated with a bias in favor of Western perspectives and U.S. policy.** Reporting that was grounded in unsubstantiated information (which includes over 12 percent of Alhurra’s news content) was twice as likely to favor the Western viewpoint over the Arab/other perspective, and almost three times less likely to be critical of U.S. policy.
 - **Alhurra was much more critical of Arab governments and political opposition groups than it was of U.S. policy in the region.** Reporting was twice as critical of Arab political positions and policies as it was of U.S. policies.
- **Seen as Propaganda:** Discussion group participants felt that Alhurra’s reporting, when stacked against its competitors in the region, represented a false or tilted perspective of events, especially with regard to its coverage of Iraq and the

Israeli-Arab conflict. Discussion group members also felt that Alhurra's news was overly critical of Arab political and opinion leaders. It is important to note that, while the U.S. policy and viewpoints were often clearly identified, participants thought that they were unpersuasive or included too little explanation. While some identified Alhurra's coverage as being more positive with regard to the possibilities of peace and stability in the region, these attributes were more often seen as evidence of an agenda rather than coverage that provoked a different point of view.

- **A Lack of Connection to the "Arab street":** Discussion group participants felt that Alhurra too often relied on official sources about issues important to the general Arab public. Rarely were sources entirely independent, and the voice of the average Arab was either non-existent or subordinated to official pronouncements. Moreover, coverage of highly divisive issues – Israeli-Arab conflict and Iraq in particular -- was often seen as overly optimistic with regard to the possibilities of stability and reconciliation. Further, the paucity of coverage of Islam and Islamic-related issues indicates insensitivity to one of the fundamental elements of most Arabs' lives. When contrasted this to the approach of numerous new Arab media organizations, Alhurra seems out of touch with its audience.

The study provides detailed quantitative analysis of these points and more, as well as thoughtful comments by discussion group participants. Taken together, they should prove helpful in charting Alhurra's future.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Broadcasting Board of Governors/International Broadcasting Bureau asked the USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School to conduct a study of Alhurra Television, as is described below and in the appendices of this report.¹ The Center on Public Diplomacy is a joint program of the university's Annenberg School for Communication and the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences' School of International Relations.

The research project is described below and in the appendices of this report. The research design included two distinct but complementary research methods:

- A content analysis of all Alhurra news and topical programming during November 2007 (content provided by BBG/IBB);
- Expert discussion groups conducted in Beirut, Cairo, and Dubai during which Arab media professionals and academics considered Alhurra's coverage in the context of the scope of work defined by BBG/IBB.

These methods are further delineated below. This resulting report provides both quantitative and qualitative analyses of Alhurra's news product. The research team submits this report as part of the ongoing assessment of Alhurra as international broadcasting policymakers and the managers of Alhurra continue to develop Arabic-language programming that fulfills the objectives defined by Congress and others within the U.S. government.

SCOPE OF WORK

The statement of the scope of work presented by the Broadcasting Board of Governors reads in part:

“Alhurra is the U.S. Government’s Arabic language satellite television network aimed at the Middle East and devoted to news and information....Its journalism is guided by the BBG’s statutory mission to promote freedom and democracy through the open communication of ideas....

“Recently, Alhurra’s adherence to the broadcasting standards and principles enunciated in the U.S. International Broadcasting Act, as evidenced by its news and programming decisions, has been questioned....

“This work requirement, therefore, calls for the contractor to assess Alhurra TV news and current affairs broadcasts to determine whether these broadcasts conform with the standards and principles set forth in the act, and more specifically, with MBN’s [Middle East Broadcast Network’s] Journalistic Code....”

The goals of the evaluation are to determine “whether Alhurra TV provides viewers in the Middle East with a reliable source of accurate, objective and comprehensive news and information, and to determine if Alhurra TV presents United States policies and responsible discussions of those policies as required under the statute.” [The entire Scope of Work statement is attached as Appendix 1.]

Additional Criteria

The following items are part of the Middle East Broadcast Network Journalistic Code of Ethics:

“MBN’s mission is to broadcast news that is consistently accurate, authoritative, objective, balanced, and comprehensive. MBN strives to serve as a model of the free marketplace of ideas and a free press in the American tradition, promoting freedom, democracy and human rights, including freedom of religion. Additionally, MBN has a mandate to present the policies of the United States government in a clear and effective manner through news reporting and responsible discussion....

“Information shall be reported or discussed in a factual, objective context that enhances understanding of the events and issues and provides clarity without distortion or bias. Objective language shall be used to reflect events and issues accurately and dispassionately. Broadcasters shall present opposing or differing views accurately and in a balanced manner on all issues. MBN shall be independent from any political party, ruling or opposition group or organization, émigré organization, commercial or other special-interest organization, or religious body, whether inside or outside the broadcast area; and shall not endorse or advocate any specific political, economic, or religious viewpoint.” [The entire Code of Ethics is attached as Appendix 2.]

Following is Section 303 (“Standards and Principles”) of the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994, as amended:

(a) BROADCASTING STANDARDS—United States international broadcasting shall—

- (1) be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States;
- (2) be consistent with the international telecommunications policies and treaty obligations of the United States;
- (3) not duplicate the activities of private United States broadcasters;
- (4) not duplicate the activities of government supported broadcasting entities of other democratic nations;
- (5) be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism;
- (6) be based on reliable information about its potential audience; and
- (7) be designed so as to effectively reach a significant audience.

(b) BROADCASTING PRINCIPLES.—United States international broadcasting shall include—

- (1) news which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive;
- (2) a balanced and comprehensive projection of United States thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of United States culture and society;
- (3) clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States Government and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies;
- (4) programming to meet needs which remain unserved by the totality of media voices available to the people of certain nations;
- (5) information about developments in each significant region of the world;
- (6) a variety of opinions and voices from within particular nations and regions prevented by censorship or repression from speaking to their fellow countrymen;
- (7) reliable research capacity to meet the criteria under this section;

- (8) adequate transmitter and relay capacity to support the activities described in this section; and H.R. 2333—53
- (9) training and technical support for independent indigenous media through government agencies or private United States entities.

[Sections 301-303 of the Act are attached as Appendix 3.]

METHODOLOGY

The principal evaluation methods are as follows:

1. A content analysis of Alhurra news and topical programming during November 2007 was conducted (this was the data set provided by the BBG). The shows were categorized by type and unitized for analysis. A set of research questions was developed in order to operationalize the scope of work and an assessment procedure was created to evaluate the programming within the context of Alhurra's mission and code of ethics as well as the broadcasting standards and principles. A code-book containing the decision-rules to be used in the coding process was written and native Arabic-speaking coders were trained according to the decision-rules. Intercoder reliability was calculated for each research question using Andrew Hayes SPSS macro for Krippendorff's alpha (reported in Appendix 6).
2. Expert discussion groups in Beirut, Cairo, and Dubai. These groups comprised academics and news professionals from their respective regions who were selected by the USC research team. A standard protocol was developed for these sessions and is outlined in Appendix 7. The participants had watched Alhurra for at least a month leading up to the discussions, which took place in March and April 2008. During the sessions they were shown representative stories from November 2007 (the same period used for the content analysis). The discussions were designed to help better understand whether Alhurra's target audience believes that the channel is succeeding in its mission to provide accurate, objective, comprehensive news coverage that effectively presents U.S. policy. Each discussion was moderated by a senior local academic and was attended by a member of the evaluation team from the University of Southern California. The names and affiliations of all participants are attached as Appendix 7. The ground rules for these discussions included the assurance that no participant would be quoted by

name in order to create a discussion of the issues that was as open and honest as possible.

THE CONTENT ANALYSIS

To systematically evaluate Alhurra TV news and topical programming's adherence to the guidelines laid out in MBN's journalistic code of ethics, as well as the guiding Congressional legislation, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of Alhurra's news programming from November 2007. Native Arabic-speaking coders analyzed 4,662 minutes, or about 77 hours, of Alhurra news programming.

Based on the statement of work provided by the IBB/BBG, and drawing from specific protocol outlined in MBN's journalistic code of ethics, the content analysis focused on evaluating the following research questions: (1) the overall accuracy and comprehensiveness of the news agenda; (2) the avoidance of personal judgments and the use of value-neutral language; (3) the presentation of opposing views when covering major issues; (4) the avoidance of the presentation of unsubstantiated information; (5) the ability to provide a balance of sources in reporting the news; (6) Alhurra's ability to clearly and effectively present U.S. policy in the region; and (7) Alhurra's treatment of religion and religious issues.

After reviewing events and news from November 2007, we identified 22 major issues in the news agenda. For each agenda item, examples were given during training so that the coders clearly understood the differences between each of the issues. The list of the issues coded for (along with examples of the stories that fell within each category) is as follows:

1. Afghanistan. Examples include: Afghani security and reconstruction, Afghani politics, and Afghani agricultural development.
2. American Public Diplomacy. Examples include: the resignation of Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes and U.S.-funded exchange programs.
3. Arab Human Rights Issues. Examples include: prisoner rights in Syria, women's rights in Saudi Arabia, legal protections for foreigners in Sudan, and Egyptian torture and police brutality.
4. Business (non-political). Examples include: Stock market news.

5. Democratic Governance in the Arab World. Examples include: Elections in Algeria, Jordan, and Palestine, civil society issues and public protests.
NOTE: the elections in Lebanon, Russia and Pakistan were each considered to be significant stories and had their own categories separate from this category.
6. Democratic Governance in the U.S. Examples include: Congressional hearings and U.S. elections.
7. Economic Growth (politically related). Examples include: economic policies of Arab governments, economic-related policy change by the U.S. government, oil and OPEC.
8. Humanitarian Issues. Examples include: Bangladeshi natural disaster, Indonesian earthquake, famine in Gaza, and treatment of refugees and overall conditions of refugee facilities.
9. Iran. Examples include: Iranian foreign policy and nuclear development, sanctions on Iran, and Iranian influence/interference in Iraq
10. Iraqi reform/economic health. Examples include Iraqi domestic politics, Iraqi civil society development, economic policy change, and Iraqi sports.
11. Iraqi security. Examples include insurgent violence, Iraqi Army, coalition forces' success and failures.
12. Israel-Arab conflict: Examples include: coverage of the Annapolis summit, security issues in Gaza, external actors' roles in the conflict, and the history of the conflict.
13. Lebanese elections/stability
14. Pakistani stability. Examples include: coverage of Benazir Bhutto and Pakistani elections.
15. Religion. Examples include: the Pope, Islamic leaders, and Muslims in Europe.
16. Russia. Examples include: Russian foreign policy and diplomacy in the region and Russian elections.
17. Sports

18. Sudanese security. Examples include: security-related violence in Darfur and all non-humanitarian political news in Sudan.
19. Turkey/Kurdish security and independence. Examples include: changes in Turkish policy with regard to Northern Iraqi Kurds and tensions between the two groups.
20. U.S Human Rights Issues. Examples include: concerns of abuse by U.S. and coalition military forces (e.g., Abu Ghraib) and Guantanamo Bay.
21. Venezuela. Examples include: Hugo Chavez's economic policy and oil output.
22. War on Terror (General, non-Iraq). Examples include: Al Qaeda in Morocco, Algerian car bombing, Osama bin Laden, Tripoli anti-terrorism conference, Madrid bombings.
23. Other. Examples include primarily three topics: North Korea, Kosovo, and cultural stories.

The following seven sections outline results of the content analysis.

1. Was the overall distribution of stories appropriately comprehensive?

The month of November featured three major news issues that affected international politics:

- Lebanon's presidential election
- The Annapolis Summit and related issues concerning Arab-Israeli conflict resolution
- Instability in Pakistan

In terms of the percentage overall time spent on an issue, Alhurra's four highest ranking stories were:

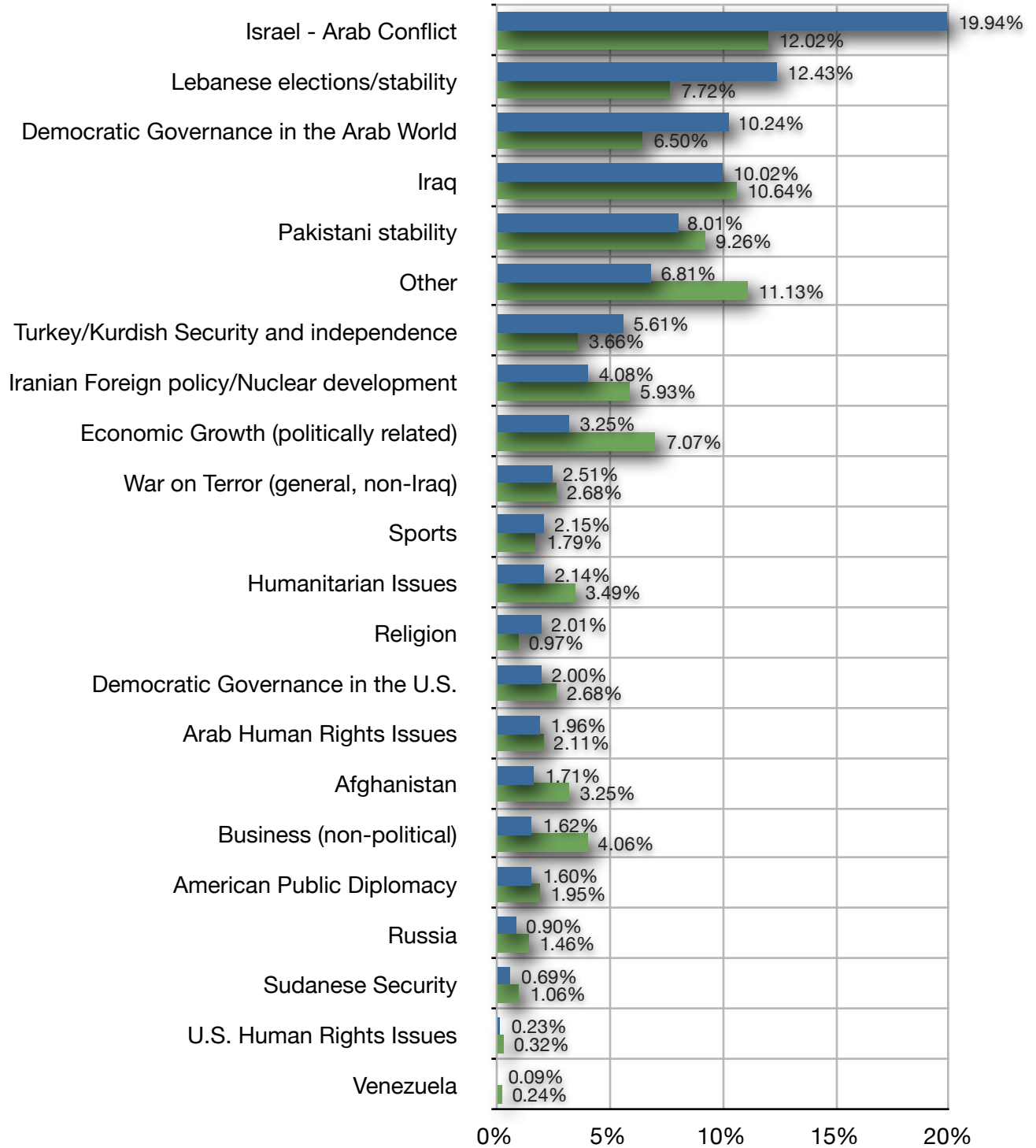
- Arab - Israeli conflict (19.94 percent)
- Lebanon's elections and stability (12.34 percent)
- Democratic governance in the Arab world (10.24 percent)
- Iraq (10.02 percent)

In terms of number of stories aired, Alhurra's prioritization changed only slightly, with Pakistan receiving more stories than democratic governance in the Arab world.

- Israeli - Arab conflict (12.02 percent)
- Iraq (10.64 percent)
- Pakistani stability (9.26 percent)
- Lebanon (7.72 percent)

FIGURE 1.1: ALHURRA'S NEWS AGENDA

■ Percentage of overall broadcast (overall time)
 ■ Percentage of overall broadcast (number of stories)



ANALYSIS:

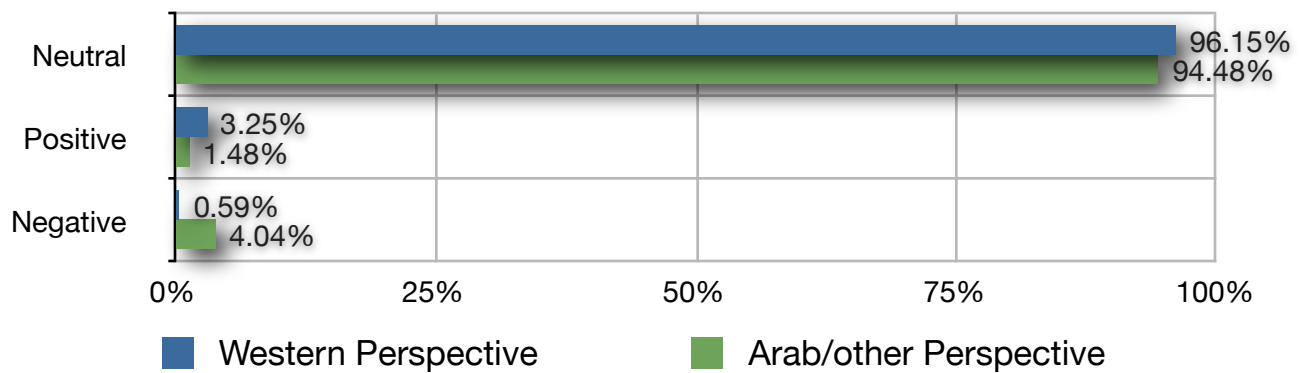
Looking beyond the top ranked stories, the range of international story topics aired during November 2007 was adequate, but not exceptional. Based on the project findings and the longer-term work of members of the research team, it is safe to say that people in the region are not wholly parochial in their interests. They are interested in the world that they do not know, particularly the rest of the “global South,” with which they feel kinship, and broader international coverage would presumably find a receptive audience. Furthermore, they are interested in news about the Arab Diaspora, which needs considerably more attention in Alhurra’s coverage planning. These viewers are also intensely interested in the United States – its politics, its culture, its values, and more generally in how America works. Al Jazeera and other channels in the region cover the United States – particularly events such as a presidential election campaign – but presumably Alhurra could do this at least as well if it were to be given a higher priority on the channel’s news agenda. Given the level of competition that Alhurra faces, to win a larger audience it cannot simply mirror the news content of other channels but must distinguish itself from them. Appraising priorities of what gets covered would be an important part of this process. Alhurra is not the “go-to” channel for any particular topic, and it might be wise to change that by devoting more resources to selected areas of expertise such as American electoral and governmental processes.

Furthermore, to be competitive in covering news about the Arab world will require significantly more on-the-ground resources in order to match up effectively with Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, and other indigenous news channels, as well as Western competitors such as BBC Arabic. Many of these news organizations have strong journalistic infrastructure and brand advantages over Alhurra, and thus competing with them requires a truly exceptional effort at covering issues of importance to Arabs from the ground up, coverage Alhurra is rarely described as providing. (See discussion group section for comments.) Again, the question of resources arises. To what extent will Alhurra (and those who set the channel’s policies) invest in expanded and enhanced coverage? The research team’s work on related matters has found that part of Al Jazeera’s success is a product of its breadth and depth of coverage. The channel has

its own reporters on the ground throughout the world, and if Alhurra wants to play in this league it will need to make its news agenda more far-reaching and extend its reporting capability significantly. Defining its principal areas of expertise will be an important part of this effort.

2. How often did Alhurra’s news coverage include the expression of personal judgments and/or valued language? Were there particular topics that were more likely to include the expression of personal judgments and/or valued language²?

FIGURE 2.1: ALHURRA’S TREATMENT OF “ARAB/OTHER” AND “WESTERN” PERSPECTIVES³



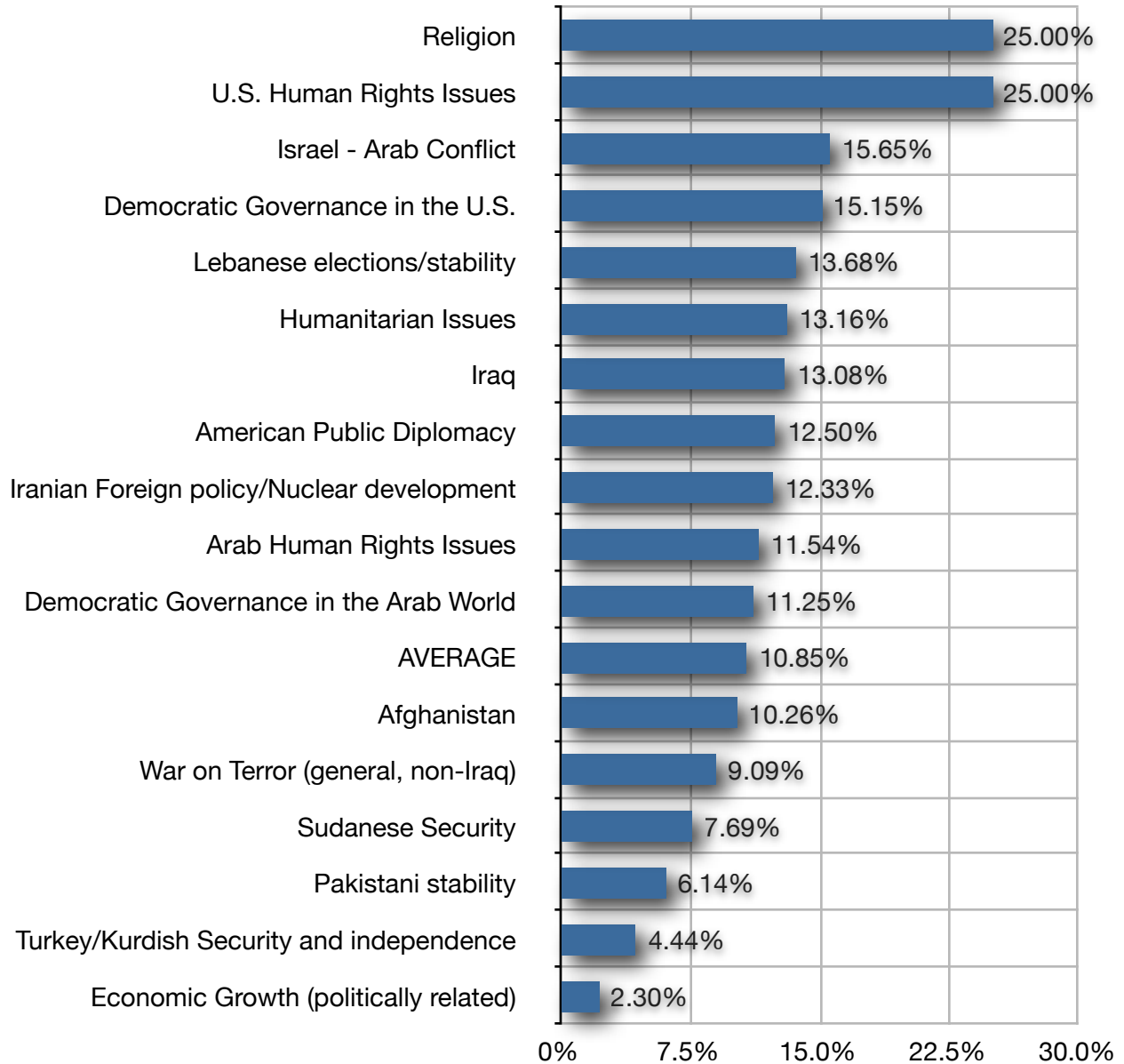
Analysis of Alhurra’s news coverage found that it was generally consistent in using value-neutral language. The coverage was neutral in describing the “Arab” or “other” perspective 94.48 percent of the time, and neutral in describing the “Western” perspective 96.15 percent of the time. It is important to note that when Alhurra’s coverage was critical of a particular perspective, it was more than six times as likely to describe an Arab/other perspective negatively (negatively described 4.04 percent of the time) than a Western perspective (negatively described 0.59 percent of the time). Similarly, when Alhurra’s coverage praised a particular perspective, it was twice as likely to praise a Western perspective (described positively 3.25 percent of the time) than an Arab/other one (described positively 1.48 percent of the time). A “Western” perspective was defined as any perspective that was in support of an American or Israeli position, and “Arab/other” was defined as any perspective (both government and non-government) that was in support of an Arab position. In cases where Arab world was not the focus of the story, the “other” perspective was defined as a perspective

originating from or defending the country/subject in question (thus, "other" was not a catch-all phrase, but rather something more narrow).

The appearance of personal judgments in broadcasts, however, was more frequent. On average, almost 11 percent (10.85 percent) of Alhurra's news coverage included the expression of a personal judgment from a journalist. Moreover, there were several topics about which personal judgments were expressed significantly more often than others. For example, when covering the U.S. human rights matters and religious issues, 25 percent of the stories included an expression of a personal judgment by an on-air journalist. In addition, stories about each of the following issues were well above average in terms of including personal opinions: Israeli-Arab conflict (15.65 percent); democratic governance in the U.S. (15.15 percent); Lebanese elections/stability (13.68 percent); humanitarian issues (13.16 percent) and Iraq (13.08 percent). Examples of expressions of personal judgments include commenting in ways that aligned the journalist with a particular perspective (pro/anti-Arab/other or Western), as well as language that went beyond presenting information or views attributed to sources. For instance, if after describing a government's change in policy a reporter added commentary regarding the likelihood of the effectiveness of the policy change without sourcing it, it would be considered a personal judgment. (Coders were asked to use this category to identify pro-Western or pro-Arab/other bias, and so they looked for comments that would indicate which point of view expressed in a news story was favored by the journalist. If, however, the journalist cited a source, it would not be considered within this category.)

FIGURE 2.2: PERCENTAGE OF STORIES THAT INCLUDED THE EXPRESSION OF PERSONAL JUDGMENT

■ Percent of time journalists expressed personal judgment (by issue)



When examined in terms of whether the expression of a personal judgment was likely to be either for or against the Western (meaning American or Israeli) and/or Arab/ other perspectives presented, several issues stood out. When discussing the Israeli-Arab conflict, 23.91 percent of the personal expressions were likely to be considered

against the Arab/other perspective presented and in favor of the Western perspective 13.04 percent of the time. It is important to note that these expressions were never found to be critical of the Western perspective nor ever in favor of the Arab/other perspective. Similar breakdowns, where expressions were either in favor of the Western perspective or against the Arab/other perspective, were found regarding the following issues: Afghanistan (25 percent of the expressions were pro-West, another 25 percent were anti-Arab/other), Arab human rights issues (16.67 percent of the expressions were pro-West, 33.33 percent were anti-Arab/other), Pakistani stability (7.14 percent of the expressions were pro-West, 21.43 percent were anti-Arab/other), and the War on Terror (16.67 percent of the expressions were pro-West, 33.33 percent were anti-Arab/other).

TABLE 2.1: HOW EXPRESSIONS OF PERSONAL JUDGMENT TREAT THE WESTERN AND ARAB/OTHER PERSPECTIVES

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Expression was Pro-West</i>	<i>Expression was Anti-West</i>	<i>Expression was Pro-Arab/other</i>	<i>Expression was Anti-Arab/other</i>
Afghanistan	25%	0%	0%	25%
American Public Diplomacy	16.67%	0%	0%	0%
Arab Human Rights Issues	16.67%	0%	0%	33.33%
Democratic Governance in the Arab World	5.56%	5.56%	11.11%	33.33%
Democratic Governance in the U.S.	10%	10%	0%	10%
Humanitarian Issues	20%	0%	10%	30%
Iranian Foreign policy/Nuclear development	16.67%	5.56%	5.56%	11.11%
Iraqi reform/economic health	12.50%	0%	37.50%	0%
Iraqi Security	23.08%	3.85%	11.54%	7.69%
Israel - Arab Conflict	13.04%	0%	0%	23.91%
Lebanese elections/stability	11.54%	3.85%	7.69%	15.38%
Pakistani stability	7.14%	0%	0%	21.43%
Religion	33.33%	0%	33.33%	16.67%
War on Terror (general, non-Iraq)	16.67%	0%	0%	33.33%

ANALYSIS:

The tilt in coverage of Arab-Israeli relations and in reporting about the Iraq war is pronounced. As was also found in our discussion groups, this does not go unnoticed and presumably amplifies skepticism about Alhurra's objectivity. Participants criticized what they saw as an uncritical presentation of Israeli positions and a failure of Alhurra journalists to challenge Israeli pronouncements. Clearly the coverage needs better policing. Any news organization that seeks to appeal to an Arab audience but is perceived to be pro-Israeli and an apologist for the American military presence in Iraq will suffer credibility problems. This is not to say that Israeli and American viewpoints about these matters should not be presented, but this should be done in a balanced way that emphasizes neutrality and objectivity. As Table 2.1 shows, the expression of personal judgments will be likely to underscore questions about Alhurra's credibility because they tended to promote the Western perspective while being critical of the Arab perspective, particularly on such politically sensitive issues as the Israeli-Arab conflict. This underscores the importance of addressing the balance between Alhurra's journalistic and political missions and better developing their compatibility.

If all of Alhurra's coverage included such bias, it might have less impact on the channel's credibility. But because other, less geopolitically salient issues -- Pakistan and Turkish/Kurdish security issues, for example -- include a relatively small amount of opinionated coverage, the comparatively large amount of personal expression on such geopolitically and culturally sensitive issues presumably stands out as evidence of a strong bias in favor of an American political agenda.

3. How often were opposing views presented? Were there particular topics that were more or less likely to include the presentation of opposing views?

Overall, Alhurra’s reporting failed to present opposing views when discussing an issue 60.37 percent of the time.

Alhurra’s reporting was least likely to present opposing views, and thus unlikely to be considered critical and balanced, when it covered the following issues: U.S human rights (presented opposing views 0 percent of the time), Afghanistan (opposing views presented 9.52 of the time), Iraq (opposing views presented 11.76 percent on non-security issues, 22.06 percent on security issues), and the War on Terror (opposing views presented 18.52 percent of the time).

TABLE 3.1: PERCENT OF COVERAGE THAT PRESENTED OPPOSING VIEWS (BY ISSUE)

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Percent of Coverage Providing Opposing Views</i>
U.S. Human Rights Issues	0%
Afghanistan	9.52%
Iraqi reform/economic health	11.76%
War on Terror (general, non-Iraq)	18.52%
Iraqi Security	22.06%
Humanitarian Issues	22.22%
Economic Growth (politically related)	27.27%
American Public Diplomacy	30%
Sudanese Security	33.33%
Iranian Foreign policy/Nuclear development	35.29%
Democratic Governance in the U.S.	39.29%
AVERAGE	39.63%
Democratic Governance in the Arab World	42.59%
Russia	44.44%
Pakistani stability	48.05%
Venezuela	50%
Turkey/Kurdish Security and independence	50%
Lebanese elections/stability	52.38%
Israel - Arab Conflict	53.06%
Religion	60%
Arab Human Rights Issues	61.90%

ANALYSIS:

A case can be made that Alhurra's news stories about virtually all the issues listed in Table 3.1 merit greater effort toward including opposing views. This is a matter of fundamental journalistic practice and, as with other items in this report, it is counterproductive to fail to acknowledge and address this flaw in Alhurra's coverage. Some of the most popular newer media organizations in the region make it a point to feature this kind of balance, partly because it was missing for so long from the old-line Arab news media. To compete effectively in the Middle East's new journalistic environment, Alhurra must do better at this; otherwise the channel will be dismissed as "just another government mouthpiece" and will probably be unable to increase its audience base.

Given the particular relevance of each of these issues to current U.S. foreign policy interests in the region, as well as to existing skepticism with regard to U.S. intentions in Iraq, Afghanistan and the overall War on Terror, the lack of balanced coverage may significantly enhance the perception that Alhurra's news reporting is biased in favor of the Bush administration's foreign policy interests. This is an instance of a conflict between part of Alhurra's mission, "to present the policies of the United States government," and the detachment of objective journalism. The governing statute (the International Broadcasting Act of 1994, as amended; Section 303) requires that U.S. international broadcasting shall "be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States." That provision may blur the line between "promoting" and "presenting" U.S. policy. In the view of the research team, if Alhurra is to increase its credibility and its audience share it must do a better job of ensuring that its news programs incorporate intellectual balance, such as when representatives of governments and other interests are featured in news stories. To borrow an Al Jazeera slogan, the Alhurra news product should more often offer "opinion, and the other opinion."

4. How often was reporting based on unsubstantiated information? Were there particular topics about which reporting was more or less likely to include the use of unsubstantiated information?

Alhurra's programming needs improvement in terms of not relying on unsubstantiated information. In 12.49 percent of its news reporting, its coverage included unsubstantiated information.⁴

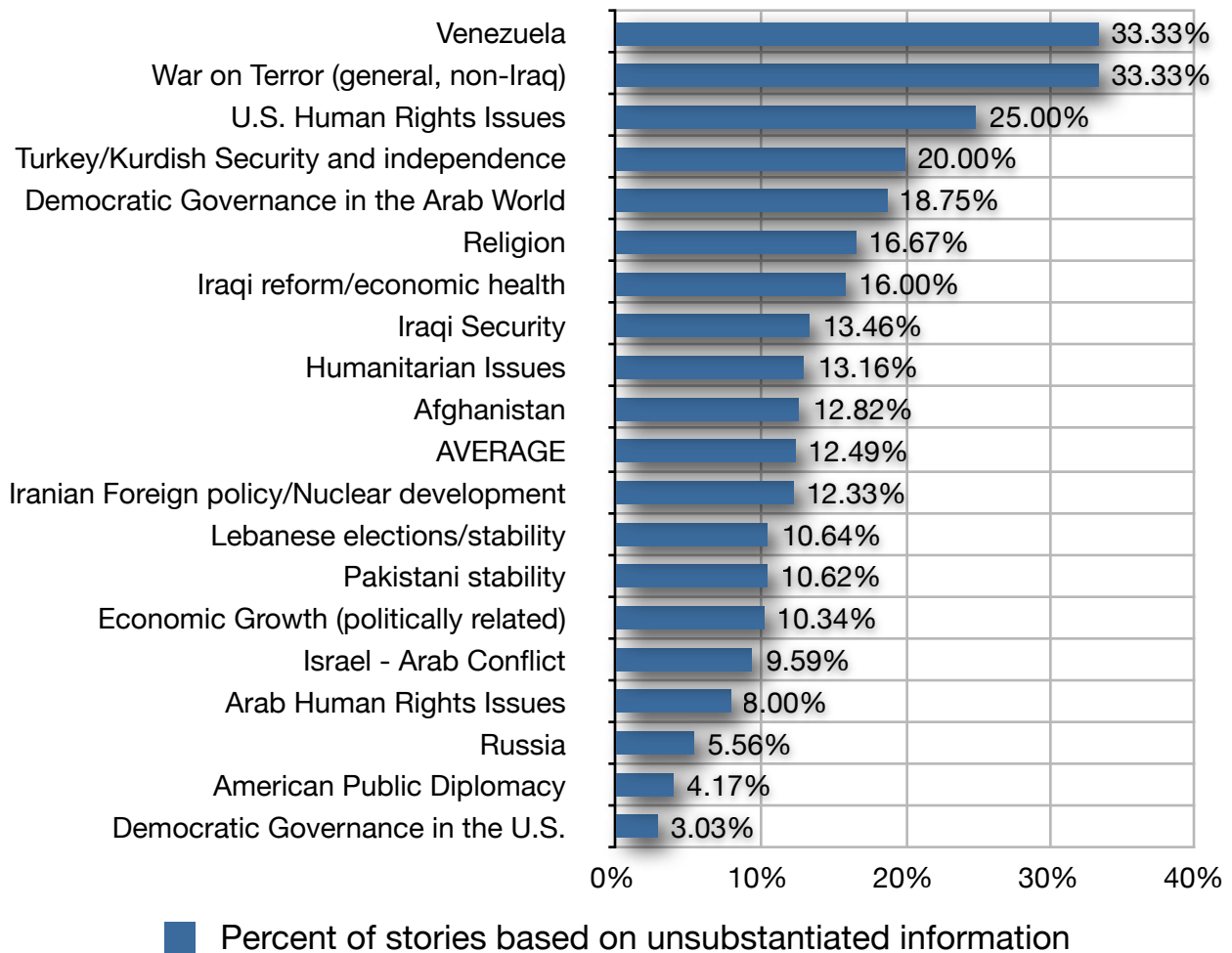
Coverage of four issues stood out as relying significantly on unsubstantiated material: Venezuela (33.33 percent), the War on Terror (33.33 percent), U.S. human rights issues (25 percent), Turkey/Kurdish security and independence (20 percent), and democratic governance in the Arab world (18.75 percent).

Reports based on unsubstantiated information were far less likely to be critical of U.S. policy (2.38 percent) than coverage based on substantiated information (6.80 percent). Moreover, reports based on unsubstantiated information were over twice as likely to be considered favorable of the Western perspective (6.35 percent to 2.83 percent) as well as critical of the Arab/other perspective (8.73 percent to 3.4 percent).

TABLE 4.1: USE OF UNSUBSTANTIATED INFORMATION'S EFFECT ON BIAS

<i>Report based on unsubstantiated information?</i>	<i>Percent of reports favorable of the Western perspective</i>	<i>Percent of reports critical of the Arab/other perspective</i>	<i>Percent of reports critical of U.S. policy</i>
Yes	6.35%	8.73%	2.38%
No	2.83%	3.40%	6.80%

FIGURE 4.1: PERCENT OF STORIES BASED ON UNSUBSTANTIATED INFORMATION (BY ISSUE)



ANALYSIS:

The corrective measure needed for this matter is simple. Editorial managers at Alhurra should insist on better substantiation of news content. In the rare instances in which it cannot be provided, the audience should be told why this is the case.

The finding that news stories that rely on unsubstantiated information were more likely to include non-critical reports of the U.S. and its policies may be viewed as another indicator of the channel’s pro-U.S. tilt. When U.S. policy is being discussed, journalists should be particularly diligent about relying on and citing qualified sources.

5. How balanced was Alhurra's overall coverage in terms of the sources cited or interviewed in its coverage? Were there particular topics where the sources cited were more or less likely to be balanced?

The overall number of sources cited during a broadcaster's coverage of a particular issue is typically one useful indicator of its overall quality of coverage. Alhurra cited an average of 2.81 sources per issue covered. Alhurra was especially strong in its reliance on sources in its coverage of the Israeli-Arab conflict (average of 4.47 sources per story), of American public diplomacy (3.42), and Iraqi security (3.28). Alhurra's news was particularly weak, in terms of its overall sourcing, on the following issues: Venezuela (average of 1.33 sources per story), War on Terror (1.48 sources) and humanitarian issues (1.55 sources).

Interestingly, the number of sources cited does not correlate with the average amount of time spent on a particular story. For instance, while the average story covering Lebanese elections and stability was much longer than a typical news story (6 minutes and 9 seconds compared to 2 minutes and 20 seconds), it cited approximately the same number of sources as the average story covered on Alhurra. Similarly, the average story covering religion, while only citing 1.92 sources, lasted 7 minutes and 42 seconds.

When the sources were analyzed in terms of their political or ideological orientation (Western, Arab/other, neutral), Arab/other sources were on average cited 1.56 times per report, while Western-oriented sources were cited only 0.65 times.⁵ There were only three issues where Western sources were cited more often than Arab/other sources: (1) American public diplomacy governance in the U.S. (1.92 to 1.38); (2) democratic governance in the U.S. (1.82 to 0.61); and (3) U.S. human rights issues (1.00 to 0.25). Alhurra relied on Arab/other sources much more often than Western sources when reporting on the following issues: (1) Israeli-Arab conflict (2.49 to 1.58), (2) Iraqi Security (2.34 to 0.69), (3) Democratic governance in the Arab world (2.33 to 0.05), (4) Iraqi reform/economic health (2.28 to 0.28) and (5) Turkey/Kurdish security and independence (2.07 to 0.31). As can be easily seen below, issues covering events taking place in the Middle East were much more likely to rely on Arab/other sources,

while issues originating from events in the U.S. or West were much more likely rely on Western sources for information.

FIGURE 5.1: AVERAGE NUMBER OF SOURCES COMPARED TO AVERAGE LENGTH OF EACH STORY

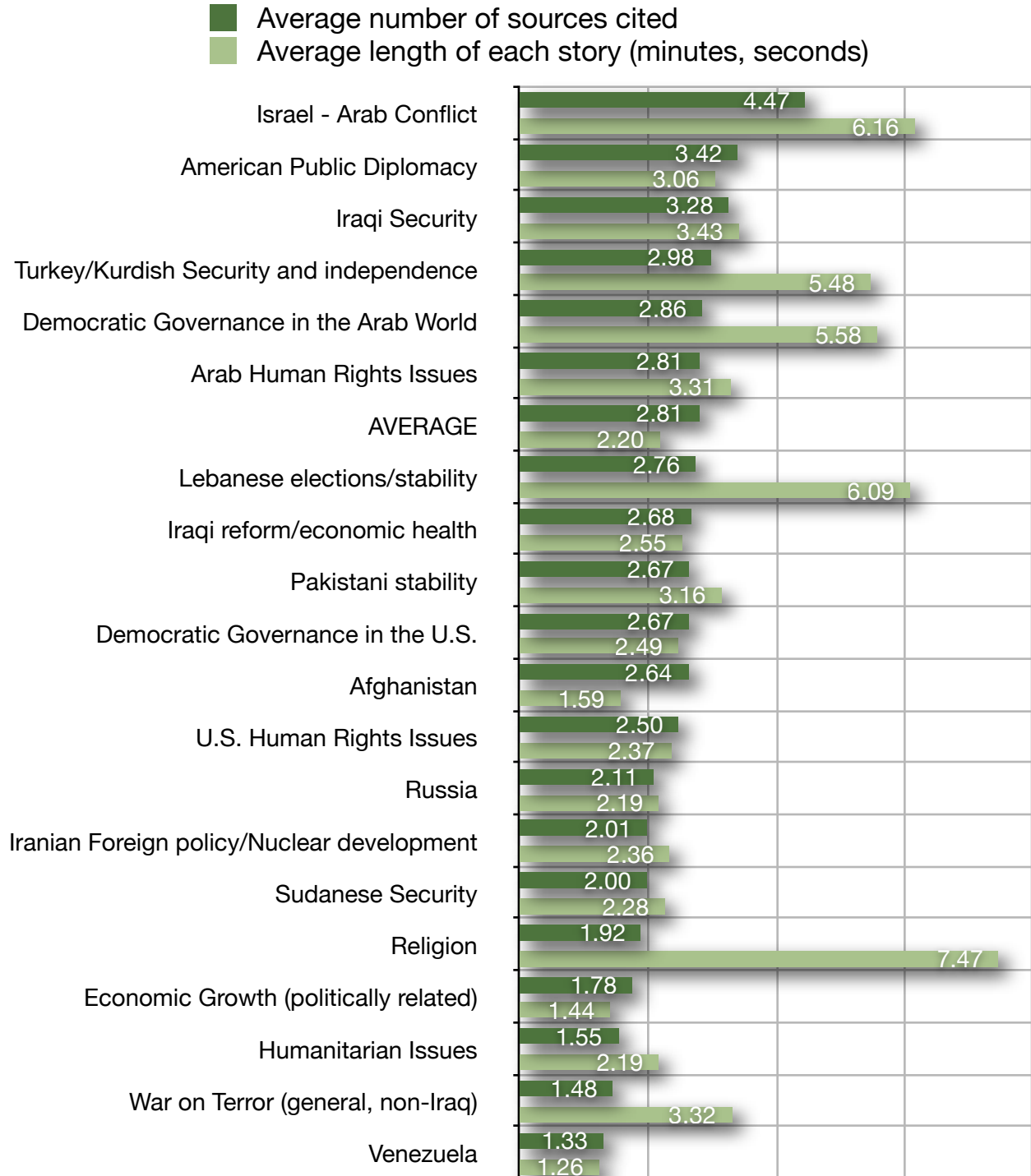
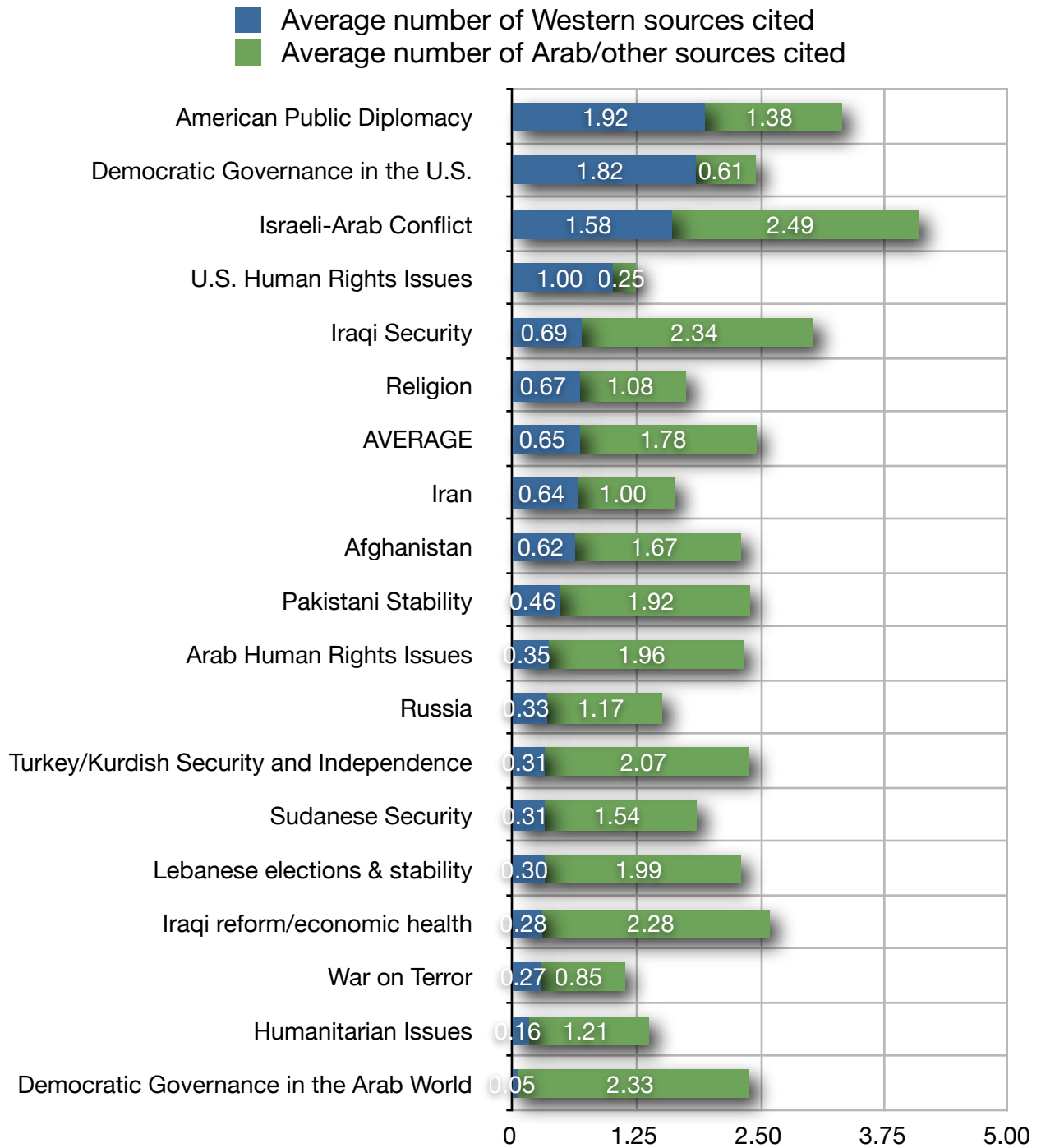


FIGURE 5.2: AVERAGE NUMBER OF WESTERN AND ARAB/OTHER SOURCES CITED



ANALYSIS:

This section indicates the topics for which Alhurra is providing broad sourcing (particularly in terms of the number of sources) and those subjects for which more sources would be appropriate. The number of sources is only a partial measure; the background/viewpoint of sources should also be diverse.

There are different ways to appraise these results. The use of Arab/other sources in stories related to the region is important. But by relying on U.S./Western sources for Western-related issues and interests and Arab/other sources for Arab issues, Alhurra may be seen as just another old-style channel that much of the Arab audience now considers obsolete.

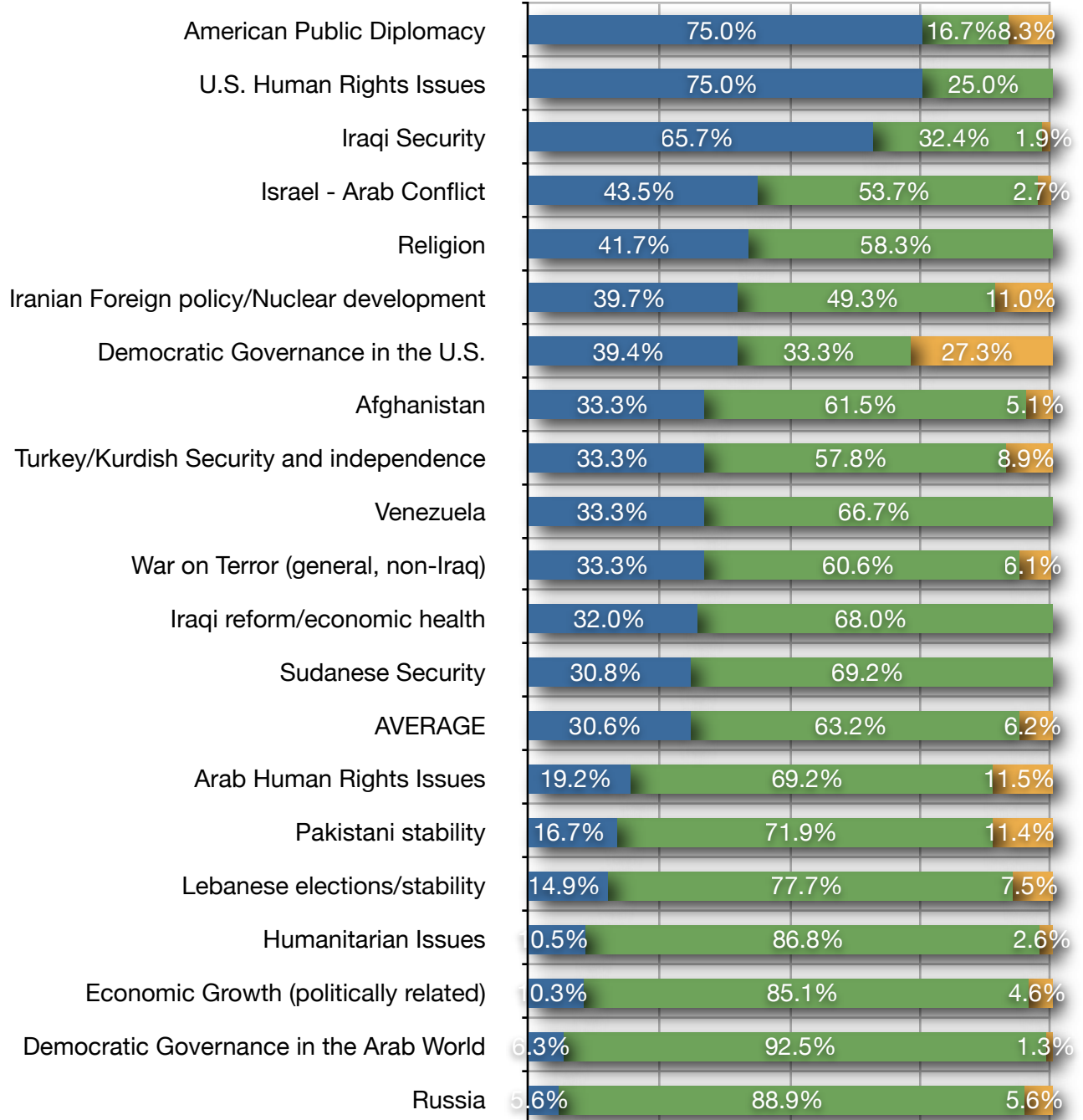
The success enjoyed by newer Arab media organizations, such as Al Jazeera, is due in part to their willingness to break away from the region's traditional narrowness in issues covered, sources used, and viewpoints on which news decisions are based. Arab audiences have become accustomed to this new diversity (regardless of their recognition that these channels have their own ownership-based agendas). Given the still-expanding ranks of information providers in the region – online as well as broadcast – Alhurra should recognize that competing effectively requires more consideration of the array of sources used in news stories.

6. How well has Alhurra's reporting clearly and effectively presented U.S. policy in the region?

Part of Alhurra's congressional mandate is to provide the "clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States." The content analysis found that Alhurra was more likely to promote U.S. policy than describe it neutrally when reporting on the following issues: (1) American public diplomacy (75 percent versus 17 percent); (2) U.S. human rights issues (75 percent versus 25 percent); (3) Iraq (59.23 percent versus 39.23 percent). Contrastingly, Alhurra's coverage was most critical of U.S. policy when discussing (1) democratic governance in the U.S. (27.27 percent of reporting was found to be critical of U.S. policy/processes)⁶ and (2) Arab human rights issues (11.54 percent), Pakistan (11.40 percent) and Iran (10.96 percent). Alhurra's coverage was found to be most neutral when discussing Arab democratic governance (92.50 percent), Russia (88.89 percent), humanitarian issues (86.84 percent) and Lebanon (77.65).

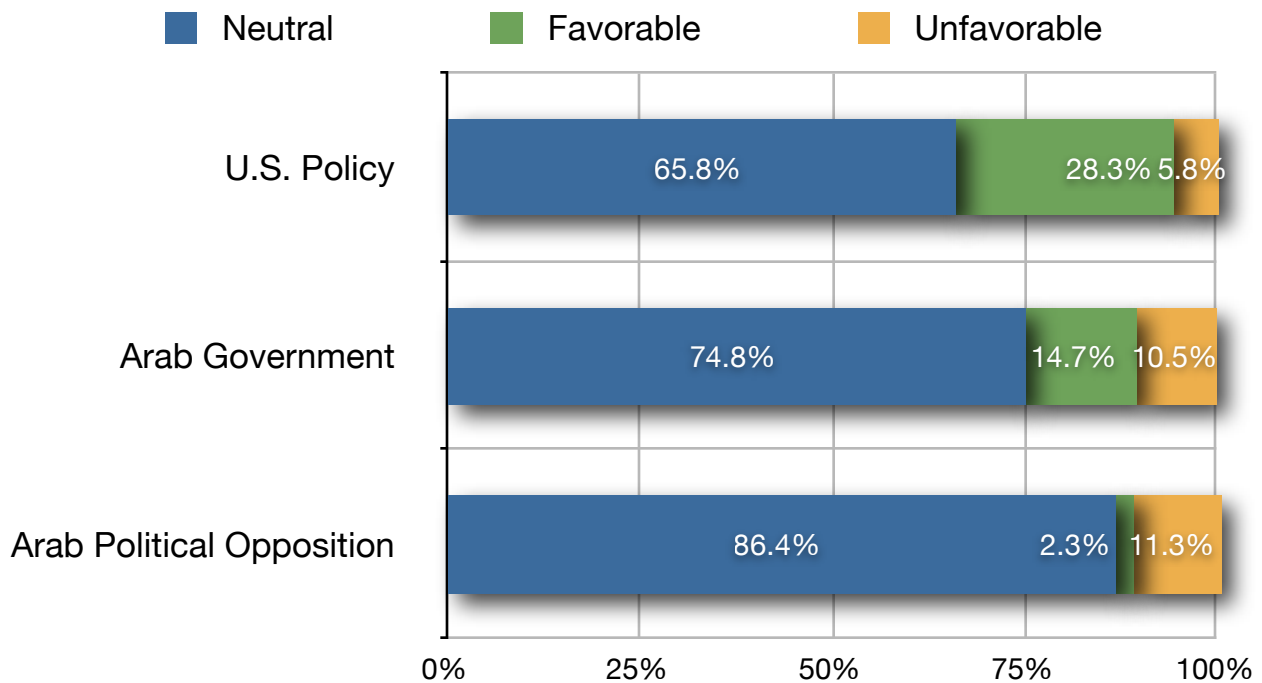
FIGURE 6.1: ALHURRA'S COVERAGE OF U.S. POLICY

- Percentage of coverage that promoted U.S. policy
- Percentage of coverage that was neutral regarding U.S. policy
- Percentage of coverage that was critical of U.S. policy



To help put these numbers in perspective, we also analyzed how favorable, unfavorable or neutral Alhurra’s coverage was not only of U.S. policy, but also of Arab governments and Arab political opposition parties.⁷ U.S. policy was, on average, described significantly more favorably than Arab governments and Arab political opposition (28.32 percent, 14.69 percent, and 2.3 percent, respectively). Moreover, Alhurra was almost twice as critical of Arab governments (critical 10.53 percent of the time) and Arab political opposition (11.33 percent) than it was of the U.S. (5.84 percent).

FIGURE 6.2: ALHURRA’S COVERAGE OF U.S. POLICY COMPARED TO ARAB GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL OPPOSITION



ANALYSIS:

“Arab democratic governance” includes stories about elections, the enactment of legislative change, how political groups are treated, and similar topics. A failure to be critical of the activities that fall under this category signals a certain similarity between Alhurra and the traditional state-run Arab media broadcasters that are no longer seen as credible or watched as widely as in the past. Moreover, it puts Alhurra in stark contrast with Al Jazeera, which is known for being critical of many Arab regimes. Given that Al

Jazeera is widely considered to be the most credible and viewed news broadcaster in the region (according to the Shelhami/Zogby surveys, among others), this contrast does not bode well for Alhurra's brand or ability to compete for a significant Arab audience.

Positive coverage of the U.S. was most likely to occur when discussing the following seven issues: American public diplomacy, U.S. human rights issues, Iraq, Israeli-Arab conflict, Iran, democratic governance in the U.S. and Afghanistan. Alhurra's coverage of issues that are of particular importance to current U.S. foreign policy interests are most likely to be supportive. Again, the fact that Alhurra's coverage of other issues -- issues less directly tied to current U.S. foreign policy goals in the region -- is more likely to be judged neutral is of concern in that it provides a contrast between coverage that may be identified as propagandistic and that which is considered more objective. It is this contrast that audiences have picked up on, and according to the discussion group analysis, undermines the overall credibility of Alhurra's news operations. A related issue is Alhurra's treatment of political opposition groups. This matter should be carefully considered by Alhurra's editorial policymakers, because it offers Alhurra an opportunity to distinguish itself, in a favorable way, among the many Arab broadcasters that are hesitant, for a variety of reasons, to provide evenhanded coverage of opposition voices. This is an exceptionally important issue in the region.

7. How did Alhurra cover religion and religious issues?

Overall, Alhurra's coverage of religion was perceived by the coders to be relatively neutral. Less than 1 percent of its coverage was found to criticize or praise Islam. Only 0.978 percent of its coverage was found to praise Christianity, and none of its reporting was found to be critical of Christianity.

ANALYSIS:

It is not possible to make specific judgments about this topic when there are such small amounts of data nor is it possible to determine accurately the reliability of the coding when there is so little variation in the coding patterns. It is possible that there was a "social desirability" effect in this coding scheme and that religion was seen by the coders as a touchier issue than the others that were being coded and thus they were reluctant to assess this issue. Subsequent analyses should be undertaken by future researchers to use computer-aided content analyses of transcripts to look for words or phrases that might indicate the presence of particular forms of bias in order to supplement the data obtained by human coders.

A related and perhaps more significant issue is the dearth of general coverage of Islam. Given the centrality of Islam in the lives of so many in the Arab world, Alhurra's sparse coverage of religion generally and Islam in particular should be addressed. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence found by the research team indicates that Alhurra's target audience would like to hear more from Alhurra about Islam in America, among members of the Arab Diaspora, and elsewhere in the world.

THE EXPERT DISCUSSION GROUPS

The discussion groups convened in Beirut, Cairo, and Dubai provided thoughtful comments about the topics reviewed in the content analysis. It should be noted that these groups were comprised of people who should be among Alhurra's desired audience: opinion leaders, most of whom have had education and or work experience in the United States. The discussions were decidedly nonpolitical; specific U.S. policies drew far less attention than did the journalistic quality of Alhurra's news product.

Following is a sampling of comments from the discussion groups and a list of recommendations that can be inferred from those comments.

1. Comments on the comprehensiveness in distribution of stories:

- Participants cited a lack of breadth of coverage: "Alhurra has no exclusives," and "field reporters contributed nothing; the same information could have been had from newswires." (Dubai)
- Participants cited Alhurra's coverage of the March 2008 Arab summit as a more recent example of the channel inadequately covering an event of importance in the Arab world. (Dubai)
- The group spoke consistently about objectivity being in the eye of the beholder. Alhurra, participants said, had a very mechanical and narrowly focused sense of objectivity but left out essential elements of the broader picture. In its representation of Arab-Israeli issues it left out regional history, UN resolutions on the subject, views of the Arab media on events like the Annapolis meeting, and the parallel experience of Palestinian refugees. (Beirut)
- Alhurra's refusal to cover Islamists, Hamas, and Hizbollah as real/legitimate political actors significantly decreases its credibility and ability to accurately reflect events in the Arab world. (Cairo)

- Participants said Alhurra presents an unrealistic depiction of the Iraq war zone. You cannot report about the war, they said, and claim that everything is stable and there is peace and security in Iraqi streets while anyone can switch to other channels, including CNN, and see very different versions of the story. (Cairo)
- Participants indicated that they thought Alhurra’s coverage of Iraq and the Israeli-Arab conflict looked more like “Hollywood productions” than a reflection of events that were actually taking place in the Arab world. Another participant described the coverage as “some kind of simulation, more like a video game.” (Cairo)
- Alhurra’s news narrative, said group members, continually reflected a story of how the political and social failings that many throughout the Arab world are facing are the fault of Arab governments and people. Participants noted that while other news outlets would explore the role of political actors outside the Arab world (the United States, Israel and the United Nations, for example), Alhurra repeatedly focused on the failures of Arab political and opinion leaders. (Cairo)
- The region is interested in American culture, participants said, and would be more likely to watch a channel which provided that rather than attempting to imitate an Arab station. Many of the group spoke of enjoying the Saudi-owned MBC4 which runs many U.S. programs, including *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. One suggestion was that they would like to see a channel for and by Arab-Americans. (Beirut)
- Participants recommended that Alhurra should focus on cultural programming, and move more toward a documentary format. They said the channel should focus on goings-on within the United States. Participants indicated that they would be interested in more programming explaining the U.S. elections process,

as well as more reporting with regard to Arab-Americans living throughout the United States. (Cairo)

- Participants expressed interest in having more coverage of American life – culture, social issues, politics. There was much interest in explanatory coverage of the U.S. presidential campaign. (Dubai)
- Participants suggested providing U.S. commercial newscasts with dubbing/ subtitles. (Dubai)

2. *Comments on Alhurra’s expression of personal judgments and use of valued language:*

- Participants criticized the lack of explanatory/clarifying links between soundbites. “The anchors stated the editorial line, then came the official statements.” (Dubai)
- There was a lack of credibility, said participants, stemming from the perceived identity of Alhurra as a government mouthpiece. There was also concern over the lack of skepticism shown by the anchors. Their optimism seemed strangely at odds with the tone of the rest of the Arab-language media. The participants said that optimism is a bias, although one or two participants said that they rather liked this optimism and that Alhurra was showing that one did not have to be quite so negative all the time. They said that Arab media’s negative bias was too often just a shortcut to appearing safe and wise on air. (Beirut)
- There was criticism of Iraq coverage, with participants alleging that the news stories downplay U.S. casualties. (Dubai) Participants said the Iraq coverage seemed absurdly partial with its emphasis on a 99 percent victory, and loaded language of “purification operations” and the “restoration of law and order.” (Beirut)

- The accuracy of the Iraqi security story was challenged as “reflecting the propaganda machine.” Semantic bias was cited in descriptions of Al Qaeda in Iraq being “crushed” and “expelled.” (Dubai)

3. *Comments on Alhurra’s presentation of opposing views:*

- The Egyptian story lacked an Egyptian government point of view, but participants reacted positively to the story about police brutality. (Beirut) On the other hand, some participants said that this story about an alleged human rights violation was “trying to appease the Arab audience in a crude way” that was also inconsistent, given U.S. support for the Mubarak government. (Dubai)
- Many in the group were angry about the Annapolis conference story: “The Israeli spokesman was lying,” said several participants, and they argued that there was no explanation of his statements and the reporter did not, apparently, challenge him with questions. For accuracy’s sake, said participants, the journalists should have provided clarification, “truth testing,” and alternative viewpoints. Concerning depiction of the Israeli position, the participants said the report was “partial, biased, and prejudiced.” (Dubai)

4. *Comments on Alhurra’s balance in sources cited/interviewed:*

- Participants cited failure to include enough viewpoints. Concerning the story about the Annapolis conference, for example, they noted failure to present opinions of those who did not support the conference. “There needed to be vox pop” – reaction from the public on the West Bank. (Dubai)
- In the stories about democratic governance, participants said, there was “no other side” presented despite the existence of oppositional viewpoints. In the story about elections in Algeria, for example, they said that there was inadequate explanation as to the reasons why 80 percent of Algerians decided not to vote. There was also praise for these stories, such as, “It was good to have another voice because some of the red lines do not exist for Alhurra.” (Dubai)

- In the few examples where the channel associated itself with the Arab mainstream, it dealt with it in a negative way, showing only negative images about Arabs. Participants noted that journalists rarely spoke to average members of the Arab public and had little connection to the people or voices of the “Arab street.” (Cairo)
- Participants noted what they called a severe lack of independent expert analysis. Participants said that Alhurra rarely featured unaffiliated expert analysts when covering a story, and that most commentary was from official government sources. (Cairo)
- Participants said they thought that Alhurra sometimes failed to present “the other opinion,” offering just one perspective on how and why an event was taking place. They described this as being in clear contrast to other Arab media outlets, Al Jazeera in particular. When “the other side” was presented, participants felt that the amount of time offered to the other (often Arab) side was less than the amount of time provided to the Western or pro-Western perspective. (Cairo)

5. Comments on Alhurra’s programming accurately presenting U.S. policy in the region:

- Participants cited lack of intellectual connection between Arab interests and U.S. policy in Alhurra’s reports. (Dubai)
- In the Annapolis story, Bush and Rice were quoted, but there was no elaboration. This was said by participants to be an “inadequate explanation of the U.S. viewpoint.” They added that the report provided “no clear American voice.” (Dubai)

- Participants said the Iraq security story “reflects U.S. policy, not necessarily reality” – reality as perceived through other news organizations’ coverage.
- Alternatively, opinions of people interviewed in the story coincide with the U.S. view, so Alhurra is doing its job of reflecting U.S. policy. (Dubai)
- The participants cited a disconnect between Alhurra and its audience. They said that there should be more sensitivity to the fact that American foreign policy (as presented by Alhurra) is really about *domestic* policy in the Arab states. (Dubai)
- Participants felt that the propagandistic role of Alhurra meant that it could actually harm opinion of the United States in that it calls into question the U.S. government’s dedication to a critical element of its democratic claims, the freedom of the press. (Cairo)
- Participants cited Alhurra’s coverage of U.S. relations with Palestinian Mahmoud Abbas as changing from a negative slant prior to the Palestinian elections to more positive after Hamas won those elections. This indicates, they said, that the United States does not want to support democratic outcomes in Palestine. (Cairo)
- The lack of a clear, well established firewall between Alhurra’s funding source and its editorial policies left many of the participants wondering how objective and accurate Alhurra’s news can be. Participants worried that, especially after reading through the MBN’s journalistic code of ethics and the guiding congressional legislation governing U.S. broadcasting efforts, that U.S. policy interests would always take precedence in the broadcaster’s reporting of the news. (Cairo)

- Participants felt that Alhurra’s brand is too closely associated with U.S. national interests and policies in the region, and thus found that it was unlikely to be able to establish a sizable audience or promote democracy in the region. In the new Arab media context, they said, you cannot succeed when you are a “government-branded channel” and Alhurra has branded itself as a U.S. government channel. (Cairo)

- The question of “why now” was raised several times during the discussion. Participants felt that the timing of launching Alhurra coincided with the increased Arab opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq, and thus felt that Alhurra was more likely trying to influence Arab public opinion rather than promote the free flow of information and democratic governance in the Arab world. (Cairo)

- The group felt that it would have been better if the channel was going all-out to sell America. They said they received more news about America from Al Jazeera. Some felt that there was too much election/political coverage on Alhurra at present, and that sometimes the attempts at reporting breaking news were not in line with interests in the region. Why break into regular programs to report a senator’s speech? (Beirut)

- “Inspire, don’t try to convince.” (Dubai)

6. Comments regarding Alhurra’s journalism:

- *In the discussion groups, political attitudes about U.S. policy in the region did not appear to be at the root of the negative feelings about Alhurra. Much of the criticism of Alhurra in the sessions was grounded in the low opinion of the channel’s journalism and production competence.*

- Some participants referred to Alhurra’s news product as “journalism light,” noting a lack of credibility and little gravitas on the part of the anchors (citing, by

comparison, Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel). One comment: “Anchors don’t seem to know what is going on, even when they are asking questions.” (Dubai)

- There were mixed appraisals of the technical quality of reports. Some comments were positive, such as “Good technically,” but the majority were negative: “Wallpaper footage – something to look at rather than engage with,” (Dubai) and comments about flawed production values, such as the lack of graphics and a generally amateurish look. Among the comments was, “The programs would fail if presented as a class project at an American communication school,” and participants spoke of the crew appearing in reflections, bad lighting and bad sound levels. The website was also said to be out of date. (Beirut) Participants said the quality of the Arabic spoken on Alhurra is exceptionally poor and displays a lack of knowledge about the Arab media environment. (Cairo)

- As for overall content, participants said: “It is mediocre, and from a country that has the best TV news. It is a duplicate of Arab government channels.” Another comment: “It does not grab me in any way; it’s not intelligent, it’s not interesting, it’s not engaging.” Al Jazeera was cited in contrast. Other participants said that Alhurra can be preachy and condescending, and “fails to win the hearts and minds of Arab people.” (Dubai)

- Participants said that they felt the US was giving the Arab world second- or third-best. They asked, in a region with 480 satellite channels and 25 news stations, why watch? The group felt strongly that Alhurra had “no soul” – no charisma to attract viewers. “Journalism should have a soul.” Other comments: “If Alhurra wants change its objective should be clear”; “I rarely turn it on as it seems to be dead”; and Alhurra is “a waste of U.S. taxpayers’ money.” (Beirut)

- Along similar lines, there was criticism that Alhurra gives the impression of being “a third-rate Lebanese station.” The group felt that having a headquarters

in Virginia keeps the station too distanced from the necessary social and cultural context. Specific dislikes included too many dubbed documentaries. The program Inside Washington was referred to as “an insult” because the host’s Arabic is so bad. Positive comments were few but included praise for “the car show guy” and the coverage of information technology and other high-tech matters, as this is poorly covered on Arab channels. (Beirut)

- Participants were skeptical about America’s assumption that it operates the best media in the world. They said American media is too patriotic and parochial. They said they would like to see a greater diversity of views about America – maybe a show on Alhurra hosted by Michael Moore. They felt that Alhurra certainly did not live up to its declared values. (Beirut)

- The participants were unimpressed by the arrival of BBC Arabic. They felt it was coming too late to make a difference. (Beirut)

- A number of participants suggested that Alhurra’s news coverage eerily reminded them of how Egyptian state-controlled broadcasters had covered the news in prior to the emergence of satellite news channels and today’s information revolution. (Cairo)

- Participants said that Alhurra’s content and style are too boring. They said Arabs have become accustomed to Al Jazeera’s style of reporting, which is often more “on the ground,” less reliant on traditional government sources for information, and more flamboyant than the programming that Alhurra offers. They added that the breadth and depth of Al Jazeera’s journalistic and investigative coverage far exceeds that offered by Alhurra, leaving little incentive to watch Alhurra. Participants noted that Al Jazeera’s coverage of U.S. events, American politics in particular, was far better than what they had seen on Alhurra. (Cairo)

Conclusions based on the discussion groups' comments:

In order to secure a larger and more attentive audience Alhurra must proceed on two related fronts. It must improve the quality of its journalism, and it must reshape public perceptions of its credibility. Based on the observations of members of the three discussion groups, these are among the improvements that might be undertaken:

- a) Broaden the scope of coverage to include more reports from Africa, Latin America, and other areas in “the South” that tend to receive little attention from Western news organizations.
- b) Better police the objectivity of news content, keeping what appear to be journalists' personal opinions and biased language out of news programs.
- c) More aggressively seek out diverse viewpoints, even when they are critical of U.S. policies and American allies.
- d) More assertively challenge pronouncements by officials and their spokespersons.
- e) More consistently avoid unsubstantiated material in news reports, seeking better balance between non-Western and Western sources.
- f) When explaining American foreign policy, be more sensitive to audience skepticism about the channel's motives.
- g) Improve production quality – everything from graphics to anchors' Arabic.

By no means is this an all-inclusive list. But it is clear from the findings of this study that if Alhurra is to fulfill its mandate from Congress and serve as a useful facet of American foreign policy, reforms will be essential.

OVERALL ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Alhurra's identity

Many of Alhurra's troubles seem to stem from a perceived identity crisis: Is it a news channel or a propaganda tool? Is its primary commitment to solid journalism or to serving political purposes? And how does the audience see it?

Credibility, which any news organization must have, is determined by the answer to such questions. The roots of Alhurra's perceived lack of credibility can be found in the content analysis included in this report and are reflected in many of the comments from the discussion groups. The content analysis indicates that this problem could be at least partially rectified by putting greater emphasis on objectivity and including more sources/interviewees in news stories who may be critical of U.S. policies and interests. Further, the breadth of coverage could be expanded to cover events and issues that may interest viewers in the region even if they are not especially significant in terms of U.S. Middle East policy.

Particularly when compared to the expanding number of indigenous news sources in the region that have profoundly influenced the Arab world's political life, Alhurra tends to be viewed as American/Western, and therefore must overcome significant audience skepticism and mistrust.

Al Jazeera's shadow

Any appraisal of Alhurra's effectiveness must take into account the rapidly evolving dynamics of Middle Eastern news media and particularly the role of Al Jazeera. The style and substance of Al Jazeera's programs have become the standards against which its competitors are measured. This is the context in which popular attitudes about Alhurra's identity and journalism must be considered.

Egyptian journalist Fahmy Howeidy wrote: "Before the emergence of Al Jazeera, I only watched entertainment programs or football matches on Arab TV channels, only

stopping at the latter during times of relaxation, laziness, or boredom. I researched important events or ideas through chasing news bulletins, reports, and discussion programs broadcast on Western television channels, particularly British and American ones. I never thought that I would find ‘food’ of that nature on any Arab channel.”⁸

Providing a new kind of intellectual nourishment is an important ingredient in Al Jazeera’s appeal. The channel has proved to a skeptical audience that Arab media can be useful and that it is no longer necessary to rely on Western news organizations for information about important events. Through a mix of innovative programming, credible journalism, and persistent marketing, Al Jazeera has established itself as the “go-to” information resource in much of the Middle East. Walk into cafes from Morocco to Kuwait and you’ll see that the television in the corner is tuned to Al Jazeera. A survey conducted in March 2008 in six Middle Eastern countries asked, “When you watch international news, which of the following networks’ news broadcasts do you watch most often?” Al Jazeera led the array of channels by a large margin, named by 53 percent of respondents. Alhurra was named by 2 percent.⁹

One of Al Jazeera’s strengths has been its introduction of energetic and sometimes contentious debate into an Arab news business that was previously known for its drab docility. The high production values of the channel’s newscasts and the lively exchanges in its talk shows have expanded the news audience and changed the nature of political discourse within the Arab public sphere. Getting more people to pay attention to and talk about news is an important facet of larger issues related to democratization. Overall, notes historian Bernard Lewis, television “brings to the peoples of the Middle East a previously unknown spectacle -- that of lively and vigorous public disagreement and debate.”¹⁰

The style and substance of Al Jazeera’s programming has led its audience to become more engaged with the issues addressed in coverage. This is largely due to the channel’s being trusted more than many of its competitors. Critics of Al Jazeera, particularly in the West, often challenge the channel’s objectivity, but such criticism misses the point in terms of understanding the channel’s baseline strength. Rather than judging the news product they receive according to standards prescribed by outsiders, most of Al Jazeera’s viewers consider *credibility* to be a news provider’s most important

attribute, and these viewers want news that is gathered independently for Arabs by Arabs, and that sees events through *their* eyes.

In the new era of proliferating satellite television channels, state-controlled and Western broadcasters have found that they are at a significant competitive disadvantage in the Arab world because they are not as credible as Al Jazeera. Furthermore, the presentation of news on Al Jazeera reflects a passion that is well suited for an audience that feels passionately about many of the issues and events that the channel covers.¹¹ This is the reality of the Middle East media environment, and Alhurra's policymakers must address these matters if their channel is to compete effectively.

Summary conclusions

Based primarily on the content analysis, with secondary reinforcement from the discussion group proceedings, the research team sees the principal issues affecting Alhurra as being those related to the fundamentals of journalism, not the exigencies of politics.

This is not an esoteric matter related to an idealized journalism, but rather goes directly to the issue of Alhurra's fulfillment of its legislative mandate and its responsibilities deriving from the Middle East Broadcast Network Journalistic Code of Ethics.

Section 303 of the International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (as amended) calls for, among other provisions, United States international broadcasting to "be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism" and "to be designed so as to effectively reach a significant audience." These broad requirements coincide with the more specific standards prescribed by the MBN code of ethics. This code, which can be found in its entirety in Appendix 2, addresses ten principal topics:

- Accuracy.
- Impartiality.
- Controversial/sensitive issues.
- Analysis, commentary and editorials.

- Tone of moderation and respect.
- Avoidance of advocacy.
- Ethical conduct.
- Interviews.
- Editing and production standards.
- Plagiarism.

Within this framework, the challenges facing Alhurra as it seeks to attain excellence in carrying out its mandate are those that must be addressed by all news organizations:

- Ensuring comprehensiveness of coverage; providing the breadth that the audience expects.
- Imposing discipline in producing the news product to protect against personal and institutional biases that can infect a news product.
- Offering diverse viewpoints about important issues from sources whose backgrounds and expertise contribute to a balanced news product.
- Avoiding rumor and other unsubstantiated material.
- Thoughtfully and thoroughly addressing the topics of greatest interest to the target audience, such as religion and local democratization efforts.

Add to these Alhurra's additional duty to effectively present U.S. policies and it is clear that the task for this news organization is exceptionally difficult.

For each of these duties, our diagnosis is that Alhurra is not performing at the level that it needs to reach to be successful. This study is, admittedly, narrow. It looked at one month's news and topical programming and it queried a limited, albeit highly qualified, array of discussion group panelists. Analyzing the qualifications of Alhurra personnel and the structure of the channel's editorial process was outside the scope of the study, but such analysis is the logical next step for those who will determine Alhurra's future.

To fulfill Alhurra's mission requires being able to compete effectively in the Arab news marketplace. That will require expanded and more proficient coverage, and to reach this higher level will necessitate a significant budget expansion to enable broader reporting and more professional management. It will also require grappling with political

issues involving journalistic independence and the realities of establishing the credibility needed to gain and keep an Arab audience.

Is Alhurra doing a good enough job in meeting its own standards and serving its audience? Although the findings in this report can be viewed in different ways, in the opinion of this research team, for the reasons described throughout the report, the answer is no.

Can a reformed Alhurra succeed? In our view, yes, if there is renewed commitment to the principles and practices that are supposed to be the foundation of the channel's operations. We hope this report will serve as one of the many tools needed in reconstructing Alhurra.

ENDNOTES

¹ It is important to note that Alhurra has three distinct broadcasting streams. In addition to the main satellite television channel, Alhurra also has a special Iraq stream and a stream targeting Arabic speakers in Europe. As per the instruction of the BBG, this research project only evaluates Alhurra's main stream available in 22 countries throughout the Middle East.

² The expression of personal judgments was defined as a failure to report information in a "factual, objective context that enhances understanding of the events and issues and provides clarity without distortion or bias." The use of value-neutral language was defined as: "Objective language used to reflect events and issues accurately and dispassionately."

³ A "Western" perspective was defined as any perspective that was in support of an American or Israeli position, and "Arab/other" was defined as any perspective (both government and non-government) that was in support of an Arab position. In cases where Arab world was not the focus of the story, the "other" perspective was defined as a perspective originating from or defending the country/subject in question (thus, "other" was not a catch-all phrase, but rather something more narrow).

⁴ Drawing from MBN's Journalistic Code of Ethics, "unsubstantiated information" was defined as: "Where doubt or controversy exists on significant points of fact, information must be based on at least two independent sources."

⁵ Sources cited in the newscast were identified as being one of the following: (1) Pro-West or U.S.; (2) Pro-Israeli; (3) Pro-Arab Government; (4) Pro-Arab Political Opposition (e.g. non-ruling political groups); (5) Pro-Arab People (non-politically aligned sources, e.g. someone from the "Arab street."); and (6) Neutral. In cases where the issue being discussed was not based in the Arab world, coders used the same categorization scheme, but rather looked for whether the source was aligned with the government, political opposition or people of the country or region being discussed in the report. For the purpose of this analysis, the sources have been re-categorized into "Western" and "Arab/Other."

⁶ For example, the category of "Democratic governance in the U.S." includes topics relevant to the processes and procedures of American governance and civil society, including (but not limited to): U.S. elections, the U.S. judiciary, Congressional hearings and enactment of legislation, executive branch policies and procedures, and the activities conducted by political organizations within the U.S.

⁷ Examples of Arab political opposition groups include non-ruling political parties and organizations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

⁸ Fahmy Howeidy, "Setting the News Agenda in the Arab World," in *The Al Jazeera Decade* (Doha: Al Jazeera Channel, 2006), 129.

⁹ "2008 Annual Arab Public opinion Poll: Survey of the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland." Available online at: <http://sadat.umd.edu/surveys/2008%20Arab%20Public%20Opinion%20Survey.ppt>

¹⁰ Bernard Lewis, "Freedom and Justice in the Modern Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 3, May/June 2005, 46.

¹¹ Philip Seib, *The Al Jazeera Effect: How the New Global Media Are Reshaping World Politics* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2008), 19-20, 143-44.

APPENDICES

1. Statement of Work Requirements.
2. Middle East Broadcast Network Journalistic Code of Ethics.
3. Section 303 of the International Broadcasting Act of 1994, as amended.
4. Definitions and examples of each news issue
5. Definition of coding terms
6. Content analysis intercoder reliability
7. Outline of discussion group format and questions
8. Discussion group participants: Cairo, Beirut, Dubai.
9. Evaluation team members.

APPENDIX 1

STATEMENT OF WORK REQUIREMENTS

BACKGROUND / INTRODUCTION

The Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) requires an independent, informed, timely and analytical evaluation of the overall program content of the Middle East Broadcast Network's (MBN) Alhurra Television program stream to address specific concerns identified herein.

Alhurra is the U.S. Government's Arabic language satellite television network aimed at the Middle East and devoted to news and information. In addition to reporting on regional and international events, the channel broadcasts interviews and panel discussions, current affairs programs, and features on a variety of subjects. Its journalism is guided by the BBG's statutory mission to promote freedom and democracy through the open communication of ideas. Alhurra is operated by MBN in its role as a grantee of the BBG.

Recently, Alhurra's adherence to the broadcasting standards and principles enunciated in the U.S. International Broadcasting Act, as evidenced by its news and programming decisions, has been questioned. Debate and criticism have focused on specific news and topical programs that generated substantial negative publicity for Alhurra TV, MBN, and the BBG, and prompted critics to question the editorial decision-making process used by Alhurra TV.

This work requirement, therefore, calls for the contractor to assess Alhurra TV news and current affairs broadcasts to determine whether these broadcasts conform with the standards and principles set forth in the Act, and more specifically, with MBN's Journalistic Code (copies attached).

Given the public nature of the current debate about Alhurra programming, and the urgent need to ensure that the network carry out its high profile and urgent public diplomacy mandate in accordance with its statutory mandate, this evaluation should be conducted with appropriate speed and professionalism.

TASKS

A. Sampling

Programming for this project will be original content of Alhurra TV's main pan-Arab channel. Program samples examined for this review will be as aired by Alhurra TV, as recorded off-air in real time, or as drawn from the archives of Alhurra TV or from other collections provided by the BBG, beginning with the programs aired on or after the date of this purchase order (contract.)

In addition to MBN's Journalistic Code (pg. 4) and the BBG's enabling legislation (pg. 8), the contractor will receive the necessary documentation from BBG to be able to develop and implement its own sampling methods for random selection of programs to be evaluated; such documentation includes, but is not limited to, broadcast logs, descriptions of programs, scripts of programs (Arabic transcriptions or English translations), and schedules of satellite feeds to Alhurra's target areas.

BBG will make available relevant research reports including field surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and other methods; such reports will be used by the contractor as background information to provide context, may not be published or otherwise distributed and may be subject to further non-disclosure provisions. Research findings may be excerpted from the reports, and quoted with appropriate attribution.

B. Evaluation

The goals of this work requirement are to evaluate whether Alhurra TV provides viewers in the Middle East with a reliable source of accurate, objective and comprehensive news and information, and to determine if Alhurra TV presents United States policies and responsible discussions of those policies as required under the statute.

Alhurra TV programming is divided into four general categories, as defined below. It is the intent of this work requirement to focus evaluation of Alhurra TV on the first two – News Reporting, and Topical.

1. News Reporting

Alhurra TV has several news programs every day. These programs include regularly scheduled newscasts, and live coverage of significant news events that are of interest to target area viewing audiences. The quality of the Alhurra TV news programs selected for review is to be measured against the statutory broadcasting standards and principles, including the following core broadcast requirements:

- Accuracy – does the story report, or the program reflect, the facts correctly?
- Objectivity – are relevant sides of an issue reflected fairly, and in proportion?
- Comprehensiveness – is the whole story being reported, and in context?
- Policy – is US policy appropriately presented, and responsibly discussed?

2. Topical Programming

Alhurra TV originates a range of topical programs that are broadly intended to engage the viewer by reflecting topics of interest in the Middle East. These programs deal with a wide range of issues that touch on political, social and cultural topics. The object of this task is to determine whether or not Alhurra TV's topical programs reflect the core mission requirements outlined in paragraph 1, above.

3. Non-Topical Programming

Alhurra TV originates non-topical programs that are similarly intended to engage the interests of audiences in the Middle East. Programs reflect the diversity of such audience interests, and also present topics related to the American cultural experience.

4. Acquired Programming

Alhurra TV acquires additional programming that it does not itself produce, from external sources. These long-form programs – including documentaries, biographies, and similar formats dedicated to serious subject matter – are intended to reflect elements of American values as they are relevant to the interests and experiences of the Middle East viewing audience.

C. Deliverable

The deliverable for this purchase order (contract) is a final written draft report that contains the recommendations and findings of an assessment of Alhurra TV programming as defined in the Statement of Work.

The contractor shall deliver, in hard copy and electronically, a detailed written draft report with findings and recommendations to the BBG by September 14, 2007. Within five working days after the receipt of the draft report, the BBG will have discussed and reviewed the report and will provide written comments back to the contractor. Those comments may reflect subject matter discussions within the BBG regarding the language of the final report.

APPENDIX 2

MIDDLE EAST BROADCAST NETWORK JOURNALISTIC CODE OF ETHICS

MBN's mission is to broadcast news that is consistently accurate, authoritative, objective, balanced, and comprehensive. MBN strives to serve as a model of the free marketplace of ideas and a free press in the American tradition, promoting freedom, democracy and human rights, including freedom of religion. Additionally, MBN has a mandate to present the policies of the United States government in a clear and effective manner through news reporting and responsible discussion.

ACCURACY

MBN journalists shall do their utmost to ensure that all broadcasts are factually accurate. Where doubt or controversy exists on significant points of fact, information must be based on at least two independent sources. No program material shall be broadcast that is based on rumor or unsubstantiated information. Documents, video or audio obtained from outside sources must be properly authenticated. Factual errors will be corrected on-air as soon as possible.

IMPARTIALITY

Information shall be reported or discussed in a factual, objective context that enhances understanding of the events and issues and provides clarity without distortion or bias. Objective language shall be used to reflect events and issues accurately and dispassionately. Broadcasters shall present opposing or differing views accurately and in a balanced manner on all issues. When groups or individuals whose views are important for balanced programming decline to comment, it is appropriate to note this on the air. MBN shall be independent from any political party, ruling or opposition group or organization, émigré organization, commercial or other special-interest organization, or religious body, whether inside or outside the broadcast area; and shall not endorse or advocate any specific political, economic, or religious viewpoint.

CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES

MBN does not provide an open platform for terrorists or those who support them. This has long been the policy of all United States international broadcasting organizations and grantees, and MBN fully complies with this policy. MBN will not broadcast live speeches or interviews with persons designated as terrorists unless the broadcast has been previously approved by the Vice President for News, or his or her designee. When the broadcast will be on the radio, the Radio Sawa news director should be consulted.

ANALYSIS, COMMENTARY AND EDITORIALS

All broadcasts should contain sufficient background information and explanation to enable the audience to better understand the significance and consequences of information being reported. Journalists shall not insert their personal opinions or judgments in factual reports at any time. Failure to abide by this policy constitutes grounds for termination of employment. Material that is primarily analytical will be clearly labeled as such, to distinguish it from factual news reporting and commentary.

* *Analysis* provides background information, explanation, and differing authoritative views on an issue or event—but states no personal opinion on the part of the speaker. Analysis is preferred over commentary.

* *Commentary*, which is to be clearly labeled as such, is analytical in content and judicious in tone but reflects the personal judgment or opinion of the speaker on a particular issue.

TONE OF MODERATION AND RESPECT

Broadcasts, including talk shows and debates, shall at all times maintain a calm and professional tone and shall project a model of civilized, reasoned discourse, as well as respect for the human rights of all persons. Broadcasters and guests shall not make religious, ethnic, socio-economic or cultural slurs upon any person or groups and shall observe common standards of etiquette and taste. Broadcasts shall not contain material that could be construed as an incitement to violence. Programming on disturbances or other tense situations must be balanced and factual. MBN will not permit its programs to be used as a platform for terrorist organizations.

AVOIDANCE OF ADVOCACY

MBN supports freedom, democracy and the human rights common to democratic states. However, MBN does not advocate the adoption of specific policies or legislation, or endorse or oppose candidates for elected or appointed office.

ETHICAL CONDUCT

MBN staff members and contributors shall maintain the highest ethical standards in all conduct, taking particular care to avoid any conflict of interest, or the appearance thereof, in their relations with individuals, groups and/or political or commercial interests inside or outside the broadcast area. MBN staff members and contributors shall remain free of associations and activities that could, or could appear to, compromise their integrity, damage their credibility or jeopardize their journalistic independence. They shall refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations to the extent any of these could compromise journalistic integrity. MBN staff members and contributors shall in no way abuse their status as public Figures, or the good reputation of MBN, to promote personal interest or gain. In keeping with this policy, MBN employees are not permitted: (a) to appear on radio or television programs, in print, or in commercial advertising under their own names or pseudonyms; (b) to write (under their own names or pseudonyms) for publication (electronic or otherwise) on any topic; or (c) to serve in an advisory capacity for any media organization or political or advocacy group without the express written prior permission of the Vice President for News.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews must be unrehearsed and specific questions must not be submitted in advance. It is permissible to discuss in advance with the interviewee the purpose of the

interview and the general subjects to be covered. All recorded interviews are subject to editing and no MBN staff member or contractor may represent to anyone that an interview will be carried in full. The raw or edited film, tape, other electronic version of the interview or transcript may not be shown to or played for an interviewee or representative in advance of its broadcast, nor may the interviewee or a representative participate in the editing of the interview.

EDITING AND PRODUCTION STANDARDS

All persons who edit reports, interviews and other materials for air shall ensure that their editing reflects fairly, honestly and without distortion what was seen and heard by MBN reporters and recorded by our cameras and microphones. Interviews are to be edited in a straightforward manner, preserving, even in short sound bites, the sense of the interview. Answers may not be taken out of context or edited together in a manner to change their meaning. The narration leading to a sound bite must reflect the question that elicited the response.

PLAGIARISM

When a journalist at MBN uses facts gathered by any other organization, those facts must be attributed. This policy applies to material from newspapers, magazines, books, CDs and broadcasts, as well as to material taken from news agencies like Reuters, Agence France Presse and the Associated Press (for example, “the Secretary told Reuters”). In other words, even when we purchase news services, we do not treat the reporting done by others as reporting done by us. MBN’s preference, when time and distance permit, is to do our own reporting and verify another organization’s story; in that case, the reporter, correspondent or anchor need not attribute the facts. But even then, as a matter of courtesy and candor, the reporter, correspondent or anchor should credit an exclusive to the organization that first broke the news (for example, “CBS reported this morning...”).

Attribution to another news organization, however, does not mean MBN’s journalists can broadcast rumors or allegations that would not independently meet the test of MBN’s own reporting standards, as set forth in this policy. Rumors and allegations must satisfy MBN’s standard of newsworthiness, taste and plausibility before being broadcast, even when attributed. And when the need arises to attribute, that is a good cue to consult with a senior producer or editor about whether broadcast is warranted at all. Thus, MBN would not permit the broadcast of a statement like this – “One Commissioner apparently accused another Commissioner of lying about the grain statistics, according to the Associated Press” – unless MBN had independently confirmed, in accordance with this policy, that “One Commissioner accused another Commissioner of lying about the grain statistics,” in which case attribution would not be necessary. In cases when it makes a difference whether MBN staffers or stringers directly witnessed a scene, MBN should distinguish on air between personal interviews and telephone or Email interviews, as well as written statements. [This policy was adapted from the plagiarism policy of *The New York Times*, which is available on-line at <http://www.asne.org/index.cfm?id=408>.]

APPENDIX 3

SECTIONS 301-303 OF THE INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING ACT OF 1994, AS AMENDED

TITLE III – UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING ACT

SEC. 301. SHORT TITLE.

This title may be cited as the “United States International Broadcasting Act of 1994”.

SEC. 302. CONGRESSIONAL FINDINGS AND DECLARATION OF PURPOSES.

The Congress makes the following findings and declarations:

(1) It is the policy of the United States to promote the right of freedom of opinion and expression, including the freedom “to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers,” in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(2) Open communication of information and ideas among the peoples of the world contributes to international peace H. R. 2333—52 and stability and the promotion of such communication is in the interests of the United States.

(3) It is in the interest of the United States to support broadcasting to other nations consistent with the requirements of this title.

(4) The continuation of existing United States international broadcasting, and the creation of a new broadcasting service to the people of the People’s Republic of China and other countries of Asia which lack adequate sources of free information, would enhance the promotion of information and ideas, while advancing the goals of United States foreign policy.

(5) The reorganization and consolidation of United States international broadcasting will achieve important economies and strengthen the capability of the United States to use broadcasting to support freedom and democracy in a rapidly changing international environment.

SEC. 303. STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES

(a) BROADCASTING STANDARDS—United States international broadcasting shall—

(1) be consistent with the broad foreign policy objectives of the United States;

(2) be consistent with the international telecommunications policies and treaty obligations of the United States;

(3) not duplicate the activities of private United States broadcasters;

(4) not duplicate the activities of government supported broadcasting entities of other democratic nations;

(5) be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism;

(6) be based on reliable information about its potential audience; and

(7) be designed so as to effectively reach a significant audience.

(b) BROADCASTING PRINCIPLES.—United States international broadcasting shall include—

(1) news which is consistently reliable and authoritative, accurate, objective, and comprehensive;

(2) a balanced and comprehensive projection of United States thought and institutions, reflecting the diversity of United States culture and society;

(3) clear and effective presentation of the policies of the United States Government and responsible discussion and opinion on those policies;

(4) programming to meet needs which remain unserved by the totality of media voices available to the people of certain nations;

(5) information about developments in each significant region of the world;

(6) a variety of opinions and voices from within particular nations and regions prevented by censorship or repression from speaking to their fellow countrymen;

(7) reliable research capacity to meet the criteria under this section;

(8) adequate transmitter and relay capacity to support the activities described in this section; and H. R. 2333—53

(9) training and technical support for independent indigenous media through government agencies or private United States entities.

APPENDIX 4

DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES OF EACH NEWS ISSUE

After reviewing events and news from November 2007, we identified 23 major issues in the news agenda. For each agenda item, examples were given so that the coders understood clearly the differences between each of the issues. This is a list of the issues coded for, and some (though not all) examples of the stories that fell within each category:

1. Afghanistan. Examples include: Afghani security and reconstruction, Afghani politics, and Afghani agricultural development.
2. American Public Diplomacy. Examples include: the resignation of Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes and U.S.-funded exchange programs.
3. Arab Human Rights Issues. Examples include: prisoner rights in Syria, women's rights in Saudi Arabia, legal protections for foreigners in Sudan, and Egyptian torture and police brutality.
4. Business (non-political). Examples include: Stock market news.
5. Democratic Governance in the Arab World. Examples include: Elections in Algeria, Jordan, and Palestine, civil society issues and public protests. NOTE: elections in Lebanon, Russia and Pakistan were treated separately from this category.
6. Democratic Governance in the U.S. Examples include: Congressional hearings and U.S. elections.
7. Economic Growth (politically related). Examples include: economic policies of Arab governments, economic-related policy change by the U.S. government, oil and OPEC.
8. Humanitarian Issues. Examples include: Bangladeshi natural disaster, Indonesian earthquake, famine in Gaza, and treatment of refugees and overall conditions of refugee facilities.
9. Iran. Examples include: Iranian foreign policy and nuclear development, sanctions on Iran, and Iranian influence/interference in Iraq
10. Iraqi reform/economic health. Examples include Iraqi domestic politics, Iraqi civil society development, economic policy change, and Iraqi sports.
11. Iraqi security. Examples include insurgent violence, Iraqi Army, coalition forces success and failures.
12. Israel-Arab conflict: Examples include: coverage of the Annapolis summit, security issues in Gaza, external actors' roles in the conflict, and the history of the conflict.
13. Lebanese elections/stability
14. Pakistani stability. Examples include: coverage of Benazir Bhutto and Pakistani elections.

15. Religion. Examples include: the Pope, Islamic leaders, and Muslims in Europe.
16. Russia. Examples include: Russian foreign policy and diplomacy in the region and Russian elections.
17. Sports
18. Sudanese security. Examples include: security-related violence in Darfur and all non-humanitarian political news in Sudan.
19. Turkey/Kurdish security and independence. Examples include: changes in Turkish policy with regard to Northern Iraqi Kurds and tensions between the two groups.
20. U.S Human Rights Issues. Examples include: concerns of abuse by U.S. and coalition military forces (e.g., Abu Ghraib) and Guantanamo Bay.
21. Venezuela. Examples include: Hugo Chavez's economic policy and oil output.
22. War on Terror (General, non-Iraq). Examples include: Al Qaeda in Morocco, Algerian car bombing, Osama bin Laden, Tripoli anti-terrorism conference, Madrid bombings.
23. Other. Examples include primarily three topics: North Korea, Kosovo, and cultural stories.

APPENDIX 5

DEFINITION OF CODING TERMS

VALUE NEUTRAL: Coders were asked the following question: “Was the language used by the broadcast journalist value-neutral?” Value neutral language was defined as Objective language used to reflect events and issues accurately and dispassionately and as language that was “independent from any political party, ruling or opposition group or organization, émigré organization, commercial or other special-interest organization, or religious body, whether inside or outside the broadcast area; and [did] not endorse or advocate any specific political, economic, or religious viewpoint.”

PERSONAL JUDGMENT: Coders were asked the following question: Did the journalist(s) insert his (their) personal judgments in the report?” The expression of personal judgments was defined as a failure to report information in a “factual, objective context that enhances understanding of the events and issues and provides clarity without distortion or bias.”

OPPOSING VIEWS: Coders were asked the following question: “Were opposing views presented?” Opposing views was defined as the presentation of differing yet factual opinions on issues that were not publicly accepted fact.

UNSUBSTANTIATED INFORMATION: Coders were asked: “Was any of the program material based on unsubstantiated information?” Unsubstantiated Information” was defined as: “Where doubt or controversy exists on significant points of fact, information must be based on at least two independent sources.”

APPENDIX 6

CONTENT ANALYSIS INTERCODER RELIABILITIES

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Number of Coders</i>	<i>Krippendorf's Alpha</i>	<i>Notes</i>
1. Issue	3	1	
2. Judgments	3	0.87	
3. Views	2	0.88	
4. Information	3	0.83	
5. Sources	3	0.87	
6. Policy	3	0.77	Slightly below the preferred range (.80 and above), but acceptable
7. Religion	3	N/A	Too few data points

APPENDIX 7

OUTLINE OF DISCUSSION GROUP PROTOCOL

Introductions:

- Moderators introduce themselves and the project
 - Distribute prepared documents, including MBN's Journalistic Code of Ethics and an abbreviated copy of the Congressional statute governing U.S. broadcasting in the Middle East. (These documents were also distributed to the participants before each working group convened).
- Each participant introduces him/herself
- Moderator explains the schedule for the rest of the afternoon and discusses rules for the conversation (rules of order).

Discussion One: Israel-Palestine

- Show clip of Alhurra TV's coverage of Annapolis summit/Arab-Israeli peace process (approximately 8 minutes long)
- Initiate the discussion with the following questions (and encourage participants to draw not only from the clip shown, but also their prior viewing experiences):
 - [COMPREHENSIVENESS] Do you think that Alhurra's coverage of Arab-Israeli peace process provides sufficient background to the viewer?
 - Are there particular historically significant viewpoints that are underrepresented or ignored?
 - [ACCURACY] Does Alhurra's coverage report and reflect the facts of the situation accurately?
 - If not, what facts are missing? Why are they significant to the particular story in question?
 - [OBJECTIVITY] Are the relevant sides of an issue reflected fairly and proportionally?
 - Which sides are over/under-represented? How does that impact the credibility of the broadcaster more generally?
 - [POLICY] How does the reporting represent U.S. policy with regard to the Arab-Israeli peace process?
 - Do you find this reporting to be credible and/or helpful? Does it impact your viewpoint of the United States more broadly?

Discussion Two: Iraqi Security

- Show clip of Alhurra TV's coverage of Iraqi security (approximately 8 minutes long)
- Initiate the discussion with the following questions (and encourage participants to draw not only from the clip shown, but also their prior viewing experiences):
 - [COMPREHENSIVENESS] Do you think that Alhurra's coverage of the security situation in Iraq provides sufficient background to the viewer?
 - Are there particular historically significant viewpoints that are underrepresented or ignored?

- [ACCURACY] Does Alhurra's coverage report and reflect the facts of the situation accurately?
 - If not, what facts are missing? Why are they significant to the particular story in question?
- [OBJECTIVITY] Are the relevant sides of an issue reflected fairly and proportionally?
 - Which sides are over/under-represented? How does that impact the credibility of the broadcaster more generally?
- [POLICY] How does the reporting represent U.S. policy with regard to the security situation within Iraq?
 - Do you find this reporting to be credible and/or helpful? Does it impact your viewpoint of the United States more broadly?

Discussion Three: Democratic Governance in the Arab World

- Show clip of Alhurra TV's coverage of democratic developments in the Arab world, including those encouraged by the U.S. Government (approximately 8 minutes long)
- Initiate the discussion with the following questions (and encourage participants to draw not only from the clip shown, but also their prior viewing experiences):
 - [COMPREHENSIVENESS] Do you think that Alhurra's coverage of democratic developments in the Arab world provides sufficient background to the viewer?
 - Are there particular historically significant viewpoints that are underrepresented or ignored?
 - [ACCURACY] Does Alhurra's coverage report and reflect the facts of the situation accurately?
 - If not, what facts are missing? Why are they significant to the particular story in question?
 - [OBJECTIVITY] Are the relevant sides of an issue reflected fairly and proportionally?
 - Which sides are over/under-represented? How does that impact the credibility of the broadcaster more generally?
 - [POLICY] How does the reporting represent U.S. policy with regard to democratic developments in the Arab world?
 - Do you find this reporting to be credible and/or helpful? Does it impact your viewpoint of the United States more broadly?

Discussion Four: General Impressions of Alhurra TV's News

- This session will focus on the larger impressions that the participants have of Alhurra's news coverage. More specifically, we are interested in asking about their:
 - Opinion about what the ideal role of a broadcaster in the Middle East would look like
 - What are the proper topics and depth of journalism?
 - What is the proper role of a journalist?

- Would such an idealized broadcaster be able to have a significant audience?
- Opinion of the overall viewership of Alhurra TV. How does Alhurra compete with its broadcasting competitors in the region?
 - What are its strengths and weaknesses?
 - Are there specific groups/demographics that are/aren't watching? Why?
- Opinion of the "topical programming" that Alhurra offers. How do their editorial and roundtable discussion programs compare to those from other broadcasters in the region
 - Are they more or less fair/objective/accurate than the news in general?
- Opinion of whether Alhurra TV effectively articulates the foreign policy objectives of the United States
 - Examples?
- Opinion of how Alhurra TV influences opinions of the United States more broadly, including non-governmental institutions and cultural and political diversity
- Opinion of the impact that Alhurra TV is having on the development of democratic ideals and institutions within the Arab world
- Suggestions for improving Alhurra TV's news and topical programming

APPENDIX 8

DISCUSSION GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Beirut, Lebanon

Hussein Abdallah
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Daily Star

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