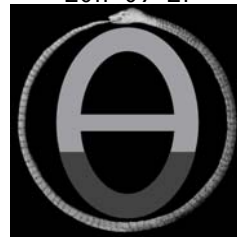


Al Jazeera As Covered in the U.S. Embassy Cables Published by Wikileaks

Compiled by
Maximilian C. Forte

To accompany the article titled,
“Al Jazeera and U.S. Foreign Policy: What WikiLeaks’ U.S. Embassy Cables Reveal about U.S. Pressure and
Propaganda”

2011-09-21



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Viewing cable 04MANAMA1387, MINISTER OF INFORMATION DISCUSSES AL JAZEERA AND

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
04MANAMA1387	2004-09-08 14:27	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Manama

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001387

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/07/2014

TAGS: PREL KPAO OIIP KMPI BA

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF INFORMATION DISCUSSES AL JAZEERA AND
IRAQ

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Al Jazeera Satellite Channel and Iraq dominated the conversation during the Ambassador's Sept. 6 introductory call on Minister of Information Nabeel bin Yaqoob Al Hamer. The Minister said that he had directed Bahrain Satellite Television to stop airing the videotapes on abductions and kidnappings in Iraq during news broadcasts because airing them serves no good purpose. He mentioned that the GOB had also spoken to Al Jazeera Satellite Channel and Al Arabiyya about not airing the hostage videotapes.

¶2. (C) When asked if Al Jazeera had ever had a correspondent based in Bahrain, Al Hamer replied no, adding that he continued to receive requests from Al Jazeera on this. According to Al Hamer, even though Bahrain's relationship with Qatar had improved following the ICJ decision about the Hawar Islands, Al Jazeera continued to focus only on negative stories about Bahrain.

¶3. (C) The Minister opined that Al Jazeera was losing credibility in the region and that most Bahraini viewers watched Al Arabiyya, which he believes is more balanced (Al Arabiyya does have a correspondent in Bahrain). He added that Bahrain's majority Shia population was displeased with Al Jazeera's coverage of the recent events in Najaf, which they felt portrayed Shia in a negative light. He concluded

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by noting that Al Jazeera's stature as a regional media outlet took a blow when it was asked to leave Iraq.
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Viewing cable 04ABUDHABI3430, SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AL JAZEERA AND BEHEADINGS

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04ABUDHABI3430	2004-10-01 12:44	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED	Embassy Abu Dhabi

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Diana T Fritz 02/05/2007 05:23:58 PM From DB/Inbox: Search Results

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 03430

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CXABU:

ACTION: PAO
INFO: POL AMB ECON DCM

DISSEMINATION: PAO
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: PAO:HOLSIN-WINDECKER
DRAFTED: PAO:AALKHATIB
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RUCQSOC/USCINCSOC MACDILL AFB FL//PA//

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003430

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP; NEA/PPD; NEA/RA; INR/R/MR; PA;

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 LONDON FOR GOLDRICH; PARIS FOR ZEYA; ALSO FOR MOC

E.O. 12958: N/A
 TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KMDR](#) [TC](#)
 SUBJECT: SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: AL JAZEERA AND BEHEADINGS

¶1. SUMMARY: COLUMNIST YOUSSEF IBRAHIM WROTE IN "AL ITTIHAD" THAT AL JAZEERA ABUSED ITS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION BY DEBATING WHETHER THE BEHEADING OF INNOCENT CIVILIANS IN IRAQ IS A JUSTIFIED METHOD OF RESISTANCE. END SUMMARY.

¶2. UNDER THE HEADLINE "IS AL JAZEERA ALLOWED TO ADVOCATE BEHADINGS?" YOUSSEF M. IBRAHIM OPINED IN "AL ITTIHAD" 09/27: (ARABIC DAILY, ABU DHABI-BASED, SEMI-OFFICIAL, CIRCULATION 85,000)

"Imagine a television talk show where the hosts debate the merits and demerits of cannibalism, discussing whether it is good to kill people to eat their flesh, liver and hearts seriously, on the air on prime time.

This past Tuesday, Feyssal Al Qassem, the infamous anchorman of Al Jazeera's program Counter Direction or "Al etijah Al Muaakess" went well beyond.

Al Qassem hosted an Egyptian guest who over an entire hour was allowed to advocate, with sickening insistence, the beheading of hostages in Iraq as a legitimate act of resistance to what he called "these American dogs", regardless of whether the captives who are of many different nationalities, are military personnel, civilians, aid workers, or spies.

They are all mercenaries, the Egyptian man screamed, as Al Qassem of the Al Jazeera network cheered him on. Truly, he who has no shame is not afraid. Arabism and Islam have nothing to do with such people.

Where does Al Jazeera, and Al Qassem, think they are taking their Arab-speaking viewers, the young before the old, when they put on a talk show tantamount to issuing a fatwa, or edict, for murder in the name of Islam and God or Arab Nationalism?

Does Al Qassem and his network appreciate how much damage they are doing to the religion of 1.2 billion Muslims, in addition to polluting the minds of many who watched him dish out this garbage?

Al Qassem, whose program is already known as vile, loud, and messy, descended further into ignominious behavior.

As the host of this unbelievable conversation, Al Qassem prompted, watched and blessed a so-called Egyptian political commentator arguing that people having their heads severed from their bodies in the most savage of ways is okay in the name of resistance to American occupation, and more important, to teach the Americans a lesson.

How about what this teaches Arab children? What will they retain when they hear gratuitous invitations to kill, slash, hate,

demean and ostracize "the other", including innocent journalists, aid workers, and United Nations officials, both men and women who came to help Arabs of Iraq.

In Al Qassem's television show the opposing view guest, an Iraqi who argued hopelessly that such savagery is inhuman, was at a loss for words. Who would not be?

There is a point where freedom of expression in the media stops and advocating irresponsible bloody savagery begins. Clearly Al Jazeera and Feyssal Al Qassem have no idea where that point is. Sponsors, mainly the government of Qatar, should pull the plug on him, tell him he is fired, and then apologize to Arabs, Muslims and the whole civilized world for this smear.

Like it or not, Al Jazeera has a huge following of Arabic-speaking people. This is a public trust. If a satellite channel claims to speak in the name of Arabs, its bosses and sponsors must make sure it does not spit where it eats.

Al Jazeera has absolutely no right to allow ignorant, persons and reckless anchormen to further soil the reputation of all Muslims and Arabs by debating decapitation of human beings. There are no pros and cons here. And it is not the first time Al Jazeera has done that. For years it has given prime time to the rabid Egyptian so-called religious leader, Yusuf Al Qardawi who issued an edict allowing the killing of Americans in Iraq and wife beating. The other day Al Itihad, the Emirates Arabic daily, to its credit, denounced him as an 'ignorant man' misleading Muslims. Abdelrahman Al Rashed, the manager of the competing Arabic network Al Arabiya, also to his credit, also took him on saying he is polluting minds and shaming Muslims. It is now up to the Qatari government to stop these charades.

All this comes shortly after Al Azhar, the highest authority in Sunni Islam, condemned as a crime the kidnappings and beheadings of anyone being carried out in Iraq in the name of Islam.

What's worse is that in an electronic voting on the issue a huge majority of Al Jazeera's viewers encouraged decapitation while less than 10 per cent voted against.

The calamity that most of those who voted for it were Arabs and Muslims living in the West with free access to the internet, enjoying the full freedom of Western democracies.

What does this say? That Al Jazeera has successfully polluted the minds of millions who should think differently, or that Arabs seriously suffer from schizophrenia.

Is it a surprise that prominent psychiatrists say that 10 per cent of Arab children do not sleep for ten days after viewing such repulsive kidnap-and-behead-industry photos and images of people begging for their lives with masked men standing behind defaming the Holy Quran by holding it up high.

If adults are confused, what are children supposed to be? A friend, a medical professional, wrote me the other day an email in which she said, "We do not need nation building. We need nation-rebuilding. This is a big, big issue".

Indeed as long as people such as Al Qassem are not checked, we are in trouble.

"

SISON



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Viewing cable 05DOHA1039, DISCUSSION WITH QATARI OPPOSITION FIGURES

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1039	2005-06-09 14:44	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001039

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR NEA/ARPI THORNE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KDEM QA

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION WITH QATARI OPPOSITION FIGURES

¶1. (SBU) P/E Section hosted a small group of Qatari oppositionists for lunch on May 26. The guests conveyed the view that economic and political power are overwhelmingly in the hands of the state and that democratic ideas had not yet taken root in the overall population. There was some criticism of social conformism in Qatar. They argued that the rule of law had regressed, despite appearances otherwise. Guests were: Khalid Al-Khater, an engineer and former public works official forced into early retirement; his son Abdulaziz Al-Khater, educated in western schools and a banker in Doha; Najeeb Al-Naimi, former minister of justice and now a human rights lawyer; and Obaid Al-Merri, a businessman and member of the Al-Murra tribe, many of whose members have been stripped of their Qatari nationality.

¶2. (SBU) Qatar does not have a formal opposition. In fact, political parties are not legal and there are no organized or informal groups that criticize or oppose the government. Post's lunch guests are not part of any larger structure. These individuals were invited because they are willing to speak openly with embosfs about their views; most Qataris understand that criticizing the government brings the risk of losing benefits and preferences for themselves and their families, such as housing and education. Our guests requested that the lunch be held in a residence rather than a public restaurant in order to avoid the possibility of eavesdropping.

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¶3. (SBU) Discussion touched on various different issues current in Qatar such as democracy, the new constitution (which came into force on June 9), the upcoming election for the National Assembly, participation of women in the democratic process, the stock market frenzy, and government monopolies.

¶4. (SBU) There was consensus on many of the issues. The group shared a view of democratic reform in Qatar as artificial and not rooted in the people. Rather, they see it as serving the purpose of enhancing the government's image in the international community. They do not believe the government is serious about addressing the issue of human rights in the country. The former minister of justice pointed out that some newly-issued laws bestow rights on one hand and take them away with the other. There is no role at present for civil society or associations. Discussing the new law on private associations, the group complained that the ability to form such societies is restricted by numerous requirements and fees, and that societies' activities are restricted -- for example, they may not engage in political issues.

¶5. (SBU) The elder al-Khater mentioned that due to a weak private sector, the majority of Qatari citizens work for the government. This puts a burden on the government to create employment, instead of developing the private sector and generating new opportunities. The result is that many experienced and qualified employees are forced into early retirement in order to create vacancies for the next wave of graduates. This situation has caused a serious loss of expertise, according to al-Khater.

¶6. (SBU) Al-Khater also mentioned that the government imposes "indirect taxes" through regular price increases. He said most of the companies owned by the government regularly raise the prices of their products and services. This means that the residents are paying "taxes," but in a different manner. He cited Q-Tel as an example of this practice. He also criticized the Doha Securities Market (DSM), which is dominated by public-sector companies. Although these are publicly-traded entities, shareholders are not represented on the boards of directors. Rather, the government appoints the board members. In sum, al-Khater was concerned that the rights of shareholders are not protected.

¶7. (SBU) Najeeb al-Naimi criticized the new constitution and the fact that there can be no changes to it for ten years. He also disapproved of the provision giving the Amir autonomy regarding the disposition of the state's finances. He quoted an article in the constitution which allows the Amir to withdraw any sum of money from the treasury and use it for any purpose "without any questions asked." Al-Naimi said that he was public in his criticism of the constitution and had voted against it in the face of a government-sponsored "yes" campaign.

¶8. (SBU) Al-Naimi continued that laws in Qatar are not strictly enforced and usually include loose and uncertain phrases such as

"public interest" and a security exception. He said that the rule of law in Qatar has regressed in recent years, despite appearances to the contrary. In particular, he criticized Law No. 17 of 2002 which authorizes the Minister of Interior to detain someone up to six months or longer subject to the Prime Minister's approval, without trial if in the "public interest." Al-Naimi also criticized the current Advisory Council for not challenging government policy. He believes that the new Advisory Council (after elections take place sometime in 2006) will continue to reflect government policy since one-third of it will be appointed and likely will always support the government. Al Naimi believes Qatari society is still not ready to oppose the leadership.

¶9. (SBU) The group speculated whether women would be appointed to the Advisory Council next year. (Currently, there are no female members.) As one member of the group asked rhetorically, "Why have democracy for women when men don't have it?" Guests argued that society is not ready and remains sensitive about women in public positions. They believed this issue has to be handled gradually and carefully. All disapproved of appointing females in key posts since, in their opinion, it will result in delays, create impediments, and not necessarily benefit society.

¶10. (SBU) Elaboration over the nationality issue showed two opinions. Najeeb Al-Nuaimi believed that the stripping of nationality from some Al-Murra members was, in most cases, legal. This, he said, is because those tribe members are of Saudi origin who came to Qatar after 1972 and were still holding dual nationality, which is against the law in Qatar. He based his information on a meeting he had with several members of the tribe. The other guests, however, believed that the Al-Murra lived in Qatar before Qatar became a state and that the stripping them of nationality is illegal. Al-Khater added that the concept of the citizenship is neither well-defined nor protected in Qatar and in other Arab States, as Arab governments don't differentiate between citizenship and national origin. Guests cited examples and agreed that stripping nationality from dead people -- which has the effect of removing nationality from the deceased's descendants -- is taking the issue a step too far.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) We found that the individuals we met with shared a number of views, though on occasion they were reticent in front of their colleagues. Not represented at our lunch were dissidents with political-Islamic views, because such a mix would probably result in mutual suspicion. Both the liberal and the Islamic opposition critiques give perspective to the Qatari government's effective message of democratic reform and economic openness. Post will continue to develop reports in this area.



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Viewing cable 05DOHA1567, AL JAZEERA INTERNATIONAL: THE HASSAN AND JOSH SHOW

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1567	2005-09-13 10:50	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001567

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA INTERNATIONAL: THE HASSAN AND JOSH SHOW

Ref: Doha 1264

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Pol/Econ chief participated September 2 in the filming of an Al Jazeera International pilot program not intended for broadcast. The program, co-hosted by two personalities prominent in the 2004 documentary 'Control Room', still lacks polish. AJI operations are still in a somewhat chaotic embryonic stage, with much reliance on current Al Jazeera resources. End summary.

Background

¶2. (U) Al Jazeera International (AJI - see reftel) producer Caroline Anstey approached post in late August with a request for ambassadorial participation in the pilot of a talk show planned for the launch of AJI (reportedly scheduled for late 2005/early 2006). Entitled 'The Hassan and Josh Show', the pilot program is co-hosted by Josh Rushing and Hassan Ibrahim, two personalities who played prominent roles in the 2004 documentary 'Control Room' produced by Egyptian-American director Jehane Noujaim. The controversial documentary focused on the Al Jazeera TV channel's Doha-based coverage of events during the 2003 U.S. military action in Iraq.

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¶3. (U) U.S. citizen Josh Rushing was a CENTCOM-based U.S. Marine Corps lieutenant assigned to escort the documentary crew, and Hassan Ibrahim, a UK citizen of Sudanese origin who has been employed by Al Jazeera since its founding in 1996, was an editor at the Al Jazeera Doha studios. Rushing's unexpectedly extensive commentary in the documentary on events related to the U.S. military action in Iraq was reportedly not well viewed by his chain of command and he subsequently resigned from the Marine Corps. He and Hassan, who developed a friendship as a result of their interaction during the documentary, are now both employees of Al Jazeera International.

¶4. (SBU) The pilot program filmed with Embassy participation in Doha on September 2 is reportedly one of several pilots for the same show, including one filmed in Washington last summer with the participation of NEA/PD Alberto Fernandez. The pilots are not intended for broadcast. Their purpose, according to producers, is to 'try out' the format of the proposed new program. Producers intend to have Josh in Washington and Hassan in Doha, linked by satellite, with one guest per show. Producers hope that the two hosts, interacting with their guest from different cultural and philosophical perspectives, will create an unusual dynamic for the program.

¶5. (SBU) While post did not consider the 'guinea-pig' pilot program appropriate for the Ambassador, we did want to establish a link to the new channel and offered Pol/Econ Chief Rob Pyott as a substitute. The offer was eagerly accepted, and filming took place on September 2 at the Al Jazeera studios in Doha. Josh flew to Doha from Washington for the event.

The show: needs work

¶6. (SBU) Hassan and Josh are clearly still amateur anchors and will need considerable practice to present a more professional and engaging program. It was agreed that the program would deal with U.S. support for reform in the region, with focus on MEPI. Rob made commendable efforts to keep the dialogue on track and answered all questions appropriately. However, Hassan brought up issues such as Iraq, elections in Egypt and the Arab-Israeli conflict in a haphazard manner, preventing any kind of meaningful analysis or sustained exchange. He has both strong Arab nationalist feelings and a strong personality. This combination undermined the intended structure of the show and marginalized Josh's role.

¶7. (SBU) Although the resulting program lacked quality, the atmosphere before, during and after the filming was cordial. The AJI staff as yet have no facilities of their own (their

studios are under construction here in Doha) and are 'camping' at Al Jazeera Arabic's facilities. The two producers we worked with were UK citizen Caroline Anstey, a documentary maker who says she has made documentaries for the BBC and National Geographic among others; and Robb Wood, an American citizen based in Washington. Anstey has relocated to Doha with her husband, who is also employed by AJI. Both Anstey and Wood appeared to be young, ambitious professionals.

Beheadings and tapes: key issues

¶8. (SBU) At an 8/29 familiarization meeting with Emboffs prior to the filming, both Josh and Hassan talked about the criticism they habitually face, as employees of Al Jazeera International, from non-Arab interlocutors. They said such criticism usually focuses on two questions. One is whether Al Jazeera has ever shown beheadings. (Both men strongly denied that the channel has ever done such a thing, asserting it has always stopped tapes prior to the actual moment of execution). The other issue is Al Jazeera's mysterious access to Al Qaeda tapes. Hassan insisted that the tapes reach Al Jazeera through anonymous sources. Prior to September 11, 2001, the tapes were sent through the mail or via DHL, he said. Now he thinks they are sent via a zipped file which is downloaded in some unknown location (he speculated Morocco) and subsequently passed to Al Jazeera. He did not elaborate on the mechanism used in this last stage.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) The purpose of Embassy participation in the pilot was to show some initial openness to AJI and to get to know some of the personalities involved. Having achieved these objectives, we will continue to observe and report on AJI's birth.

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1593, 9/17 MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MANAGING DIRECTOR

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1593	2005-09-18 13:08	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 DOHA 001593

SIPDIS

INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY,
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2010

TAGS: KPAO PREL PTER QA ALJAZEERA

SUBJECT: 9/17 MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MANAGING DIRECTOR

REF: A. DOHA 1264

¶B. THORNE-EMBASSY DOHA EMAIL 9/8/05

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Scott McGehee for reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: PAO met 9/17 with Wadah Khanfar, Managing Director of Al Jazeera (AJ). The following topics were discussed:

Para 2: Khanfar's view of GWOT;

Para 3: A new entity: "The Al Jazeera Network"

Paras 4-7: Al Jazeera's relations with Arab governments (including Iraq's);

Paras 5: USG/AJ relations;

Paras 9-22: DIA's "unclassified snippets";

Para 23: AJ's Madrid correspondent, Taysir Alluni.

End summary.

Khanfar's view of GWOT

¶2. (SBU) A Palestinian with Jordanian citizenship, Khanfar has been employed by AJ for the last eight years, having joined it a year after its establishment and becoming managing director in October 2003. Khanfar gave his views on U.S. policy in the region and vis a vis Al Jazeera, noting that until 9/11 Al Jazeera was regarded by the USG and the

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western world as a great asset and symbol of progress in the region. Following 9/11, Khanfar said the the USG's distinction between a war on terror and a war on Islam has not filtered down to the grass roots in the Arab world. He said the terminology "War on Terror" is unfortunate because the phenomenon it is designed to describe does not match conventional conceptions of war - with a beginning, a definable period of action, and an end. Khanfar referred to recent comments by Deputy Secretary Zoellick in which the latter referred to the "Struggle Against Violent Extremism." This formulation better meets the reality of the situation and avoids the polarizing affect of a phrase like "The War on Terror," said Khanfar. A key post-9/11 USG mistake was to take a page from Osama bin Laden's book and divide the world into two camps - "either with us, or against us," he added. Al Jazeera falls in neither camp nor - as a member of the international Fourth Estate with analytical and critical responsibilities - should it, said Khanfar.

New: The Al Jazeera Network

¶3. (U) According to Khanfar, the Al Jazeera group has recently established the Al Jazeera Network (AJN), a legal entity that will oversee the growing number of Al Jazeera offshoots. AJN will retain the same executive leadership (chaired by Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer) as AJ and its role will be to ensure consistency of quality and message across the different offshoots, which now include Al Jazeera Arabic, Al Jazeera International (Ref A), Al Jazeera Children's Channel (septel reporting), Al Jazeera Sports and Al Jazeera Documentary, plus the AJ website, the Al Jazeera Media Training Center in Doha and the new Al Jazeera Center for Research and Studies. The latter, recently established in premises here in Doha, is a think-tank intended to analyze political, economic, social and other developments in the region from an "insider's viewpoint." There are few, if any, credible think-tanks in the region that play this role, said Khanfar. The Center has recently opened under the leadership of Mustafa Sawaq, an Algerian professor of English literature who until recently was a correspondent in Al Jazeera's London Bureau. Regarding Al Jazeera International, Khanfar said that AJ and AJI are currently in talks to determine the nature and extent of editorial collaboration between the two.

Al Jazeera's thorny relationships

¶4. (SBU) PAO asked Khanfar how he views AJ-USG relations. Khanfar prefaced his response by noting that tension characterizes AJ's relations with many governments, not just the USG. He listed Iraq, Iran, Algeria, Morocco, Sudan and Egypt as current examples. He described as an aside AJ's problems with Algeria, saying they began when an AJ interview with President Bouteflika was unexpectedly terminated because

of breaking news, offending Bouteflika, who then cut off relations with AJ. AJ is in negotiations with Algeria to re-establish its presence in Algiers, and Khanfar implied that Bouteflika has made a repeat interview with him a condition of moving forward. Concerning Tunisia, Khanfar said AJ is free to visit Tunisia to report as stories develop but wants to establish a permanent correspondent in Tunisia. So far the Tunisian government has said it would grant a license only to a specific individual proposed by the government, an offer that AJ cannot accept, said Khanfar. On the other hand, he said, AJ has recently re-established its presence in Kuwait and has opened up offices for the first time in Bahrain and UAE. The only Gulf country where AJ is not present now is Saudi Arabia.

Relations with the USG

¶5. (C) Concerning relations with the USG, Khanfar said they were transformed by 9/11 and the subsequent US military action in Iraq. Both sides have made mistakes, he said, noting that the past nine years have represented a learning process for Al Jazeera, one that remains ongoing. A turning point in USG/AJ relations was reached earlier this year when detailed, practical exchanges began to take place between the two sides. AJ remains open to such input and indeed welcomes it, said Khanfar. "We have been more able to respond since we have received input. It is now a practical discussion, a much more healthy relationship," he said. There is more optimism now at Al Jazeera concerning the future of USG/AJ relations, however, he said, one USG perception that holds things back is that AJ has espoused a specifically anti-American strategy, so that each negligent mistake or evidence of bias by an individual reporter or anchor is viewed through this optic as part of a larger editorial conspiracy. "Al Jazeera is not there to be anti-American," said Khanfar. "Absolutely not."

Al Jazeera and Iraq?

¶6. (C) PAO asked for an update on AJ's status in Iraq. Khanfar responded that the Iraqi government had responded to AJ's request to return to Baghdad by setting "unacceptable conditions", including requiring AJ to sign on to restrictive guidelines governing reporting on issues relating to ethnic and sectarian groups. He said that in his opinion both the Kurdish and Sunni representation in the Iraqi government would be fine with AJ returning to Baghdad, but that the key opposition comes from Shi'a representative Abdel Aziz Al Hakim, of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, who is in turn influenced by Tehran, said Khanfar.

¶7. (SBU) Ironically, as well as the ire of governments, AJ

sometimes simultaneously attracts the ire of extremists such as Al Qaeda's Al Zargawi, said Khanfar, recalling that a recent prominent AJ news headline was "Rumsfeld and Al Zargawi Attack Al Jazeera."

Daily quality assurance meeting

¶8. (C) Khanfar noted that he holds a daily 1pm meeting with an AJ quality assurance team entrusted with implementing AJ's code of ethics and conduct, which views and analyzes all Al Jazeera programming, looking for lapses in professionalism, balance and objectivity. "That meeting is very tight, tighter even than your list," said Khanfar. He noted that great progress has been achieved in many areas, particularly in discouraging reporters from inserting their own opinions into their field reports and in discouraging the use of value-laden language (e.g. "resistance" vs "military groups" or "occupation" vs "multinational force"). "Where there is a problem -- whether we learn about it from you, from our QA team, or from another source -- we fix it immediately," said Khanfar. Anchors and reporters are subject to a range of disciplinary actions for violating the AJ code of ethics and conduct, including being pulled from a particular program or beat, he said.

Reaction to DIA's "unclassified snippets" on AJ reporting in July

¶9. (C) PAO raised DIA's most recent unclassified snippets (Ref B) and asked for Khanfar's comments. Due to constraints of time, only some items were discussed. (Note: Per Ref B instructions, PAO did not leave a hard copy of the points with Khanfar, but told him that a hard copy had been left with the MFA. Khanfar complained that the MFA can take "two or three weeks" to send things over. Post recommends that NEA/ARPI seek permission to leave a hard copy of these points with Khanfar in future. He clearly takes them seriously and both sides would benefit from him having time and leisure to study and respond to them in a timely fashion. End note.) PAO began the discussion by saying that although a sustained reduction in negative news coverage has been noted overall in the last several months, the USG remains concerned about AJ's continued broadcasting of insurgent-provided videos and airing of provocative interviews.

Rationale for airing insurgent-provided tapes

¶10. (C) Khanfar said this is a thorny problem with which Al Jazeera continues to wrestle. As of now, the policy is as follows: Each insurgent-provided tape should meet specific standards before any portion of it is aired, he said. The aired portion must be newsworthy; the material should not

speak against specific people or organizations by name; and the aired portion must be placed in a critical analysis context by the program. For example, the most recent tape of Al Qaeda operative Al Zawahiri (dealing with the London attacks) was radically cut in broadcasting. "The tape was 28 minutes long and we aired two minutes," said Khanfar. Those two minutes contained practical information concerning the bombings, while the remainder was abstract commentary on Islam, the teachings of the Koran and reflections on Arab regimes. Also: "Airing these tapes is a way of demystifying the whole Al Qaeda mystique," said Khanfar. "The audience sees that these are issues you can criticize, and this does increase rationality in the audience."

July 27: Interview with Ali Belhadj of FIS

¶11. (U) DIA snippet: "On 27 July 2005, al-Jazeera interviewed Ali Belhadj, deputy chairman of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria about the recent murder of Algerian diplomats in Iraq by Abu-Mus'ab al-Zarqawi's group. Rather than condemning the terrorist action, Belhadj said that, 'there is no solution to the occupation except through jihad and resistance. There is a gateway for freedom which is based on bloodshed... I am praying to God Almighty to help them conquer the occupation and the enemies...' After the interview, Algerian authorities arrested Belhadj for inciting violence."

¶12. (C) Khanfar's response: AJ categorically opposes the kidnapping of civilians, whatever their nationality, and when AJ includes kidnappings in its news programming, attempts to do so in ways that will lead to a positive resolution for victims. In this case, said Khanfar, AJ was told by Belhadj that he wished to broadcast a plea to the kidnappers to release the Algerian diplomat. However, he did not live up to this agreement and instead stated his support for the kidnapping while on air. "When we realized he was not sending the message we agreed on, we cut him off," said Khanfar. "That was at 4pm, the program was live. We then worked quickly to invite people to discuss his statements, disagreeing with him, and that was broadcast at 9:30pm the same day."

¶13. (C) Policy on kidnapping videos: Khanfar noted that AJ used to broadcast kidnapping videos as they were received, including the voices of both kidnappers and victims, but has now developed a specific more limited policy concerning such tapes. No more than 10-second segments are now broadcast, with no sound used from the tape - only comments by the anchor. "Most networks do the same, including BBC and Fox and sometimes our standard is even higher than theirs," said Khanfar.

July 27: Interview with Abu-Muhammad al-Maqdisi

¶14. (U) DIA snippet: "On 5 July 2005, al-Jazeera interviewed Abu-Muhammad al-Maqdisi, recently released from prison in Jordan, who claimed that Abu-Mus'ab al-Zarqawi was not the 'murderer portrayed by news agencies' but a 'brother who is concerned about religion and ...devoted and kind to his brethren.' Al-Jazeera made no mention of al-Zarqawi's lethal attacks in Iraq."

¶15. (C) Khanfar's response: "We should have been rewarded for interviewing Al Maqdisi!" Khanfar said Al Maqdisi was the spiritual leader of Al Qaeda's Al Zarqawi. During the course of his imprisonment in Jordan, he revised many of his religious beliefs and reversed his position on key Al Qaeda points of doctrine. After being released, he gave a full-page interview to Al Hayat newspaper, detailing the ways in which his beliefs had changed, including the fact that he no longer believed that Islamic teachings support the killing of civilians, and this encouraged AJ to showcase him. Although he spoke in praise of Al Zarqawi in the July 27 AJ interview, the praise was a preface to cataloguing his disagreement with Al Zarqawi's modus operandi, said Khanfar. Following the interview, Al Zarqawi issued a tape criticizing Al Maqdisi and Al Jazeera, and saying the former had been brainwashed in prison. "The interview created havoc in Al Qaeda circles, it shed light on these Islamic issues and started an important theological debate!" said Khanfar.

July 13: Suicide car bomber attack kills 28 children

¶16. (U) DIA snippet: "On 13 July 2005 a suicide car bomber attack in Baghdad killed 28 children in a Shia neighborhood. Al-Jazeera reporter Walid Khalid accurately reported that the car 'exploded before reaching US forces.' However, al-Jazeera reported that the attack killed only four civilians without mentioning the deaths of the children. Al-Jazeera downplayed a terrorist attack that killed numerous Iraqi children."

¶17. (C) Khanfar's response: "I noticed that report and I interfered to fix it," said Khanfar. AJ was criticized for the omission in that report by at least two other Arab newspapers, he said. He said that AJ has a policy of double-sourcing anything out of Iraq (since they do not have a bureau there) but that initial reports of that attack were both unclear and contradictory. Once the confusion was sorted out, AJ did report on the deaths of the children, said Khanfar.

¶18. (C) On downplaying insurgent atrocities: Khanfar categorically denied that AJ has a policy of downplaying or under-reporting attacks on civilians, citing its prominent headline and reporting on the recent attack on a Shi'a mosque in Baghdad as just one example.

July 6: Interview with Muthanna al-Dari

¶19. (U) DIA snippet: "On 6 July 2005, al-Jazeera interviewed Dr. Muthanna al-Dari from the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), who claimed that 'occupation forces arrested people and tied them down to explosives and blew them up before turning them over to their families the next day as dismembered bodies. Nobody talks about these things.' Al-Jazeera regularly interviews al-Dari and allows his extremist views to go unchallenged."

¶20. (C) Khanfar response: "Al-Dari holds a prominent position and is a well-established personality in the mainstream. He is constantly interviewed in the Arabic press -- you can see him everywhere and not just on Al Jazeera." Secondly, Khanfar said, as soon as al-Dari made that remark on the live show, AJ made strenuous efforts to locate a U.S. spokesperson to provide an opposing viewpoint. "We tried four times," said Khanfar. No one at CENTCOM would go on the record to contradict Al Dari, he said. "This happens all the time. We are live, 24 hours, seven days a week, we cannot anticipate when someone will say something extreme like that. We have to be able to get comments fast. We get tired of dialing. They promise to get back to us and they don't."

July 23: "Behind the News" - on the London bombings

¶21. (U) DIA snippet: "On al-Jazeera's 'Behind the News' program broadcast on 23 July, all three guests blamed US and British imperialistic policies for the London bombings -- not the terrorists. One guest suggested that Usama bin Ladin had a legitimate reason to fight 'the Western onslaught.'"

¶22. (SBU) Khanfar's response: He could not recall the episode in question but promised to look into it. "I take this seriously because I am responsible for this program," he said. (Note: It appears that the program is a special project of his. End note.)

Taysir Alluni

¶23. (SBU) PAO asked about the status of Al Jazeera correspondent Taysir Alluni, who was re-arrested in Madrid on 9/16. Khanfar said that the re-arrest is normal judicial procedure in Spain, preceding the issuance of a verdict in Alluni's case, expected on 9/18. He said a team of Al Jazeera lawyers had traveled to Spain and were optimistic that the remaining charge against Alluni would be dropped and he would be released.

Comment:

¶24. (C) Khanfar came across as energetic, articulate and

thoughtful. He is clearly committed to bringing Al Jazeera up to professional international standards of journalism and (while emphasizing that USG criticism is just one source of input among many) seems to be not only open to criticism but to welcome it. He insisted on the need for a healthy tension between AJ and its critics -- the tension that he said should naturally exist between any news-gathering source and its objects of focus. He seems to be a practical individual, and clearly much prefers dealing with criticism that details dates and times and specific instances of lapses in professionalism, rather than broader abstractions. He appears very familiar with and closely involved in monitoring the daily content of Al Jazeera's programming. He encouraged PAO to meet with the head of the AJ quality assurance department and we will take him up on this offer in the days to come.

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1734, EMBASSY DEMARCHES ON OBJECTIONABLE AL JAZEERA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1734	2005-10-13 14:08	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001734

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2010
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY DEMARCHES ON OBJECTIONABLE AL JAZEERA
WEBSITE MATERIAL

REF: A. WHITTLESEY-DOHA EMAIL 10/13

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador and PAO met separately 10/13 with GOQ and Al Jazeera officials to express USG objections to material published recently on Al Jazeera's website (www.aljazeera.net) relating to the recent visit of U/S Karen Hughes to the region. Al Jazeera's website director acknowledged that some of the material was unacceptable as published and had been changed on his instructions. All the material has now been removed from the website. End summary.

¶2. (C) The material in question was a piece entitled "Improving America's Image: Where to?" It consisted of an introduction and four sections (including photos) entitled "Manifestations," "Causes," "American Tools," and "Karen Hughes." The stated purpose of this piece was to "review the reasons and manifestations of enmity to Washington that is spreading among Arab and Islamic peoples."

¶3. (C) Ambassador raised the objectionable website content during a 10/13 meeting with Abdulla Al-Jaber, Acting Director of the European and Americas Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ambassador stressed that this was the sort of irresponsible reporting that produced problems and

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tensions in relations between Qatar and the United States. The Ambassador also made reference to the most recent DIA analysis of Al-Jazeera broadcasts, noting that the incidence of objectionable content had increased after several months of relative improvement.

¶4. (C) PAO met separately 10/13 with Abdulaziz Al Mahmoud, chief editor of Al Jazeera website. Drawing on Ref A points PAO objected to the slide show's depiction of the 9/11 attacks as a "manifestation" of "enmity" in the Arab world toward US policies, emphasizing that those attacks were cowardly acts carried out by a handful of terrorists with no regard for human life. PAO also rejected the slide show's assertion that USG sanctions had caused "the starvation of thousands of Arabs and Muslims," noting that the US is the largest donor of emergency food supplies in the world. PAO also took issue with and contradicted the slide show's assertion of "US. control of the Arabs' wealth and oil" and noted that the section entitled "Tools" (referring to the public diplomacy tools that the US has used in the Arab world) gave a narrow, distorted view of such US actions, including omission of any mention of the US role in liberating Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Afghanistan or Iraq, or the large scale of USG assistance in Darfur and South Asia, and the fact that the US is the largest donor to the Palestinian people. PAO noted that the slide show appeared to have been removed from the website and requested confirmation of the fact. PAO also encouraged Al Mahmoud to draw on the many information resources available to him and his staff via the Public Affairs Section, and left him a folder with fact sheets and links relating to USG assistance in the region, including USG emergency aid and details of USG exchange programs.

¶5. (C) Al Mahmoud had clearly been expecting PAO to raise the website material and was ready with his response. He said the slide show had not been removed, but had migrated (as is normal with front page material) into the archives (Note: It has now apparently been completely removed. End note). He concurred with the points PAO raised and noted that the website material had been brought to his attention by the managing editor. He had reviewed the slide show and requested changes be made. Most notably, he said, he had ordered that the picture of the starving African child be removed and that the mention of "US. control of Arab wealth and oil" be amended. "A mistake was made, and it has been fixed," he said. He urged PAO to look again at the slide show to verify if the changes made the slide show less objectionable.

¶6. (C) PAO subsequently attempted to retrieve the archived slide show from the website without success and, a couple of hours after the meeting, Al Mahmoud called to say that the slide show had in fact been completely removed from the website on orders from Al Jazeera's managing director, Wadah Khanfar. (Note: Post surmises that Wadah had in turn been

influenced by the Ambassador's MFA meeting earlier in the day. End Note).

The Website Director

¶7. (C) Abdelaziz Al Mahmoud is U.S.-educated, having graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from New York State's Clarkson University. He also served in the Royal Air Force and participated in numerous training sessions both in the US and the UK. He gave several humorous descriptions of life at Al Jazeera, including a lively imitation of the weekly editorial committee meeting (headed by Wadah Khanfar) he attends and the role of "wasda" (influence/nepotism) in Al Jazeera/Qatari/Gulf affairs.

¶8. (C) Al Mahmoud said that until April he had been responsible for both the English and the Arabic websites, but that now the English website was the responsibility of Al Jazeera International. "There is no relationship whatsoever between the English and the Arabic website," he said. He expressed his disapproval of this state of affairs, saying that with the new AJI TV channel, Al Jazeera had become a four-headed entity, and the result was "chaos" he said, disapprovingly. He told PAO that the AJ website follows the AJ TV channel in terms of its lead story and in terms of the general issues of focus. The website has a slower pace than the TV station, however, and is more oriented to in-depth analysis. He said his staff is currently working on a "huge" analysis of the Iraqi constitution and related issues. The website is continuously updated, and publishes a 100 news items a day, which makes it one of the largest news websites in the world, said Al Mahmoud.

¶9. (C) Comment: Al Mahmoud is clearly very wary of attracting negative attention from his chain of command, and is aware that an irritated USG means trouble for him. He urged PAO to call him directly any time the Embassy observes troubling material on the website. End comment.

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1765, PAO MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MANAGING DIRECTOR

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1765	2005-10-20 13:25	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001765

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2010

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: PAO MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MANAGING DIRECTOR

REF: A. THORNE-EMBASSY DOHA 10/18 EMAIL

¶B. THORNE-NANTONGO 10/18 EMAIL EXCHANGE

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PAO met 10/19 with Al Jazeera Managing Director Wadah Khanfar to discuss the latest DIA report on Al Jazeera and disturbing Al Jazeera website content. Khanfar is preparing a written response to the DIA points from July, August and September which should be available during the coming week. Khanfar said the most recent website piece of concern to the USG has been toned down and that he would have it removed over the subsequent two or three days. End summary.

¶2. (C) Per Ref A, PAO gave Khanfar a hard copy of DIA's unclassified snippets from July, August and September.

SIPDIS

Khanfar said he had recently received hard copies of the July and August snippets via the MFA and was in the process of preparing a written response to them. He said he would include September's points in the report and pass it to PAO during the course of the coming week. "We need to fix the method of how we receive these reports," said Khanfar, noting that he had found one of them (presumably sent from the MFA) "on the fax machine."

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DIA's unclassified snippets for September

¶3. (C) PAO told Khanfar that despite an overall decrease in negative coverage since February, the month of September showed a worrying increase in such programming over the previous month. She summarized the latest USG reporting on Al Jazeera by noting that problems still remain with double-sourcing in Iraq; identifying sources; use of inflammatory language; a failure to balance of extremist views; and the use of terrorist tapes.

¶4. (C) Having had an opportunity to review the July and August reports, Khanfar said he had several observations to make. On a semantic level, he objected to the use of the word "agreement" as used in the August report on the first page, under the heading "Violence in Iraq", where a sentence reads: "In violation of the station's agreement several months ago with US officials etc". "The agreement was that it was a non-paper," said Khanfar. "As a news organization, we cannot sign agreements of this nature, and to have it here like this in writing is of concern to us."

¶5. (C) He then said that broadly, the reports' points fell into three categories. "Some are simple mistakes which we accept and address," he said. In the second category, he said, are points that are taken in isolation and out of context by the USG report. "This report takes bits and pieces from a whole thing and does not give the context," he said, noting that in some instances during the AJ broadcasting day, a comment made or position taken by one person may be balanced with a different comment or position later in the same show or later on during the same day. Since Al Jazeera is live 24 hours a day, seven days a week, it is not always possible to provide needed balance at the moment itself, he said. The report, he said, fails to note where balance was achieved in the following news hour, for example, or later on the same day. Thirdly, said Khanfar, there are points on which resolution does not seem possible, such as the use of terrorist tapes. "We have always said that we are going to use these tapes and we will continue to use them. The question is how. None of the tapes are used just like that," he said, meaning that they are reviewed for newsworthiness and are edited. Concerning the use of inflammatory language, Khanfar said the station's concern is with the language used by its own reporters and anchors. No station staff member is permitted to use loaded vocabulary. The reports' focus on inflammatory language is on that used by non-Al Jazeera interviewees, he pointed out. "How can I control what these people say? I can only control Al Jazeera staff. All we can do is try to balance what these people say in other parts of the program," he said.

¶6. (C) Commenting on the reports overall, he said they lacked

balance in that they only focus on the negative. "A report like this should have both sides," he said. "It does not report the voice we have given to American spokespeople over the recent past," he said. "We do not always find a military spokesman, for example, but we are trying our best, and we have some success. This is not mentioned." Speaking of Al Jazeera's coverage of the Iraqi referendum, he said the station provided 12 hours of continuous coverage, which featured voices from all those vested in the process -- Kurds, Shia, Sunni, Americans, Britons and others. "I would really like to see that in next month's report," he said. Khanfar repeated that he would respond in more detail to all three reports over the coming days and pass the response to PAO.

Troublesome website material

¶7. (C) PAO raised the question of an Al Jazeera website piece published in the last week, listed under the heading "Special Coverage", and containing "Live Testimony Concerning Tal Afar". The site opens to an image of bloody sheets of paper riddled with bullet holes. Viewers click on the bullet holes to access testimony from ten alleged "eye witnesses" who described recent military operations in Tal Afar.

¶8. (C) Khanfar said that, in accordance with an earlier promise to PAO (Ref B), he had taken a look at the piece and had two images removed (two injured children in hospital beds, and a woman with serious facial injury). PAO pointed out that the testimony of a "doctor" in the piece also implied that poison gas had been used on residents of Tal Afar and that the appearance of the piece, in particular the bloody bullet hole icons, came across as inflammatory and journalistically questionable. Khanfar appeared to repress a sigh but said he would have the piece removed. "Not immediately, because that would be talked about, but over two or three days," he said.

¶9. (C) He said he had told the website staff that in future, when they want to add an item to the "Special Coverage" section of the website, they should send a draft of the idea over to his office. (Note: The AJ website is located in a separate building across town. End note.) He noted that until two or three months ago, the website staff had enjoyed much more autonomy. Now, however, website director Abdel Aziz Al Mahmoud attends the weekly editorial meetings at the TV channel offices, and the website staff is being pulled under the umbrella of the same editorial standards as the TV channel. "I don't say that such things are not going to be repeated on the website, but it is a learning process," said Khanfar.

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1786, MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA QUALITY ASSURANCE CHIEF

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1786	2005-10-26 13:14	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001786

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2010

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA QUALITY ASSURANCE CHIEF

REF: DOHA 1593

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PAO met 10/26 with Jaafar Abbas Ahmed, the head of Al Jazeera's Quality Assurance unit. Abbas spoke frankly of the difficulties the unit faces in encouraging the professionalization of Al Jazeera, including resistance and hostility from AJ's older generation of journalists. He said progress has been made, however, and described AJ Managing Director Wadah Khanfar as "a source of strength." End summary.

¶2. (C) Jaafar Abbas Ahmed, the head of Al Jazeera's Quality Assurance (QA) unit, is a Sudanese national with long experience as a journalist, including work as a BBC reporter. He told PAO he was blacklisted by Sudan for 15 years as a result of a report on Sudan for the BBC. He began working part-time with Al Jazeera at its inception in 1996 and set up the channel's QA unit in August 2004. He now works full time as the head of the QA unit, which is located in a villa in Doha's West Bay area, across town from the AJ TV studios. Abbas said the separation is intended to underline and safeguard the unit's independence. Abbas also writes newspaper columns for publications in Saudi Arabia, London, Sudan and Qatar. He said his column was recently banned in Sudan for six months but was reinstated a couple of weeks ago.

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¶3. (C) According to Abbas, the effort to professionalize Al Jazeera is an uphill one and that although progress has been made, "we still have a long way to go." The seven-member QA staff monitor the AJ TV channel 24 hours a day, with focus on news broadcasts and talk shows. Overview of the AJ website is also in their purview but is not carried out systematically due to limited staff resources. ("Sometimes we do a random inspection of the website, and we find all the rules have been completely ignored," he observed ruefully.)

¶5. (C) Abbas said the first step undertaken by the QA unit after its founding in late 2004 was the promulgation of the Al Jazeera codes of conduct and ethics. Workshops were held for the Al Jazeera staff to introduce and explain the new codes; since then, the QA unit has been monitoring the channel's performance in light of these codes. Abbas attends the weekly editorial meetings and gives his input to senior editors and producers "bluntly, to their faces," he said. The QA unit also issues daily reports by email on the day's programming, and when a big event happens, the QA unit will record BBC and CNN coverage of the same event and compare it critically to AJ's coverage.

¶6. (C) He noted that his unit met with significant resistance initially and were known informally among AJ staff as the KGB, the CIA, the FBI or ("the best one", said Abbas, laughing) the Expediency Discernment Council of the System (Note: The Iranian government watchdog committee headed by former Iranian president Hashemi Rafsanjani. End note.) "Things have improved now," he said. "People are becoming wary of our criticism. We have producers, senior producers, coming over here to discuss our reports with us. We are like a tumor -- a benign one -- that people are learning to live with," he said, grinning. However, hostility still remains, he said, and there are some AJ journalists who even now will not return a casual greeting in the corridors.

¶7. (C) The chief obstacle in professionalizing the channel is that "old habits die hard," said Abbas. He estimated that the AJ staff under his purview (all those who bear the title "journalist", which include correspondents, reporters, stringers, editors and producers) number not more than 200. While AJ started out with a significant number of ex-BBC reporters, this cadre has shrunk over the years, attracted to other channels such as Al Arabiyya, Abbas said. He added that only a handful remains. A majority of the remaining journalism staff are therefore ex-state TV reporters. They may be brilliant, but the journalistic culture they have absorbed is different from the one AJ is trying to cultivate, Abbas explained. There is, for example, a cultural tendency towards verbosity among Arabs, among whom rhetoric is a cherished and respected art. This tendency clashes with standard journalistic practice, which encourages reporters to avoid adjectives: If a particular event is "horrific", don't say so but let pictures and statistics show that to your

audience, he said.

¶8. (C) Abbas said that in his view there has been a definite improvement in Al Jazeera's overall performance since the QA's inception fourteen months ago. He said the newer, younger reporters with less experience respond very well to the AJ environment. The problem is with the older, more experienced journalists. The QA unit has had more of an impact on AJ's news broadcasts than it has had on the AJ talk shows, which are the domain of AJ's more experienced journalists. "Each of them thinks they are Oprah Winfrey. They think they don't need guidance," he said, rolling his eyes.

¶9. (C) "We at Al Jazeera need to develop our own style," he said, pointing at a thick printout of the BBC's new style guide lying on his desk. "There is an overlap between code of conduct and style." For example, scenes of violence. How should AJ air them? Close up? Or only using long shots? "What seems gross in the US might not seem gross to an Arab viewer," he said. "And we are an Arab channel, we focus on what is of interest to the Arab viewer. The Arab viewer wants to see on screen proof of Israeli brutality, so it is OK to show a dead Palestinian child, for example," he said. "If you don't show these things, then they think you are participating in the cover-up."

¶10. (C) Abbas also talked about the controversy over the use of the word "martyr" and the verbs associated with it. Current AJ guidance says the word may only be used in association with events in Palestine and nowhere else, he said. He described how AJ sent an admonitory fax two days ago to the AJ bureau chief in Beirut who interspersed his report on the release of the Mehlis report with mentions of the "martyr" Rafik Al Hariri. Many in Al Jazeera think it is a mistake to allow the use of the word at all, even in connection with Palestinians, but that is an emotionally charged topic in the Arab world and one it is too late to walk back, said Abbas.

¶11. (C) He said the QA unit is developing a computer system that will allow them to access with one click the record of every AJ journalist: How many times he has made biased remarks; what are his repeated mistakes; how many times he breached the code of conduct or ethics; and so on. "Then we will have a say in the performance appraisal of the employees, which affects allowances, annual increases, even promotions," Abbas said.

¶12. (C) The difficulties faced by the QA unit are many, but it has come to rely on AJ Managing Director Wadah Khanfar as "a source of strength," said Abbas. "He is behind us all the way."

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1803, MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MEDIA TRAINING CENTER

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1803	2005-11-02 10:41	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 001803

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE
TUNIS AND ABU DHABI FOR MEPI OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KMPI](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA MEDIA TRAINING CENTER
DIRECTOR

REF: DOHA 1786 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: PAO met 10/31 with Mahmoud Abdel Hadi, Director of the Al Jazeera Media Training and Development Center located in Doha, now in its second year of operation. Abdel Hadi said the focus of the Center is regional and that 1,500 Arab journalists have participated in the Center's programs this year, with training provided by British and French journalism institutions. The Center has a developing relationship with the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. Abdel Hadi attended MEPI's October 2004 Media Strategies workshop in Abu Dhabi and said the Center is open to cooperation with MEPI. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Abdel Hadi reports directly to Al Jazeera Managing Director Wadah Khanfar. A journalist of Palestinian origin, Abdel Hadi came to Doha in 1998 to work for Islam Online. (Note: A popular Islamic affairs website with wide international readership headquartered in Doha, its titular head is Muslim cleric Yusuf Al Qaradawi. End note). He then moved to Al Jazeera where he was instrumental in setting up the Al Jazeera website. In 2003, he began setting up the AJ

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Training Center, which he has directed since its inception in early 2004.

¶3. (SBU) Abdel Hadi told PAO the AJ Training and Development Center ("the Center") was formally established in February 2004 and is now approaching the end of its second year. With 20 permanent administrative staff, the Center occupies a leased villa in Doha's Al Sadd neighborhood, pending construction of a permanent site closer to the AJ studios in the Markhiya area of Doha. The Center is well-equipped with state of the art media technology. The Center's mission is regional in scope and it conducts training and consultation activities both in Doha and in other Arab countries. The Center has no training staff of its own but imports trainers on an as-needed basis from various British/French/US journalism institutions. The Center currently has memoranda of understanding with the UK's Thomson Foundation and France's "Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme de Lille," said Abdel Hadi. He said the Center also has a relationship with the University of Missouri's School of Journalism (MU Professor Emeritus Roger Gafke is scheduled to teach a train-the-trainers course at the Center in Doha on November 20) and has recently proposed a memorandum of understanding with Missouri. The Center is also exploring possibility of signing an MOU with Japan's NHK news service. In addition, the Center conducts courses in cooperation with international organizations, such as a recent course in documentary production offered in cooperation with the International Center for Journalism (ICFJ). The Center's language of instruction is English, with interpretation provided as needed for participants.

¶4. (SBU) According to its promotional brochure, the Center's overall mission is "to contribute to the development of Arab and international media." The Center provides training and consultation in television, radio, print media, e-journalism, media marketing, media planning and media management. Training and consultation take place in Doha but the Center also designs and implements programs in the field. It has conducted extensive training and consultation for Sudan Television, as well as programs in the UAE and Oman. Abdel Hadi says he has visited both Yemen and Djibouti to design programs for their state media operations, although both projects have run into funding problems. The Center is non-profit and structures its fee schedule with the aim of breaking even, so it cannot provide free training, said Abdel Hadi. Training participants are almost exclusively Arab journalists, although the Center once ran a course for journalists from Kyrgyzstan, sponsored and paid for by the Qatar National Charity Association, he said.

¶5. (U) Abdel Hadi provided the following statistics for the Center: 1,100 participants last year; 1,500 participants this year (in Doha and in the field); 67 courses conducted last year; 105 courses conducted this year; 5 courses conducted

outside Qatar last year; 12 courses outside Qatar this year. The majority of the participants in the first year were Al Jazeera staff, but now most are non-Al Jazeera journalists.

MEPI Cooperation?

¶6. (SBU) Under "Activities of the Center in its first year" AJTDC's promotional brochure prominently mentions the fact that the Center "participated in the workshop organised by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) on media strategies in the Middle East and North Africa." Abdel Hadi said he much appreciated the strategic approach taken by the 2004 MEPI workshop. He said strategic thinking on media management and reform is much needed in the region, where very often donor countries make disparate and uncoordinated contributions to a problem that really needs a comprehensive strategy. "You end up with lots of workshops here and there, but no results. To be successful with media reform, you have to think strategically," he said. He said the Center is currently cooperating with UNESCO to produce a model media law, for example. Once the model law is completed, the Center would begin to think about strategies for introducing it into Arab countries around the region. There would be opportunities for cooperation with programs such as MEPI here, he said. Other opportunities for cooperation with MEPI might include assisting the implementation of programs for poorer countries in the region, such as the one designed by the Center for Djibouti, which is currently stalled for lack of resources, he added.

Problems of the Arab media

¶7. (SBU) Despite minor differences from country to country, the state of the Arab media is pretty much the same throughout the region, said Abdel Hadi. To a great extent, the Arab media is still stuck in the old mindframe which operated on the assumption that the national audience could be controlled through the state media. This is no longer the case, he said. The national audience has become internationalized, but media managers in Arab countries are failing to acknowledge and to deal with this change. They do not understand the mission or the responsibility of the media and continue to produce programming under the old paradigm, which views state media as a propaganda apparatus for the government and not a medium for monitoring government performance. "The irony is, they are not meeting the goals of their government by doing this," he said. Current media managers do not undertake studies to analyze their effectiveness in reaching their audience and never ask "Should we offer a new proposal to the state?" he said. If, for example, you find that you are spending 10 million dollars to reach five percent of the national audience, and those five percent are merely watching the main news

bulletin, "you have to recalculate. You should even consider 'to be or not to be' -- should we continue to exist?" But this does not happen in the Arab world, he said. Media managers simply want to keep their jobs and don't want to make changes that could jeopardize their jobs and the status quo.

¶8. (SBU) Abdel Hadi noted that there is a definite generational gap among Arab journalists. In many cases, it's too late for the older generation, he said. Changing mindsets requires a sweeping removal of old ideas, and this is not easy to accomplish. "It can be very discouraging to work with older journalists, but what a joy to work with the younger ones!" Abdel Hadi said. About 40 percent of the participants who go through the Center are in their 30s or younger, and these are the future of Arab journalism, he observed. Some of them are discouraged when they return to their home countries and are stopped from implementing what they have learned by the older generation of managers, so the Center tries to run a parallel track, reaching out to both journalists and to their managers, to inculcate universally accepted standards of journalism, said Abdel Hadi.

Pilgrimage visas for Al Jazeera staff

¶9. (SBU) Abdel Hadi noted in passing that it is next to impossible for Al Jazeera staff to obtain Saudi visas to perform Umra (the minor pilgrimage to Mecca) as private citizens and that they also face significant difficulties in getting regular Hajj pilgrimage visas from the Saudis.

Al Jazeera Radio - 107.7 FM

¶10. (U) Abdel Hadi mentioned that live sound track for Al Jazeera TV is available via FM radio in Doha on 107.7 FM, which has proved to be the case, although signal quality is somewhat choppy.

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1937, GOQ REQUESTS OFFICIAL EXPLANATION OF AL-JAZEERA

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05DOHA1937	2005-12-06 13:58	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 001937

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD AND NEA/ARPI, NSC FOR ABRAMS AND DOD/OSD
FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2010

TAGS: PREL KPAO QA ALJAZEERA

SUBJECT: GOQ REQUESTS OFFICIAL EXPLANATION OF AL-JAZEERA
ISSUE

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, Reasons 1.4 (B AND D)

¶1. (C) Text of diplomatic note received by Ambassador
Untermeyer on 4 December 2005:

Begin Text:

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar presents its compliments to the State Department of the United States of America and has the honor to refer to the news reported on 22 November 2005 by the British newspaper "The Daily Mirror", that a Top Secret memo from the Office of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair which the paper was able to obtain, stated that during his meeting with the Prime Minister Mr. Blair in the White House on 16 April 2004, President Bush was clear on his determination to bomb the headquarters of Al-Jazeera Channel situated in Doha, and that the British Prime Minister opposed that inclination as it would have created a big problem. Also, Al-Hayat Newspaper reported on 23 November 2005 the substance of what the paper called "an American official", that "America does not need to bomb Al-Jazeera Headquarters...if we wanted to put it out of action, we could have sent two soldiers to prevent the staff from entering it!

The Government of the State of Qatar received these news with

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great concern and astonishment, since it specially pursues its relations with the United States from the reality of deep friendship and alliance. Accordingly, the Government of the State of Qatar requests an official explanation of the subject as soon as possible because it touches upon the hard core of Qatari American relations which the State of Qatar is keen to proceed with its development for the interests of the two countries.

While the Ministry awaits the speedy response of the State Department of the United States of America, seizes once again this opportunity to express its highest considerations.

End Text.

¶2. (C) Embassy understands that this diplomatic note was also delivered by Ambassador Al-Khalifa to A/S Welch.

¶3. (C) Ambassador's view is that this matter warrants a more fulsome USG public response than has been offered to date. Such a statement could underscore the absurdity of the bombing statement attributed to the President by describing the many strong and positive aspects of U.S.-Qatari relations.

¶4. (C) Ambassador recommends that our official response to the GOQ include the following elements: 1) no attack on Al-Jazeera has ever been planned; 2) it is inconceivable that any military action would be taken against a friendly nation that hosts American military and civilian personnel; and 3) The GOQ is aware that U.S. Government's approach to Al-Jazeera is to encourage greater professionalism and balance in its broadcasts.

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Viewing cable 05DOHA1976, DAS GRAY'S DECEMBER 1 MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA

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05DOHA1976	2005-12-14 08:15	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001976

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2010

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: DAS GRAY'S DECEMBER 1 MEETING WITH AL JAZEERA
MANAGING DIRECTOR

REF: DOHA 1593

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: DAS Gray met with Al Jazeera Managing Director Wadah Khanfar December 1 in Doha. Topics discussed included the Daily Mirror story alleging President Bush considered bombing Al Jazeera offices in Doha; USG concerns about Al Jazeera's professionalism, and possible cooperation in the field of journalist exchanges with the USG. Khanfar also made a plea for senior USG appearances on Al Jazeera and for USG support in re-opening Al Jazeera's Baghdad bureau. End summary.

The Daily Mirror Story

¶2. (C) DAS Gray met with Khanfar December 1 at the Al Jazeera offices in Doha. Also attending the meeting were Al Jazeera Deputy Chief Editor Ayman Gaballah, NEA/ARPI Desk Officer Shawn Thorne and PAO Mirembe Nantongo. The meeting took place upon Khanfar's return from a trip to London, where he had sought without success an appointment with Prime Minister Blair concerning the leaked classified memo allegedly containing indications that President Bush considered bombing Al Jazeera's Doha headquarters in April 2004. Khanfar raised the issue at the start of the meeting, telling DAS Gray humorously that Al Jazeera had not been sure that the meeting

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with DAS Gray should be held at AJ offices "for your own safety." DAS Gray responded by noting that the White House dismissed the story, as had Prime Minister Blair. Such allegations cannot be taken seriously, he said. The USG has its differences with Al Jazeera, stemming from the latter's lack of professionalism, but Administration officials do appear on Al Jazeera - which also has a long-established bureau in Washington - and the US is a strong supporter of freedom of the press.

¶3. (C) "We want to know the truth, we need either denial or confirmation," said Khanfar. He said the story has generated "panic, speculation and suspicion" among Al Jazeera staffers and has created an uncomfortable environment. The effect has also been material, said Khanfar, claiming that landlords of Al Jazeera bureaus overseas are now looking askance at their tenants, and that insurance companies have been reconsidering their premiums. "I myself have suspended judgment until I know for sure that the discussion took place," said Khanfar. (Note: The story, and speculation concerning its veracity or lack thereof, continues to play in the local press, most recently as a result of a December 10 seminar co-hosted in Doha by Al Jazeera and the Qatar Red Crescent Society on the role of journalists in enhancing respect for human rights. Khanfar was a speaker at the conference and repeated his call for "the truth about the memo." The seminar received wide local coverage. End note.) Khanfar then referred to incidents in the past when coalition forces accidentally struck Al Jazeera offices in Baghdad and Kabul. "There was no proper investigation, no apology, no-one said anything," he complained, adding that whenever any other news service in Iraq or Afghanistan suffered damage or injury to its premises or staff they received some sort of message of acknowledgement/condolence from coalition authorities.

Concern over Al Jazeera's journalistic practices

4.(C) DAS Gray then moved on to reiterate the list of USG concerns over Al Jazeera's lack of professionalism. Khanfar responded at length that Al Jazeera is not "anti-US" and does not espouse any kind of "anti-US editorial policy", upon which DAS Gray pointed out that USG concerns center on Al Jazeera's journalistic practices and not on whether the station is anti- or pro-US. "We are not asking Al Jazeera to become a tool of the US Government; what we are asking for is its professionalism," said Gray. Khanfar went on to note that, contrary to popular belief, Al Jazeera has never broadcast tapes showing beheadings. He said he also believed that Arab intelligence services are working against Al Jazeera in an attempt to discredit it for their own purposes, without specifying in what way he believed these services operate against Al Jazeera.

Al Jazeera-USG Cooperation?

¶5. (C) DAS Gray then asked Khanfar for his thoughts on possible USG/Al Jazeera cooperation, specifically in the area of boosting Al Jazeera's professionalism. DAS Gray described the International Visitor program implemented by the USG all over the world and asked if Khanfar felt AJ journalists might benefit from such a program. Khanfar acquiesced immediately. He said many AJ journalists have "a very generalized picture of America." A visit to the United States would certainly help them appreciate "the complexity" of American society, particularly with regard to decision-making apparatus of the U.S. Government and would correct "the perceptual filter" currently in place, he said. (Note: In a December 7 discussion with PAO on the same theme, AJ Chief Editor Ahmed Sheikh, who himself participated in an IV program in 1984, also welcomed the idea, noting that a stint in a US television newsroom would be very beneficial to AJ journalists and producers. End note.) Khanfar also noted that a group of U.S. journalists would be welcome to spend a week or so in the Al Jazeera newsroom.

What AJ wants from the USG

¶6. (C) Khanfar also reiterated two familiar themes, asking for more senior USG officials to appear on Al Jazeera and for support for the re-opening of AJ's Baghdad bureau. "We are not hoping for Donald Rumsfeld, but it has been a long time since Secretary Rice was on Al Jazeera," he said. He noted President Bush's recent appearance on Al Arabiyya, which Al Jazeera viewed as sending a pointed message to Al Jazeera: "the message to Al Jazeera of exclusion was clear." Khanfar also asked for USG support in re-opening the Al Jazeera bureau in Baghdad. The Iraq dossier has two key elements, he said, the security aspect and the political aspect. Al Jazeera is able to cover the security aspect using non-Al Jazeera journalists on the ground and footage from wire services, but it is next to impossible to cover the political aspect effectively from a distance. "During the last year, security has become an overwhelming part of things. But coverage of the political side is needed," Khanfar said. He added that Al Jazeera recently received a visit from senior Iraqi Shi'a representative Abdel Aziz Al Hakim, of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, who in the past vehemently refused to consider the possibility of re-opening the Al Jazeera Baghdad bureau (reftel). Al Hakim was more conciliatory during his recent visit, said Khanfar, and broached the possibility of cooperation with Al Jazeera. Khanfar said he made no promises, given that Al Jazeera cannot have special arrangements with any political elements and is waiting to see what transpires.

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06DOHA104	2006-01-23 08:24	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000104

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STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE
BAGHDAD FOR HOSTAGE WORKING GROUP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2010

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)

SUBJECT: ENTERING ITS TENTH YEAR, AL JAZEERA COVETS GLOBAL
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REF: A. 05 STATE 217718

¶B. 05 DOHA 1765

¶C. 05 DOHA 1803

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PAO met 1/18 with Wadah Khanfar, Al Jazeera Managing Director, to discuss Ref A demarche and continuing USG concerns with Al Jazeera programming. Khanfar described a series of initiatives planned by Al Jazeera to mark its tenth anniversary year with a view to positioning itself on the global journalistic stage. Khanfar complied 1/19 with PAO's request to provide the Baghdad Hostage Group with a copy of the videotape showing American citizen kidnap victim hostage Jill Carroll with her captors. End summary.

Continuing USG concerns with AJ programming

¶2. (C) PAO met 1/18 with Wadah Khanfar, Al Jazeera Managing Director, to deliver the most recent DIA unclassified snippets and discuss Ref A demarche. Khanfar said he had not yet received Ref A talking points (delivered 12/15 to ForMin Hamid bin Jassim by the Ambassador) from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. PAO summarized continuing USG concerns with

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the professionalism of Al Jazeera's news and talk show coverage, including the airing of terrorist-provided videotapes; the channel's failure to present a diverse range of opinions or to balance extremist views, in particular where coverage of events in Iraq is concerned; inaccurate reports on coalition military operations in Iraq; failure to adequately double-source on Iraqi reporting; failure to clearly identify sources; failure to run retractions; and continued use of inflammatory language. Khanfar promised a more detailed response to Ref A demarche and the latest unclassified snippets after he had had a chance to review

SIPDIS

them. Meanwhile, he said, he continues to be concerned about the USG's relatively recent insistence that Al Jazeera stop airing insurgent-provided videotapes altogether. He reiterated his previous insistence (Ref B) that Al Jazeera had agreed only to air judiciously-edited portions of such tapes and that he had never agreed to keep them off the air.

Al Jazeera Turns Ten

¶3. (C) "This year is our tenth anniversary. We are planning many activities to globalize Al Jazeera's style and go international," said Khanfar. Among the initiatives planned are the following, he said.

The International Board of Visitors

¶4. (C) Khanfar said Al Jazeera has now established an international advisory body consisting of respected international journalism figures to assess and advise on Al Jazeera operations. (Note: The suggestion originated with former Ambassador Rick Burt of the Washington lobby firm of Barbour Griffith Rogers. End note.) The new body, to be known as the Al Jazeera International Board of Visitors, is due to arrive in Doha on February 3, having reviewed Al Jazeera-related material prior to their arrival. The group, which Khanfar said AJ envisions as playing an institutionalized international "quality assurance" role, will spend two days in consultation with the channel's staff in Doha and make its recommendations. The group will hold regular meetings on a three-monthly basis thereafter. According to a list provided by Al Jazeera's head of International and Media Relations (Canadian citizen Satnam Matharu), ten of the Board's proposed 15 members are:

¶1. Frank Sesno, former CNN Washington Bureau Chief, now professor of public policy and communication at George Mason University.

¶2. Richard Burt, senior adviser to the Washington Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS), former U.S. Ambassador and former New York Times correspondent.

- ¶3. Christine Ockrent, producer and anchor of France 3 Television's weekly current affairs program, France Europe Express.
- ¶4. Josef Jofee, publisher-editor of the German Weekly Die Zeit.
- ¶5. Andrew Neil, former BBC journalist, chief executive of The Spectator.
- ¶6. Yoichi Funabashi, Foreign Affairs Columnist for the Japanese newspaper, Asahi Shimbun.
- ¶7. Allister Sparks, former editor of the South African newspapers the Rand Daily Mail and the Sunday Express, founder of the South African Institute for Advancement of Journalism.
- ¶8. Enrique Santos Calderon, Editor of the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo.
- ¶9. Fahmy Howaidi, columnist and deputy editor in chief of the Egyptian Al Ahram newspaper.
- ¶10. Joseph Samaha, Editor in Chief of the As-Safir newspaper, former Beirut manager of Al Hayat newspaper.

(The complete document with member bios has been emailed as a PDF document to NEA/ARPI Shawn Thorne).

The Second Al Jazeera Forum

¶5. (C) Khanfar said AJ's second annual forum is scheduled to be held in Doha Jan 31 thru Feb 2 and is entitled: "Defending Freedom, Defining Responsibility." According to Khanfar, more than 250 professional journalists have been invited from Asia, Europe, the USA and the Middle East. (Fox, CNN, ABC and NBC are among the US invitees, he said.) The themes listed in the forum advertising seem to have global, rather than regional, appeal. For example, one panel is entitled: "World Media: Building Walls or Pulling Them Down?" and another, "Media and Power: Democracy versus Dictatorship." One panel, "Al Jazeera in the Mirror" will take "a critical look at Al Jazeera" and at "the so-called 'Al Jazeera Effect' and how satellite television has changed the way information is disseminated. It will also look at the soon-to-be launched English-language channel, Al Jazeera International." (Note for Telesur watchers: Among those expected to attend, according to Matharu, is Andres Izarra, the head of the South American channel.) Khanfar and Matharu urged PAO to attend the conference.

Al Jazeera Training Center expands its programming

¶6. (C) The Al Jazeera Training Center will keep in step with this 10th-anniversary mode of expansion and internationalization, said Khanfar. The courses will be expanded and upgraded. Instead of short-term courses measured in days or weeks, three-month, six-month and one-year courses will now be offered by the training center. The one-year

courses in particular will focus on university graduates, who, despite their technical journalism training, often lack political awareness, he said. The Training Center will seek to offer in-depth courses to such graduates focusing on the philosophical, historical and political aspects of their job. PAO asked about the trainers for these courses. Khanfar replied that the majority of the trainers currently come from the Thomson school of journalism in the UK (Note: as discussed Ref C. End note.). He said Al Jazeera had begun to develop a relationship with the Missouri School of Journalism with an eye to signing a memorandum of understanding with them (Ref C). He said the school's Dean visited Doha and plans were fairly advanced to sign the MOU to implement the expanded course offerings, when the school suddenly pulled back and told AJ that given "the current atmosphere" and the connotations attached to the Al Jazeera name, it might be best to hold back on cementing the relationship between the Missouri School of Journalism.

Khanfar provides copy of hostage tape

¶7. (C) Following the 1/17 airing by Al Jazeera of a tape showing American citizen hostage Jill Carroll in captivity in Baghdad, PAO reiterated the USG position that such tapes should not be aired. Khanfar replied that Al Jazeera has said from the beginning it would continue to air such tapes but only in edited versions, as it did 1/17. He noted that Al Jazeera continued to broadcast its condemnation of the kidnapping and to call for the release of Carroll and would continue to broadcast interviews with individuals calling for her release during the course of the day. PAO asked Khanfar for a copy of the tape, noting that Embassy Baghdad could use the information possibly to help save Carroll's life. Khanfar hesitated and said, "We have refused every request like this, but let me see what I can do. I have to get some permissions first." A copy of the tape was passed to PAO by AJ on the morning of 1/19.

Comment

¶8. (C) In pursuing its global ambitions, Al Jazeera has been quick to take advantage of the wide international media support it garnered in the wake of the Nov 22 UK Daily Mirror story alleging that in April 2004 President Bush had proposed bombing Al Jazeera's Doha headquarters to Prime Minister Tony Blair. (Note: The story has continued to play strongly on Al Jazeera and in the local media, as the channel pursues its efforts to obtain a copy of the classified UK government memorandum allegedly containing details of the exchange. Khanfar confirmed to PAO 1/18 that AJ hired a UK law firm in early January to continue to pursue the matter. End note.) Following the publication of the Daily Mirror story, Khanfar traveled to London claiming he sought the truth about the alleged conversation from the British government. Although

the UK government proved unresponsive, Khanfar attracted support for AJ's position among British and international media by organizing various well-publicized press events, including a discussion seminar he co-hosted with the Daily Mirror at the London Press Club. Khanfar is clearly using this support to further his vision of an internationalized AJ. Another element in his favor is the establishment of Al Jazeera International, the English version of the channel, due to be launched later this year. Although there are reports of tension between the staffs of Al Jazeera Arabic and Al Jazeera International, the standing up of AJI, with its growing list of big-name media recruits from all parts of the world, has certainly added a much wider international scope to the Al Jazeera brand name. Al Jazeera Arabic presently has a reported estimated viewership of between 40 and 50 million and targets primarily Arabs, who represent about 18 percent of the Muslim world. AJI, with hubs planned in Doha, Washington, London and Kuala Lumpur, hopes to appeal to the English-speaking remainder of the Muslim world. Together, if their joint vision works out as planned, they will represent a pivotal element in US relations with both the Arab and the Muslim worlds.

Comment continued

¶9. (C) Al Jazeera's approach to the kidnapping of Christian Science Monitor reporter Jill Carroll seemed to turn on the fact that she is a fellow journalist. The approach fits in with AJ's apparent new strategy of positioning itself as a central player in the global stage of journalism. AJ's airing of the tape was restrained and was accompanied by a forthright condemnation of such acts against journalists worldwide. We feel it is also noteworthy that AJ has continued to air appeals for Carroll's release (including, most recently, an appeal from Jim Carroll, the journalist's father) and continues its iteration of the "solidarity among journalists" theme. Khanfar's decision to share a copy of the tape (which AJ has never done before) may also be a reflection of the importance he places on this theme. It will be interesting to see in what way AJ's approach will differ in future cases where the kidnap victim is not a fellow journalist.

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Viewing cable 06DOHA219, AL JAZEERA AND KIDNAPPING TAPES

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DOHA219	2006-02-13 13:07	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Doha

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000219

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STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARPI; S/CT FOR MARK THOMPSON FROM RYE
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/12/2011

TAGS: PREL KPAO QA ALJAZEERA

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA AND KIDNAPPING TAPES

REF: DOHA 104 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Officials from Embassies Doha and Baghdad met with Al Jazeera leadership on Feb 11 to discuss Al Jazeera,s handling of videos that Al Jazeera receives from terrorist hostage takers, its broader editorial policies, and the media,s role in hostage and terrorist crises. Al Jazeera officials defended their policy of showing but not sharing hostage videos, but agreed to raise the issue with the Al Jazeera Board of Directors for reconsideration after hearing technical arguments about how the videos can be used in a hostage case. Al Jazeera impressed upon the U.S. side the breadth and scope of its reach, its impending growth and reorganization, and its sincerity in its struggle to be accepted as a global, independent, legitimate, mainstream media network, while protecting its desire not to be "held hostage" to the agendas of either governments or terrorist groups. End Summary.

¶1. (S/NF) Embassy Doha Public Affairs Officer Mirembe Nantongo and Embassy Baghdad Hostage Working Group Director Erik Rye met with Wadah Khanfar, Managing Director for Al Jazeera on Feb 11, primarily to convince Al Jazeera to share copies of hostage videos delivered to them by what are most

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likely terrorists organizations in Iraq. Khanfar is an urbane and smooth spokesman who dealt directly with the issue at hand. Embassy Doha has built cooperative personal relationships within Al Jazeera that resulted in a hostage video being passed to the United States once, but that was an exception to official policy, which is to allow Embassy officials on-site viewing and note-taking from the tape. Khanfar articulated a video policy that was case-specific, but based on the principles of not giving free advertising to propagandists--terrorists or otherwise; not showing suffering or humiliation; protecting the safety of the hostage foremost; and showing only those portions of the tape deemed newsworthy--such as proof of life of the hostage. Khanfar said that for these reasons they will note editorially that the origins of the tape cannot be confirmed nor the content corroborated; they will usually not show either the terrorists nor the hostage speaking, but will note in a voice-over the contents of the tape. (Note: these voice-overs have included the demands and claims of responsibility of hostage-taking groups in the past. End note.) Khanfar also stated that Al Jazeera would make an editorial statement condemning the kidnapping and calling for the victim's release when the victim was a journalist, but would otherwise maintain journalistic objectivity when running stories on other hostages. Khanfar noted that in the Jill Carroll case, they had worked with Islamic and Arab community leaders to publicize statements of condemnation.

¶2. (S) Rye explained that minute details in such tapes, such as colors and patterns of background materials, can be used to corroborate other information that could break open a case, and can't possibly be described accurately enough with any amount of note-taking. Rye also explained that any such information is most useful only if it has not yet been broadcast, since once hostage-takers know the tape has aired, they can cut off connections to information and individuals in the tape. Information on tapes is time-sensitive, and thus getting access to them immediately is critical. Also, given the number of people involved in working on hostage cases within the USG, often remotely located, it is necessary to be able to transmit copies of the tape in order to "connect the dots" of useful information. Having one USG observer view the tape simply isn't effective. Rye also commented that statements of condemnation are desirable in general, but in a specific hostage case can be a double-edged sword if they have an unpredictable impact on kidnappers, and thus in an ideal situation, any media messages would be coordinated with those handling the case. Rye noted that hostage tapes were different from tapes of other news events, since they held information pertaining to an ongoing crime--the kidnapping--as well as also holding potential clues to a future crime--the killing of a hostage. For those reasons, hostage tapes should be subjected to a more nuanced "tape policy". Lastly, Rye noted that Al Jazeera had an interest in not making concessions to hostage-takers in the form of airing their videos on-demand, since it would only

encourage further attempts by terrorist groups to manipulate Al Jazeera.

¶3. (S) Khanfar appeared to take these arguments to heart, and noted examples when Jazeera had refused to air certain tapes, and described how the propaganda portions of videos were excised. He appeared sincere about nurturing Al Jazeera's journalistic independence and integrity, and defending it from being seen as the mouthpiece of extremism. He articulated in detail Al Jazeera's desire to remain free of influence from terrorists groups. Khanfar agreed to raise the issue of hostage tapes with the board of directors at their next meeting. But he also noted that their lawyers had been advising them to avoid handling tapes in a manner that would lead to subpoenas and possible court appearances by Al Jazeera staff. Whatever their next decision, the potential of tapes to be considered evidence in legal proceedings will remain a crucial factor in determining the level of cooperation Al Jazeera will offer. Khanfar also was sensitive to the idea of being asked to do something particularly for the United States, and clearly did not want to be in a position where they would be seen doing favors. The U.S. side suggested that other governments with hostages in Iraq would most likely be appreciative of increased access to videos, and any hostage video policy should be applied equally to all countries with hostages.

¶4. (S) The U.S. team also met with Editor-in-Chief Ahmed Sheikh, who unlike Khanfar digressed into historical and political arguments for Arab nationalism and Palestinian statehood. He seemed to have a genuine concern for hostage survival, however, and noted that they feared not airing tapes could provoke a killing, but that airing the tapes with deadlines would "start the clock running". Rye noted that third parties were never responsible for the actions of terrorists or hostage takers, and could not go too far down the road of restricting or taking actions to influence the hostage takers, since that ultimately led to making concessions and opening Al Jazeera to further manipulations. Sheikh said that he wished they never received any tapes, and was glad that a recent Jill Carroll video ended up with a Kuwaiti TV station and not Al Jazeera. (Note: Although the tapes are no doubt a headache, his remark is probably somewhat disingenuous since Al Jazeera continues to make a name for itself in the Arab and Western worlds breaking stories of this nature. His remark also conflicts with an offhand admission by Khanfar that they see other stations such as the Kuwaiti channel that aired the Carroll video as competitors. Sheikh speculated that the Kuwaiti channel--which aired Carroll speaking--was probably given the tape because Al Jazeera ran the last Carroll video with a brief clip and voice-overs only and that Al Jazeera had effectively driven the hostage takers to another channel to get the amount of coverage they desired. End note.)

¶5. (S/NF) Comment: these and other Al Jazeera officials also

explained the coming expansion of Al Jazeera into a truly global network, including an English language channel and an over-arching management structure that will enforce uniform policies across its several outlets. As Al Jazeera continues to define its place in the media world and its relationship with the West, its role in influencing popular perceptions of terrorist events and groups will only increase. This increasing responsibility has already resulted in a clearly defined code of ethics and editorial policies, and increasing transparency in how those guidelines are carried out. They know they are under the microscope, and want to be taken seriously. Al Jazeera's growing globalization will only increase the pressure upon them to adhere to international standards of journalism and result in an organization that can be dealt with upon familiar ground, and within a framework already established by the mainstream media. End Comment.

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Viewing cable 06DOHA312, AL JAZEERA NETWORK BOARD OF DIRECTORS NAMED

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DOHA312	2006-03-01 07:58	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

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UNCLAS DOHA 000312

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/PPD; NEA/ARPI
NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL KPAO IZ QA ALJAZEERA

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA NETWORK BOARD OF DIRECTORS NAMED

REF: 05 Doha 1593

¶1. (SBU) In an effort to maintain brand identity and consistency of message and quality, the GOQ established in late 2005 (reftel) an entity known as the Al Jazeera Network (AJN), charged with overseeing all bodies bearing the Al Jazeera brand name. On March 1, an Amiri decree announced the establishment of the AJN board of directors. The Board includes present Al Jazeera Arabic Managing Director Wadah Khanfar. The key position of AJN Managing Director, which will wield significant operational authority and influence over the brand's editorial policy, has yet to be filled.

¶2. (SBU) According to press statements, the seven-member board will include:

-- Shk. Hamad Bin Thamer Al Thani, Chairman. Hamad bin Thamer is currently the chairman of the Al Jazeera board, as well as of the Qatar TV & Radio Corporation.

-- Khalaf Ahmed Al Manni, Vice Chairman - long-time number two of Hamad bin Thamer.

-- Ahmed Abdallah Al Kholaifi.

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-- Abdallah Mubarak Al Kholaiifi- Currently Director of Human Resources at Qatar TV.

-- Dr. Elham Bader Al Sada, a respected academic, currently a presenter at Qatar TV & Radio Corporation. A popular as well as somewhat controversial Qatari personality, she hosts a lively morning show on Qatari national radio that sometimes takes a critical stance on domestic issues, including nationality and sponsorship laws. A Qatari citizen, she is married to a Jordanian and her mother is of Palestinian origin.

-- Mahmoud Shammam, Washington Bureau Chief of Newsweek in Arabic. An American citizen of Libyan descent, Shammam lives in Washington and is known to be close to the Amir, Sheikha Mozah and to key officials at the Amiri Diwan in Doha. Known for his liberal and anti-Islamist views, as well as for his criticism of Al Jazeera and its editorial policy, Shammam is also prominent among Libyan opposition figures.

-- Wadah Khanfar. Currently Managing Director of Al Jazeera Arabic satellite channel. Rumor has it that Khanfar is angling for the job of AJN Managing Director.

¶3. (SBU) The AJN Board will oversee all of Al Jazeera's numerous offshoots. These - now representing a veritable media empire - include:

-- Al Jazeera Arabic, est. 1996
 -- Al Jazeera International, to be launched May 2006.
 -- Al Jazeera Arabic website (currently under AJ editorial control).
 -- Al Jazeera English website (currently under AJI editorial control).
 -- Al Jazeera Mubashir: Est. 2005. Live conferences, meetings, discussions, comparable C-span, no anchors, no editing process.
 -- Al Jazeera Sports, est. 2003. 24/7 sports news channel.
 -- Al Jazeera Children's Channel - est. 2005, targets Arabic-speaking children aged 3-15; billed as "edutainment"
 -- Al Jazeera Documentary - to be launched 2006. 24-hour Arabic programming, comparable to the Discovery Channel.
 -- Al Jazeera Training Center - est. Feb 2004, providing training to AJ and regional journalists; eyeing a regional role in media reform efforts.
 -- Al Jazeera Center for Studies - Doha-based think tank, est. 2005; designed to provide an academic Arab perspective on socio-political-economic issues affecting the region.
 -- Al Jazeera Mobile, bilingual, SMS-based breaking news service.

¶4. (SBU) The next step will be to name the managing director of the Al Jazeera Network, a key operational position that will wield considerable influence and play a key role in

shaping editorial policy across the Arabic and English TV channels and websites, as well as in resolving the considerable tension currently existing between the Arabic and English channels.

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Viewing cable 06DOHA328, Al Jazeera website director to quit; start new

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DOHA328	2006-03-02 14:24	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000328

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STATE FOR NEA/PPD, NEA/ARPI
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KPAO PREL QA ALJAZEERA

SUBJECT: Al Jazeera website director to quit; start new newspaper

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The director of the Al Jazeera Arabic website, Abdulaziz Al Mahmoud, said he is quitting his Al Jazeera job to take up the chief editorship of an Arabic newspaper called "Al Arab", which will become the fourth Arabic daily newspaper on the Qatari market. Al Mahmoud is the only senior Qatari at Al Jazeera - which has just a handful of Qatari employees - and ascribed his desire to leave Al Jazeera to disillusionment with the channel and a difficult relationship with AJ Managing Director Wadah Khanfar. End summary.

Abdulaziz Al Mahmoud

¶2. (SBU) The new Chief Editor of Al Arab, Abdulaziz Al Mahmoud, is a close Embassy contact. A U.S-educated Qatari citizen, he graduated from New York state's Clarkson University in 1988 as a mechanical engineer. Al Mahmoud served as the commanding officer of the Technical Training School of the Qatari Armed Forces prior to becoming chief editor of the Arabic daily Al Sharq from 1998 until 2001. In July 2001 Al Mahmoud became chief editor of Al Jazeera.net. Until last year, he was in charge of both the Arabic and

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English versions of the website. A few months ago, control of the English website was handed over to Al Jazeera International and its editor-in-chief is currently British national Russell Merryman.

The trouble with Al Jazeera

¶3. (SBU) Al Mahmoud told PAO that working at Al Jazeera these days is frustrating compared to what it was when he joined in 2001. In the old days, he said, Al Jazeera was buzzing with idealism and alive with passionate debate between partisans of different ideologies (Arab nationalists, Islamists, secularists, socialists etc), and that it had a genuinely revolutionary atmosphere about it. Now, he said, people come to work from 9 to 5 like bureaucrats and Al Jazeera has become part of the mainstream establishment. He also said his relationship with AJ Managing Director Wadah Khanfar had become "difficult", but did not elaborate on the reasons for this.

The Deputy Chief Editor

¶4. (SBU) The deputy chief editor of Al Arab will be Qatari citizen Mohammed Hajji, a former IV and another good Embassy contact. Mohammed Hajji is a law graduate from Beirut University's branch in Alexandria, Egypt. Hajji joined Al Sharq as a reporter and moved to Al Watan newspaper as an editor in 2001. Hajji traveled to the US in February 2004 to participate in a State Department-funded IV program on Foreign Policy and Decision Making process. PAS is currently funding an English language course for Mr. Hajji in a local English language institute.

Al Arab

¶5. (U) Founded in 1972, Al Arab was Qatar's first post-independence Arabic newspaper. It was headed by the late Abdallah Hussein Nem'ma, a prominent Qatari intellectual who occupied the position of chief editor until his death. Al Arab was shut down in 1995, following his death. The Al Arab license was reportedly sold by the Al Nem'ma family to Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) in the 1990s. Post has learned that HBJ's partner in the "new" Al Arab enterprise is Sheikh Thani bin Abdallah Al Thani, who is also the Chairman of the Board of Qatar's Al Sharq newspaper. Publication is expected to begin in the next several months.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) With a population of less than one million, the

majority of whom do not speak Arabic, Qatar is not in need of a fourth Arabic language newspaper, particularly as Al Arab is not designed to fill a particular vacant news niche. All three current Arabic newspapers tend to print the same information, with only slight variations in editorial bent, and we do not expect Al Arab to be any different. The main attraction of newspapers in Qatar would appear to be their business value. The advertising revenues earned by all five local papers are reportedly considerable.

¶7. (SBU) Comment continued: Although Qatari-funded and Qatari-controlled, Al Jazeera has few Qataris on its staff, possibly due in part to the fact that the overall number of practicing Qatari journalists is relatively small. Al Mahmoud's departure means the loss of AJ's only senior Qatari manager. His replacement at Al Jazeera.net has not yet been named.

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Viewing cable 06DOHA467, WADAH KHANFAR TAKES THE HELM OF THE AL JAZEERA

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06DOHA467	2006-03-27 14:49	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000467

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP, S/CT
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE
BAGHDAD FOR HOSTAGE WORKING GROUP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2010
TAGS: KPAO PREL QA ALJAZEERA
SUBJECT: WADAH KHANFAR TAKES THE HELM OF THE AL JAZEERA
NETWORK

REF: A. DOHA 312
B. DOHA 317

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PAO met March 27 with Wadah Khanfar, Managing Director of Al Jazeera satellite channel. Khanfar discussed his recent appointment as Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network, noting that his two mandates are to minimize costs by integrating the infrastructures of the diverse Al Jazeera entities and to develop a brand strategy. He has been given a year to complete the integration and to come up with a

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business model for privatization. Khanfar said that Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera International will remain independent editorially. Khanfar said AJ would not give embassies of countries with hostages in Iraq copies of hostage tapes but would permit their law enforcement authorities to view the tape in any location with an Al Jazeera bureau. Khanfar also discussed AJ's March 25 interview with a representative of the "Islamic Army in Iraq" and a September 2005 series on 9/11 prepared by AJ reporter Yousri Fouda. End summary.

The new position

¶2. (C) Wadah discussed his appointment as Director General of the Al Jazeera Network, the entity set up to assure unity of brand and operations among the different Al Jazeera entities. Khanfar, who is also a member of the recently-named AJN Board (Ref A), said the DG position will not have a role in the day-to-day running of the different Al Jazeera entities. The DG's mandate is two-fold, he said: to integrate the infrastructures of the diverse Al Jazeera entities and to develop a unified brand strategy. In his new position, Khanfar now oversees the following bodies:

- Al Jazeera Arabic, est. 1996
- Al Jazeera International, to be launched later this year.
- Al Jazeera Arabic website (currently under AJ editorial control).
- Al Jazeera English website (currently under AJI editorial control).
- Al Jazeera Mubashir: Est. 2005. Live conferences, meetings, discussions, comparable to C-span.
- Al Jazeera Sports, est. 2003. 24/7 sports news channel.
- Al Jazeera Documentary - to be launched 2006. 24-hour Arabic programming, comparable to the Discovery Channel.
- Al Jazeera Training Center - est. Feb 2004, providing training to AJ and regional journalists; eyeing a regional role in media reform efforts.
- Al Jazeera Center for Studies - Doha-based think tank, est. 2005; designed to provide an academic Arab perspective on socio-political-economic issues affecting the region.
- Al Jazeera Mobile, bilingual, SMS-based breaking news service.

¶3. (C) The exception to this list is the Al Jazeera Children's Channel (est. 2005, targets Arabic-speaking children aged 3-15; billed as "edutainment"), which Al Jazeera co-owns with Qatar Foundation. At ten percent, the AJ ownership of the children's channel is not large enough for it to be included an eventual business plan. Khanfar said he has been given a year to complete the integration process and to come up with a business model for privatization to present to the AJN Board of Directors. He stressed that the two satellite channels, AJ and AJI, will be editorially

independent and will not subject to central control from AJN. He noted that AJN has created an IT directorate, an engineering directorate and an administrative directorate, but has not created an AJN news directorate. Each channel will keep their current news directors (Ahmed Sheikh in the case of AJ and Steve Cook in the case of AJI), and although there will inevitably be a degree of coordination between the two, there is no expectation of either's toeing a central editorial line. Khanfar described the AJN organizational chart as starting at the top with board chairman Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer, followed by the AJN Board itself, then the position of DG, who oversees the Executive Council, made up of the managing directors of the present channels (Nigel Parsons in the case of AJI and himself in the case of AJ, among others). The Executive Council would be the body most closely involved in the day-to-day running of the different AJ entities, he said.

Will Khanfar stay on as MD of Al Jazeera?

¶4. (C) Asked if he planned to stay on as Managing Director of Al Jazeera Arabic, Khanfar laughed and said: "I have a plan to replace myself." He said that although he is staying on for the moment at Al Jazeera Arabic's helm, he envisioned a gradual withdrawal as he becomes more involved in the business aspect of AJN operations, but he did not say whom he intended to replace him.

Final goal: Privatization?

¶5. (C) Khanfar said he will spend the coming year weighing three different business models that have been proposed to AJN for its eventual privatization (including one prepared by Ernst & Young, he said). His goal is to make a selection by year's end and propose it to the AJN Board of Directors for adoption. Privatizing the Al Jazeera entities as a package would make it a package worth three times Al Jazeera Arabic alone, a package that would also be "less troublesome, less scary" to the investor than Al Jazeera Arabic by itself, he said. When PAO said that speculation about Al Jazeera privatization has come and gone with regularity and no results over the last few years, he said, "That was because there was no mechanism on which to make a decision on privatization. Now we will have one."

Hostage tapes

¶6. (C) PAO recalled Khanfar's conversation with Emboffs and U/S Hughes in February (Ref B and previous), in which the US petitioned Al Jazeera to reconsider its editorial policy and allow embassies whose nationals have been kidnapped in Iraq a physical copy of the videotapes sent to Al Jazeera by

hostage-takers. Khanfar said he had raised the issue with his fellow board of directors and the board's decision had been negative. As he had explained previously, Khanfar said, Al Jazeera does not want to become embroiled in legal action surrounding the tapes and for that reason does not want to become part of any chain of evidence. He said, however, that law enforcement officials of the countries in question are welcome to view the tape on Al Jazeera premises at any time and for any length of time. PAO asked if future tapes of US hostages could be transmitted to the Al Jazeera bureau in Washington for examination by US authorities on Al Jazeera premises there, and Khanfar said, "Yes, of course," adding that AJ had already performed this service for German officials in the past.

Interview with Iraqi hostage-taking group

¶7. (C) PAO then referred to a March 25 Al Jazeera interview with a representative of the "Islamic Army in Iraq" who claimed to be part of a group that kidnapped journalists and executed them if they were found to be "spies." PAO asked how such an interview could be justified in light of Al Jazeera's stated policy of condemning kidnapping and violence against journalists. Khanfar said that this was not the first time this individual had been interviewed on Al Jazeera, although in the past interviews with him have been conducted by phone. He said the subject's message was "very political" and the interview was valid news, as he is a member of a current organization and gave important information about the organization itself. He also made an offer to negotiate with the United States, Khanfar said, adding that the original interview was much longer than the version that aired and that he himself had "personally intervened" to take out some "very strong statements" made by the interviewee. PAO asked where the interview was filmed, and whether it was filmed in Baghdad. Khanfar said it was not filmed in Baghdad but, he said, "it is difficult to tell you where, because that was the condition of filming it, that we would not say." He said all he could say was that it was filmed by the Al Jazeera Beirut correspondent.

Delay in launch of Al Jazeera International

¶8. (C) Khanfar confirmed his own press recent statement announcing the probably delay of the launch of Al Jazeera International, due to technical reasons (a delay in delivering IT systems). He said the channel is now looking at an early summer launch, instead of a late spring one.

Yousri Founda series on 9/11

¶9. (C) PAO gave Khanfar a copy of February's DIA unclassified

snippets and also a non-paper on a four-part series on 9/11 prepared by Al Jazeera reporter Yousri Fouda which aired last September. The non-paper, prepared by IIP/SC's Counter-Misinformation team, criticized the series for espousing unfounded conspiracy theories concerning the events of 9/11. When Khanfar heard Fouda's name he rolled his eyes and appeared to know immediately which series was in question. "I thought it was stupid myself," he said. He said channel editors had intervened to make the original series more balanced than it had started out, but he had received many complaints about the series nonetheless. He thanked PAO for the input.

Comment:

¶10. (C) Khanfar was his usual urbane, articulate, professional self. At 38, he is relatively young to have attained a position of such influence. His vision is now clearly fixed on his new mandate, which is considerably wider and much more international in scope than the activities of the Arabic channel. His reference to making the Arabic channel more attractive to investors by "packaging" it within a group of less polarizing additional entities that will in turn treble the value of the original was a telling figure of speech.

¶11. (C) As we have previously reported, there has been a considerable amount of tension between Al Jazeera and Al Jazeera International, with many viewing it as a de facto struggle for Arab/Islamist control of the Al Jazeera brand name, and supporting or opposing Khanfar's candidacy for the DG position on the grounds that he would impose such control over Al Jazeera International. His statements espousing and endorsing independent editorial directions for the two channels would seem to contradict this last view but we will continue to report on the politics of the situation as they develop.

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Viewing cable 06DOHA793, AL JAZEERA ACCORDING TO WADAH KHANFAR

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06DOHA793	2006-05-24 12:58	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000793

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INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#) [ALJAZEERA](#)
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA ACCORDING TO WADAH KHANFAR

REF: A. DOHA 312
B. DOHA 467

¶1. Summary: (U) On May 21, a Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) delegation met with Wadah Khanfar, Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network (AJN) and Managing Director of the Arabic Al Jazeera TV channel. Khanfar told the delegation that Al Jazeera, reflecting regional developments, has entered the third of three major phases it has passed through since its inception in 1996. He talked at length about the new Al Jazeera English channel and also confirmed his intention to step down as MD of the Arabic channel to focus on his responsibilities as DG of the overall network, but he did not discuss a timeline or the identity of his replacement. End summary.

¶2. (U) On May 21, a BBG delegation led by Governor Joaquim Blaya met in Doha with Wadah Khanfar, currently serving as both Director-General of the overall Al Jazeera Network (AJN - reftels) and Managing Director of the Arabic language Al Jazeera TV channel. The delegation included Brian Coniff, BBG Executive Director; Bert Kleinman, President of the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN -- in charge of Al Hurra TV

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and Radio Sawa); and Mouafac Harb, Executive Vice President of MBN.

¶3. (U) Responding to questions, Khanfar described Al Jazeera's beginnings, noting that Al Jazeera's "edge" then and now is that the channel is seen as an integral part of the socio-cultural fabric of the Middle East region and an entity that "understands the cognitive map of the people in this region." Khanfar noted that Al Jazeera's 10th anniversary is coming up on November 1, 2006 and told the delegation that, in his view, Al Jazeera has entered the third of the three phases it has passed through since its inception in 1996.

The first phase: 1996 - 2001

¶4. (U) The leitmotif of the first period was Al Jazeera's motto: "The opinion and the other opinion," said Khanfar. Al Jazeera stood out as a voice challenging the status quo and in particular the policies of Arab governments. Its focus was on the region, and its themes were regionally-focused, with emphasis on reform, democracy and corruption.

The second phase: 2001-2005

¶5. (U) In the second phase, the focus moved to the international arena, to global issues such as the War on Terror, with coverage of Iraq, Afghanistan and Palestine as "hotspots" in that context, said Khanfar. The focus shifted to global political issues, with the Arab world as one unit and America, Europe and the West as another, he said. In this phase, Al Jazeera developed "war reporting" as an organizational skill for the first time as it reported on the "hotspots." In this phase, Arab domestic politics took a back seat both in the regional perspective and in Al Jazeera's perspective, he said.

The third phase: 2005 - present

¶6. (U) This third phase began with Egypt's Kifayah movement, and was consolidated by elections and pro-reform movements in Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq and Palestine, said Khanfar. The mood started to change and Al Jazeera began to return to the issues that had concerned it in its first phase -- democracy, reform and Arab issues. "Now, if you look at our headlines, you see most of the issues that are discussed are regional issues," including political Islam, good governance, democracy, Middle East economic and women's issues, internal struggles among Palestinian factions, and so forth. This third phase includes the establishment of Al Jazeera English and the effect of that establishment, he added.

Al Jazeera "English"

¶7. (U) Khanfar pointedly called the English-language channel scheduled for launch latter this year "Al Jazeera English." (Comment: There has been controversy over usage of the nomenclature "Al Jazeera International" for the English channel, with opponents of that usage arguing that such a label implies that the English channel is international while the Arabic channel is not. This is another manifestation of the ongoing tension between the Arabic and English AJ concepts, with those in the Arabic "camp" claiming this development over nomenclature as a victory. End comment.) When asked about this, Khanfar said that the matter is being discussed by the AJN board, and that his proposal is to change the name of the new channel to "Al Jazeera English" and to use the label "International" to describe the whole non-Arabic AJ operation, and not just as the logo of an individual channel. This would simplify matters should AJN decide to branch out into another language channel -- Al Jazeera French, or Al Jazeera Turkish, for example. The actual logo for the English channel would be the classic Al Jazeera logo with "English" written underneath it in English. Any new language channels would similarly have their mother-language appearing in native script under the classic AJ logo, he said.

The new channel

¶8. (U) As he did in Ref B, Khanfar tried to emphasize that the English channel will be an editorially separate entity from the Arabic channel. Each channel will have its own editorial board, he said. He added that there will be an overall AJN Editorial Board, consisting of the two boards combined, which will meet periodically "for coordination" purposes (Note: This appears to be a closer merging of editorial functions than was apparent during Ref B conversations. End note.) The English channel will not necessarily use the same terminology as the Arabic channel, since "Every language has a mind of its own," he said. AJ Arabic already has a code of conduct, derived from its code of ethics, and the English channel is developing its code, along with its own style guide, he said. "The BBC style guide will not be very far from the Al Jazeera English style guide. We are not inventing a new way of reporting here," he said. The new thing Al Jazeera is bringing to the table is its focus on field reporting, said Khanfar. 70 percent of news bulletins are field reporting, he said, and "we give and will give field reporting a high priority."

¶9. (U) Asked about the launch date of the new channel (Note: Initially announced for spring 2006, it has since slipped to early summer and then to the fall. End note), Khanfar laughed

and said: "Very soon." He said the delay relates to the installation of technical equipment. The decision was taken early on that the new channel would use high-definition TV technology, which necessitated connecting its four regional hubs (Doha, Kuala Lumpur, Washington, London) using broadband fiber-optics. The decision stands, but has led to technical delays because of technology's complexity, he said. (Note: In addition, the AJ English studios in Doha, which are being constructed next to the AJ Arabic studios, are clearly still not ready for use and occupancy. End note.)

¶10. (U) Asked about AJ English distribution problems in the U.S., Khanfar acknowledged that AJ has a significant perception problem in the US, where it is often perceived as "the beheading channel" or "the mouthpiece of terrorists." But the network has signed one contract in the US and is working toward more, he said. AJ English will also be available free via an internet connection to US and world users, he said, so that anyone with a broadband connection can watch it, and even those with a slower connection will be able to watch, although with reduced quality.

Personnel and bureaus

¶11. (U) AJ Arabic currently has 40 bureaus and 75 correspondents worldwide, said Khanfar. He said AJ English will be working out of these same bureaus, and that probably 7 or 8 additional bureaus will be added, including in places such as India and the Philippines, where AJ does not currently have bureaus. He estimated that the total overall number of employees of both the English and Arabic channels combined does not exceed 2,000. Less than a quarter of these positions are editorial, he said, estimating that each channel has approximately 160 journalists, producers and editors, with the remainder providing technical and administrative support.

Who will lead AJ Arabic after Khanfar?

¶12. (U) Asked about his plan "to replace himself" as head of the Arabic channel (Ref B), Khanfar acknowledged that holding down the two jobs he is currently performing for an extended period of time is demanding and unrealistic, not least because of the sharply different perspective required for each. He said he has raised the issue with the AJN board (Ref A), which will "make a decision," but did not provide details on timeline or the identity of his replacement. (Comment: rumor and speculation are rife in Doha about the identity of his replacement, as well as about the nature and extent of his power as Director-General of the Al Jazeera Network, and his reportedly contentious relationship with some of the AJN board members. End comment.)

AJ Arabic translated

¶13. (U) Khanfar referred to several existing agreements whereby the content of the Arabic channel is broadcast abroad in foreign languages using simultaneous interpretation. He said about 6 hours a day of translated AJ coverage is broadcast in Malaysia in the Malay language, with one to two hours daily also broadcast in Indonesia and in Urdu and Hindi in India. He said the channel is looking at entering into an agreement in Turkey for the same purpose. The system does have problems, he acknowledged. He had just returned from a trip to Kuala Lumpur, where he said there were problems with the fact that the translators don't have the contextual knowledge they need, resulting in inaccuracies in translation.

Privatizing Al Jazeera

¶14. (U) Asked about his Ref B comments, in which he noted that part of his task as DG of AJN is to select a business model for the eventual listing of AJN on the stock market, Khanfar indicated that a note of caution has been injected into that plan. He said he wanted over the next five years to introduce more of a business model into Al Jazeera's operations, partly in order to make the network at least partially self-dependent with revenues from advertising. But he said that a total listing on the stock exchange is unlikely. Those with money to invest in the region usually have political connections, he said, and AJN would not want to create a situation where investors inimical to the AJN ethos were able to gain a controlling interest in the network. What is being considered now is a possible partial listing on the stock exchange to avoid such an eventuality, said Khanfar.

Comment

¶15. (SBU) The Al Jazeera Network is clearly a much bigger animal than the already unwieldy Al Jazeera Arabic channel and has yet to define many key aspects of itself, including the relationship between the Arabic and English channels, the technical details of the framework AJN will provide for the overall operation of the different AJ entities, and the distribution of power within that framework. Chatter about tension between Khanfar and Nigel Parsons, the Managing Director of Al Jazeera English, continues, with some speculating that Parsons will leave the English channel soon after its launch, and others claiming that Khanfar is trying to infiltrate the English channel with employees loyal to him, since he currently has no loyalty base from which to attempt to control the new channel. The identity of Khanfar's replacement at AJ Arabic is also the source of much speculation, given that Al Jazeera politics, like Qatari

politics, are personality driven and the inclinations of his replacement are likely to have a significant impact on the channel's operations.

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TAGS: KDEM KPAO PGOV QA TS
SUBJECT: QATARI MFA: AL JAZEERA S NOT A BILATERAL
QATAR-TUNISIA ISSUE

REF: TUNIS 2639 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: After recalling its Ambassador from Qatar October 19 in protest at the content of an Al Jazeera interview with a Tunisian opposition member concerning the Tunisian government's hijab policy, the Tunisian government (GOT) announced the closure of its mission to Qatar October ¶25. A Government of Qatar (GOQ) news blackout on the topic for Qatari media was lifted October 26, with the local publication of the GOT statement announcing the closure, and condemning what it termed "a hostile campaign meant to harm

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Tunisia." The GOQ has not issued a statement on the matter and a GOQ rep told post that the GOT has not officially informed the GOQ of its decision to close its embassy. The Tunisian ambassador is the second Arab ambassador to Qatar to be recalled over Al Jazeera programming, following the recall of the Saudi ambassador in 2002. End summary.

GOQ reaction

¶2. (C) Although it initially instructed local media to stay away from the story before lifting the embargo October 26, the GOQ has yet to issue any official statement concerning the incident. PAO spoke October 29 to Ibrahim Al Sahlawi, Director of Arab Affairs at the MFA. Al Sahlawi confirmed that the GOQ has not issued any official statement, noting that it has not yet received official notification from the GOT of their intent to close their mission. Furthermore, Al Sahlawi said, the issue is not a bilateral one: "This is not an issue between the two governments," he said.

Al Jazeera reaction

¶3. (C) PAO also spoke with Al Jazeera Chief Editor Ahmed Sheikh, who echoed points made by Al Jazeera chief Wadah Khanfar and reported by international media, to the effect that Al Jazeera is not waging any campaign against the GOT, does not endorse the positions of its guests, and is willing to provide a platform for the GOT's point of view on the topic. "They are very sensitive, autocratic and totalitarian," said Sheikh of the GOT. He confirmed that Al Jazeera has no bureau or registered correspondent in Tunisia: "We have never been allowed to work in Tunisia," he said.

Local Tunisian reaction

¶4. (C) Faisal Baatout (protect), the AFP correspondent in Qatar who covered the story, is also a Tunisian national. He told PAO October 29 that the GOT is blaming the GOQ because, "They don't believe that Al Jazeera is independent. They have tried to stop programs in the past through political intervention and they succeeded, so they try this." He said the local Tunisian community consists of some 7,000 individuals, according to the recently-departed Tunisian Ambassador to Qatar, and all are concerned about the provision of GOT services to Tunisian citizens here. Baatout said there is speculation that the Tunisian mission to Kuwait will send a representative to Doha on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to meet the needs of local Tunisians.

Comment

¶5. (C) The Tunisian ambassador is the third to be recalled from Qatar in the past four years and the second to be recalled because of Al Jazeera programming. The Saudi Ambassador to Qatar was recalled in 2002 (and has not been replaced) because of a debate aired by Al Jazeera critical of the Saudi royal family. In a development unrelated to Al Jazeera, the Jordanian ambassador was recalled last month in protest at the Qatari Government's refusal to vote for the Jordanian candidate to replace UNSYG Kofi Annan. The Al Jazeera establishment is well accustomed to receiving criticism from foreign governments for its coverage and has effectively adopted a blase "take a number" approach to such criticism.
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SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA TURNS TEN

¶1. Al Jazeera celebrated its 10th Anniversary November 1 with a lavish celebration held in the open-air on the Al Jazeera compound in Doha. The event was attended by the Qatari Amir and his wife, Sheikha Moza, as well as a wide range of Qatari dignitaries and members of the diplomatic community, including Ambassador, DCM, and PAO.

¶2. Al Jazeera used the occasion to unveil a memorial wall listing the names of more than 630 journalists killed and imprisoned throughout the world, including some Al Jazeera staffers. Al Jazeera clearly spent a significant sum on the celebration, which included a performance of a symphony composed for the event by

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Lebanese musician Marcel Khalifa. The choral work, entitled "Elegy for the Orient," was performed in the Italian city of Piacenza by the Italian Philharmonic Orchestra and was beamed live to Doha, where guests watched the performance on giant outdoor screens.

¶3. The musical performance was preceded by a precis of Al Jazeera's ten-year history, given by two of the channel's presenters, including dramatic clips, predominantly of Al Jazeera's war and conflict coverage. Speeches followed by Al Jazeera Board Chairman Sheikh Hamad bin Thamer Al Thani and Wadah Khanfar, Director-General of the overall Al Jazeera Network and Managing Director of the Arabic channel.

¶4. Neither speech contained any surprises - both congratulated the Amir, Qatar, Al Jazeera staffers and the Arab world in general on the occasion of the 10th anniversary. Khanfar reiterated familiar themes - such as the unique edge in Middle Eastern coverage given Al Jazeera by its location in the heart of the region; its role in educating and liberating the average Arab listener; and the challenges and resistance the channel has faced. Khanfar recognized the families of Al Jazeera reporters who have been either killed in the line of duty (correspondent Tareq Ayoub), or detained (reporter Tayseer Alouni, now under house arrest in Spain after being convicted of collaborating with a terrorist group; and cameraman Sami Al Hajj, detained since 2001 in Guantanamo Bay). (Note: Alouni appeared during the proceedings in a taped statement in which he thanked his supporters, congratulated Al Jazeera and encouraged fellow journalists. End note.)

¶5. Khanfar also referred to the upcoming November 15 launch of the English-language Al Jazeera International and the network's plans to launch a pan-Arab newspaper (septel reporting on both topics).

¶6. The anniversary received wide local and regional press coverage in both news and commentary sections, with the tone primarily congratulatory of the channel and of the Amir for supporting it.

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Viewing cable 06DOHA1659, AL JAZEERA ENGLISH LAUNCHES - FINALLY

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DOHA1659	2006-11-16 14:38	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDOA #1659 3201438
ZNR UUUUU ZZH ZUI RUEWCSE1491 3201433
R 161438Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0000
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME
RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

UNCLAS DOHA 001659

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STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA ENGLISH LAUNCHES - FINALLY

- ¶1. MORE THAN TWO YEARS AFTER ITS INITIAL CREATION IN 2004, THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE VERSION OF AL JAZEERA - NOW KNOWN AS AL JAZEERA ENGLISH (AJE) - LAUNCHED TO GREAT FANFARE IN DOHA NOVEMBER 15.
- ¶2. IN LAUNCHING THIS PROJECT, THE AMIR OF QATAR HAS DISBURSED UNDISCLOSED, BUT UNDOUBTEDLY VAST, SUMS OF MONEY TO MATCH UP AN IMPRESSIVE LINE-UP OF RESPECTED FIGURES IN JOURNALISM WITH CUTTING-EDGE HIGH-DEFINITION TV TECHNOLOGY. BROADCASTING FROM FOUR GEOGRAPHIC CENTERS (DOHA, KUALA LUMPUR, LONDON AND WASHINGTON), AJE BOASTS 20 NEW BUREAUS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, AS WELL AS FREE ACCESS

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TO THE EXISTING 42 BUREAUS OF THE AL JAZEERA ARABIC CHANNEL. SOME 30 SEASONED CORRESPONDENTS FROM A WIDE RANGE OF COUNTRIES ARE STAFFING THE NEW BUREAUS.

¶3. THE TWO YEARS PRECEDING AJE'S LAUNCH HAVE BEEN FILLED WITH RUMORS AND SPECULATION CONCERNING BOTH ITS CONTENT AND THE NATURE OF ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE AL JAZEERA ARABIC CHANNEL.

THE CONTENT

¶4. THE QUESTION OF CONTENT HAS BEEN ANSWERED IN SMALL PART BY THE FIRST 24 HOURS OF AJE PROGRAMMING. IN FULFILLMENT OF ITS PROMISE TO FACILITATE "THE FLOW OF NEWS FROM SOUTH TO NORTH" AJE FOCUSED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON NEWS FROM THE DEVELOPING WORLD IN ITS FIRST 24 HOURS. ITS FIRST LIVE NEWS BROADCAST FEATURED (IN THIS ORDER) STORIES FROM GAZA, DARFUR, IRAN AND ZIMBABWE, FOLLOWED BY ITEMS FROM SOMALIA, CONGO AND BRAZIL, INTERSPERSED WITH BREAKING NEWS UPDATES ON A TSUNAMI WARNING IN JAPAN. THE NEWS SEGMENTS WERE LONGER IN LENGTH

SIPDIS

THAN IS USUAL ON CABLE NEWS PROGRAMS - AGAIN IN FULFILLMENT OF THE CHANNEL'S PROMISE TO PRESENT NEWS AT A SLOWER, MORE DETAILED AND THOUGHTFUL PACE. OVER THE HOURS, THE FIRST NEWS BROADCAST MOVED FROM DOHA ANCHORS TO ANCHORS IN KUALA LUMPUR, LONDON AND WASHINGTON. NEWS ITEMS ON THE U.S. AND THE UK WERE CONSPICUOUSLY FEW (THE AMERICAS SEGMENT FEATURED A STORY BY FORMER CNN CORRESPONDENT LUCIA NEWMAN FROM BRAZIL).

MIDDLE EAST COVERAGE

¶5. THE FIRST STORY ON THE NEW CHANNEL WAS FROM THE GAZA STRIP, FOCUSING ON HAMAS AND ISLAMIC JIHAD ROCKET ATTACKS LAUNCHED INTO ISRAEL FROM THE STRIP AND ON THE RECENT ISRAEL MILITARY ACTION IN GAZA. THE STORY FEATURED CORRESPONDENTS IN BOTH GAZA AND JERUSALEM; TOGETHER WITH SHOTS OF A BANDAGED BABY GIRL AND GRIEF-STRICKEN PALESTINIAN MOTHERS AND CHILDREN SEARCHING THROUGH RUBBLE. LATER, THE CHANNEL COVERED THE DEATH OF AN ISRAELI WOMAN HIT BY A PALESTINIAN ROCKET AND FEATURED SHOTS OF, AND COMMENTARY FROM, PASSIONATELY ANGRY ISRAELI CITIZENS.

THE TERMINOLOGY QUESTION

¶6. ONE OF THE CENTRAL QUESTIONS OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN POSING WITH REGARD TO AJE IS WHETHER OR NOT IT WILL DISTANCE ITSELF FROM "LOADED" TERMINOLOGY SUCH AS REFERENCES TO "MARTYRS" RATHER THAN "SUICIDE BOMBERS." THIS IS A QUESTION YET TO BE ANSWERED FULLY, ALTHOUGH ON NOVEMBER 16, NEWS OF A RETALIATORY ISRAELI STRIKE ON THE HOUSE OF A PALESTINIAN BELIEVED TO BE LINKED TO THE ROCKET ATTACKS LAUNCHED FROM GAZA WAS FEATURED ON THE BELOW-SCREEN AJE ROLLING TICKER AS "ISRAELI ROCKET HITS FIGHTER'S HOUSE IN GAZA," GIVING THE SENSE THAT AJE TRIED TO FIND A BALANCE BETWEEN LABELING THE INDIVIDUAL A "TERRORIST" AND A "RESISTANCE FIGHTER," BOTH LOADED

TERMS DEPENDING ON THE CULTURAL CONTEXT.

RIZ KHAN INTERVIEWS ISMAIL HANIYA AND SHIMON PERES

¶7. RIZ KHAN, THE FORMER CNN ANCHOR, ROLLED OUT HIS NEW SHOW NOVEMBER 16 - "A LIVE INTERACTIVE SHOW LETTING VIEWERS QUESTION WORLD LEADERS, NEWSMAKERS, AND CELEBRITIES, ADDRESSING KEY ISSUES AND TRENDS IMPACTING LIVES AROUND THE GLOBE" - WITH BACK-TO-BACK INTERVIEWS WITH PALESTINIAN PRIME MINISTER ISMAIL HANIYA AND ISRAELI VICE PRIME MINISTER SHIMON PERES, BOTH OF WHOM ANSWERED QUESTIONS FROM KHAN AND QUESTIONS SENT IN BY VIEWERS FROM AROUND THE WORLD.

COMING HIGHLIGHTS

¶8. AJE IS ADVERTISING AN IN-DEPTH SPECIAL PROGRAM PROFILING SYRIAN

PRESIDENT BASHIR AL ASSAD AND ANOTHER PROFILING SAMMI AL HAJJ, THE SUDANESE AL JAZEERA CAMERAMAN DETAINED SINCE 2001 IN GUANTANAMO BAY. THE CELEBRATED DAVID FROST INAUGURATES HIS WEEKLY SHOW, "FROST OVER THE WORLD" ON NOVEMBER 17, REPORTEDLY WITH AN INTERVIEW WITH BRITISH PRIME MINISTER TONY BLAIR. THE FULL AJE PROGRAM LINE-UP CAN BE VIEWED AT THE AJE WEBSITE([HTTP://ENGLISH.ALJAZEERA.NET](http://ENGLISH.ALJAZEERA.NET)), RE-LAUNCHED NOVEMBER 15 TO "MATCH THE LOOK AND FEEL" OF THE NEW CHANNEL.

ADVERTISING

¶9. AJE HAS MADE CLEAR THAT IT DOES NOT DEPEND ON ADVERTISING FOR OPERATING REVENUE, AND ITS MANAGING DIRECTOR, NIGEL PARSONS, HAS ACKNOWLEDGED TO POST THAT THERE IS A "POLITICAL" RELUCTANCE BY SOME ADVERTISERS TO SEEK AIR-TIME WITH AL JAZEERA. PRESENTLY ADVERTISING ON AJE ARE ENTITIES SUCH AS NOKIA, ETIHAD AIRLINES, QATAR AIRWAYS, QATAR FINANCIAL CENTER AND DUBAI HOLDINGS.

WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

¶10. ACCORDING TO COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR LINDSEY OLIVER, THE CHANNEL LAUNCHED TO 80 MILLION HOUSEHOLDS VIA CABLE AND SATELLITE. AJE PRESS MATERIALS CLAIM LAUNCH PLATFORMS IN AFGHANISTAN, AUSTRALIA, BELGIUM, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA, BULGARIA, CROATIA, CYPRUS, DENMARK, ESTONIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, GERMANY, GHANA, GREECE, HONDURAS, HONG KONG, INDONESIA, IRELAND, ISRAEL, ITALY, JORDAN, KENYA, KUWAIT, LATVIA, LEBANON, LITHUANIA, MALAYSIA, MALDIVES, MALTA, MIDDLE EAST, NEW ZEALAND, NORWAY, POLAND, PORTUGAL, QATAR, ROMANIA, SOUTH AFRICA, SPAIN, SWEDEN, SWITZERLAND, THAILAND, THE NETHERLANDS, TURKEY, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, UNITED KINGDOM, UNITED STATES, AND UGANDA. "IN ADDITION TO CABLE, ADSL, MOBILE PLATFORMS AND SATELLITE, AL JAZEERA ENGLISH WILL BE AVAILABLE AS A LIVE STREAM TO THE ONE BILLION USERS OF THE INTERNET WORLDWIDE," SAID THE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS.

U.S. DISTRIBUTION

¶11. OLIVER, ECHOING PREVIOUS POST CONVERSATIONS WITH AJE MANAGEMENT, ACKNOWLEDGED DIFFICULTY IN PENETRATING THE U.S. MARKET BUT REMAINED OPTIMISTIC ABOUT FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES. AT LAUNCH, THE FOLLOWING LIMITED DISSEMINATIONS WERE AVAILABLE IN THE U.S.:

-- GLOBECAST (WWW.GLOBECAST.COM) A FRENCH-OWNED COMPANY WHICH MANAGES WORLD TV SERVICE, A 200-CHANNEL BOUQUET, FOR THE US MARKET. WORLD TV SERVES AN ESTIMATED 500,000 HOMES IN THE U.S. WHO LARGELY RECEIVE IT DIRECT-TO-HOME FROM INTELSAT.

-- FISION (HTTP://WWW.FISION.NET/) A HOUSTON-BASED COMPANY PROVIDES 400 DIGITAL TELEVISION CHANNELS TO HOUSTON SUBSCRIBERS.

-- JUMP TV (HTTPS://WWW.JUMPTV.COM/EN/CHANNEL/ALJAZEERA/) BILLS ITSELF AS AN "ONLINE TV NETWORK." IT ALREADY OFFERS AL JAZEERA ARABIC AS WEBCAST OVER THE INTERNET.

-- VDC (WWW.VDC.COM) AN INTERNET-STREAMING OPERATION WHICH UTILIZES INTERNET PROTOCOL TELEVISION (IPTV) TECHNOLOGY.

POST-LAUNCH

¶12. THE ROLL-OUT WAS SLICK AND PROFESSIONAL, WITH AJE STAFFERS EXPRESSING RELIEF AT THE RELATIVELY HITCH-FREE LAUNCH. CHARLOTTE DENT, AJE'S PUBLIC RELATIONS CHIEF, TOLD PAO NOVEMBER 16 THAT THE CHANNEL HAS BEEN "DELUDED" WITH EMAILS FROM INTERNET VIEWERS IN THE U.S. AND CANADA WHO ARE "DISAPPOINTED" AT NOT BEING ABLE TO VIEW AJE PROGRAMMING VIA CABLE OR SATELLITE. DENT SAID COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR LINDSEY OLIVER PLANS A RETURN TRIP TO THE U.S. NEXT MONTH TO RE-CONNECT WITH SATELLITE/CABLE PROVIDERS. "THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN PHENOMENAL, FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD. ONCE U.S. CARRIERS REALIZE WE ARE NOT SUCH A GAMBLE, I THINK THE SITUATION WILL CHANGE," SAID DENT.

¶13. DENT SAID THE MOOD AT AJE NOVEMBER 16 WAS ONE OF "TOTAL ELATION" AFTER A HITCH-FREE LAUNCH. SHE SAID THE CHANNEL IS CURRENTLY AIRING 12 HOURS DAILY OF LIVE NEWS PROGRAMMING (FROM NOON TO MIDNIGHT GMT), WITH THE REMAINING HOURS COVERED BY RECORDED PROGRAMMING AND, WHEN NECESSARY, LIVE BREAKING NEWS UPDATES. SHE SAID THE PROPORTION OF LIVE NEWS PROGRAMMING WILL RISE TO 14, 16, 18 ETC., UNTIL IT REACHES

24 HOURS A DAY, PROBABLY BY THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2007.

AJA AND AJE - GETTING ON MUCH BETTER NOW

¶14. ONE REMARKABLE TURNAROUND THAT HAS BEEN IN THE MAKING OVER THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AL JAZEERA ARABIC AND AJE. INITIALLY HALLMARKED BY DISTRUST AND HOSTILITY, WITH THE AJ ARABIC STAFFERS OPENLY EXPRESSING FEARS THAT THE "WESTERNER-DOMINATED" AJE WOULD HIJACK AND/OR DILUTE THE AL JAZEERA BRAND AND IDENTITY, THE RELATIONSHIP HAS EVOLVED INTO FAMILIARITY

AND EVEN SOME COLLEGIALLY. CHATTING WITH AJ ARABIC STAFFERS AT AJ STUDIOS NOVEMBER 15, PAO WAS SURPRISED AT THE WARMTH AND PRIDE IN THE LAUNCH EXPRESSED BY STAFFERS AT THE ARABIC CHANNEL. SIMILARLY, THE TONE AT THE FRIENDS OF AL JAZEERA BLOG ([HTTP://WWW.FRIENDSOFALJAZEERA.ORG](http://www.friendsofaljazeera.org)), WHICH HAS LONG BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY HOSTILITY AND OFTEN DOWNRIGHT VENOM, ECHOED A SIMILAR SENSE OF COLLEGIALLY AND ACHIEVEMENT AROUND THE LAUNCH. AJE STAFFERS, IN THEIR TURN, ARE CONSISTENTLY CAREFUL TO RECOGNIZE, IN PUBLIC AND IN PRIVATE, THAT AJE IS BUILT "ON THE HERITAGE OF OUR SISTER CHANNEL."

¶15. PART OF THE CAUSE OF THIS TURNAROUND IS UNDOUBTEDLY THE FACT THAT WADAH KHANFAR, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF THE ARABIC CHANNEL, WAS NAMED EARLIER THIS YEAR AS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE OVERALL AL JAZEERA NETWORK (WHICH NOW INCLUDES AJA, AJE, AJ SPORTS, AJ DIRECT - SORT OF AN ARABIC C-SPAN -, AJ DOCUMENTARY, THE AJ MEDIA TRAINING CENTER AND THE AJ RESEARCH CENTER). KHANFAR'S CONSIDERABLE ENERGIES HAVE SINCE BEEN DIRECTED AT UNIFYING THE TWO CHANNELS, BOTH PHYSICALLY AND CONCEPTUALLY. THE PHYSICAL RELOCATION OF AJE TO THE SAME COMPOUND AS AJA ALSO INCREASED THE STAFFS' FAMILIARITY WITH EACH OTHER AND LED TO REDUCED TENSION.

COMMENT

¶16. AJE HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN TO PROVE ITSELF, AND THE COMING MONTHS WILL SHOW WHETHER IT CAN FOLLOW UP THE SUCCESS OF ITS LAUNCH BY BOTH MAINTAINING AND EXPANDING ITS CURRENT ESTIMATED AUDIENCE OF 80 MILLION. A TOO-EXCLUSIVE FOCUS ON NEWS FROM THE "SOUTH" MAY WELL RISK ALIENATING VIEWERS FROM THE "NORTH," AND MALADROIT HANDLING OF "HOT" MIDDLE EAST TOPICS COULD ALIENATE EITHER OR BOTH ARAB AND NON-ARAB AUDIENCES. OTHER QUESTIONS OF KEY INTEREST WILL BE THE EXTENT TO WHICH AJE AND AL JAZEERA ARABIC INFLUENCE EACH OTHER; AND WHERE THAT MUTUAL CYCLE OF INFLUENCE WILL TAKE BOTH THE ENTIRE AL JAZEERA NETWORK AND THE OVERALL PHENOMENON OF MIDDLE-EAST-CENTERED NEWS GENERATION.
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Viewing cable 06MUSCAT1614, MEDIA REACTION: NATIONAL DAY IN OMAN, AL JAZEERA

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06MUSCAT1614	2006-11-20 13:01	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED	Embassy Muscat

VZCZCXRO3789
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHMS #1614/01 3241301
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 201301Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7432
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0456
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0348
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

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FOREIGN PRESS CENTER FOR SILAS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OIIP](#) [KPAO](#) [KMDR](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: NATIONAL DAY IN OMAN, AL JAZEERA
INTERNATIONAL, AMERICAN "WWIII", OMANI MODEL FOR PEACE

¶1. SUMMARY: Omani media focus this week was squarely - and nearly exclusively - on coverage revolving around the celebration of the country's national day (the Sultan's birthday). The very little press attention to other matters displayed mingled pride and concern over the startup of Al Jazeera international and drew on the Sultan's recent remarks to reflect on the path to peace in the region. END SUMMARY.

COVERAGE

¶2. All papers, along with broadcast news on radio and television,

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 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98
 99 00 01 02 03 04 05 06 07 08
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carried blanket coverage relating to the observation of Oman's national day. The Sultan's November 15 speech to the Majlis Oman (the joint session of the Majlis al Shura and Majlis al Dowla) received laudatory headlines ("His Majesty to grace Council of Oman's annual meeting today", "His Majesty declares big drive to develop human resources"). Features in all papers highlighted new and ongoing development projects across the Sultanate ("Muscat Municipality takes up many ambitious projects"), while coverage of the holiday itself is summed up by the "Times of Oman" banner headline, "Tryst with the Glorious Day". The signing of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement received prominent placement in most of the many year-in-review features present in all media. Several papers published special holiday feature sections, while state-owned Arabic and English papers included a special souvenir portrait of Sultan Qaboos.

 Al Jazeera Int'l: A "Positive Voice" - Co-opted?

¶3. On November 20, state-owned Arabic daily "Oman" (circulation 38,000) carried a column by academic commentator Muhammad Awadh al-Mashaikhi in which he gave voice to mixed feelings about "Al-Jazeera International News Channel: the Positive Voice Coming from the South":

Although Al Jazeera has surpassed any other news channel in the Arab world (not least as a result of the enormous funds invested in it and the political will that facilitated its freedom of expression), it is difficult to judge the new channel in its own context. [Al Jazeera International] is operating in a very competitive environment in which other international English news channels, such as CNN and the BBC, dominate. Now its competition is not regional Arabic channels, but those with a track record of attracting billions of viewers worldwide. Already it has been noticed it started with excessive focus on Israeli news; on the first day it had a lengthy interview with Shimon Peres, and the first sports item was about the Israel vs. Croatia football match. In addition, its political programs received participation from Israelis from occupied Jerusalem through telephone calls. The world is expecting from "Al Jazeera International" to provide an informative media message that is based on honesty, creditability, authenticity, balance, and objectivity. This will be expressed through showing the bitter realities that the Arabic and Islamic nations are living in."

 "Americanized Model" to blame for World War III?

¶4. Private Arabic daily "Al-Watan" (circulation 42,000) reflected November 20 on CENTCOM Commander Abizaid's comments on the need to confront Islamic extremism, asking "Who is Provoking World War III?":

"General John Abizaid turned the cameras on himself when he spoke about the possibility of "World War III" erupting in the region. When American military leaders use statements like this, usually they are looking for higher political positions. [Abizaid] did not provide any reasons why the situation is going in the wrong direction that he talked about. However, the wrong actions that his leaders are committing, their handling the nations of this region with an iron hand - these are the reasons for such a war. He is forgetting that the Iraqi wound is only of American making, Palestinian suffering results from an American model of tyranny, the game in Lebanon is a mere draft of what America wants to create, and the pressure against Afghanis to discard the Taliban is an excuse for the American invasion. The reason for this "World War III" is not because these nations need freedom, something they completely

MUSCAT 00001614 002 OF 002

comprehend and fight for, rather, it is the Americanized model of freedom."

A ROYAL VISION FOR PEACE

¶5. "Al Watan" drew from Sultan Qaboos's November 15 speech to recommend his thinking as the way to create peace and stability in its November 20 column, "Understanding Peace...A Vision in the Sultan's Message":

"The national approach to foreign policy was very clear in the Sultan's message: it is based on integrity, justice, peace, security, and tolerance. His political vision shows what is needed internationally in the future to consolidate peace and stability in the world, and to do so on proper, solid political and diplomatic bases. Everyone knows that the Sultanate has been the first to support peace in the world, and that this is the main criterion in its foreign policy. The Sultan's method of foreign policy has always originated from his support of rights, regardless of geographic and demographic dimensions or any religious or ideological differences. Only on these bases will the world know peace and stability, allowing it to develop and flourish."

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Viewing cable 06DOHA1715, AL JAZEERA ENGLISH HEAD OF NEWS CAUTIOUSLY

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06DOHA1715	2006-12-07 11:04	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO8869
RR RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #1715/01 3411104
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R 071104Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5896
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1000
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//PASS TO USCENTCOM FWD//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 001715

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INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2011
TAGS: KPAO PREL QA ALJAZEERA
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA ENGLISH HEAD OF NEWS CAUTIOUSLY
OPTIMISTIC, SEEKS FEEDBACK

REF: DOHA 1659

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (U) PAO met December 6 with Ibrahim Helal, Deputy Managing Director for News and Programming of Al Jazeera English (AJE). The Egyptian-born Helal is 36 years old and worked as program editor for the Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) channel from its founding in 1996 until 1999. He then worked for Abu Dhabi TV as head of news from 2000 to 2001, before returning to AJA as editor-in-chief. He left AJA when current AJA MD Wadah Khanfar took over the reins in 2003 and worked at the BBC World Service Trust as Project Director for the Middle East and North Africa, where he was responsible for training and development of Arab media organizations. He joined AJE in May

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¶2006.

2.(U) When asked for his assessment of AJE's performance so far, Helal said cautiously "so far, so good," but that he was reluctant to pronounce "so soon" (Per reftel, AJE launched three weeks ago, on November 15). He was anxious to hear PAO's assessment of AJE's performance so far. PAO said it was early days yet, but the launch seemed to have gone very well and the overall reaction in international media to date seemed to have been positive. She noted that AJE has certainly delivered on its promise to bring news of "the South to the North", with its extended focus on developing country issues, and asked to what extent Helal thought this sort of focus may prove alienating to broader international audiences.

¶3. (U) Helal agreed it was a danger (making specific reference to a current, very extended, series of programs on the problem of malaria) and said that part of AJE's balancing act at this point is to ensure that it has specific objectives for its "South to North" programming. Some of the program editors are so eager to fulfill this mandate, that they do not question what the specific objectives may be. AJE has to consider the ethical lines in question here, he said. A television station cannot set itself up to act as a political tool in order to force change in any arena -- that would take it beyond its journalistic mandate. Helal said this was an issue he had had with Al Jazeera Arabic -- where many of the reporting and editorial staff wanted to be perceived as activist and to feel activist, but in the last analysis, had no coherent specific objectives behind their programming and editing choices, not to mention the fact that activism runs counter to TV journalism imperatives.

Middle East coverage

¶4. (U) A large part of AJE's strength will be the texture it brings to coverage of Middle East issues, which, because of their potential and actual impact, are actually international, rather than regional issues, Helal said. Taking the recent assassination of Pierre Jemayl in Lebanon as an example, Helal said that AJE was able to bring a much more accurate sense of the Lebanese realities to the English-speaking screen, highlighting complexities that are glossed over by Western media. But "is it too much for the average viewer?" he worried. Does the average viewer want that level of detail?

Iraq

¶5. (C) PAO asked how AJE was managing Iraq coverage. Helal said AJE had asked the Al Maliki government for access and had spoken to "the Iranians" about the issue as well. He said

the Iranians, who "seemed to be speaking for the Al Maliki government" gave a positive response to the AJE request, but so far permission from the Al Maliki government has not been forthcoming. Like AJA, he said, AJE can operate in the north of Iraq and otherwise procures footage from local production houses and manages quite a comprehensive coverage of events in Iraq from Doha. He asked PAO if the USG could help with getting Iraq access for AJE and PAO responded that that would be a decision for the Iraqi government to make.

Terrorist videotapes

¶6. (U) PAO asked what the AJE policy would be should it

DOHA 00001715 002 OF 003

receive a tape from Al Qaeda and their ilk. Helal said AJE's policy would be the same as AJA's -- "if it is newsworthy, we will air it."

Personnel issues

¶7. (U) Helal noted that AJE is still about 20 percent under-staffed, which will affect its ability to switch to 24-hour live news coverage (Note: The channel launched with 12 hours of live news a day - noon to midnight GMT - and has now expanded to 17 hours, from 1000 GMT to 0300 GMT). He did not anticipate being able to reach 24-hour coverage before next February. He acknowledged difficulty with hiring Arab nationals to work at AJE. "We had PR about having 30 percent Arabs on our staff before launch, but we don't," he said. He estimated that Arab staff are less than 20 percent of news staff, and blamed stymied clearances by the Qatari Government -- few Arab candidates receive the OK from the GOQ internal security, he said.

Getting feedback

¶8. (U) Helal said the process of gathering feedback is largely done by AJE's PR department, who gather and analyze commentary, and share trends and specifics with the news staff. "We also have many friends at CNN, BBC and so forth, who let us know what they think," but no formal ratings data is available yet in the region. Helal saw that as something AJE would focus on at a later stage of its establishment. He claimed, laughing, that CNN and BBC had emergency strategy meetings when AJE launched, to assess the impact of the new channel and define strategies to meet its new challenge. He noted he was pleased with the lack of negative feedback from the Al Jazeera Arabic channel: "I know we have many, many enemies over there, and we would have heard right away if

there had been problems" from their perspective with AJE's coverage of Middle East issues, he said.

Interaction with AJA

¶9. (U) He noted that interaction with AJA has proved fruitful for AJE so far. "We meet every day with their editorial team," he said. AJE did a recent special on Congo, which relied heavily on AJA access and contacts during its production. AJE has used AJA's Bahrain correspondent for actual reporting - "he happens to speak good English, and I thought, why not?" said Helal. Similarly, he said, AJE used a translated report from an AJA reporter "for variety" during recent events in Lebanon, and has also used some of AJA's exclusive footage.

Assessment of Al Jazeera Arabic

¶10. (U) PAO asked Helal how he saw AJA currently. He said AJA has made a lot of progress in the last few years in many areas, but still has work to do. It now has 75 reporters worldwide, for example. "That is huge," he said, and noted that problems with "TV-readiness" quality control therefore abound. He said AJA is very strict on accuracy and Doha staff review each AJA report for accuracy at several points before it goes to air - including having Doha staff edit the package if necessary just before it goes to air. At AJE, "we are not so strict. We trust our reporters," he said, adding that AJE field-produced segments frequently go directly to air with little or no Doha review. Therefore, he said, although the AJA reports are accurate, have all the right interviewees and present all the facts, they are written for newspaper or radio, they are not written for TV, he said.

Comment

¶11. (C) Helal appears young, energetic, knowledgeable and articulate and is clearly very much aware of the history Al Jazeera English is building upon and of the opposing pitfalls - among Middle Eastern and Western audiences alike -- facing the new channel. He was brought to AJE by Wadah Khanfar in May 2006 at the height of tensions between the Arabic and English channels, when significant numbers of the former were concerned that a "Westerner-run" AJE would hijack Al

DOHA 00001715 003 OF 003

Jazeera's hard-won brand and Arab identity. His history with Al Jazeera Arabic and his strong regional/cultural credentials have no doubt been an important element in quieting those tensions. He will certainly have a key role in

determining whether those tensions are eventually resolved or whether they flare up again. He urged PAO to keep in touch and not to hesitate to provide feedback at any time or to request clarification if something "does not appear clear."
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2011/08

Viewing cable 06DOHA1745, AL JAZEERA QUALITY ASSURANCE CHIEF BELIEVES

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06DOHA1745	2006-12-14 13:12	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO5376
RR RUEHROV
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 141312Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5925
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1005
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//PASS TO USCENTCOM FWD//
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 001745

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STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2011
TAGS: KPAO PREL QA ALJAZEERA
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA QUALITY ASSURANCE CHIEF BELIEVES
PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

REF: A. 05 DOHA 1786
B. DOHA 312

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: PAO met December 14 with Al Jazeera Quality Assurance Chief, Jaafar Abbas Ahmed, to review progress made by the Quality Assurance (QA) Unit in his assessment since Ref A report in October 2005. In the intervening period, Abbas was named head of QA for the overall Al Jazeera Network, which includes Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA) and Al Jazeera English (AJE) among others. According to Abbas, AJE's performance is proving to be "an eye-opener" to AJA staff, and he foresees considerable mutual benefit accruing to the two channels from their proximity to each other. Abbas feels considerable

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progress has been made in establishing the credibility of the QA unit, which is now regarded by AJ staff with "a mixture of hostility and respect," whereas initially (Ref A), the unit was regarded "with open hostility." The QA Unit is undergoing expansion and hopes to undertake more sophisticated content analysis in the coming months. End summary.

QA for the Network

¶2. (C) Initially established in 2004 to monitor news and program quality -- specifically accuracy and bias -- at AJA, the QA Unit's mandate has now been extended to cover the entire Al Jazeera Network (established in March 2006, Ref B), which includes Al Jazeera Arabic (AJA), Al Jazeera English (AJE), the two websites, Al Jazeera Direct (cf C-Span) and the soon to be launched Al Jazeera Documentary (cf the Discovery Channel). According to Abbas, the decision to name him to the Network was taken by AJN Director-General Wadah Khanfar, in order to ensure uniform standards of quality across the network. Abbas, who drafted the AJ Codes of Ethics and Conducts implemented at AJA eighteen months ago, has re-issued the two Codes for adoption by all AJ entities after a current period of open comment from all staff. Although the Codes cover all standard international journalism concepts (honesty, fairness, objectivity, independence, dealing with sources etc), the original AJA codes were written specifically for an Arabic channel and needed to be revamped to cover the new overall AJ reality, Abbas said.

¶3. (C) Abbas said that in his opinion the November 15 launch of AJE has proved in many ways to be "an eye-opener" for many of the Arabic staff, particularly with regard to coverage of Arab/Middle Eastern/Muslim issues. The AJE staff tend to be mainly "from established democracies" and "balance comes to them so naturally. It is second nature to them to tell the other side of the story," he said, adding that the AJE journalists' attitude of "positive neutrality" is a new element for most of the Arab journalists (whether raised in "Republics of Fear" and used to either toeing the official line in previous jobs, or used to not being able to express their own opinions freely, or used to unthinking emotional bias with regard to Arab issues). While AJE brings this benefit to AJA, AJA in its turn is able to inform and support AJE with its expertise and background on Middle Eastern/Arab affairs, he said.

QA Unit now "respected"

¶4. (C) PAO recalled that during their last conversation (Ref A), Abbas had noted that the QA Unit was regarded with "open hostility" by Al Jazeera journalists, and asked whether that situation had changed. Abbas said the QA Unit has steadily gained in credibility and is now regarded with "a mixture of

respect and hostility." The QA Unit produces a daily report on all the news bulletins, which is discussed by mandate at the daily 1pm editorial meeting, he said. The QA Unit also produces focused sustained reports on a single individual - whether a correspondent in the field or a presenter in the studio - which is used to provide counseling where necessary. Fully backed by AJN DG Wadah Khanfar, the QA Unit has been given some administrative teeth, he said -- some journalists have lost their jobs over repeated deliberate violations of the Code of Conduct, and the QA Unit now has input into the performance review that decides the annual salary increments the AJ staff receive. "No journalist now dares to be openly biased in script," he said, which had not been the case a year ago. Occasionally a reporter in the field will make

DOHA 00001745 002 OF 003

comments showing bias during unscripted post-report interviews with anchors, he said. Sometimes this is because a reporter may be weak at ad-libbing; sometimes established verbal patterns take over; sometimes the bias is deliberate. In all cases, the reporter is called to task and the slip documented, said Abbas.

¶5. (C) The QA Unit, formerly located in separate premises in a different part of town, is now located on the Al Jazeera compound, with QA Unit staff offices actually inside the Al Jazeera newsroom. Abbas said this co-location has contributed to the reduction in hostility between AJ staff and the QA Unit. The ability to discuss and resolve issues in person at the time they arise has been a positive factor, he said.

QA Unit to add 6 new employees

¶6. (C) Abbas said he is currently interviewing for six new staff members, to add to the current 7-member QA Unit. This is partly to identify some native English speakers with good Arabic to take on the task of monitoring AJE, but Abbas also said he wants to take the QA Unit in the direction of content analysis. Now that the more overt forms of bias are much less of a problem, Abbas said he is interested in looking at the "more subtle forms of bias." For example, the ratio of coverage of some issues compared to others in overall programming; the number of times certain guests appear; the types of guests that appear, and so forth. Abbas says that by tracking such concepts "we will eradicate a lot of undetectable bias."

The big name shows are still no-go areas

¶7. (C) Abbas said there are "some shows" he no longer monitors -- mentioning specifically Faisal Al Qasim's "The Opposite Direction" (a heated Cross Talk-type show); Sammy Haddad's "More Than One Opinion" (a discussion show) and Ahmed Mansour's "Without Limits" (a one-on-one interview show). On Al Qasim he said ("off the record") that in his view the show should be "wiped off the air" -- Al Qasim has run out of steam, no longer has anything to add to the general discourse. He started out discussing significant issues such as reform and democracy, but "last week he had a show on plastic surgery!" No self-respecting intellectual will appear on Al Qasim's show, said Abbas. Regarding Mansour, he said Mansour is a "good journalist, researches his topics and prepares very well. It's not for me to say why he is rude to some of his guests and overly polite to others," said Abbas. (Note: A Cairo-based Egyptian, Mansour is known for favoring "Islamist" pro-Muslim Brotherhood guests on his show. These three names are among Al Jazeera's most senior and most prominent and well-established personalities. PAO inferred from Abbas's words and demeanor that he had likely clashed with them at some point, come off worst in the encounter and declined to give further input where it was ignored. Although his claims of having gained respect and influence over the rank and file of AJ's journalistic staff seem credible clearly he still has some way to go when it comes to such AJ seasoned heavy-hitters as Haddad, Al Qasim and Mansour. End note.)

In-house political education series

¶8. (C) Abbas said he is in charge of organizing a monthly lecture series on "political education", which aims at giving the AJ journalistic staff theoretical background in "concepts, ideas and schools of thought." he said. The most recent lecture was on Shi'aism. Other lecturers have included a representative of Hezbollah and one from the Tunisian "Renaissance" party, he said. PAO noted that the Embassy would be pleased to organize a talk for this series by Embassy Doha's visiting Fulbright professor, a University of Massachusetts professor currently teaching an international affairs program at Qatar University. Abbas welcomed the idea and we will pursue it.

Comment

DOHA 00001745 003 OF 003

¶9. (C) A seasoned and committed journalist, Abbas made it clear he feels his unit has made significant progress in greatly reducing basic journalistic problems relating to accuracy and bias. This he sees as largely due to the

high-level AJ support the QA mandate enjoys and the administrative teeth it has been permitted to develop, with an unexpected boost provided by the living example of the more seasoned and sophisticated AJE phenomenon next door. His vision is now focused on providing more in-depth "content analysis" requiring a more sophisticated and broader approach to the overall news day. AJ appears to have been forthcoming with the budgetary support he needs to implement this vision. Post will continue to report on his efforts.

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Viewing cable 07SINGAPORE2247, AL JAZEERA ENGLISH TO START BROADCASTING IN

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07SINGAPORE2247	2007-12-27 06:02	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Singapore

VZCZCXRO9861
RR RUEHDT RUEHPB
DE RUEHGP #2247/01 3610602
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 270602Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4644
INFO RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0065
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0503
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0167
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 002247

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV SOIC SN MY SCUL KMDR

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA ENGLISH TO START BROADCASTING IN
SINGAPORE

¶1. (U) Summary. Al Jazeera English will likely begin broadcasting in Singapore twenty-four hours a day in the first quarter of 2008, according to Nigel Parsons, Managing Director of Al Jazeera English. On December 4, the Media Development Authority of Singapore granted SingTel a landing license to broadcast Al Jazeera English on mio TV, SingTel's internet protocol television (IPTV) service. Parsons added that Al Jazeera English will also pursue a full cable license to broadcast on StarHub, which reaches more viewers than SingTel. End Summary.

Getting Comfortable with Al Jazeera

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¶2. (SBU) After monitoring Al Jazeera English long enough to be familiar and comfortable with the channel and its content, Singapore's Media Development Authority agreed to give SingTel a license to broadcast Al Jazeera English in Singapore on its mio TV, SingTel's internet protocol (IPTV) service, Amy Chua, Director of Media Content at MDA told us. Chua did not expect any problems, but noted that if the channel broadcasts objectionable content, it would be up to SingTel as the supplier to take action and MDA would step in if appropriate action were not taken. Nigel Parsons, Managing Director of Al Jazeera English commented to us that the GOS took a cautious approach, monitoring the channel for some time before they granted a license. Parsons observed, "I wouldn't be surprised if they decided to give us the IPTV license to kind of test the waters."

¶3. (SBU) When asked what prompted the MDA to approve a license for Al Jazeera English at this time, Chua mentioned the popular demand expressed by visitors from the Middle East who want to see Middle East reporting while in Singapore. Krishnasamy Bhavani, Press Secretary at the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) commented that Singapore is surrounded by Muslim nations and needs to offer programming relevant to the region.

Broadcast to Begin in Early 2008

¶4. (U) Al Jazeera English will begin broadcasting as soon as final details are negotiated between the channel and SingTel, according to Parsons. He expects the channel to be on air twenty-four hours a day on mio TV beginning early in the first quarter of 2008. In addition, Parsons noted that the channel signed a non-exclusive agreement with SingTel, so that Al Jazeera English can pursue an additional license with StarHub (Singapore's main cable service) to become part of that supplier's basic tier service.

¶5. (U) Al Jazeera English currently has hubs in Kuala Lumpur, Doha, London, and Washington. The broadcasting centers hand off to each other over the course of the day, and SingTel plans to broadcast the channel twenty-four hours a day. Parsons mentioned that the broadcaster hopes to set up new studios in Nairobi and Gaza, and that Latin America is quite high on the channel's priority list as well.

Impact of Al Jazeera in the Region

¶6. (SBU) Parsons cited two regional examples where Al Jazeera English had led coverage of local events that garnered international attention. He boasted that Al Jazeera was the only broadcaster to remain in Burma throughout the demonstrations and its footage was aired by broadcasters

around the world. Regarding the November 25 Indian community demonstration in Kuala Lumpur, Parsons asserted that the local Malaysian media were forced to report the event in full because Al Jazeera English was running it in full on the Astro channel. He commented that Al Jazeera had initially been concerned whether it was seditious to cover an illegal demonstration, and had talked it over with police and local government officials before deciding to broadcast coverage. He claimed the channel placed great importance on being impartial and presented its stories in context. Parsons added that a Malaysian government spokesman in Kuala Lumpur had thanked Al Jazeera English for its impartial coverage of the demonstration.

SINGAPORE 00002247 002 OF 002

¶7. (SBU) Comment. The GOS clearly considered the ramifications carefully before granting a license for Al Jazeera English to broadcast in Singapore: press reports indicate that MDA took most of the year to reach its decision. The GOS likely welcomed SingTel's application for the license because its mio TV reaches a much smaller audience than rival broadcaster StarHub's cable service. With a target audience of Singapore's 14 percent Malay Muslim population and many visitors familiar with Al Jazeera, the new channel will likely attract a solid market share. GOS officials will watch closely, and determine whether to grant a second broadcast license for StarHub to air Al Jazeera English based on their assessment of the channel's content and Singaporean reaction to the broadcasts. End Comment.

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Viewing cable 08DOHA283, DISGRUNTLEMENT AT AL JAZEERA ENGLISH; IS A NEW

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA283	2008-04-07 13:51	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO5248
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #0283/01 0981351
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P 071351Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7808
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000283

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: DISGRUNTLEMENT AT AL JAZEERA ENGLISH; IS A NEW
VISION IN THE OFFING?

Classified By: CDA MICHAEL A. RATNEY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Al Jazeera Network's English channel, less than two years out of the starting box, continues to hemorrhage middle and senior-level staff, including big names like American Dave Marash, who excoriated the station for taking on an anti-American bent. Charges that the English newsroom staff are anti-American "have some truth to them," Al Jazeera's (AJ) Managing Director Wadah Khanfar said, but the real problem is one of management. The station has followed too closely the BBC's model when it comes to breaking news, and this needs to change to fit audience expectations of seeing urgent issues presented quickly by young and dynamic presenters. Khanfar claimed that a recent flap over anti-Islamic comments by an Arab-American on a talk show prompted AJ's leadership to institute previously absent

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management controls over Arabic talk shows. Increasing editorial control from Doha over AJ's worldwide bureaus and talk shows may be a sign that the Qatari leadership intends to keep AJ's various channels and formats hewing as closely to Doha's political line as AJ's Arabic channel has done from the beginning. END SUMMARY

 Marash AIRS DIRTY LAUNDRY

¶2. (C) The month of March saw further defections from the AJ English channel, including news director and former BBC executive Steve Clark, and former ABC "Nightline" presenter Dave Marash. Khanfar said it was "understandable" that Clark would ask to leave, since his wife, Jo Burgin, is suing the station over accusations of discrimination. It was also "time for him to move on and let someone more dynamic take over." Khanfar said he wished that Marash had not taken his frustrations out on AJ in the media after he quit. Marash, he said, was "too old" and "didn't look right" seated next to a younger, more attractive co-anchor, and so he was upset when AJ moved him out of his anchor position to produce special programs regarding the U.S. elections. Khanfar said he was "dissapointed" that Marash had taken his disagreements with Al Jazeera public.

¶3. (U) Marash, in an April 4 interview with the Columbia Journalism Review, stated that his removal as anchor at the Washington bureau meant that there were now "zero American accents in any of the presenter roles at Al Jazeera," and that editorial control was being exerted more and more from the Doha headquarters. That is why, he explained, Doha "literally sneaked a production team into the United States" and then "they went off and shot a four-part series (on poverty) that was execrable."

¶4. (U) Marash asserted that AJ English's increasingly shoddy reporting with regard to the United States was a conscious decision by senior Qatari officials that following "the American political ideal of global, universalist values...was no longer the safest or smartest course, and that it was time, in fact, to get right with the region." That is why the Qataris have "made up" with the Saudis and Al Jazeera has concentrated on stories that are "boosterish...of Saudi Arabia," according to Marash. He added, however, that Al Jazeera's coverage "south of the equator" is "terrific."

 WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

¶5. (C) The loss of heavy hitters like Dave Marash followed a steady stream of lower-level staff who have left over reported benefit cuts and an inability of senior management

to intervene on their behalf. Hamad al-Kuwari, an AJ board member and former Qatari Minister of Information, told PAO that the AJ staff were "whining" a great deal, but were not really leaving. The true problem with AJ English, he maintained, is that the British employees are "arrogant and unwilling to listen." They are "acting like colonialists" and are not easy to satisfy.

¶6. (C) Wadah Khanfar told PAO that there was "some truth" to the accusations of anti-Americanism among British staff members, but that AJ English needed to "move away from the BBC model of not airing breaking news immediately while they gather more information and conduct interviews." Khanfar

DOHA 00000283 002 OF 002

explained that "audiences have become accustomed to tuning into satellite channels to see breaking news right away. If something is happening in the world and I turn on AJ English, I want to see the news, not an analysis of a small African tribe somewhere."

¶7. (C) Khalid Ali Johar, a Qatari who is nominally in charge of human resources for Al Jazeera, was quoted in a front-page article in the local English daily "Gulf Times" on April 7 as saying that the staff departures were "not a red line for us to be worried about. We had 25 resignations by the end of March, which is a normal figure regarding turnover in a large organization like ours." He added that, contrary to rumors, there would be no "relaunch" of AJ English.

MANAGEMENT - FOR A CHANGE

¶8. (C) PAO asked Khanfar what steps AJ was taking to prevent unprofessional gaffes from recurring. Asked to cite an example, PAO offered the recent flap over comments by Arab-American Wafa' Sultan on the popular talk show "The Opposite Direction," which were widely viewed as anti-Islamic, and caused AJ to offer an on-air apology. Khanfar said he took the incident very seriously and had ordered a committee to provide him with recommendations for corrective action.

¶9. (C) The first step, he said, was to introduce management controls. Previously, presenters such as Faisal al-Qasim were allowed to choose themes, guests, and questions with no oversight. Now, a producer has been appointed for each talk show, who will have approving authority for the selection of themes and guests. The producer will answer to the senior news editor, who will also have oversight authority.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) Previously, one of the most common criticisms we heard from AJ employees was how little management oversight was exerted on a daily basis. AJ English's top executive, Nigel Parsons, was reportedly not even consulted when benefits packages were changed and other decisions were made.

Now that Doha appears to be exerting more editorial control and introducing management oversight, senior staff are beginning to chafe. As Dave Marash remarked, AJ English is now becoming less of a "multipolar news channel" and more of "an authentic regional voice," much like AJ Arabic. As a consequence, balanced and professional coverage of the United States is now less likely to be seen on AJ English -- a fact that will make it all the more difficult to market the station to major U.S. cable providers, which Khanfar claims is a primary goal -- but may not be particularly important to Qatari officials who view AJ, both English and Arabic, as important tools of Qatari foreign policy.

RATNEY

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Viewing cable 08DOHA301, QATAR'S ARRANGEMENTS WITH ISRAEL AND THE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA301	2008-04-15 09:09	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXYZ0018
 PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDO #0301 1060909
 ZNY SSSSS ZZH
 P 150909Z APR 08
 FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
 TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7835
 INFO RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 0554
 RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 0661
 RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0137
 RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 0382
 RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0782
 RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 1261
 RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 0506
 RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 3171
 RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 2234

S E C R E T DOHA 000301

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR NEA/IPA KURT MEDLAND

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/15/2018

TAGS: PREL KPAL KWBG IS

SUBJECT: QATAR'S ARRANGEMENTS WITH ISRAEL AND THE
 PALESTINIANS

REF: STATE 34850

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael A. Ratney,
 for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Qatar's Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad Bin
 Jassim Al Thani, in a March 31 meeting with NEA Assistant
 Secretary David Welch, summed up Qatar's views on resolving

SIPDIS

security-related aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
 this way: "Qatar will accept any agreement acceptable to the

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Palestinians." Until such an agreement is reached, Embassy Doha notes that Qatar maintains relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA), HAMAS, and Israel. Qatar's overall financial support of the Palestinians put it at the top of the list of Arab League contributors, alongside Saudi Arabia and the UAE, for 2007. Qatar, however, has not sent any money through Arab League channels since June 2007, and it remains unclear the extent to which the GOQ will fund government salaries while HAMAS and the PA remain in conflict. Senior Qatari officials have expressed frustration that the Quartet encouraged Palestinian elections, then discouraged international contacts with HAMAS after it won the elections and formed a government.

¶2. (C) Qatar advocates engaging HAMAS, including hosting visits by Khalid Mish'al, as the only viable strategy to ensure a successful, long-term agreement between the parties.

It also applies the same logic in engaging Israeli officials, such as FM Livni, who visited Doha as recently as April 13-14. Indeed, Qatar maintains both overt and discreet relations with Israel. The most obvious manifestation of the relationship is the Israeli Trade Office in Doha, which helps coordinate political issues and official visits between the two states (and spends relatively little time on trade matters). The office nevertheless promotes business ties and assists Israeli commercial interests when there are problems.

¶3. (C) According to Ambassador Roi Rosenblit, head of the Israeli Trade Office, there is officially about USD 2 million in annual trade between Israel and Qatar. In the past year, Qatar exported to Israel about USD 1.2 million of goods, mostly petrochemicals, while Qatar imported from Israel about USD 800,000 of goods, mostly high-tech telecommunications equipment. Real trade, however, may be as much as four times higher (i.e., up to about USD 5 million) via third countries, and includes Israeli exports of agricultural goods which are sometimes labeled in stores as coming from Egypt or Jordan. Some products are shipped to Qatar by air via Jordan, while others are generally imported by boat. There is virtually no visible trade in terms of public marketing of Israeli-origin goods in Qatar.

¶4. (C) While Qatar does not have any Arab League boycott laws on the books or enforce a boycott, the GOQ will usually send an embassy observer to the Central Boycott Office meetings in Damascus. Some government tender documents also continue to contain outdated boycott language, but a decree from the Minister of Finance to make the language current is unlikely anytime soon. Senior GOQ officials, while ostensibly satisfied with the current level of engagement, are reluctant to undertake further normalization absent forward movement on the peace process. Despite its aspirations to play the role of regional mediator, Qatar does not want to stray too far from the Arab fold.

¶5. (S) Qatar has no known security arrangements with Israel, although Qatar's Foreign/Prime Minister has hinted obliquely in private meetings that the GOQ sometimes "helps" Israel's security service. Qatar has no known security arrangements with the Palestinian Authority, nor does it provide the PA any security assistance. Qatar has long been accused (particularly by Jordan and the PA) of providing funds to HAMAS, though the Foreign/Prime Minister vehemently denies this, and we have seen no smoking gun to corroborate the allegations.
RATNEY



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Viewing cable 08DOHA493, CONTACT INFORMATION FOR ENGAGING QATAR ON

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA493	2008-07-09 13:35	2011-08-30 01:44	UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXYZ0009
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDO #0493 1911335
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 091335Z JUL 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8038

UNCLAS DOHA 000493

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NEA/RA FOR ADAM VACCARO
SCA/RA FOR JERRY BRENNIG
EEB/CIP/TS FOR JOSEPH BURTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [XF](#) [AL](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: CONTACT INFORMATION FOR ENGAGING QATAR ON
OBJECTIONABLE BROADCASTS

REF: STATE 068256

(SBU) Per reftel, post provides the following information
(country code 974 should be dialed before the local numbers
indicated below):

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Jabor bin Youssef Al Thani, Director and Chief Editor
Tel: 4322725

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87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94
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Viewing cable 08DOHA581, AL-JAZEERA EXPLAINS LESSENER AL QAEDA COVERAGE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA581	2008-08-14 05:32	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO0128
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #0581 2270532
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 140532Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8137
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0179
RHMFISS/USAFCENT SHAW AFB SC PRIORITY
RBDHDZA/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMSOCCENT MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000581

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2018

TAGS: [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: AL-JAZEERA EXPLAINS LESSENER AL QAEDA COVERAGE

Classified By: Amb. Joseph LeBaron, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) During an August 12 office call by visiting Senate Foreign Relations Committee Staff Member Perry Cammack, Al-Jazeera Network (AJN) Managing Director Wadah Khanfar said the network still receives tapes from Al Qaeda but doesn't bother airing them or mentioning them because "Usama bin Laden has lost all credibility among Muslims and is no longer the symbol he once was." Khanfar elaborated that Al Qaeda's brutality in Iraq has "destroyed" the organization and its claim to speak for Muslims.

¶2. (C) Comment: AJN's reduced coverage of Al Qaeda may be meant to curry favor with the government of Iraq, as part of its strategy for gaining permission to re-open its bureau in that country. That is something Khanfar has been negotiating hard for with the Iraqis for several months.

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¶3. (C) While AJN may have backed off on its coverage of Al Qaeda and associated tapes, the past month has seen a marked increase in its coverage of the Taliban, including interviews with Taliban representatives. Septel will report the results of a separate conversation with Khanfar regarding AJN's renewed interest in the Taliban.

¶3. (U) Mr. Cammack did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 08DOHA633, AL JAZEERA TELLS GLASSMAN IT'S RESTRUCTURING TO

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA633	2008-09-04 10:22	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO5094
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #0633/01 2481022
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 041022Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8192
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1112
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RBDHDZA/COMUSNAVCENT
RHMFISS/COMUSAFCENT SHAW AFB SC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DOHA 000633

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/04/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA TELLS GLASSMAN IT'S RESTRUCTURING TO
BOOST PROFESSIONALISM AND INDEPENDENCE

REF: DOHA 581

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera has launched a 5-year restructuring plan to become profitable, to include creating subsidiaries to broadcast in additional languages, Director General Waddah Khanfar told visiting U/S Glassman August 26.

-- Relations with the USG are "much better than before," Khanfar said; cable providers in the United States, however, are still reluctant to carry Al Jazeera English, and for reasons other than money.

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-- Al Jazeera no longer airs extremist recordings unedited; it attempts to check facts with the USG before airing coverage of incidents involving the U.S. military, he said.

 COMMENTS

-- Khanfar for some time has talked about Al Jazeera's "five-year plan." Perhaps it is finally getting underway.

-- So far, Al Jazeera's efforts to restructure, to achieve profitability, to foster professionalism, and to air only "newsworthy" segments of extremist tapes have produced only incremental improvements to Al Jazeera's various broadcast elements: for example, straight news, talk shows, breaking news, and correspondents' reports.

-- Al Jazeera's desire to break into new markets through subsidiaries in several languages may force Al Jazeera to avoid its sometimes inflammatory reporting and commentary, especially reporting by Al Jazeera's extensive network of foreign correspondents, who operate out of more than 45 offices around the world.

 Restructuring Al Jazeera

¶1. (C) James Glassman, Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, began his August 26 meeting with Al Jazeera (AJ) Director General Wadah Khanfar by asking if Khanfar had a plan for AJ to become commercially independent of the Qatari Government. Khanfar affirmed that it was "the goal of any network" to have financial independence, but that he was "happy with the Amir because he does not interfere" in AJ's operations.

¶2. (C) Qatar "does not support Al Jazeera out of charity," he stated, and it "understands that Al Jazeera has given Qatar great name recognition in the Arab world." AJ has caused bilateral problems for Qatar, but "countries such as Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt are beginning to understand that they have to separate the Qatar government from Al Jazeera in their minds."

¶3. (C) With regard to profitability, Khanfar said he was encouraged by an advertizing deal recently concluded with Saudi business giant Abdul Lateef Jameel, noting that "Saudi Arabia represents 65 percent of the regional advertising market, and we need them to achieve profitability."

¶4. (C) Khanfar stated, however, that subsidiaries -- not

advertising -- would constitute the network's primary profit center, and that AJ has launched a five-year restructuring plan with this in mind.

¶5. (C) Khanfar emphasized that "our main brand is news and we want to keep that separate so as not to compromise our standards." But he added that much of the network's focus would be on creating new subsidiaries, such as AJ channels in Turkish and other languages, and on strengthening current products, such as AJ's four sports channels and the documentary service. Outsourcing of human resource

DOHA 00000633 002 OF 003

functions, finding alternate broadcasting arrangements to bring down satellite fees, and integrating AJ Arabic and English bureaus would constitute another major part of AJ's restructuring.

¶6. (C) U/S Glassman asked if restructuring would bring with it increased professionalism among AJ reporters. Khanfar responded by saying, "As long as the region is in chaos, we will have problems" such as the recent flap over former Samir Quntar, the Lebanese prisoner recently released by Israel. (NOTE: AJ's Beirut bureau chief threw a party for Quntar and was reprimanded by the AJ editorial board.) This is why, Khanfar said, AJ established a quality assurance department to monitor broadcasts and report violations of the AJ code of ethics, established in 2004, directly to him. The AJ editorial board meets every month to review these reports and issue statements on professional standards. "When a mistake is made," said Khanfar, "we go on the air immediately to correct it."

RELATIONS WITH USG BETTER

¶7. (C) Khanfar told U/S Glassman that AJ's relationship with the USG was "much better than before," when senior officials accused AJ of promoting violence. While he confessed to "missing Donald Rumsfeld" for the ratings boost that he provided, Khanfar said the USG's "attacks" created a negative atmosphere for AJ in the United States, which has made it difficult to gain access to cable providers. Khanfar shared that AJ was willing to pay for access, but that all the major providers had declined "for fear of being pursued legally by groups that think we support terrorism."

¶8. (C) Arab governments had also taken advantage of the USG's stance against AJ to crack down on the network in their countries, Khanfar asserted, and are increasingly taking action due to AJ's focus on human rights and democracy in the Arab world. "We have never seen ourselves as part of a

reform movement," Khanfar said, adding, "we are just journalists, but we believe strongly in protecting the peoples' right to knowledge."

AJ ENGLISH: THE NEW FLAGSHIP

¶9. (C) Moving to the topic of AJ English, Khanfar said he expected it to eventually overtake AJ Arabic as the network's "global brand," emphasizing on two occasions that AJ English is "not the voice of the Arabs," but that "since a lot of news is generated from this region, we are more capable" than other networks "of understanding it." AJ's overall strength, he said, "comes from being based in the global south."

AQ TAPES NO LONGER AIRED UNEDITED

¶10. (C) Asked about AJ's policy with regard to tapes received from extremist groups, Khanfar echoed comments made to a recent staffdel (reftel), noting that a process was in place within AJ to determine the proper use of any extremist tape that is received.

¶11. (C) The tape is first reviewed by three senior editors, who then identify any newsworthy items, he said. Any airing of the extremist tape must be followed by a discussion with an expert in order to "put it into perspective" for the audience, and not allowed to stand alone. Unless there is news in it, like the killing of a senior leader, Khanfar said, the interest in a tape from Osama bin Laden or Ayman Zawahiri is "no longer there." Khanfar claimed that CNN and BBC followed the same standards with regard to extremists' messages.

FACT CHECKING

¶12. (C) U/S Glassman told Khanfar that it was his policy to encourage State Department officials to engage with AJ, and that his military colleagues shared that view. Unfortunately, however, AJ still airs a certain amount of

DOHA 00000633 003 OF 003

inaccurate information regarding incidents involving the United States. Glassman strongly urged Khanfar to "call and check the facts before going on air," to which Khanfar replied by claiming that it is AJ policy to call military spokesmen when AJ reports on an incident involving the military, but "most of the time, we get no response, so after

15 to 60 minutes, we usually make a decision to go on the air."

¶13. (U) U/S Glassman cleared this cable.
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 08DOHA647, AL JAZEERA TO AIR 9/11 CONSPIRACY DOCUMENTARY;

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA647	2008-09-09 05:30	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO8232
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #0647 2530530
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 090530Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8205
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000647

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2018

TAGS: PREL KPAO QA

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA TO AIR 9/11 CONSPIRACY DOCUMENTARY;
CLAIMS EDITORIAL BALANCE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera plans to air on its documentary channel September 10 a German program presenting conspiracy theories about the 9/11 attacks.

-- PAO contacted Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar to get more information about the documentary and to communicate Embassy's concern that the "documentary" will be unbalanced and sensationalistic.

-- Khanfar said that the Arabic voice-over will be "editorially balanced." Khanfar said the narration would make it clear to viewers that these were conspiracy theories that the documentary would serve to discredit.

(C) COMMENTS

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-- The fact that Al Jazeera has decided to air this "documentary" demonstrates that the channel continues to indulge intermittently in sensationalism that will win no allies in its bid to expand into North American markets. Such actions could well reinforce the belief that Al Jazeera is more interested in feeding stereotypes than countering them.

End Key Points and Comments.

¶1. (C) PAO telephoned Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar on September 3, requesting an explanation of a promotion aired on Al Jazeera Arabic that day for a program that will run September 10 on the Al Jazeera Documentary channel called "The Other September." According to the promotion, the program will present alternate theories about the 9/11 attacks against the United States.

¶2. (C) Khanfar replied that he had not actually seen the documentary, which was produced by a German company, but that he had directed the AJ Documentary staff to provide a narrative voice-over that was "editorially balanced." Asked what that meant, Khanfar said the narration would make it clear to viewers that these were conspiracy theories that the documentary would serve to discredit.

¶3. (U) The Al Jazeera documentary channel airs Arabic-narrated programs produced elsewhere, notably Europe and the United States, and its general presentation is not unlike the History Channel in the United States.
 LeBaron



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08DOHA687	2008-09-24 13:48	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO0558
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
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P 241348Z SEP 08
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INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000687

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/23/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [QA](#)
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BALANCE

REF: DOHA 647

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).
)

Note: This cable includes an action request. Please see
"Next Steps and Action Request" below. End Note.

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera aired on its main channel the Italian-produced documentary "Zero 9/11" in two parts on September 3 and 10, with an Arabic voice-over produced by Al Jazeera.

-- Contrary to the assurances of Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar (reftel), the voice-over did not discredit or offset in any way the conspiracy theories presented in the film. The voice-over simply translated into Arabic the English-language narration.

-- Contacted by PAO about this, Khanfar said, "I actually agree with you. That is why I have decided to broadcast

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another documentary to balance it." Apparently, Khanfar did not actually see the film before it was broadcast, despite Embassy's protests about Al Jazeera's plans to broadcast the "documentary."

-- Khanfar indicated that he had directed his staff to identify another 9/11 documentary to "balance" the first, since the first presented conspiracy theories as fact. Khanfar said he welcomed U.S. government help in identifying an appropriate documentary.

-- However, Al Jazeera's chief of acquisitions separately told us he had received no such directive from Khanfar. And he indicated that he thought another 9/11 documentary showing was unnecessary. Al Jazeera, he said, had a long history of presenting the official views on 9/11. That was "enough balance."

 (C) NEXT STEPS AND ACTION REQUEST

-- Embassy intends to hold Khanfar to his word.

-- Action Request: Post requests Department's help in expeditiously identifying appropriate documentaries that accurately depict the events of 9/11.

-- In his introductory meeting with Al Jazeera Chairman Hamed bin Thamer al-Thani, Ambassador will also raise the airing of this documentary as an example of Al Jazeera's unacceptable practice of presenting two points of view completely separate from one another in context and time, and claiming this as journalistic balance.

-- Embassy will follow up and report.

End Key Points and Next Steps.

 ZERO 9/11: ZERO CREDIBILITY

¶1. (SBU) The USG's Open Source Centers in Amman and Doha provided the following summary of the "Zero 9/11" documentary, an Italian-produced film that aired on Al Jazeera Arabic in two parts on September 3 and 10 in prime evening time slots:

-- The film casts doubt on the official U.S. Government version of the 9/11 events.

-- It hosts people who are considered knowledgeable in their fields, such as former pilots, physicists, metal experts and others, who all question the official version of events.

-- They first dispute the official version about the collapse of the twin towers, saying the reasons provided could not have been responsible for the collapse. Several of them speak about the possibility of an implosion or "controlled demolition."

-- The documentary then disputes the commonly accepted version of the attack on the Pentagon, saying there was no evidence a plane hit the Pentagon, as no wreckage was found and footage from "86 cameras" showed no plane.

DOHA 00000687 002 OF 002

-- Throughout the program, screen captions, often unattributed, cast doubt on certain aspects of the official 9/11 story. The documentary refers occasionally to official statements or commonly held versions of events, but provides them largely for purposes of immediate refutation.

-- Arabic voice-over translation is provided throughout, which appears to match what the speakers are saying in the original language. (NOTE: Al Jazeera does not usually editorialize when providing translations of documentaries that it did not produce. END NOTE)

-- The press release for the film states: "ZERO: An investigation into 9/11, has one central thesis that the official version of the events surrounding the attacks on 9/11 cannot be true." As advertized, the film offers a constant attack on the results of both government and private investigations into the 9/11 attacks.

¶2. (C) Armed with this expert analysis, PAO contacted Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar on September 22 and noted that the Arabic voice-over of the documentary did not measure up to Khanfar's earlier assurances (reftel) that the narration, which was produced by Al Jazeera, would discredit the conspiracy theories put forth in the film. Khanfar replied, "I have now seen it and I actually agree with you. That is why I have decided to broadcast another documentary to balance it."

¶3. (C) Khanfar continued, "I have asked my acquisitions people to look around for a documentary that we will air to balance the views in this one." Asked if Khanfar would be willing to consider films suggested by the Embassy, he replied that such assistance would be "most welcome."

¶4. (C) Separately, PAO contacted Zeidoun al-Badri, Al Jazeera Documentary channel's chief of acquisitions, and asked if he had any plans to purchase and air a 9/11 documentary that accurately portrays the attacks, contrary to what was represented in "Zero 9/11." Al-Badri replied that he was

aware of no such plans and that, in his view, Al Jazeera had already presented a "balanced view" on 9/11 in keeping with the company's motto, "The Opinion and the other Opinion."

¶5. (C) Every year since 2001, Al-Badri claimed, Al Jazeera has run documentaries that capture the official version of events, including from victims' families, eyewitnesses and government officials. "Zero 9/11" was the first documentary that Al Jazeera has run presenting only conspiracy theories, he asserted. Al-Badri noted that his office had "excellent relationships with American film distributors" and that if "something new comes out, we would be willing to consider it." In that vein, like Khanfar, he welcomed Embassy's suggestions of other 9/11-centered films.
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 08DOHA792, AL JAZEERA: MORE THAN JUST A NEWS CHANNEL

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA792	2008-11-06 14:26	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO4669
OO RUEHDE RUEHDIR
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8409
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000792

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA: MORE THAN JUST A NEWS CHANNEL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- The Al Jazeera Network encompasses much more than the Arabic-language station for which it is most famous, and the network seeks to wield influence beyond its traditional audience in the Arab world.

-- This includes channels broadcasting sports, documentaries, and children's programing, as well as the English-language station that has been the focus of much of AJ's efforts over the past year.

-- Nevertheless, the Arabic service remains the network's most influential medium. For this reason, Embassy will be

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reporting systematically on AJ Arabic's approach to issues on which the USG wishes to influence Arab public opinion via regular cables analyzing trends in editorial policy, personnel changes and other developments within the network, as well as weekly summaries of Al Jazeera's broadcasts compiled by the Public Affairs Section and the Open Source Center's Doha bureau.

 THE MANY ARMS OF AL JAZEERA

¶1. (SBU) For all of the competition that has sprung up from channels like Al Arabiyah, Al Hurra, BBC Arabic and others, Al Jazeera is still considered the undisputed king of Arabic broadcast media in most of the Arab world. For that reason, Al Jazeera is a vital component to the USG's strategy in communicating with the Arab world.

¶2. (SBU) While Al Jazeera's Arabic news channel is a well-known brand worldwide, most outside the region are not aware of the many other pieces of the Al Jazeera "empire," many of which also reach wide audiences. The following are brief descriptions of the other parts of the Al Jazeera Network.

¶3. (SBU) Television

-- Al Jazeera English: Staffed primarily by Brits, the channel's broadcasts seem to be a mix between a documentary channel and a straightforward 24-hour news station. Unlike Al Jazeera Arabic, the English side has yet to find its niche. AJ Director General Wadah Khanfar is reportedly not pleased with its haphazard selection of news stories and wants it to focus on being a news channel that emphasizes the voices of the "global south." The channel claims a large viewership in Africa and South Asia, but has no data to back up the claim. Al Jazeera English saw an exodus of disgruntled staff during 2008, and has made little progress in attaining what it describes as its biggest goal: entry into the U.S. market.

-- Al Jazeera Mubasher: Sort of an Arabic C-Span, this channel runs live and taped coverage of public events, including conferences and parliamentary sessions from the region. For example, it regularly airs sessions organized by regional think tanks like the Brookings Doha Center.

-- Al Jazeera Sports: This is comprised of two channels, which are reportedly Al Jazeera's money makers, since it requires subscriptions and attracts advertizing dollars.

-- Al Jazeera Documentary: This channel runs popular documentaries purchased from European and U.S. sources such as the History Channel and National Geographic, with Arabic

voice-overs produced by Al Jazeera. It has also begun producing original documentaries for itself and other networks.

-- Al Jazeera Children,s: This channel is really an arm of the Qatar Foundation that uses the Al Jazeera brand and its broadcasting equipment to reach its audience. Al Jazeera has absolutely no editorial control, and it is the only part of the Al Jazeera Network not co-located on the Qatar Broadcasting compound. It is the only "edutainment" channel in the Middle East, and hews very closely to Sheikha Mozah,s

DOHA 00000792 002 OF 002

desire to increase quality educational options available to Arabs.

-- Al Jazeera Subsidiaries: Al Jazeera's Director General has said that he intends to launch subsidiaries in regional languages such as Turkish and Urdu, although no apparent steps have so far been taken in this regard. Al Jazeera's Chairman of the Board, Shaykh Hamad bin Thamer, was quoted in local media in early November as stating that "no new channels" were in the works.

¶4. (SBU) Internet/Mobile Phone

-- Al Jazeera.Net: Al Jazeera's Arabic website director claims that most of its visitors come from the United States, indicating that the site is not the first choice for news in the region. As Internet penetration grows in the region, however, its influence, particularly among young people, can be expected to grow.

-- Al Jazeera Mobile: A recent poll in Qatar revealed that a staggering 90 percent of respondents received news alerts on their mobile phones, and most of these users were relying on Al Jazeera Mobile, a service that is also available around the region.

¶5. (SBU) Print Media

-- Al Jazeera Newspaper: Plans have been underway for a regional newspaper for several years, and a chief editor remains on salary within Al Jazeera, but this project appears to be mothballed for the moment.
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 08DOHA845, AL JAZEERA: ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS, CHANNELING

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08DOHA845	2008-12-04 07:34	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO8157
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #0845/01 3390734
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 040734Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8501
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHMFISS/USAFCENT SHAW AFB SC
RBDHDZA/COMUSNAVCENT

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000845

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2018

TAGS: PREL KPAO PGOV QA

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA: ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS, CHANNELING
GOODWILL

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D
) .

KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

-- Al Jazeera insiders believe that poor guest selection for news programs and talk shows is undermining the network's professionalism. Common mistakes, chaotic management and personal biases all affect guest selection, but USG cooperation can positively address some of these shortcomings, according to contacts.

-- Interviews of USG officials conducted by Al Jazeera Arabic and English over the past month appear to indicate that Al Jazeera staff are willing to treat us more professionally, a factor that some attribute to goodwill within Al Jazeera on the heels of the U.S. election.

-- Embassy intends to take advantage of this positive trend by seeking placement of more U.S. voices, both official and

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private, on Al Jazeera in the coming months and closely monitoring the performance of producers and interviewers. Al Jazeera's audience of 40-50 million Arabs is too large and important for us to do otherwise.

 POOR GUEST SELECTION

¶1. (C) Several Al Jazeera employees, including interview producers, assessed that the network's most formidable obstacle to providing balanced, professional broadcasts was an often unsatisfactory set of guests willing to appear. Interview producers complained that the Al Jazeera Washington bureau "does little to help us" find appropriate U.S.-based guests, and those that they could find are often reluctant to appear on Al Jazeera, given its negative reputation in the United States. Other guests were willing to appear, but not during many of the network's live prime-time broadcasts, which air at awkward times in the United States.

¶2. (C) Al Jazeera's Quality Control Chief, a Sudanese journalist named Jaafar Abbas, said simply that the interview producers were "idiots" and that Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar had no control over them. Personal biases and incompetence were more to blame than anything else for the quality of guests that appear on Al Jazeera Arabic. This is a problem, he said, that pervades every news piece, not just those related to the United States. "How do you explain, for example, that Yassir Arman is always called to comment on behalf of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, and not Pagan Amun or anyone else who is actually from southern Sudan?" he asked.

¶3. (C) Abdulaziz al-Mahmoud, a board member of Al Jazeera and formerly the head of its website, made it clear to PAO that there was no love lost between him and Wadah Khanfar -- whom he considers corrupt and untrustworthy -- but said that he did not believe the poor selection of guests on the network was an editorial decision. It's more a problem of chaotic conditions in the newsroom and a lack of coherent management than intended malice, he stated.

 HAND-HOLDING APPEARS TO WORK

¶4. (C) PAO met with a number of interview producers, editors and other Al Jazeera employees to discuss ways of remedying the problem of guest selection. Al Jazeera staff suggested that Embassy provide names of well-known Americans who may be willing to appear remotely on the network to discuss the news of the day. PAO agreed in principle, noting that it would be useful for post to show producers how to search for academics, authors, think-tank members and former USG

officials and state officials who could offer their views on specific topics.

¶5. (C) Embassy also arranged for six live and taped interviews from November 25 to December 2 on Al Jazeera Arabic and English with the USAID Administrator, the USAID A/A for Public Affairs, the A/S for International Organizations, and the President's Special Envoy for Sudan. While each interview required talking to 3-4 different people within Al Jazeera and preparations sometimes bore out the accusations of "chaos in the newsroom," the interviews were generally professional, focused on agreed-upon topics, and

DOHA 00000845 002 OF 002

were aired in a straightforward manner.

¶6. (C) One exception came during A/S Hook's interview on Al Jazeera's "Inside Story," when a guest that PAO had not been apprised of joined the show and was given the lion's share of available broadcast time. The interview producer apologized repeatedly, claiming that she thought someone else had informed PAO of the last-minute guest.

GOODWILL IN THE AIR?

¶7. (C) Asked why USG officials seemed to be receiving more balanced treatment on Al Jazeera recently, Abdulaziz al-Mahmoud replied that the election of Barack Obama was a significant factor. "Everyone is hanging their hopes on him and is waiting to see what he will do, so we are giving him the benefit of the doubt," he said.
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 09DOHA80, AL JAZEERA ASKS: "WHY NOT US FOR OBAMA INTERVIEW?"

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DOHA80	2009-02-02 11:55	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO0688
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #0080/01 0331155
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FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8689
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000080

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2019

TAGS: PREL KPAO QA

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA ASKS: "WHY NOT US FOR OBAMA INTERVIEW?"

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera executives want to know why POTUS chose Al Arabiya for his first interview. No matter its reputation in the United States, one board member argued, Al Jazeera has by far the largest audience reach in the region.

-- Pressed by PAO about Qatar's blatant use of Al Jazeera as a political tool during the Gaza crisis, the board member acknowledged that "some Qataris had been asking if the government's actions in this regard were in the long-term interest of the country."

-- Another board member asked if Washington was aware that Al Arabiya was viewed by regional audiences as "pro-regime," so if the intent was to send a message of change from the previous administration, the argument fell on deaf ears, the board member said.

-- Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar reportedly ordered Al Jazeera English to stop broadcasting excerpts of

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the Al Arabiya interview because nothing the President said was "newsworthy," although this ban appeared to be lifted on February 1. Al Jazeera Arabic provided little coverage of the interview.

 (C) COMMENTS

-- That Al Jazeera employees are miffed over Al Arabiya's scoop is no surprise. Even these pro-U.S., pro-reform contacts high within the Al Jazeera structure have a hard time understanding that they cannot have their cake and eat it, too, i.e. Al Jazeera cannot expect to use its exclusive position in Gaza to run biased coverage and then expect the new Administration to usher in a new relationship with the station due only to its dominant market share.

-- At the same time, Al Jazeera remains the 800-pound gorilla in the media market, and, as the Saudis have shown, dealing with its Al Thani keepers strategically is key to moderating its more egregious coverage. Embassy will offer its thoughts on such a strategy septel.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

¶1. (C) Ahmed al-Kholaifi, Managing Director of Al Jazeera's Board of Directors, told PAO on January 29 that he was encouraged by the message conveyed by President Obama during his interview on Al Arabiya. A graduate of U.S. universities, Kholaifi said he was "really rooting for America." He added, "I just have to ask, though, why not Al Jazeera?"

¶2. (C) PAO explained that he did not have specific guidance from Washington on the choice of stations, but asked Kholaifi if he thought it made sense for the President to appear on Al Jazeera after its wall-to-wall, extremely graphic coverage of the Gaza incursion. PAO added that the Gaza coverage had laid bare once and for all the tight relationship between Qatar and Al Jazeera, which very clearly was using the station as a political tool to pressure the Saudis and Egyptians. Al Jazeera, PAO stated, was becoming part of the news, not a reporter of the news.

¶3. (C) Kholaifi admitted that "there are some Qataris who are questioning the wisdom of the government's actions" with regard to Gaza, and "asking if they are in the long-term interests of the country." In the short-term, he stated, everyone agreed that something had to be done and supported the Amir's active diplomacy. He added that he thought Al Jazeera employees were taking their cues from the Amir's actions, but not receiving direct instructions from the government.

¶4. (C) "No matter what you thought of our Gaza coverage," Kholaiifi continued, "the U.S. Government should put its voice on Al Jazeera, because we are the station that Arabs are watching."

¶5. (C) Another Al Jazeera board member, Abdulaziz al-Mahmud, also a U.S.-educated reformist, asked if Washington decision makers were aware that Al Arabiya is viewed as a pro-government propaganda channel, whereas Al Jazeera has credibility with "ordinary Arabs." If the President's intent was to communicate with the Arab street, he said, then his message has fallen on deaf ears, because

DOHA 00000080 002 OF 002

"nobody watches Al Arabiya."

¶6. (C) The Senior Interview Producer for Al Jazeera English, who is not Qatari, said that all of her colleagues at the station were trying to piece together the message that President Obama was trying to send to Al Jazeera by choosing its main competitor. "We all want him to succeed," she explained, "but he's not doing any good going on a channel that maybe 10 percent of viewers watch."

¶7. (C) Challenged by PAO to cite the journalistic standards behind the reason for not showing excerpts of the interview on Al Jazeera, the producer noted that Al Jazeera English had in fact run several clips, but then was forced to pull them when Director General Wadah Khanfar intervened. His reasoning, she stated, was that the President said "nothing newsworthy" in the interview. Al Jazeera Arabic, according to contacts, ran few excerpts. (NOTE: Al Jazeera English began running excerpts again on the morning of February 1. END NOTE)
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 09DOHA103, USING AL JAZEERA TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE

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09DOHA103	2009-02-10 14:23	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXYZ0010
OO RUEHWEB

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INFO RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 000103

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2019
TAGS: PREL PGOV KPAO QA
SUBJECT: USING AL JAZEERA TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE
ARAB/MUSLIM WORLD

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4
(B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

-- As the Department seeks to implement President Obama's and the Secretary's goal of a renewed dialogue with Arab and Muslim audiences, we should make strategic use of the Al Jazeera television network, including both the Arabic and English news channels.

-- Embassy recommends that top USG officials, including Special Envoys, the Secretary, and other cabinet officials grant interviews to Al Jazeera to lay out the President's foreign policy agenda.

-- This Embassy stands ready to help with this effort, including through our direct contacts with Al Jazeera headquarters and with senior members of the Qatar government and the Al Thani ruling family.

-- Al Jazeera and its Al Thani overseers have demonstrated a

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willingness to put U.S. officials on the air. And they are flexible, to an extent, about how that is done.

-- Al Jazeera Board Chairman Hamed bin Thamer Al Thani offered us a free broadcast hour to present our views about September 11. We should instead call in that offer to convey the new Administration's message out on a network we know millions of Arabs watch.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

¶1. (SBU) As the Department seeks to implement President Obama's and the Secretary's goal of a renewed dialogue with Arab and non-Arab Muslim populations, we should make strategic use of the Al Jazeera television network. Notorious though it may be for its sensational broadcasts, even its detractors recognize that Al Jazeera commands a market share in the Arab world of over 50 percent, reaching between 40 and 50 million Arabs every day. Despite bans imposed at one time or another by a number of Arab governments, Al Jazeera is still the undisputed king of Arab broadcast media.

¶2. (SBU) We should also keep in mind that most Muslims are not Arabs, and Al Jazeera's English channel, which claims to reach 100 million households, reaches many of the Muslim audiences that do not speak Arabic, particularly in Africa and South Asia.

¶3. (C) For these reasons, former Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes remarked that "as a communicator, I cannot afford to ignore Al Jazeera." But by and large, that is exactly what most senior Bush administration officials did, especially from 2004 onwards. In doing so, the USG lost a critical opportunity to communicate directly with millions of Arabs.

¶4. (C) There are many good reasons not to like Al Jazeera. Their journalistic and editorial practices are often unprofessional, and the Qataris' use of the station to stoke Arab sentiment over emotional issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is crass. The station's coverage of the events in Gaza, described by one Al Jazeera insider as "outrageously biased" in favor of Hamas, is just one recent example.

¶5. (SBU) That said, post is not aware of any occasion in recent years in which Al Jazeera has refused to interview a senior official. Interviewers do ask tough and sometimes outrageous questions, but no more outrageous than what Ambassadors and officers face every day from the Arab public.

¶6. (C) In addition, Al Jazeera Board Chairman Hamed bin

Thamer Al Thani has proven open to creative uses of Al Jazeera's airwaves by the USG beyond straightforward interviews. In response to our complaint about a documentary spewing fantastical conspiracy theories about 9/11, for example, Hamed bin Thamer offered to allow the USG a full broadcast hour to present its views either as an interview or in another format.

¶7. (C) We should take advantage of this willingness to not only allow U.S. voices to appear on Al Jazeera, but also the flexibility the Al Thanis are demonstrating in how we put our message across.

¶8. (C) Importantly, as is true for Arabs around the region, editors and journalists inside Al Jazeera tell Embassy staff that they are personally reserving a large amount of goodwill for the Obama administration. The USG needs to take advantage of this window of opportunity. We do not need to like or condone the actions of Al Jazeera to use it as a platform to communicate with the Arab world.

¶9. (C) Embassy urges that senior officials, including the Secretary, Special Envoys Mitchell and Holbrooke, and other cabinet officials consider granting interviews to Al Jazeera as soon as possible and on a regular basis to lay out the President's foreign policy agenda. This Embassy stands ready to help with this effort, including through direct diplomacy with Qatar's ruling family and members of Al Jazeera's Doha headquarters.

¶10. (C) The Arab world is waiting eagerly to hear more from President Obama, the Secretary and senior officials, and indications are that audiences are reacting positively to the Administration's swift engagement and willingness to listen. We need to extend that engagement to Al Jazeera as soon as possible.
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 09DOHA116, AL JAZEERA DIRECTOR DISCUSSES GAZA COVERAGE

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DOHA116	2009-02-11 13:41	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO8515
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDO #0116/01 0421341
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 111341Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8740
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000116

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2019

TAGS: PREL KPAO WE GZ IS QA

SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA DIRECTOR DISCUSSES GAZA COVERAGE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH E. LEBARON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Al Jazeera Network Director General Wadah Khanfar told Ambassador on February 10 that Israel's incursion into Gaza was "a ready-made TV show" and that Al Jazeera had achieved "perhaps its highest ratings ever" by relying on an unrivaled network of correspondents and producers to broadcast factual information and images quickly.

-- Al Jazeera attempted to put images in context and provided a perspective on Israel with two correspondents filing reports from there, according to Khanfar.

-- Ambassador pointed out the incongruity of the Qataris' pointing to the Arab street as a call for action, all while the Qatari-funded Al Jazeera's images were whipping up sentiments on the street

-- Khanfar agreed that sentiments were at fever pitch on the Arab street and that al-Jazeera's coverage logically contributed to it. But he tried to counter Ambassador's

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point by making (the extraneous point) that anger was high in Indonesia and Turkey, too.

-- Khanfar believed that Arab emotions, particularly in the Gulf, ran higher this time than during the war in Lebanon in 2006 because "HAMAS is a Sunni organization that Sunnis could point to and say, 'Look at us, we too are resisting the way Hizbollah (a Shi'i organization) did.'"

 (C) COMMENTS

-- Khanfar was clearly pleased with yet another war-time scoop for Al Jazeera. The network's unparalleled financial resources, provided by the Qatari Government, continue to provide the human and technical resources to operate in difficult areas that other networks simply cannot afford to cover so comprehensively.

-- Whatever the Qataris' involvement, Al Jazeera's Gaza coverage has proven once again that, when its broadcasting capabilities coincide with Qatar's active foreign policy, the combination can be potent.

-- This is not intuitively obvious, but, to help improve the USG's image on the Arab street, we need to step up USG senior-level engagement of the Qatari leadership. Better relations with the ruling al-Thani family will translate into changes in al-Jazeera coverage that will gradually help improve the image of the United States in the Arab street.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

¶1. (C) Ambassador called on Al Jazeera Director General Wadah Khanfar on February 10 to hear his views on the network's coverage of Gaza and share the USG's concerns about it. Khanfar explained that Israel's incursion into Gaza was a "ready-made TV show" that Al Jazeera could not afford not to cover 24 hours a day. "Even some Israelis were watching us, especially in the south," he boasted, "because we always had the latest information."

¶2. (C) The Director General noted that Al Jazeera had four correspondents and 20 producers working in Gaza before the fighting, which created "an unparalleled network." Al Arabiyah, by contrast, had just one correspondent reporting regularly from Gaza and no producers, so its reports, he said, were always packaged, whereas Al Jazeera's were live.

¶3. (C) "We also had four correspondents in Israel," he stated, "and in every news bulletin, we ran reports from two in Israel and two in Gaza." This, he explained, helped balance perspectives. Al Jazeera introduced a new program called "Opinions from Israel" to highlight the different

opinions about the fighting among Israelis.

¶4. (C) Ambassador argued that showing Israeli "talking heads" or balancing the number of reports was no balance at all, not when on the other side of the scale you are broadcasting graphic images of dead children and urban damage from modern warfare.

¶5. (C) Khanfar countered that "even if we had given the Israelis 50 percent of the airtime with no images at all, the power of the story was so great that there still would have been an emotional response by the audience." Witnesses

DOHA 00000116 002 OF 002

interviewed by Al Jazeera in Gaza were impossible to balance, he said, but Al Jazeera strived to put things into context by noting casualty numbers, and citing the percentage of homes and buildings that had been hit throughout Gaza, not just in one area.

¶6. (C) Without conceding the point, Ambassador observed that Al Jazeera's coverage took viewers' emotions and then raised them to a higher level through its coverage. Then Qatari leaders would point to the anger on the Arab street as a call to action. But because Al Jazeera is funded by the Qataris, it forms a vicious cycle leading to more graphic coverage, more emotion, more demonstrations, and then more calls to action.

¶7. (C) Khanfar tried to counter, saying, extraneously, that demonstrations in Turkey were the largest in 27 years, and that Indonesians had also come out in large numbers, despite the fact that these are not big markets for Al Jazeera.

¶8. (C) Khanfar denied that there was any political bent within Al Jazeera, because "how would we decide on it, with 22 Arabs in a room?" he asked. He noted that some in the editorial board had disagreed with HAMAS, others with Egypt, so it was impossible to determine and implement one political line in Al Jazeera's broadcasts.

¶9. (C) The Director General had an alternative theory for the strong level of popular Arab emotion over Gaza: HAMAS, being a Sunni organization, represented the "Sunni resistance." Sunnis could point to HAMAS and say, "finally, we did something, we are resisting the way Hizbollah did," according to Khanfar, who said that this was view was particularly strong in the Gulf countries.

¶10. (C) During the Lebanon war in 2006, Khanfar claimed, "Salafis were calling me all the time, accusing me of supporting Hassan Nasrallah, a Shia; now they are calling me to demand that I show more about Gaza because this is seen as

our fight, our victory."
LeBaron



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Viewing cable 09DOHA318, AL JAZEERA TACKLES LABOR CONDITIONS IN QATAR

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09DOHA318	2009-05-14 08:13	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Doha

VZCZCXRO4044
PP RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #0318/01 1340813
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 140813Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9056
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 0227

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 000318

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/14/2019
TAGS: PREL PHUM KTIP KPAO QA
SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA TACKLES LABOR CONDITIONS IN QATAR

Classified By: CDA MICHAEL A. RATNEY, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- The Al Jazeera English channel broadcast a three-minute report on unfair labor conditions in Qatar on April 10, tying the workers' situation of squalid living conditions, unpaid status, and heavy indebtedness to the global economic crisis.

-- The journalist who filed the report said that, in reality, the workers "have no idea the global economy is in crisis," because "they have been living in these conditions in Qatar for years." Realizing what a sensitive topic labor rights are in Qatar, however, he did not want to address systemic labor problems, and instead decided to limit his focus to payment problems that may be linked to the global downturn.

-- A producer at Al Jazeera, whose report on general labor conditions in Qatar was shelved two years ago, said the April 10 broadcast demonstrates that the "door is now open" on this subject, which she attributes to the leadership of Al Jazeera English Director Tony Burman and the "real journalists" that

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he has brought on board since joining the station in the summer of 2008.

 (C) COMMENTS

-- It has become conventional wisdom that Al Jazeera does not feature reporting about Qatar, with the official explanation for this being that "nothing of international importance happens in Qatar." In reality, Al Jazeera does occasionally report on happenings in Qatar, including conferences, major statements by the leadership, and economic developments.

-- What Al Jazeera has resolutely steered away from, however, is reporting on anything politically controversial in Qatar, including labor conditions.

-- Taken together with other actions the Qataris have initiated over the past several months, the fact that Al Jazeera is now reporting on this previously taboo subject may be another sign that the Qatari Government is more serious about addressing the rights of foreign laborers in Qatar.

END KEY POINTS AND COMMENTS

¶1. (U) Casey Kaufman, an American citizen journalist working with Al Jazeera English, one of the Al Jazeera Network's seven stations broadcast worldwide, filed a report on April 10 highlighting the plight of a group of Nepali construction workers living in poor conditions in Doha who have not been paid for four months. Kaufman begins the broadcast by stating that the global economic crisis has "led to a darker reality" for workers like these, noting that trade unions are not allowed in Qatar, and that complaining can lead to deportation. Video shots of the workers show cramped living conditions, while the voice-over states that 18 men are living in a two-room apartment.

¶2. (U) Kaufman interviews the workers' company manager who, under conditions of anonymity, states that if contractors do not pay sub-contractors, then workers cannot get paid. Kaufman notes in his voice-over that it is unclear whether contractors are truly experiencing liquidity problems, or are just using the economic crisis as an excuse to withhold payments.

¶3. (C) Contacted separately, Kaufman told PAO that he had visited eight camps and was struck by the fact that "these guys aren't thinking about the economic crisis at all. They have been living in these conditions since they arrived in this country." Although there was no pressure from his superiors, Kaufman said, he thought it was better not to target the labor problem in general, but to tie it to the

economic crisis so that it did not cross political sensitivities.

¶4. (C) Asked to describe his understanding of those sensitivities, Kaufman replied that "it's hard to know" because no one inside Al Jazeera really talks about them. "We know that certain subjects are sensitive, and we know who our bosses are," he said, "but I have not seen any significant amounts of pressure not to file certain stories."

¶5. (C) Phuong-Y Nguyen, a Canadian producer at Al Jazeera

DOHA 00000318 002 OF 002

English whose own report on labor conditions in Qatar was put on the shelf by Al Jazeera managers two years ago, told PAO that Kaufman's report proves that "the door is open" on the labor issue. Asked what changed, Nguyen pointed to the leadership of Tony Burman, another Canadian brought in to head the English channel in the summer of 2008, and the "real journalists" that he has since brought on board.

¶6. (C) Nguyen said that the airing of the April 10 broadcast has inspired her to renew her effort to produce a longer report on general labor conditions, that would include interviews with Qatari officials. "When we tried two years ago, the best we could get was someone from the National Human Rights Committee," Nguyen said, "but you just can't have a full report on labor issues without a Qatari Government voice."
Ratney

The US embassy cables: The documents



US embassy cables: Al-Jazeera 'proves useful tool for Qatari political masters'

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Wednesday, 01 July 2009, 13:34

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 DOHA 000432

SIPDIS

EO 12958 DECL: 06/30/2019

TAGS PREL, KPAO, QA, EG, IS, SA, IR, SU

SUBJECT: EMBASSY DOHA'S ANALYSIS OF QATARI PRIME MINISTER'S
AL JAZEERA INTERVIEW

REF: A. DOHA 421 B. DOHA 362 C. DOHA 225 D. DOHA 96 E. DOHA
422

Classified By: Amb Joseph LeBaron, reason 1.4 (B) (D)

(C) KEY ANALYTIC POINTS AND COMMENTS

-- In a rare, 50-minute interview on June 24 on Al
Jazeera's Arabic news service, Qatar's Prime Minister,

Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani, repeatedly described the United States as a "friend." He called U.S.-Qatari relations "strategic."

-- For a small state normally cautious about aligning too closely with any other country, such a public statement designed to reach throughout the Arab world is bold. It is another indication of Qatar's strong interest in upgrading the bilateral political relationship with the United States.

-- That said, the Prime Minister's repeated emphasis in the interview on Qatar's right to its own opinion is not only a reaffirmation of Qatar's foreign policy approach to the region. It is also a signal that Qatar intends to maintain and pursue state and non-state relationships that others such as the United States oppose, such as with Hamas, Hizballah, and Iran.

-- Qatar's mediation efforts throughout the Middle East and North Africa featured prominently in the Prime Minister's remarks. These efforts reflect a small and vulnerable country's acute dependence on regional stability as much as they do an ideological stance or religious impulse.

-- But the Prime Minister spent the most time on Egypt. He strongly criticized (unnamed) elements in the Egyptian government. But, significantly, he did not criticize its President. He set ambiguous terms for re-opening the Israeli trade office.

-- Despite GOQ protestations to the contrary, Al Jazeera remains one of Qatar's most valuable political and diplomatic tools.

COMMENT

-- Prime Minister Al Thani's outreach to the United States is a response to President Obama's energetic efforts to repair the U.S. relationship with the Arab and Muslim worlds. The U.S. Administration's newfound credibility in the Middle East, bolstered by a tough stand with the Israelis over settlements, has made the U.S. a more attractive partner for Qatar and other Arab countries.

-- Beyond the President's historic speech in Cairo, other reasons exist for the Prime Minister's remarks about the United States in the interview. These include Acting NEA Assistant Secretary Feltman's recent successful visit to

Qatar and the also recent and successful visits to Washington by Qatar's head of state security and Attorney General. U.S. Special Envoy for Sudan Scott Gration's close working relationship with the GOQ on Qatar's initiative on Darfur has likewise contributed. As also did the reclassification of Qatar to the Tier 2 Watch List for Trafficking in Persons.

End Key Points and Comment.

1. (U) Further to Ref A, Embassy Doha offers the following analysis and reporting on the Prime Minister's rare and important interview on Al Jazeera about Qatar's foreign policy in the region. The subjects covered in the interview, if not the questions themselves, almost certainly were worked out in advance. Thus the interview should be interpreted as a carefully-considered move by Qatar to explain to the Arab world and key members of the international community Qatar's regional political and diplomatic policies.

U.S.-QATAR RELATIONS

2. (C) Qatari Prime Minister (and Foreign Minister) Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani's June 24 interview on Al Jazeera Arabic television network broached many of the country's most controversial and active regional foreign policies. The interview took place on "Bila Hodood" (Without Borders), one

DOHA 00000432 002 OF 005

of Al Jazeera's flagship programs, which covers political and social issues in the confrontational style of its Egyptian host, Ahmed Mansour.

3. (C) The Prime Minister discussed Qatar's "strategic" relationship with the U.S. with surprising candor and explicitness, although his comments about the U.S. - Qatari bilateral relationship occupied a relatively small part of the program, and they occurred towards the middle of the interview. Repeatedly referring to the U.S. as a "friend" of Qatar, he expressed satisfaction with President Obama's concerted effort to reach out to the Muslim world.

4. (C) Pointing to the U.S. administration's campaign to halt Israeli settlement construction and resume Middle East peace negotiations, the PM remarked that he has "great

hope" in the new administration. Notably, he asserted that Qatar will help the United States to the greatest extent possible if it is serious about resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Prime Minister also expressed satisfaction that the political dialogue and climate between his country and the United States have recently improved.

5. (C) These remarks by the Prime Minister about the United States represent fulsome praise for Qatar, a country that historically has publicly downplayed its relations with the United States and the American presence in Qatar. While it hosts Al Udaid Air Base, one of the largest and most important military facilities in the Middle East, Qatar's desire to avoid the appearance of being a western outpost has led the GOQ to minimize the visibility of its security dependence on the U.S. In this context, the Prime Minister's frank admission of a "strategic" relationship with the United States is significant.

6. (C) After several years of strained relations, the Prime Minister's comments are encouraging public sign that Qatar is eager to mend political fences with the United States -- although not without an important caveat (see para. 7, immediately below.) An upgraded political relationship with Qatar could manifest itself in increased cooperation on several fronts, from counter-terrorism and Middle East peace to Iraq and Afghanistan, as highlighted in Ref B.

Relations with Extremists

7. (C) However, the Prime Minister remarked several times in the interview that Qatar remains entitled to its own opinion on regional and international issues, saying "(we) have our own viewpoints, which no one can confiscate (read: dictate)." The Prime Minister was adamant: Qatar has the right to speak out and the right to pursue an independent policy line. The subtext of this is that Qatar, despite its stated strategic alliance with the United States, despite its membership in the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League, will not abandon its independence of thought and action. To Embassy Doha, the Prime Minister was signaling here Qatar's -- the Amir's -- firm intention to maintain its engagement with, and active support for, non-state actors such as Hamas and Hizbollah regardless of international pressure.

8. (C) That said, there was a complete absence of any explicit mention of Hamas, Syria, or Hizbollah. Avoiding these fault lines is consistent with the apparent intention

of the Prime Minister to reach out to the United States in the interview, and to telegraph that intent quite publicly to the Arab world and others. Because Qatar is unlikely to abandon ties with these parties, mentioning these relationships in the interview would only emphasize obstacles in the way of improved U.S.-Qatari relations. Hamad bin Jassim probably deliberately chose instead to speak in very general terms about regional peace and stability.

9. (C) In a similar vein, Prime Minister Al Thani's brief mention of Iran was characteristically muted and probably calculated to avoid any appearance of Qatari bias vis--vis the current protests.

-- (U) The Premier reiterated the Amir's position, stated publicly on a state visit to Paris on June 23, that Iran's stability is important for the Gulf region and expressed confidence that Iran will "bypass" the crisis.

QATAR'S MEDIATION PHILOSOPHY

10. (C) Taken as a whole, the Prime Minister's comments reaffirm Qatar that has strategically chosen to present itself as a valuable regional mediator, a role in which small

DOHA 00000432 003 OF 005

size is not necessarily a disadvantage. Such a role is also in Qatar's acute self-interest. Tiny Qatar is acutely vulnerable to disruptions in the region; instability and chaos greatly increase the possibility that its sovereignty could be violated or its economic security undermined by its two neighbors with hegemonic aspirations, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

11. (C) The major exception to this regional approach is Qatar's policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the Gaza war, Qatar acted in a way that inflamed, rather than tempered, regional tensions. Recognizing the damage that this approach caused at the start of the Obama Administration, and in Qatar's relations with other Arab states, Qatar's leaders set out to rehabilitate their moderate image during the Arab League summit in Doha in March 2009 (Ref C).

12. (C) The Prime Minister's interview continued this effort. The Prime Minister framed Qatar's Gaza involvement in terms of Palestinian suffering. He chose not to justify Qatar's actions in Gaza as promoting regional stability, a justification he used when discussing other regional disputes.

DIPLOMATIC FREEZE WITH ISRAEL

13. (C) On Israel, the Prime Minister said Qatar would re-open the Israeli trade office once the conditions that led to this action were undone and Israel made efforts to improve the plight of the Palestinians. (The office has been closed since January, in the aftermath of the Gaza War.) With such an ambiguous threshold for upgrading relations, Qatar appears in no rush to restore ties with Israel, although contacts between the two continue.

-- (U) The Prime Minister denied that Qatar sought to play on the emotions of the Arab world when it closed the Israeli trade office. Exasperated, he remarked that Qatar's Arab brothers wanted the office closed when it was open, but they want it open now that it is closed. He did not elaborate.

RELATIONS WITH EGYPT

14. (C) Knowing the clamor Qatar has caused in the region, the Prime Minister addressed head-on Qatar's diplomatic tensions with Egypt, which began with differences over Israel's actions in Gaza earlier this year and quickly degenerated into a media war between the two sides.

-- (U) Egyptian charges have recently included accusations that Qatar helped plan Hamas' takeover of Gaza in the summer of 2007 and Qatari complicity in Hizbollah's alleged plot to stage attacks in Egypt.

-- (U) Qatari efforts to mediate conflicts in Sudan have come under attack by the Egyptians, who argue that Qatar is interfering in Egypt's sphere of influence.

-- (U) Responding to Egyptian allegations of interference,

the Prime Minister denied in the interview that Qatar worked (unsuccessfully) with the French to buy the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit from his captors. He asserted that Qatar was just responding to a request for assistance from a friendly, non-Arab state. He maintained that Qatar entered the negotiations only on the condition that the terms of Egypt's mediation were upheld.

15. (C) The Prime Minister suggested that Egyptian accusations were attempts by unspecified elements in Egypt to distract the public from that government's domestic failures. Dismissing Egyptian accusations as "ridiculous," he made no visible attempt to reconcile with the Egyptians, beyond an obligatory commitment to Arab Unity. The Prime Minister continued with the practice of blaming unspecified element within the Egyptian regime for the rift, while expressing admiration for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak -- no doubt to show an Arab leader respect and avoid the appearance of a personality-driven feud. Contrary to all evidence, Hamad bin Jassim denied that Qatar had tried to host a Gaza reconstruction conference in Doha after the Gaza war began to compete with one being held in Egypt (see Ref D). Knowing that Egypt's role in advancing peace is important to the United States, the Prime Minister was likely also addressing his comments to an audience broader than officials in Cairo.

16. (U) Demonstrating Qatar's indifference to current tensions, the Premier said the dispute would be resolved, but

DOHA 00000432 004 OF 005

he did not know whether it would take one day or ten years.

-- (U) The Prime Minister said that he had a meeting with Umar Sulayman, head of Egypt's General Intelligence Directorate, which was mediated by Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al Faysal. While they "spoke on everything," they did not agree on everything, he said.

RECONCILIATION WITH SAUDI ARABIA

17. (C) The lengths to which Prime Minister Al Thani praised Saudi Arabia in the interview merit further attention. They reflect Qatar's calculation that it took tensions with other Arab countries too far during the Gaza war, endangering its strategy of maximizing its influence

by preserving good relations with all countries. At a time when Qatar does not appear eager (and possibly able) to reconcile with Egypt, Qatar probably believes it cannot afford to alienate the other Arab powerhouse.

-- (C) The Prime Minister recognized that Saudi Arabia had played a role in getting some Arab states to skip Qatar's emergency summit on the Gaza war. But he argued forcefully that differences with Saudi Arabia were confined to discrete points of view, a reference, we think, to Iran, Hamas, and the appropriate role of Al Jazeera in the region.

-- (U) The Prime Minister pointed to the two country's resolution of the Khor Al Udaid maritime border dispute as evidence of improving ties. He also used conspicuously warm words to describe Saudi Arabia's contributions, calling Saudi Arabia an important country and "the backbone of the GCC."

THE DOHA AGREEMENT ON LEBANON

18. (C) In a positive sign for U.S. interests in Lebanon, the Prime Minister indicated that Qatar would not insist that the 2007 Doha Agreement remain operative, echoing comments he made in private to A/S Feltman (see Ref E).

-- (U) Commenting on Lebanese Prime-Minister designate Saad Hariri's statement that the Doha Agreement is at an end with the completion of the recent elections in Lebanon, the Prime Minister remarked that the agreement was just for a "certain phase."

YEMEN

19. (C) The Prime Minister, when discussing Qatar's role in trying to mediate the Al-Huthi rebellion in Yemen, dismissed Yemeni government accusations that Qatar funded the rebellion. The Prime Minister maintained that his country was a "fair broker" that helped forge an agreement that was not honored for no fault of its own. In response to calls from some in Yemen and the region for Qatar to reprise its mediation role, the Prime Minister indicated Qatar's reluctance by noting that he would advise the Amir

not to continue Qatar's involvement in Yemen. The Prime Minister likely also calculated that bringing the issue into the open would increase pressure on the Yemeni Government to return to Qatar-led mediation.

AL JAZEERA'S ROLE IN QATARI FOREIGN POLICY

20. (U) The Prime Minister broached the subject of Al Jazeera and the "headaches" its has caused for the Government of Qatar, from tensions with Saudi Arabia to contributing to the current rift with Egypt.

-- (U) Asked about Al Jazeera, he joked that Qatar should sell it, indicating Qatar was offered \$5 billion for it at one time. He added that the money might be worth more than the headaches Al Jazeera has caused for the regime.

21. (C) Such statements must not be taken at face value as Al Jazeera, the most watched satellite television station in the Middle East, is heavily subsidized by the Qatari government and has proved itself a useful tool for the station's political masters. The station's coverage of events in the Middle East is relatively free and open, though it refrains from criticizing Qatar and its government. Al Jazeera's ability to influence public opinion throughout the region is a substantial source of leverage for Qatar, one which it is unlikely to relinquish. Moreover, the network can also be

DOHA 00000432 005 OF 005

used as a chip to improve relations. For example, Al Jazeera's more favorable coverage of Saudi Arabia's royal family has facilitated Qatari-Saudi reconciliation over the past year.

LeBaron

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The US embassy cables: The documents



US embassy cables: Qatar using al-Jazeera as bargaining tool, claims US

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Thursday, 19 November 2009, 12:06

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 07 DOHA 000677

EO 12958 DECL: 10/05/2019

TAGS PREL, AMGT, KSPR, QA

SUBJECT: THE MOVE TOWARD AN INTERAGENCY SYNCHRONIZATION

PLAN: THE RESULTS OF EMBASSY DOHA'S THIRD FIELD ASSESSMENT

REF: DOHA 140

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron for reasons 1.4
(b and d).

KEY POINTS

-- (C) Embassy Doha's third interagency off-site was held September 30, 2009. The third in a series of semi-annual off-site sessions (reftels report on the first, held September 2008 and the second, held March 2009), the off-

site's objective was to review and update our field interagency assessment of key trends in Qatar over the coming 36 months.

-- (C) The off-site identified three new trends with important implications for U.S. policy: the emergence of the GOQ's internal security apparatus as a security force that eclipses in importance the Qatari military (para 4); the emergence of food security as a Qatari national security imperative (para 16) and the emergence of Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection as an area of increasing GOQ focus (paras 4, 8, 11 and 17).

-- (C) The off-site concluded with a look at mechanisms for interagency synchronization to most effectively pursue the policy imperatives identified during the off-site discussions. Embassy Doha's synchronization process has materially developed since the last off-site. We now have five active synchronization groups that bring together interagency players to achieve shared interagency goals identified through the multi-step synchronization process.

End key points.

1. (C) At our third inter-agency off-site, the interagency team focused on trends in the following areas:

-- Political and Foreign Policy -- Military -- Intelligence and Counterterrorism -- Crime -- Economic and Environmental -- Food Security -- Trade -- Society, Education and Media -- Demographic and Consular

2. (C) The remaining sections of this cable, keyed to these topic areas, provide a short synopsis of our interagency conclusions, followed by a description of the interagency synchronization process. We have also looked back upon the conclusions reached in our two previous off-site exercises and assessed the overall state and movement of several key trends identified across the three off-sites.

POLITICAL AND FOREIGN POLICY TRENDS

3. (C) AL THANI RULE IS SECURE; CROWN PRINCE EMERGES

-- (C) We expect the Al Thani family's rule to remain uncontested over the next 36 months. Given the history of intra-family coups in this country and known rivalries

between key members of the ruling family, however, we expect that some friction between powerful players will continue. The Amir's health is reportedly poor but stable and we expect a smooth transition in power to his son after his eventual passing. To ensure that smooth transition, we expect to see the continued emergence of Crown Prince Shaykh Tamim as more than a figurehead, as his father continues to groom him for the highest office in Qatar. We predict that he will increasingly issue more Amiri decrees under his own authority and take on more symbolic leadership duties normally reserved for the Amir, such as greeting Eid well-wishers (something he did in September for the first time in lieu of his father).

-- (C) The Amir and Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim will continue to dominate Qatar's highly personalized foreign policy, although somewhat more attention will be paid to foreign humanitarian assistance and regional social and educational initiatives led by the Amir's consort, Shaykha Mozah, than was previously the case. The new Minister of State for International Cooperation, Khalid al-Attiyah; the Amir's Office Director (and daughter), Shaykha Hind; and the PM's new Foreign Policy Advisor, Shaykh Mohammed (the Amir's son), are part of a new generation of capable, Western-educated and energetic Qataris whose role in influencing and shaping foreign policy we expect to increase slightly over the coming 36 months.

-- (C) Over all three off-sites we assessed little or no movement in the trend toward personality-based, authoritarian rule in Qatar. Seminal and wide-ranging education reforms may have planted the seeds that will move this trend towards rationalized, decentralized government, but these effects are still several years away.

-- (C) Over the next 36 months, Qatar will continue to pragmatically pursue relations with Iran, with whom it shares the world's largest non-associated natural gas field. Qatar will also continue to pursue its classic vulnerable small-state policies aimed either at pleasing as many players as possible or - where competing demands make this impossible - at containing and counter-balancing irritation caused by these policies. We expect Qatar therefore to persist in supporting problematic players such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria, even as it attempts to strengthen its relationship with the United States and its GCC neighbors. We expect the trend in favor of using Al Jazeera as an informal tool of GOQ foreign policy to continue undiminished.

-- (C) Over the past three off-sites Qatar has maintained this trend toward small-state policies and an orientation towards the middle, with the exception of a sudden swing

towards the radical camp (since subsided) that reflected high-profile pro-Hamas actions taken by the GOQ in the wake of the Israeli incursion into Gaza in January 2009.

MILITARY AND SECURITY TRENDS

4. (C) A NEW TREND: THE RISE OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE

-- (C) The creation of a professional military force will remain a second-order priority for Qatar. The Qatar Armed Forces (QAF) is not a powerful force in Qatari society, which lacks a martial tradition. The QAF could put up little defense against Qatar's primary perceived threats - Saudi Arabia and Iran - and the U.S. military's presence here is larger and far more capable than Qatar's force of approximately 8,000 men at arms. Nurturing this force over the next 36 months will therefore remain something of an afterthought for the Qatari Government.

-- (C) The Internal Security Force (ISF), on the other hand, is quickly emerging as Qatar's premier security force. While threats by terrorists or outside military forces will remain relatively low over the next 36 months, the Qatari Government recognizes that its economic and political survival depends on its critical energy infrastructure and is increasingly alarmed by vulnerabilities to that infrastructure. As Qatar focuses on its internal security, the ISF will continue to command a larger role in the three years.

-- (C) In that connection, we expect to see ISF's budgets for training and procurement increase; its requests for bilateral training programs to increase; and its role in the U.S.-Qatari bilateral relationship to grow.

-- (C) Despite ISF's increasing importance, the QAF will remain the steward of the U.S.-Qatari military relationship for the foreseeable future. Developments in that relationship on the Qatari side will continue to be personality-driven and flow from the top down. For that reason, we expect to see more frequent visits by QAF senior officers to the United States, and more senior engagement by U.S. component commanders over the coming 36 months.

5. (C) IMPROVEMENT IN U.S.-QATAR MILITARY RELATIONS

-- (C) Tactical irritants involving customs and immigration for U.S. deployed forces will reduce over the next 36

months as senior U.S.-Qatari military engagement increases, and as deployed forces demonstrate their willingness to be "good guests" by developing and enforcing procedures - including disciplinary measures - designed to respect Qatari law.

-- (C) Qatar's annoyance at a relatively small percentage of infractions of Qatari immigration and customs laws by U. S. forces will reduce as deployed forces demonstrate that they take these infractions seriously, are transparent about the number and nature of them with Qatari authorities, and implement measures to address them. In addition, we expect the activities of the Embassy's Joint Pol-Mil Issues synchronization group (see para 26) to boost the trend towards reduced friction in this key area.

-- (C) The overall mil-mil relationship declined in warmth between the first and second off-sites - partly due to customs/immigration issues and partly due to diminished U. S. military engagement with Qatar at the senior strategic level. At the third off-site, the mil-mil relationship was trending upward, as improvements occurred in these two areas. 6. (C) REGIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: APPROACH INFORMED BY COUNTRY TEAM

-- (C) The off-site team received a U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) brief on the concept of a Regional Security Architecture that will attempt - based on shared US-GCC interests and objectives - to create intra-GCC networks in the areas of leadership, equipping, operations, training, information-sharing and posture.

-- (C) In shaping its approach to each country in the RSA, the briefer said CENTCOM will rely on Chiefs of Mission, who can deploy the situational awareness and interagency platforms of the country teams that they lead to find the best fit for the RSA as a mechanism to advance U.S. national security goals in each country in a synchronized, effective way.

-- (C) The group assessed GOQ willingness to engage in military multilateralism as currently very weak, and predicted this weakness will impact negatively on the success of the RSA concept, unless primarily bilateral channels are activated to support it.

INTELLIGENCE TRENDS

7. (S/NF) POOR CT COOPERATION TO CONTINUE

-- Over the next 36 months, Qatar's intelligence services will remain focused in priority order on:

a) regime protection; b) the existential threat from Iran; c) threats of increased criminal and/or collective labor activity by third-country workers; and d) counter-terrorism.

-- As a result, to the extent the USG remains focused on counter-terrorism, cooperation between our intelligence services will remain poor, because Qatar's State Security (QSS) simply does not see a credible terrorist threat here.

8. (S/NF) A BRIGHT SPOT: CRITICAL ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION

-- We assess that the Qataris will be more amenable to cooperating on areas that they perceive to be of greatest threat, such as Iran and the threat it poses to Qatar's critical energy infrastructure protection. We expect the Qataris to respond positively to any discussion of Iran and critical energy infrastructure protection (CEIP). The activities of our Critical Infrastructure Protection synchronization group (see para 26) in the coming months will be aimed at exploiting current dynamics in this area.

CRIME TRENDS

9. (SBU) Qatar's crime index is among the lowest in the world, but has increased by more than 300 percent since 2005, due primarily to a doubling of the expatriate population, rapid economic growth, and the widespread use of the Internet.

10. (C) Qatar's continued construction boom, overall economic growth, and rapidly expanding airline can be expected to attract criminal activity over the coming 36 months, but we do not expect a radical overall increase.

11. (C) Given these trends, over the next 36 months, we expect the GOQ to:

a) increase requests for training by the USG; b) increase its use of information technology to make up for a lack of manpower in order to monitor activity and conduct operations; c) increase cooperation with GCC and others on fugitive tracking and recovery; d) increase its critical

infrastructure protection capabilities.

-- (C) Over the past three off-sites, petty crime has remained low, with a slight increase assessed at the third off-site. Organized crime has remained low and steady over the three-offsite period, while terrorist financing remained moderate and steady over the same period. Cyber crime remained low, with a slight increase assessed at the third off-site.

ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS

12. (C) Qatar will continue to diversify its liquefied natural gas (LNG) markets, particularly in Europe, where it shows signs of positioning itself as a swing supplier. This enhances Qatar's economic security and, by making more countries reliant upon a Qatari supply of LNG, this move will also contribute to Qatar's physical security.

13. (C) Qatar's reliance upon expatriate labor will continue unabated over the next three years, although we do not expect it to grow. While many of its major highway projects will be completed within that period, the need for expatriate labor will shift toward projects such as the expanded Doha International Airport, the seaport construction project, and the Qatar-Bahrain causeway.

14. (C) Qatar will continue its interest in environmental protection, and will seek U.S. assistance and expertise in increasing the capacity of its environmental bureaucracy. Such assistance, beginning with a GOQ study group expected to travel to the U.S. in December to engage with the USEPA (with a view toward the eventual placement of an EPA Fellow in the Ministry of Environment) will deepen over the next three years.

15. (C) Qatar will continue to show an interest in acquiring nuclear technology. Following a GOQ move away from acquiring such technology for energy needs, we expect the current trend in favor of acquiring it for medical applications to grow over the next three years.

A NEW TREND: THE IMPORTANCE OF FOOD SECURITY

16. (SBU) FOOD SECURITY EQUALS NATIONAL SECURITY

-- (SBU) Gulf countries can produce no more than 10-15 percent of their own food needs, and therefore regard food security as a national security issue. To that end, Qatar has established a National Food Security Program (NFSP) under the direction of the Crown Prince.

-- (SBU) The NFSP is tasked with developing a food security strategy for Qatar, and a strategy for leading the rest of the Arab world in developing new structures and partnerships for achieving food security for the entire region.

-- (C) We expect the NFSP and others seized with food security over the coming 36 months to diminish their interest in highly complicated and risky land purchases in developing countries and to shift toward establishing partnerships with producers in developed countries, such as the U.S. We expect to see growing interest in learning about sophisticated financial instruments that can be employed to smooth out prices and supply gaps, such as commodity futures and virtual stocking. We also expect Qatar to improve its stocking capabilities, both onshore and off.

TRADE TRENDS

17. (SBU) STEADY GDP GROWTH = STEADY GROWTH IN U.S. EXPORTS

-- (SBU) U.S. exports to Qatar surged by more than 340% from 2003 to 2008, to a total of USD 3.2 billion, producing a trade surplus for the United States. As a result, Qatar has become our fourth-largest export market in the Middle East, overtaking Iraq, Morocco and Kuwait in recent years. We expect export growth to continue by 20-30 percent annually over the coming 36 months. High-tech imports will claim an increasing share of U.S. exports, and these will primarily be focused on the oil and gas sector.

-- (SBU) Opportunities for greater U.S. exports will develop over the coming 36 months to the extent that port-of-entry difficulties are reduced for visiting businesspeople and U.S. businesses focus on newly-identified internal security requirements by the MOI, to include training and equipment for critical energy infrastructure protection. Our Critical Infrastructure Protection synchronization group (see para 26) will focus on shaping, influencing and exploiting opportunities in

this key area.

SOCIETY, EDUCATION AND MEDIA TRENDS

18. (SBU) SOCIETAL ATTITUDES TOWARD U.S. WILL REMAIN
CONFLICTED

-- (SBU) Qataris' views of the United States in general, and the advantages their country accrues through its relations with us, continued to decline through 2009. Qataris' confidence in the USG to deal responsibly with regional problems has, however, continued to increase, marking a 15 point jump to about 50 percent from December 2008 to July 2009. We expect these conflicted views of the United States to continue over the coming 36 months, with the percentage of Qataris feeling confident in the USG's ability to address regional problems steadily increasing as we responsibly end the war in Iraq and engage carefully with Iran.

19. (SBU) EDUCATION: SOCIAL CALAMITY OR BEGINNING OF A
SOLUTION?

-- (SBU) Qatari divorces tripled between 1986 and 2007, and anecdotal evidence suggests that larger numbers of Qatari women have decided to remain unwed. We expect these trends, which some Qatari observers refer to as a "social calamity waiting to happen," to continue as long as the percentage of Qatari women achieving secondary and tertiary degrees far outstrips men.

-- (SBU) The Qatari Government's implementation of a remedy - an educational reform plan designed by RAND and considered one of the most ambitious in the world - will reach completion over the next 36 months, but will not produce measurable results that quickly. The reform, which is converting all Qatari public schools to something resembling U.S. charter schools, aims to make education more interesting and meaningful for students while preparing them to compete in today's globalizing job market.

20. (C) AL JAZEERA WILL REMAIN A TOOL OF FOREIGN POLICY

-- (C) Over the coming 36 months - in a trend that has held steady over the past three off-sites - the regional Al Jazeera Arabic news channel will continue to be an instrument of Qatari influence, and continue to be an expression, however uncoordinated, of the nation's foreign

policy. Qatar will continue to use Al Jazeera as a bargaining tool to repair relationships with other countries, particularly those soured by Al Jazeera's broadcasts, including the United States.

-- (C) Anecdotal evidence suggests, and former Al Jazeera board members have affirmed, that the United States has been portrayed more positively since the advent of the Obama administration. We expect that trend to continue and to further develop as U.S.-Qatari relations improve, particularly to the extent that Al Jazeera coverage is made part of our bilateral discussions - as it has been to favorable effect between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and other countries.

-- (C) Over the past three off-sites we have assessed as steady the lack of overall media freedom in Qatar. Although overt and official censorship is not present, self- and discreet official censorship continue to render Qatari domestic media tame and ineffective.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND CONSULAR TRENDS

21. (C) Qatar's actual population, which roughly doubled from 2004 to 2008, is around two million, according to the Minister of State for Internal Affairs. As many as 1.8 million of this population is of foreign origin. These numbers are expected to grow among every nationality and region of origin, checked only by Qatar's economic prospects and Qatari security concerns about certain nationalities such as Pakistanis and Iranians. Indians account for the largest national group in Qatar with more than 467,000 people - about twice the number of Qataris.

-- (C) As Qataris become an increasingly smaller minority in their own country despite a relatively high birth rate, we expect to detect an increasingly embattled feeling among Qataris that will result in:

a) tighter restrictions on unskilled laborers and an increased focus on recruiting more western, white-collar workers; b) diversification away from India as a primary source of labor; and c) policy decisions increasingly driven by the imperative of reducing the number of foreigners that were brought in on a temporary basis to build up the nation's infrastructure.

-- (C) The number of American citizens who registered with

the Embassy grew by roughly five times from 2000 to 2008. The American community is expected to plateau at what we estimate to be the current number of Americans present in Qatar -- about 15,000 (not including deployed military forces). Most of those Americans work primarily in the energy, educational and security sectors.

THE INTERAGENCY SYNCHRONIZATION PROCESS

22. (C) The DCM briefed the group on the status of "synchronization" - Embassy Doha's whole of government approach to USG policy implementation in Qatar. The goal of synchronization is to arrange in space, time and purpose, for maximum effect, the plans and programs of the various elements of the U.S. Executive Branch.

23. (C) The beginning of the process is a Front Office review of the national, agency and department-level and Qatar-specific strategic planning documents relevant to Qatar's operating environment (including those of agencies represented not in Doha, but regionally). Reviewing the objectives of these plans through the prism of the nine over-arching U.S. National Security Strategy objectives establishes that the two principle shared interagency strategic issues in Qatar are counter-terrorism and economic development.

24. (C) The six-monthly off-sites - which also embrace non-resident members of the Virtual Country Team - are the next step in the process, during which the Country Team analyzes key trends in Qatar and assesses the implications of trend directions for U.S. policy. The discussions, analysis and priorities thus generated, along with the Ambassador's guidance, drive the establishment of goal-oriented synchronization groups - which are formed and disbanded as goals are defined and achieved - aimed at shaping and influencing the operating environment for the USG interagency in Qatar.

25. (C) Centered on interagency groups organized around achieving a shared interagency goal, the synchronization process brings together all elements of the interagency engaged in achieving that common goal in Qatar. Each group is lead directly by the Front Office, ensuring regular communication among group members and providing a sustained interagency perspective to guide the group's activities. Our Virtual Country Team concept uses technology to enable participation in synchronization groups by non-resident agencies and departments that cover Qatar on a regional

basis.

POST-OFFSITE SYNCHRONIZATION ACTIVITY

26. (C) As of November 2009, Embassy Doha had five active interagency synchronization groups, as follows:

-- Security and Counter-Terrorism, which brings together the mission's intelligence and law enforcement communities and relevant elements of the Country Team to achieve shared intelligence, security and counter-terrorism objectives.

-- POTUS Initiative on Muslim Community Engagement, which aims at using the Embassy's power to convene and make connections to operationalize the principles laid out in President Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech, with a Qatar-specific emphasis on economic development (including food security) and science and technology.

-- Interagency Engagement with Qatar on Joint Pol-Mil Issues, which tackles deep-seated and wide-ranging shared civilian and military problems related to GOQ Customs and Immigrations policies and processes.

-- Interagency Initiatives on Critical Energy Infrastructure Protection, which studies the complex state of play in the area of critical infrastructure protection, makes recommendation for interagency action, and acts a filter for the many USG interagency initiatives and interests that converge on this area.

-- ILiAD Support to Diplomatic Operations, which exploits the monitoring, translation and analysis capabilities of ILiAD to support regional diplomatic operations. (Note: ILiAD is a three-agency Doha-based partnership consisting of the DNI's Open Source Center, the FBI's National Virtual Translation Center and DIA's Combined Media Processing Center (CMPC) End note.) LeBaron

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SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

For Assistant Secretary Feltman from Ambassador

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL KPAO KDEM QA HA
SUBJECT: Engaging Al Jazeera on Haiti

REF: STATE 5277

¶1. (SBU) On Sunday, January 17, Al Jazeera's English (AJE) news channel, headquartered in Doha, began running inaccurate coverage of U.S. and international relief efforts in Haiti. At times, the coverage used inflammatory language, such as accusing the U.S. military of setting up a "mini-Green Zone" at Haiti's airport and shipping in weapons and soldiers instead of humanitarian aid.

¶2. (SBU) At Ambassador's direction, the Embassy took the following actions:

-- informed NEA/PPD senior staff of the trends in AJE's coverage, who quickly informed senior officials and arranged for an appearance by the Department Spokesman on AJE from its Washington bureau within hours.

-- When U/S McHale decided to call AJE Director Tony Burman during the early morning hours of January 18, ensured that Burman was ready for the call and understood the serious concerns that the Undersecretary would convey.

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-- Monitored AJE's coverage on January 19 and 20, which continued to be largely inaccurate and confrontational, but less and less so.

¶3. (SBU) By the morning of January 20, AJE's coverage had evolved markedly, with reporting focused on the work being done by U.S. military forces - particularly airdrops - and 50 orphans who had been sent to the United States on an expedited basis. AJE's 1300GMT bulletin began, for example, with images of the U.S. military distributing aid, with a voiceover saying, "U.S. troops touch down, expanding their reach into other disaster-hit areas." The bulletin also carried a clip of an interview with U.S. Lt. Mark Weinberg, explaining how his particular group was distributing aid.

¶4. (SBU) Comments by Al Jazeera correspondents during the morning of January 20 included more context than on previous days. For example, correspondent Theresa Bo cited UN sources as saying that the obstacles to delivering aid were still immense, because the port had been destroyed by the earthquake, and the roads were not good, but "aid agencies are doing their best."

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador has directed Embassy staff to continue monitoring AJE's reporting, and to communicate these observations immediately to Washington. If AJE, or any of Al Jazeera's channels, revert to inaccurate coverage, Ambassador will not hesitate to intervene at higher levels, starting with the Qatari Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Al Jazeera Network.

LEBARON



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Viewing cable 10DOHA71, SENATOR KERRY'S MEETING WITH QATAR'S PRIME MINISTER

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 DOHA 000071

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2020

TAGS: PREL KWBG KPAL IR QA

SUBJECT: SENATOR KERRY'S MEETING WITH QATAR'S PRIME MINISTER

Classified By: Ambassador Joseph E. LeBaron, for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

(C) KEY POINTS

-- Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ) told Senator John Kerry February 13 that we will all lose us 4-6 months of time in pursuing the recently announced "proximity talks" between the Israelis and Palestinians.

-- HBJ underscored that it is a mistake to ignore Hamas in seeking a lasting agreement.

-- From Qatar's perspective, there are differences in style and approaches between the two wings of Hamas, but in principle both are fundamentally aligned. Hamas leaders in Damascus and Gaza can accept recognition of Israel, but must calibrate the timing very carefully because Hamas supporters are not ready for this change.

-- According to HBJ, Egypt has a vested interest in dragging out Palestinian reconciliation talks for as long as possible. Egypt "has no end game; serving as broker of the talks is

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courage is contagious

Egypt's only business interest with the U.S."

-- The Prime Minister suggested that one or two GCC members, Morocco, and Syria form the core membership of an Arab League committee to address Palestinian-Israeli concerns. Giving Syria a role would create jealousy among the Arabs, which HBJ said would help the U.S. move talks forward.

-- HBJ said putting economic pressure on Iran by targeting its oil revenues is the best way to get Tehran to rethink its quest for nuclear weapons. For the sanctions to work, it would be vital that Russia and other countries bordering Iran implement them fully.

End Key Points.

¶1. (C) The Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), Senator John Kerry (D-MA), accompanied by Ambassador, P/E Chief and SFRC staff Frank Lowenstein and Fatema Sumar, met February 13 with Prime Minister (and Foreign Minister) of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani (HBJ). HBJ opened the meeting by observing that President Obama's presidency had brought a lot of optimism to the region. Senator Kerry agreed, adding that now we "need to deliver."

 PROXIMITY TALKS NOT HELPFUL

¶2. (C) HBJ expressed dissatisfaction that "everyone in the region" seems to have a separate plan for moving ahead on the Israeli-Palestinian dispute when only one plan was needed -- a plan that both the Israelis and Palestinians would accept and finalize. More disconcerting to Qatar, he said, was the announcement by Special Envoy Mitchell that both parties would now engage in "proximity talks." Such talks "will lose us 4-6 months of time," stated HBJ.

¶3. (C) Senator Kerry responded that we "are where we are." He assessed that the Goldstone Report and dissatisfaction in Fatah's ranks in the West Bank made it difficult for Abu Mazen to "give something to Israel" that would allow direct negotiations to begin between the parties. Add in Abu Mazen's previous statements on the need for a full settlement freeze, and the ingredients for the Palestinian people to accept direct talks simply are not there.

¶4. (C) Abu Mazen is out on a limb, responded HBJ. "He climbed a tree (drawing a line in the sand on settlements) and can't get down." HBJ suggested that President Obama's address to the UN General Assembly at the opening of its current session could serve as a "roadmap" forward: two states (Israel and Palestine) remain the goal, and the establishment of settlements must stop while negotiations

take place. HBJ stressed again that the "proximity talks" will cause a "lot of problems."

NEED FOR PALESTINIAN RECONCILIATION

¶5. (C) HBJ told Chairman Kerry he had met recently in Doha with an Israeli delegation and had encouraged them to work with Palestinians of all stripes in the pursuit of peace. HBJ underscored that it is a mistake to work with just one partner, Fatah, and ignore Hamas. Saying this does not mean

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that Qatar expresses a preference for Hamas. HBJ pointed out that Abu Mazen had taught in Qatar for 30 years and remains a friend of Qatar. Qatar has no differences with him or those around him, but the Palestinian Authority (PA) cannot sign off on an agreement on behalf of the Palestinians where open divisions exist.

¶6. (C) HBJ noted that in conversations Qatar has held with Hamas' leadership, it is clear that Hamas is ready to accept Israel's right to exist. But the acceptance must come about gradually, not in one day. Senator Kerry said he had heard this elsewhere, but in his own conversations in Damascus -- where a many leaders of Hamas reside -- he did not get the sense that Hamas was ready to accept Israel's existence.

¶7. (C) Qatar's PM observed that the biggest obstacle on the Palestinian side to an eventual agreement with Israel is the reconciliation of Hamas and Fatah. HBJ maintained that it would have happened during the previous U.S. administration, but President Bush told Abu Mazen not to sign off on it. Now, said HBJ, progress is slow, and bringing the two parties together in the spirit of reconciliation is hampered by Arab politics. Reconciliation can happen, HBJ asserted, but only "if bigger countries in the region allow it."

8, (C) Senator Kerry, noting that he had seen Yasser Arafat make the transition from PLO fighter to signer of an agreement on the White House lawn, observed that people can come around and change their position. But was that the case here? The Senator asked HBJ if the differences at play between Hamas' leaders in Damascus and Gaza were too wide to bridge.

¶9. (C) From HBJ's perspective, there are differences in style and approaches between the two wings of Hamas, but in principle both are fundamentally aligned. They can accept recognition of Israel, but have to calibrate the timing very carefully because Hamas knows that its supporters in the Palestinian territories are not ready for this change. HBJ

said Hamas leaders in Damascus and Gaza are aligned on wanting to open the border crossing at Rafah, for example, but differ on tactics in reaching this goal. The leaderships in Syria and Gaza consult each other, and no one leader in Hamas can take a decision alone, reported HBJ.

EGYPT INTERESTED IN THE PROCESS, NOT RESULTS

¶10. (C) Chairman Kerry asked HBJ if Hamas is feeling political pressure from Gazans over their current living conditions. HBJ responded that anytime people do not have housing, schools or public utilities, their political leaders feel pressure. Hamas, however, has a greater sense of urgency in reconciling with Fatah, observed HBJ, than does the broker of the talks between the Palestinian parties.

¶11. (C) According to HBJ, Egypt -- the broker -- has a vested interest in dragging out the talks for as long as possible. Egypt "has no end game; serving as broker of the talks is Egypt's only business interest with the U.S." HBJ likened the situation to a physician who has only one patient to treat in the hospital. If that is your only business, "the physician is going to keep the patient alive but in the hospital for as long as possible." HBJ emphasized that Qatar, on the other hand, is interested only in bringing about peace in the region -- and as quickly as possible.

¶12. (C) Short term, HBJ said Hamas wants to form with Fatah a unity government and rebuild the Israeli-inflicted damage in Gaza. Senator Kerry, steering the conversation toward Hamas' long-term aims, acknowledged that Qatar's leaders speak frequently with Hamas. The Chairman asked HBJ to explain why Hamas does not seem "to move when we need Hamas to move."

¶13. (C) Simply put, answered HBJ, "Hamas does not trust Egypt and the Quartet enterprise." HBJ noted that since its inception the Quartet has been anti-Hamas and aligned with the interests of Abu Mazen, Egypt and Jordan. These partners of the Quartet, observed HBJ, are the very partners who have not delivered a Palestinian-Israeli agreement.

¶14. (C) Returning to his theme that "peace brokers" act in their own self-interest, HBJ observed that President Mubarak of Egypt is thinking about how his son can take his place and how to stave off the growing strength of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Egyptian government, said HBJ, has jailed 10,000 Muslim Brotherhood members without bringing court cases against them. The Egyptian "people blame America" now for their plight. The shift in mood on the ground is "mostly because of Mubarak and his close ties" to the United States.

DOHA 00000071 003 OF 004

His only utility to the U.S. is brokering peace between Palestinians and Israelis, so he has no interest in taking himself out of the one game he has, underscored HBJ. "Tell your friends (in Egypt) they must help themselves."

¶15. (C) As for Qatar, "We want to help Abu Mazen and the Palestinians," declared HBJ. The short-term needs of Palestinians in Gaza are acute, said HBJ. We need to broker a quick reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah and move forward quickly on rebuilding Gaza. Senator Kerry asserted that HBJ was preaching to the converted and told the PM he was "shocked by what I saw in Gaza."

¶16. (C) Continuing to illustrate how Egypt had not delivered for the U.S. on Palestinian issues, HBJ said Qatar was told in late 2008 that Israel and the U.S. needed the Egyptians to deal with the crisis in Gaza. Yet former Israeli PM Olmert later complained to Qatar that Egypt is a big country and not nimble; it could not move fast enough. Senator Kerry pointed out he was in Cairo at the time Qatar was calling for an Arab League Summit in December 2008/January 2009 and asked HBJ for his perspective on the rift between Qatar and Egypt at that time.

¶17. (C) HBJ told Senator Kerry that Mubarak refused to come to Doha for a meeting of Arab leaders, preferring that the meeting take place in Riyadh. The request to move the meeting was relayed to Qatar by the Saudis, not the Egyptians. Saudi Arabia, as a big country like Egypt, has a vested interest in keeping Egypt afloat, said HBJ. The Saudis agreed to host the meeting in Riyadh not because they objected to traveling to Doha, but because the Egyptians did. "So we argued over the meeting location" while the Palestinians suffered, and we in Qatar "called a meeting and said whoever comes, comes."

¶18. (C) Qatar is worried, said HBJ, about Egypt and its people, who are increasingly impatient. Mubarak, continued HBJ, says Al Jazeera is the source of Egypt's problems. This is an excuse. HBJ had told Mubarak "we would stop Al Jazeera for a year" if he agreed in that span of time to deliver a lasting settlement for the Palestinians. Mubarak said nothing in response, according to HBJ.

¶19. (C) Asked his advice on bringing about an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, HBJ said President Clinton recognized before leaving office that Egypt was a problem. When President Clinton sought help at the end of his term in reaching a final deal, the Saudis and Egyptians did not encourage him, said HBJ. "They told him to do what he thinks right." Culturally, said HBJ, that is the way Arabs say "you are on your own." And President Clinton was, said HBJ.

¶20. (C) Now we are at a stage, said HBJ, where Egypt does not want Arab League involvement in brokering a reconciliation agreement among the Palestinians unless the talks bog down. HBJ said he had told Abbas that climbing down from his tree on no settlement activity so that talks can go forward will require Arab support. But the Egyptians won't allow it.

¶21. (C) Asked if tabling a more specific plan for peace between the Israelis and Palestinians would help, HBJ said it would be a mistake to table a plan that is too specific. HBJ then reiterated that the problem is more with those carrying out the negotiations. "The good cooks (Egypt) have not given good food to now."

¶22. (C) Senator Kerry noted that Special Envoy Mitchell had made a lot of requests of Arabs but with little success. Leaving Qatar aside, the Chairman asked HBJ for proposed next steps. HBJ said he trusts the Saudis, but because they talk openly to Egypt and do not want to create more problems for Egypt than the Egyptian government already has, it is essential to bring in the small countries and start there.

¶23. (C) HBJ suggested one or two GCC members, Morocco (although the King there is hesitant) and Syria as the core membership of an Arab League committee to address Palestinian-Israeli concerns. HBJ told Senator Kerry the inclusion of Syria might surprise him, but having Syria play a role would create jealousy among the Arabs. Some jealousy and rivalry is just what the U.S. needs, opined HBJ, to get the process moving.

IRAN AND LEBANON

¶24. (C) Turning to Iran, Senator Kerry said he understood Qatar's need to find the right balance in dealing with bigger

DOHA 00000071 004 OF 004

neighbors, especially Iran given the natural gas field both share. Due to the working relationship Qatar maintains with Iran, the Chairman asked HBJ for his advice as the international community becomes more serious about economic sanctions against Iran.

¶25. (C) HBJ said Iran's president views the U.S. as a country that is overstretched and in difficulty as a result of too many commitments. Iraq, Afghanistan, and the U.S. economy are the three main problems President Ahmadinejad sees. HBJ observed that a Western attack against Iran for Ahmadinejad would be good politics, because it would allow him to take out his opposition using the war as a pretext. Senator Kerry asked clarification of whether Ahmadinejad had said these

things, or if HBJ inferred them from conversation.

¶26. (C) Qatar's PM said Ahmadinejad had told him, "We beat the Americans in Iraq; the final battle will be in Iran."

¶27. (C) HBJ said putting economic pressure on Iran is the best way to get the leadership to rethink its quest for nuclear weapons. To be successful, he told Senator Kerry, Russia would definitely have to be on board, as would the Central Asian countries bordering Iran that provide food and supplies.

¶28. (C) Asked his perception of the state of play with the opposition, HBJ said the U.S. had done a good job of standing back and not becoming the symbol of the opposition. Cracks in the regime are appearing. It is highly significant that many demonstrators ignored Khamenei when he called on them to stop their protests. The four key pillars of Iranian power -- the court, oil sector, imams, and Revolutionary Guards --- all must stick with him, stressed HBJ. There are cracks in the system, but the downfall of the regime may not be in the cards.

¶29. (C) Asked what the sanctions should target, HBJ said the money that Iran derives from oil. Depriving Tehran of this revenue would force the regime to negotiate.

¶30. (C) Senator Kerry observed that Ahmadinejad was making it easier by his actions. There is wide consensus in the Executive and Legislative branches of Washington to press ahead. Senator Kerry warned that Ahmadinejad "should not equate Afghanistan and Iraq with what he faces."

¶31. (C) HBJ encouraged Chairman Kerry to bear in mind that Iran is clever and makes its opponents dizzy in the quest for deals. They will keep you working on a deal and then start from scratch with a new interlocutor. HBJ stressed that Iran will make no deal. Iran wants nuclear weapons, and HBJ said he would not be surprised to see Iran test one to demonstrate to the world its achievement.

¶32. (C) On Lebanon, Senator Kerry asked if Iran and Hizballah are ratcheting up their weapons stockpiles as part of Iran's war against Israel. HBJ affirmed that is the case.

IRAQ

¶33. (C) On Iraq, HBJ told Senator Kerry that Prime Minister Al-Maliki wants a Shia state, even though the Sunnis (when you count Kurds and non-Kurds) have the majority.

¶34. (U) CODEL Kerry has cleared this message.

Lebaron