Chapter One

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An Introduction

An Arab World is defined in this thesis which dealt with the twenty-two nation's states, which are independent, sovereign and different, but which all share a language, a culture. In these states Arabic is the official language and the mass media are primarily in Arabic and the people clearly consider themselves part of the Arab cultural community. The linguistic definition is a valid framework when analyzing media; particularly newspaper, radio, television and satellite broadcast media.

The Arab homeland stretches across more than 12.9 million square kilometers from the Atlantic coast of northern Africa in the west to the Arabian Sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the north to Central Africa in the south. It consists of 22 countries with a combined population of some 325 million people spanning two continents. Its position that has made it one of the world's most strategic regions. Long coastlines give it access to vital waterways: the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Agriculture is the primary economic activity in the Arab homeland. The most important food crops are wheat, barley, rice, maize, dates and millet. These are largely consumed within the region, while cotton, sugarcane, sugar beets and sesame are exported as cash crops. Contrary to popular belief, relatively few Arab countries possess petroleum and natural gas resources. Other natural resources include iron-ore, lead, phosphate, cobalt and manganese.

It was in this same area that the three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—originated, in time spreading to all corners of the world. The followers of those faiths lived in harmony throughout the centuries in the Arab homeland, since all considered themselves the people of one God.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) appeared in the seventh century A.D. with the message of Islam. His Arab followers soon spread the new faith in the West, across North Africa into Spain and France, and in the East, to the borders of China.
These Muslim believers rapidly founded a new and dynamic civilization that for centuries was the only bright light in an otherwise culturally and intellectually stagnant world. Indeed, while Europe was experiencing its "Dark Ages," the Arab/Islamic civilization was at its apogee. It was this same Islamic civilization, with its many contributions to science and the humanities that paved the way for the rise of the West to its present prominence.

The Arab homeland today is a rich composite of many diverse influences. Various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups inhabit the region. Yet, Islam and the Arabic language constitute its two predominant cultural features. The Arab people, spread over a vast area, enjoy common bonds of history and tradition. Members of twenty-two different countries, the Arabs consider themselves to be one nation.

The Arab people are further united through their membership and participation in the League of Arab States. One of the oldest regional organizations in the world, the Arab League was founded on March 22, 1945, even before the formal establishment of the United Nations. The primary objective of the Arab League, as it is commonly called, is to facilitate maximum integration among the Arab countries through coordination of their activities in the political sphere as well as in the fields of economics, social services, education, communications, development, technology and industrialization. The headquarters of the Arab League are in Cairo, Egypt, which also hosts some of the League's specialized agencies. Additional agencies are based in the capitals of other Arab countries. The twenty-two member states of the League, in alphabetical order, are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

The Arab League, a political organization intended to encompass the Arab World, defines as Arab, “a person whose language is Arabic, who lives in an Arabic speaking country, who is in sympathy with the aspirations of the Arabic speaking peoples.” Despite the wide difference between formal written Arabic and its vernacular spoken form, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the language of print and television broadcast media in the Arab world. MSA is also the official spoken language of Arab countries that comprise the Arab league.
In part, because of this struggle and the region's diversity, the media occupy a special place in the Arab society and politics. The media permeate all walks of life and exercise a profound, yet usually incalculable influence. Coverage of such significant issues as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict occupies center stage in the media, and dissatisfaction fed by the media retains the capacity to spill out into the street. Media coverage of sensitive subjects can also affect relations between the Arab world and rest of the world. Because of the significance of the media, many regimes in the Arab World heavily censor them. Only the news network Al-Jazeera remains independent of direct state control.

**Historical Development of Media in the Arab World**

Historically, we can identify three major technological breakthroughs that have had profound impact on social, political and economic aspects of human civilization. The three "revolutions" - the agricultural (10,000 B.C. to 1800 A.D.), the industrial (1800 to 1950), and the information (1950 to the present) - are now being discussed as the major stages in technological history. Each period is marked by significant changes of wealth and work. In the agricultural period, land was the most important measure of property and labour. Capital in the form of machinery and money, characterized the period of industrial growth. Today, information is emerging as the dominant power factor in the information or post-industrial age.

The contribution made by Arab and other Islamic cultures to the fields of science, communications and technology are numerous. *Al-Haitham* (965-1039) was a renowned physicist and one of the greatest investigators of the optics and communication science of all time. His research and tabulation of corresponding angles of incidence and retraction of light passing from one medium to another laid the foundation of the training of the late scientists of Western Europe. *Al-Bairuni* (973-1014) the father of geodesy was a great scientist, mathematician, astronomer, and historian who gathered information into every branch of human knowledge. His theory of the universe, his work on cosmogony, calendar, and chronology, his critique on Aristotle's Theory of Moving Cause in which Bairuni advanced the notion of dynamic and changing world, all these made the eleventh

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century the "age of Bairuni". His travel to India and his monumental work on the subcontinent is the only one example of the emphasis given to the data gathering and information by a Muslim scholar of the medieval period. He emphasized the information of *akhbar wa rawayat* or information, news, and traditions in understanding the international relations of the time and the propagation of knowledge "to speak truth." Ibn-i-Khaldun (1332-1406) who was a Muslim thinker and historian has been called the father of sociology and demography. His economic analysis of social organization produced the first scientific and theoretical work on population, development, group dynamics and his monumental work called *muqaddimah (The Introduction)* laid the ground for his observation of the role of state, communication, and propaganda in history.

Further analysis of the history of the Arab world indicates that myriad social, economic as well as linguistic features were responsible for the development and progress of their society. In general, six major factors contributed to the growth and expansion of information and communication during the early period of Islam: *first*, the universal nature of Islam, leading the universality of Arab civilization with a high level of cross-cultural communication; *second*, the tremendous integration and unity of information and technology; *third*, the incredible advancement in useful data and knowledge; *fourth*, a world economic system made of sophisticated currency and transportation culminating in high levels of trade; *fifth*, a linguistic renaissance which allowed Arabic to become the international language of the time; and *finally*, an ethical framework in which information and communication thrived. Information in Arab history was not neutral, but a social and cultural commodity. Its conversion into knowledge, its pursuance and understanding in religious, social, and natural science necessitated the study of linguistic, grammatical, and even speculative fields.

Until the advent of Islam, the Arab world restricted within the Arabian Peninsula and some outlying tracts to the northwest and northeast had shown no great signs of intellectual, scientific and political development. But the teaching of Islam had a revolutionary impact on the Arab mind. Within two decades, Medina, the seat of the

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3 Ibid
commonwealth and the first capital of Islam, became the center of gravity, but also the inquirer from abroad. Here came the Persian, the Syrian, the Greek, and the Egyptian and the diverse nationalities from the north and the west to seek new knowledge.\(^4\)

Communication has been an instrumental and integral part of Islam since its inception as a religio-political movement. Basic rights of communication in Islam included the right to know, the right to read (\textit{iqra}), the right to write (\textit{qalam}), the right to speak (\textit{khutba}), the right to knowledge (\textit{ilm}), the right to consult (\textit{showra}), the right to disseminate (\textit{tabligh}), and the right to travel (\textit{hijrah}). The prophet of Islam, Muhammad (pbuh) in preaching of the value of knowledge is reported to say that "the ink of scholar is more holy than the blood of martyr" and He (pbuh) repeatedly impressed on his disciples the necessity of knowledge and communication "even unto China".

The political, economic, and spiritual development of the Arab in less than half a century not only led to their victories over the Persian and the Roman empires and extended their influence as far as central Asia and northern Africa, but produced high level of international and inter-cultural communication and unprecedented degree of information in the form of books, manuscripts, and major libraries. Thus, the Arab world under Islamic unity made the first attempt in history to bring oral and written cultures into a unified framework laying the ground for the scientific revolution that followed in Europe many centuries later.

Development of information and communication technology in the Arab world between 630 to 1200 AD, led the development of intellectual scribes, the development of the paper industry, book making, and public libraries and universities, and innovations in postal communication, transportation and finally the world system of commerce.

However, when Islam was extended to central Asia during the early part the eighth century, the Arab learned the art of paper making from the Chinese and the paper making was introduced into the Islamic world at Samarak:\(^5\) at Baghdad in 793, in Egypt in the year 900 or perhaps earlier.

However, the beginning of the 14\(^{th}\) century as the conditions of the Arab world deteriorated, the Arabs began to be the recipient and not the supplier of information and

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\(^4\) ibid
communication technologies. Arabic language lost much of its influence as an international language as did the Arab metropolitan areas as centers of global culture. The centers of scientific, information and communication shifted from the Arab world to the European world.

The printing presses were introduced in Arab countries in the 16th century some two hundred years after their appearance in Germany and other European countries. The first newspaper in Egypt, *Courier de l'Egypte*, was established by Napoleon in 1798 after he invaded the country. The development of Arab magazines began in 1884 when two reformers *jamal-uddin Al-Afghani* from Iran and *Muhammad Abduhu* from Egypt, living in exile in Paris, published the monthly *Al- Urwat al-Wuthqa* (the Firm).

Today, the information and Technology has moved in the direction of faster, cheaper, and greater sophistication, but it has also raised the questions as to use, value, diffusion, ownership, control, norms, ethics and exploitation of information. During the classical and medieval eras, communication in the Arab world was greatly facilitated by the fact that Islam created a united system larger than its two great predecessors in the region, the Persian Empire and the Roman Empire.6

In addition, the prime tool for communication, the widespread of the same language, Arabic, made for the most efficient transmission of ideas. The development of one religio-political system and language in Islam simplified and at the same time accelerated communication to a degree not known before on such a large scale. Yet the flow of information from outside into the world of Islam, and the Arab world in particular, was made by international merchants through trade who kept keen interest for geographic information.

**History of Modern Arabic Media**

Today, newspapers and magazines are published in each and every country of the Arab world, some of which have press traditions going back more than a century. The first Arab newspaper- the first periodical publication carrying news written by and for Arabs, was apparently *jurnal al Iraq* that began appearing in Arabic and Turkish in Baghdad in

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1816. Two Arab newspapers were published in Cairo in the 1820s, Algeria followed in 1847, Beirut in 1858, Tunis in 1861, Damascus 1865, Khartoum 1899 and Mecca 1908. The first daily was published in Beirut in 1873.7

Arab information media have always been closely tied to politics. The first newspapers that appeared in the Arab world were not private but official government publications intended to tell government's bureaucrats and the people what the government wanted to hear. The newspaper Napoleon printed in Egypt on his own press starting in 1798, *Courier de l'Egypte*, was intended to inform and instruct French expeditionary forces and improve their morale. *Jurnal al Iraq*, which began in 1816 in Baghdad, was issued by the government for the army, the bureaucracy, and the literate population. The first indigenous Egyptian paper, *Jurnal al-Khadya*, which began in 1827, was published by the Egyptian government. In 1828, Mohammad Ali Pasha, with the help of Rafa'a Bik Tahtavi, started publishing a tri-weekly *Waqa'i al Masriyah*, the first Arabic newspaper from Cairo. *Al-Mubashir*, which started in Algeria in 1847, was an official bi-weekly. 1855 witnessed the publication of Syrian political newspaper “*Mara't al-Ahawal*” under the editorship of Rizqullah Husoon Halbi, from Damascus. *Al-Ra'id al-Tunisi* was begun by the Tunisian authorities in 1861, while *Al-Hijaz* by the Ottoman representatives in Mecca in 1908.8

Lebanon and Egypt have been leading centers of print media, publishing important newspapers earlier than most Arab countries; they continue to hold leading positions in journalism into the twentieth century. The first Arab daily newspaper appeared in Beirut in 1873, and *al-Ahram*, which still appears as a leading daily, started in Egypt in 1875.

A very few newspapers were published by private individuals or families in nineteenth century but these appeared only in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Morocco. Khalil Khuri printed *Hadiqat al-Akhbar* in Beirut in 1858; *Wadi al-Nil* by Abu as-Saud al-Afandi, the first Egyptian biweekly political newspaper from Cairo and *al-Ahram*

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appeared in Egypt in 1867 and 1876 respectively, and *al-Maghrib* started in Morocco in 1889.⁹

It were the Syrian-Lebanese journalists, bent on resuscitating Arab literature in the of past Arab glory, who were in the avant-garde of modern Arab journalism and launched newspapers which in turn became models for the Arab press. Such was the case of the brothers Salim and Bishara Takla, who founded "Al-Ahram" in Cairo.¹⁰

During the last decades of the twentieth century, the oil-rich Arab states of the Persian Gulf quickly expanded their print media, to some extent benefiting from Arab talent they hired from such countries as Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine, and quality daily newspapers proliferated. Circulations there remained small, however; for example, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman have had successful dailies only since the 1970s, and their circulations have never exceeded a few tens of thousands.

Among the smaller Arab states on the Persian Gulf, Saudi Arabia has the oldest newspaper traditions, and some of its leading newspapers have relatively long traditions. In the Western region of Saudi Arabia, such newspapers as *al-Bilad* and *al-Madina* were flourishing as early as the 1930s, and the dailies *Ukaz* and *al-Nadwa* had appeared there by the 1960s. In the early 1960s, *Al-Jazira* and *al-Riyadh* dailies started in Riyadh, and *al-Yaum* started in Dammam. In Yemen, governments in the south and the north have published daily papers since the 1960s, but they were of limited circulation and generally of poor quality.

These newspapers contained news and entertainment, such as stories from "*A Thousand and One Nights*", but they also contained official government guidance and authorized editorials. Perhaps no work of Arabic literature has stirred Western imagination as much as *The Thousand and One Nights*, popularly known as *The Arabian Nights*. A collection of separate stories—exciting, romantic, amusing and always highly entertaining— the book has Arab, Greek, Persian and Indian origins. It was finally compiled and unified by Arab authors in the tenth century, giving it an entirely Arab character, placing its two main centers in Baghdad and Cairo.

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⁹ ibid
At the end of the Ottoman period, which drew to a close at the culmination of the First World War, journalism did not reach beyond the confines of a traditional system, which organized the relationship between the political class and the rest of the population according to principles of obedience and respect for the established political authority. Some journalists inspired by European liberalism, challenged this system by criticizing Turkish authority, but they paid dearly for their activities by prison, torture or simply banning of their newspapers. Some of them resorted to exile in France or Great Britain, where they set up newspapers and reviews. These journalists were more driven by literature and politics than by the principle of information. It was only from 1908 onwards, in response to pressure from the Young Turks, that legal and political restrictions were lifted on the founding of newspapers, which allowed an independence press to develop in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.\(^11\)

With the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of French and English colonialism, a new press emerged in the region, first by European colonizers, then by the native people. From 1945 onwards, the press became the privileged instrument in the fight for national independence. The nationalists, who were often journalists by profession, suffered all forms of brutal treatment at the hands of the colonial authorities: prison, torture and exile. Their newspapers were suspended or banned. The Arab press, especially in Palestine, was not only bent to the colonial yoke, but also went on to confront the creation of Israel in 1948.\(^12\)

After the independence of the Arab states, the need to construct a national economics thrust the call for freedom and individual rights into the background. 1952 revolution in Egypt followed by coups d'etat in Iraq and Syria brought end of the multiparty system and to the independent press.

From 1960 to 1980 the whole region suffered from lack of press freedom, with the exception of Lebanon. The Lebanese exception is due to the complexity of the political and social composition of the country. Lebanese journalists basked in a freedom of expression, which had no equivalent in the region, and their journalism was of a very

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high technical quality. But the civil war in 1975 forced the press and these journalists in to exile in Europe and the United States. The Gulf petrol boom also drew many of these journalists, who took up position in new newspapers created thanks to the wealth generated by petrol.

The journalists who could write in all freedom were those who had set up base in Europe, but even their freedom was only a provisional one: the money generated by the petrol brought out most of these journalists. Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Libya all invested in the expatriate press in order to rally support for their power and ally themselves to the most eminent and credible press in the Arab world. Iraq and Libya founded reviews; the Saudi Arabia funded dailies.

Radio listening in the Arab World began in the 1920s, but the size of the audience was small until later decades and only few Arab states began their own radio broadcasting in the period before World War 2. Not until 1970, when Oman opened its radio transmitter, has every Arab state had indigenous radio broadcasting, and not until the fall of 1975 when Yemeni TV went on the air has every Arab state had its own indigenous television capability.

The history of television broadcasting in the Arab world goes back to the mid-1950s when on-governmental broadcast operations were launched in Morocco, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Lebanon, when these countries established TV transmitters in their capital cities. The only Arabs who could watch television in the 1950s were those few who happened to be able to see non-Arab television: French TV could be seen by some Arabs in the Maghreb states of North Africa, and telecasts by the Arabian-American Oil Company could be seen by Saudis living near ARAMCO headquarters in Dhahran. In the early1960s, taking note of the medium’s power in political mobilization and national development, Arab governments in newly independent states instituted television as a government monopoly.

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14 Ibid
16 Boyd, 1999
In almost all Arab countries, television services were subordinated to ministries of information or other government bodies, thus turning into official mouthpieces of government policies as well as into outlets of national cultural expression. In the 1970s, television systems in the Arab world were constrained by three major problems: insufficient local program production leading to external television imports, mainly from the United States and Western Europe; close government scrutiny and control, leading to prohibitive working environments, and shortages of human and financial resources, leading to dull and low-quality programming output.

One of the remarkable developments in the Arab television scene in the 1990s has been the breakup of a 40-year government monopoly model of broadcasting in the Arab world. The model traditionally derives from the notion of broadcasting as a tool of national development that should be placed under government control. Although this model drew partly on broadcast systems dominant in former colonial nations like Britain and France, a greater government control of television organizations had deprived broadcasters of editorial discretion and autonomy. Operating within ministries of information, television organizations for the most part were funded exclusively from national budgetary allocations and their employees were viewed as part of public-sector bureaucracy.

By the end of the 1980s, the Arab world TV monopoly model began to experience major cracks with the creation of more autonomous television organizations in several Arab countries and the rise of commercial television service alongside government broadcasting. The liberalization of government television in the Arab world seems to have taken place in tune with new global trends in public broadcasting around the world. Achilles and Miege (1994) note that since the mid-1980s, public service television in Western Europe had to confront competition from new commercial and for the most part generalist television channels, and to take up cultural, programming, and financial challenges.

The entry of commercial broadcasters with huge technical and financial resources into the Arab world television scene has been an important development. In September 1991, Arab audiences had their first taste of private satellite television when MBC went on the air from studio facilities in London with Western-styled programming. More
private broadcasters followed suit: Orbit in 1994, ART in 1995, LBC and Future Television in 1995, and Al-Jazeera from Qatar in 1996. These services brought to Arab homes not only a wider range of program choices, but new programming genres that continue to be distinctive features of Arab television screens. The main implication of this development has been a dwindling government television audience and fiercer competition with print media for a limited advertising pie.

The Gulf war brought about by the Iraq invasion of Kuwait opened a new chapter in the history of the media in the Arab World. The Gulf States seeing the impact of which CNN had on an international scale, grasped the strategic importance of satellite television in times of conflict. Several governments, in particular Saudi Arabia, encouraged their rich compatriots to invest in the installation of satellite television channels in Europe. MBC, ORBIT, ART were able to build their hegemonies and set up thrones under the Arab sky. Other countries followed suit by launching their own national channels. Only Al-Jazeera, financed by the Qatar government, dared to jostle traditions and political taboos by programs open to all opinions, even the most hostile established Arab regimes.

**Contemporary Arabic Media**

Arab government since Second World War have increased their influence and control over the mass media in part with the justification that their newly independent nations face overwhelmingly external and internal problems requiring unity and purposefulness and minimum of dissent in the public debate. The country cannot afford, so the argument goes, the luxury of partisan conflict, and the media must further the national interest by supporting governmental policies.17

This argument is used in connection with economic development and other domestic problems, but the most common focus of such reasoning has been the Arab-Israeli conflict. This conflict has been the single major political preoccupation for the Arab world since the late 1940s. Every Arab government has had to deal with it and has felt compelled to declare its support for the "struggle" against the Israeli enemy, calling upon citizens to sacrifice for the sake of this vital national cause. In this context, Arab

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governments have been able to justify explicitly and implicitly their influence over mass media as necessary "while the country is at war" with Israel. Because of the degree to which the Arab-Israeli dispute has become the central issue and a matter of Arab patriotism, this justification is difficult to oppose.

But during the last two decades the Arabic media witnessed drastic changes in its form, content and structure. Until the mid-1990s, Arabic media in general, and broadcasting in particular, had been monopolized by state controlled media. The Arab countries launched their own satellite system, Arabsat, in 1985, with the aim of establishing a link between the state broadcasters. Three years later, Egypt became the first Arab country to have its own satellite system -- Nilesat- marking a new era in satellite communication in the region. It was also the first Arab country to start satellite broadcasting, launching the Egyptian Satellite Channel in 1990.

It was during the 1990s that all Arab countries managed to have their own state satellite channels, although their aims varied, from using these new channels for religious or political indoctrination, to fostering cultural ties and promoting tourism in their countries. These include Tunisia’s Tunis-7, Libya’s Al-Jamahiriya and the state controlled channels of Algeria, Syria, Iraq, Oman, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Qatar. All these channels broadcast their programs in Arabic, apart from two: Libya’s Al-Jamahiriya translates some of its main news programs in French and Egypt’s state owned Nile TV International, established in 1994, broadcasts both in French and English.

The Arab satellite channels are classified into two categories: state owned and privately owned. The state owned channels primarily targeted citizens living outside their country – both long-term immigrants as well as those who go abroad for short periods of time to work or study – with aim of maintaining a link between Diaspora and their countries of origin. However such channels were characterized by tight editorial control of the content of programming, thereby rendering them little more than a tool for political propaganda, promoting the ideologies of the ruling parties. Complete editorial control was exercised over these channels by the ministries of information; officials were also involved in recruitment to the senior managerial and editorial position.

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However, it is necessary to point the differences within the Arab media world — censorship in Egypt, Morocco and Jordan, for instance is different and more lenient than in such authoritarian regimes as Tunisia, Libya, Iraq, and Syria. This kind of control was a reflection of the political realities in most of the Arab world, where the past five decades non-democratic regimes have dominated the political landscape, rendering the possibilities of a free media very hard to achieve.20

The privatization of broadcasting, partly as a result of globalization and deregulation of telecommunications, has profoundly changed the face of Arab television. State-run media had to adapt to the pressure from private networks, which were seen to be more open in their approach to programming. With the emergence of private channels and the growing popularity of the Internet, a new era seemed to have opened up.

The 1990s witnessed the emergence of satellite channels, initially catering to the Diaspora rather than focusing on audiences in the Arab world. For the private owned television networks, consumers not citizens are the key factor and therefore they tend to target general diasporic Arabs in addition to viewers in the Arab world irrespective of nationality.21

The first among these was the London based Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC), which started broadcasting in 1991 and moved its operational headquarter to Dubai only in 2002. Owned by Saudi Businessman, MBC's programmes vary from soap to entertainment to documentaries and news and current affairs. The other major players include: the Arab Radio and Television (ART), owned by Saudi businessman, Salih Kamil, which started broadcasting on Arbsat from, Italy in 1993; Orbit, owned by Al-Mawarid group from Saudi Arabia, which started its pay-TV service in 1994; and the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) and Future Television International (FTI) of Lebanon, which are partly owned by the late Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafique al-Hariri.22

The impact of deregulation in broadcasting was evident initially in Lebanon, where the audiovisual law, passed by the parliament in 1994 and put into effect in 1996,
broke the monopoly of the state on radio and television broadcasting, making the first case of private TV channels broadcasting from inside an Arab country. This led to a proliferation of channels, ranging from LBC, Future TV and Al-Manar TV, run by Hizbullah, broadcasting freely inside Lebanon and beyond, attracting viewers in Arab Diaspora. Orbit, owned by the Mawrid Group of Saudi Arabia, is credited with taking a pioneering step towards live debates when it introduced Ala al-Hawa (On the Air) in January 1996. In the sphere of news and current affairs, the London-based Arab News Network (ANN), owned by a Syrian, entered the market in 1997 as a rival of Al-Jazeera.

**Internet in the Arab World**

Few stories have gripped the world press as strongly as the spread of the Internet in the 1990s. Sensing that the easy, instantaneous, and inexpensive exchange of text and pictures will be a powerful force in remaking the world in the late twentieth century, journalists have rushed to tout the promise of the new medium, at times exaggerating its current importance. The Arab world has joined in the global enthusiasm for the Internet. It is available in almost every Arab country, and the number of users grows monthly.

More than hundred daily Arab newspapers maintain pages on the worldwide web (www); many of them post the complete text of their daily editions, and only one charge for the privilege of reading it. Non-governmental organizations throughout the Arab World, charities, opposition political movements, maintain their sites and web pages to exchange information. An increasing number of Arab governments are also establishing a presence on the worldwide web.

It seems that initially many Arab governments did not fully appreciate the degree of freedom the Internet grants its users. Thus, at first, state policy encouraged governmental bodies to use the Internet and exempted computer equipment from import tariffs so as to help citizens to own computers. As a result of the exemption of the import tariffs on computer equipments the computer market overall in the Arab world is growing at an annual rate of 20 percent, and in some countries, like Lebanon, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, it is growing at 50 percent to 60 percent per year.
Tunisia was the first Arab nation to have access to the Internet in 1991; by the beginning of the second half of the 1990s, the Internet had been introduced to the public in all Arab states except for Saudi Arabia, which provided its citizens with Internet access in 1999, and Iraq, which did so in 2000. A number of obstacles have hindered widespread acceptance of the Internet in the Arab world, the first of them is the language.

By far the primary language of the Internet is English, accounting for an overwhelming majority of home pages on the worldwide web and by far the bulk of e-mail traffic as well. In a world constructed on a backbone using a Roman alphabet, Arab users who are not familiar with English are disadvantaged. Initially, Arabic texts on the Internet were loaded as graphics files—that is, users essentially received a photograph of the text rather than the text itself. Doing so made such pages relatively easy to display but very difficult to search, as the words were not conveyed as searchable text but as an image. More recently, software advances have created widely available browsers that can reproduce Arabic text.

Even when the problem of representing text is overcome, however, there remains the problem that the bulk of the information available on the Internet is in English. The value of the worldwide web lies in the wealth of its resources, and there are few in Arabic. Internet search engines are generally optimized to run in English, and being nearly invisible to most search engines is a major liability. In the last two years, a number of Arabic search engines have begun to emerge, making it easier for Arabic-speakers to find Arabic information on the worldwide web. Yet, these Arabic search engines cannot create Arabic material, and that remains scarce, both in absolute terms and especially when compared to English-language material. The dilemma, then, is that the presence of Arabic material will depend on how much the Arab world embraces the web, and yet that will depend at least in part on how much Arabic material is there. At the present time, a large number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the Arab world have web sites, and a preponderance of those sites is in English, even when their intended audience is an Arab one.

Like their American counterparts, Arab universities have been among the first institutions in most countries to connect to the Internet. Yet, access in universities can be restricted. Public terminals may be severely overused, modem connections may be
nonexistent, and service may be unreliable. As the internet is still thought of in many places as a benefit for faculty rather than as a resource for students, many Arab students become aware of the internet while studying at a university but lack the opportunities to learn anything more than the most rudimentary skills. Businesspeople may also enjoy Internet access at work, and an increasing number of Arab businesses are finding the Internet is a cost-effective alternative to phone, fax, and printing.

The Internet certainly has seized the interest of governments throughout the region-interest rather than enthusiasm, because they regard the Internet as both promising and threatening for the region. Governments remain concerned at opening up an unregulated world of information to their populations.

The Language of Media in the Arab World

Arabic Language: an Introduction: - Arabic is the language of a rich culture and civilization dating back many centuries. It was the language of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Messenger of God and Prophet of Islam. It has produced such figures as Averroes, the medieval Aristotelian philosopher; Ibn Khaldun, the first social historian; and Khalil Jibran etc. Between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries, the volume of literary, scholarly and scientific book production in Arabic and the level of urban literacy among readers of Arabic were the highest the world had ever known to that time.

Arabic is spoken by over 200 million people, in an area extending from the Arabian Gulf in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the west. It is the language of Islam, and more than 600 million people use it as a vital spiritual component of their daily lives. This is a very difficult, but very rewarding language to learn and understand for professional reasons, academic scholarship, and in order to enjoy a rich cultural exchange with a large population of the world.

History of Arabic language: Arabic is a member of the Semitic group of languages, closely related to Hebrew and Aramaic, the language which Christ used to speak. The earliest manifestation of a linguistic form, which can be identified as Arabic, is on a tombstone at “Nemara” in the Syrian Desert, dated A.D. 328, and one or two
similar inscriptions from the fifth-sixth century. The course of the sixth century, however, had seen the production of a corpus of poetry, preserved initially by oral transmission, and only written down for the first time in the eight-ninth century. The linguistic status of this poetic corpus is very debatable, but a frequently accepted hypothesis is that it represents a sort of common language used for poetry throughout the peninsula, and not completely identifiable with any one dialect as used for the purposes of everyday life, though on the whole its main features appear to be eastern rather than western. 23

Admittedly Arabic was confined to Arabia till the beginning of the third decade of the seventh century when the Qur'an, Islam's sacred book, was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The revelations were memorized by his followers and also written down by amanuenses. Since then Arabic has moved from strength to strength, backed by the Holy Qura'n on the one hand and on the other the advancement of the science by the Arabs and Muslims of the Golden Age in the East.

The Holy Qur'an is therefore the earliest surviving document of written Arabic, apart from the few inscriptions, which have been mentioned above. Its language is unmistakably that of the poetic corpus of the sixth century. Nevertheless, it was first written down in a form reflecting the pronunciation of the western dialect of Mecca.

From the early years of Islam we possess a number of written documents, both of a formal kind (inscriptions, tombstones, coins, etc.) and of an informal kind such as letters and contracts. The former evidently aim at being written in Qur'anic language, the latter often show divergences from it attributable to dialectal influences. Poetic literature continued to be produced and transmitted orally in the same manner as it had been before the advent of Islam. And the vast body of traditions relative to the life and sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) constitute the beginning of a prose literature. 24

Thanks to Islam the Arabic language spread to Asia, Africa and Europe and many languages borrowed a great deal of its lexical items. The expansion of the Arabic language did not stop at that limit, it is now booming in most of world countries, through the expansion of Islam there, and Muslims are now aspiring to learn the language of the Qur'an with the view to knowing and being well-versed in their religion.

24 ibid
**Colloquial and Standard Arabic**

There is a considerable difference between written Arabic (variously known as Literary Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, or in its historical form Classical Arabic) and all varieties of spoken Arabic. Spoken Arabic differs from country to country and even from town to town, although it is possible to group the dialects into a few major areas within each of which there is virtually total mutual comprehension. Thus the spoken Arabic dialects of northwest Africa (Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) form a single group, as do those of the Levant (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan). Egyptian, Sudanese, and western Saudi Arabian Arabic form another group, as do the dialects of Iraq and the eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

However, even the differences between these groups of dialects are not that great. They all share many structural features and there is a high proportion of shared vocabulary. Modern Standard Arabic is generally used in formal oral contexts, such as radio and TV news reading, political speeches, lectures, etc. This form of Arabic is virtually uniform in its grammar and vocabulary throughout the Arab world. It is a potent symbol of Arab cultural and (in the sense that it is the language of the Qur'an) religious unity.

Many Arabs regards the Modern Standard Arabic, known as *Al-Fusha* (the pure) the only form of the language, which has any worth, while the dialects, though they are the universal means of everyday conversation, is regarded by many as degraded forms of the language. This feeling is often reflected in attitudes to foreigners, who attempt to learn Arabic. Many Arabs, especially educated one, feel that only the Standard form of the language should be taught, regardless of the fact that Arabs themselves would never use this kind of Arabic for some of the purposes like chatting, shopping etc. For this they insist foreigners should also use the colloquial language. It can sometimes seem an uphill battle for foreigners to get Arabs to talk to them in colloquial Arabic.\(^{25}\)

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the formal Arabic, which is written and spoken in the contemporary Arab world. In its written form, it is used almost exclusively

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in any printed publication anywhere in the world today; as such it is the direct descendent of the Arabic of the Qur'an, the poetry of Pre-Islamic Arabia, and the classical literature of the Golden Age, the major differences being in lexicon and style. It is also an oral medium of expression used in formal situations ranging from a radio newscast to a lecture or other formal address to an international conference. It is opposed to dialectal or colloquial Arabic, of which there is a particular variety for each community and differs according to region and such social factors as religion, socio-economic status, etc. The dialects are used for all non-formal situations.

The Arab does not keep MSA and his own dialect separate, but mixes them according to the degree of technical complexity of his subject, the degree of formality of the occasion, etc. When speaking his dialect, he will bring in MSA in varying degree, and when speaking MSA, he may introduce colloquialisms into it if it does not impair understanding on the part of the listener.26

Arabic as the Language of Media

The language used in the media also serves the function of communicating cultural identity. Indeed, the Arabic language is a crucial element linking the Arabs with each other and with their culture. It is inseparable from Arab culture, history, tradition, and Islam, the religion of the vast majority of Arabs. The Arabic language is one of the cornerstones of the cultural, civilization, and cultural security of the Arab and Islamic World, both in the present and in the future. It is a pillar of strength of the national, pan-Arabic, and Islamic sovereignty. It is not merely a language but a banner for this sovereignty that each state of the Arab-Islamic community is keen on.

The Arabic language forms a unifying feature of the Arab World. Arabic retains its cultural prestige primarily as the language of religion and of theological scholarship. Language is a central theme of Arab nationalist discourse, “particularly with the role of the Arab past, with its proud achievements in the human sciences – as the dominant authenticating base and legitimizing infrastructure.”

The best definition of who is an Arab is not in terms of religion or geography but of language and consciousness—that is, one who speaks Arabic and considers himself an

Arab. Arabic is extremely important to Arabs; they give considerable attention to the language, and it shapes their thinking in many ways. There is an "intimate interdependence" between Arabic and the Arab psychology and culture, and thus as carrier of language the mass media are very important in the communication of Arab cultural commonality. As the historian Phillip Hitti says, "No people in the world has such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and is so moved by the word, spoken or written, as the Arabs."27

There are several reasons for the fact that the language carries special meaning for the Arabs. First, Arabic is intimately connected with Islam. Secondly, there is also association between Arabic and an historic past in which Arab takes pride; they are proud to use the language of their illustrious ancestors. Thirdly, Arabic is an essentially element today in their very strong concept of an "Arab nation" that is pan-Arabism to which leaders continuously vow their allegiance. Even the Arabic word for foreigner (ajnabi) is usually used today to mean non-Arab foreigner only. And finally, Arabs love their language because of its intrinsic beauty quite apart from the meaning it conveys.

For all of these reasons, the mass media, which use Arabic, have a particular impact on their audience, which a literal translation into English cannot convey. William A Rough views that importance of language itself helps shape the content of the media. Whereas the Western journalists seem to have a passion for factual details and statistics, the Arab journalists by contrast seem to give more attention to the correct words, phrasing, and grammar they should use in describing an event. It would be over simplifying to say "it is characteristic of the Arab mind to be swayed more by words than by ideas and more by ideas than by facts."28

Arab media may be unique in that they convey socio-cultural values on two levels namely to the large pan-Arab audience and to the smaller nations. A great deal that is of cultural value to an individual Arab is commonly shared with other Arabs throughout the area. Arab media convey such cultural messages. On the other hand, some cultural

aspects are strictly local and are shared only with others who live within the borders of a
country or region. Arab media also convey effectively these local Arab values.

The duality of this cultural identification function can be seen clearly in the
language used by the media. The Arabic language used in newspapers throughout the
Arab world is a modified and somewhat modernized form of classical or literary, which
is universally understood by educated Arabs. Similarly radio and television throughout
the area use the same slightly modified classical Arabic for all news and other serious
programming. There are some minor differences in the accents of the professional radio
and TV people from country to country. Simultaneously, the media use colloquial Arabic
for special purposes. Each local dialect, derived originally from the classical Arabic, has
been modified so much over the years that it is used only to a very limited extent in the
 printed media and quotations of spoken Arabic, because it is not generally considered
appropriate to write it down.\footnote{ibid P 24}

However, the colloquial Arabic is used extensively in radio and television,
particularly when dealing with less serious subjects. Some interviews and discussions
about local matters vernacular plays and soap operas, comedy routines and other
programs, which are intended for the local audiences, are usually in colloquial Arabic.
And it is not uncommon for a national leader when making political speech broadcast on
radio and television to sprinkle his rhetoric with colloquial phrases designed to develop
rapport with his audience, although it is considered more correct for the main body of the
speech to be in classical Arabic.

Thus, the media communicate in modified classical Arabic horizontally to educate
elite groups throughout the Arab world, and at the same time they communicate vertically
to literate and illiterate members of their respective nations. It is also a characteristic of
the language that the colloquial varieties, while differing from each other, use the words
that are quite concrete and tangible in their meaning. The Arabic Language is also the strong
bond holding the Arabic and Islamic peoples who contributed to the booming of the Arab and
Islamic culture.
Characteristics of the Arabic Media

There are significant differences among Arab countries in the use and structure of print media, reflecting underlying differences in wealth, population, literacy, political systems, and cultural conditions. The following characteristics generally prevail, although variations and exceptions occur throughout the region.

First, most Arab print media exist on a relatively weak economic base. They suffer from small literate populations and, in most places, limited incomes. Sales are therefore limited and, in addition, the practice of advertising in the media has not developed very extensively. Even as some Arab states and individuals became wealthy during the second half of the twentieth century, advertising remained modest and businesspeople did not see media as a lucrative investment. Although newspapers were no longer an expensive luxury for the middle classes, as they were during the middle of the twentieth century, price and literacy still limited circulations.

Second, Arab media tend to be closely tied to politics in a number of ways. Some newspaper owners have tended to seek financial patronage from domestic and foreign governments or from local political parties. The Arab political parties that emerged after World War II sought to disseminate their views through the press, and party newspapers still exist in a number of Arab countries, although many of them are relatively small circulation weeklies.

Third, from the beginning, Arab newspapers have tended to include a significant amount of cultural content, traditionally publishing short stories, poetry, and serialized novels. Scholars and literary figures often write in the newspapers. At the same time, the profession of journalism, including the habit of aggressive reporting and the presentation of objective, unbiased news, has not been as fully developed in the Arab world as it has in some other parts of the world.

There is an additional and separate category of important Arab newspapers that are primarily based in Europe but published for readers throughout the Arab world. This phenomenon began during the 1970s when the Lebanese civil war forced some Lebanese publishers and journalists to leave their country and set up "offshore" operations in
London, Paris, and Rome. Some did not survive, but others did. With the end of civil war, many moved back to Beirut, such as the weekly *al-Hawadith*; others kept their bases in Europe.

The improvements in satellite and computer technology during the 1990s made it possible for these offshore publications to overcome distribution obstacles because they could do the editorial work in Europe and print the paper in various cities in the Arab world for local distribution. Editors were concerned about local censorship and taboos, but they were nevertheless somewhat freer than locally published papers, and some of them varied their content depending on the target country.

By 2003, three major Arab publishing houses in London were producing newspapers and magazines for the distribution throughout the Arab world, owned by wealthy Saudi nationals. The Saudi Research and Marketing Group, chaired by a Saudi prince, has produced the daily *al-Sharq al-Awsat* since 1977, and it also produces more than a dozen other publications, including the popular weekly magazine *al-Majalla*. Another publishing house, founded originally by a Lebanese family but now owned by another Saudi prince, produces the daily *al-Hayat* plus a weekly magazine, and it has a joint venture with a satellite television company. A third Arab daily that appears in London and is aimed at a pan-Arab audience is *al-Quds al-Arabi*; it is edited by Palestinians and tends to focus on Palestinian issues.

Finally, the structure of Arab print media tends to be fragmented, with most of the readership of individual newspapers confined to the paper's country of origin; many papers have small, specialized audiences. Most newspapers are published in one or two cities in each country because of the concentration of literate readers and because of barriers to distribution.
Roles of Media in the Arab Countries

To understand the role of media in the Arab Countries, I would like to focus on those countries where Arabic serves as the official language of the State. Each state has special characteristics; it is necessary to discuss those characteristics, and the role of media, especially Newspapers, radio, television, in national development.

In Algeria, Educational media programs are non-existent in schools and colleges. Only the University of Algiers offers classes in information and communication sciences. There is only an audiovisual center in Algeria. The mass media have participated in the national development of the country through various educational and awareness campaigns. Of course, the media role is dictated by social and economic conditions, as well as by political demands.

The electronic media provide various programs aimed at reducing the high rate of illiteracy and broadcast competitive games between colleges. The media furnish a series of courses for students taking exams. The press publishes courses and exercises within different disciplines. The periodical l'Ecole specializes in education matters. In general, economic and social development of Algeria has brought a similar level of development in the communication and information field.30

According to the Minister of Communication and Culture, the media infrastructures and facilities have achieved an acceptable degree of development. However, mismanagement and political turmoil have led to a deadlock. Lack of human expertise, ongoing technical problems, and misuse of facilities have hindered mass media from reaching their full potential in playing a constructive role in the political, educational, economic, and social development of the country.

Egypt is a major regional media player. Its press is one of the most influential and widely read in the region, and its TV and film industry supply much of the Arab-speaking

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world with various productions. The heart of Egypt’s film industry is Media Production City, an enterprise launched with the intention of creating the “Hollywood of the East.” Media criticism of the government is commonplace. Still, press laws, which prescribe prison sentences for libel and “insults”, encourage self-censorship on sensitive issues. Egypt has two state-run national TV channels and six regional channels. It is a key player in satellite TV; the Egyptian Space Channels are widely watched across the Arab-speaking world. These channels enjoy the support of the country’s huge media production industry and have access to a large archive of Egyptian films and TV programs.

Officially, censorship was banned in 1980. Nonetheless, it still governs the editorial policies of the state media. Journalists from the opposition press, who are suspected of sympathizing with fundamentalist Islamic groups, are frequently questioned by police. The authorities’ aim is to abolish or at least weaken the fundamentalist press, which is hostile to the government.31

Egypt’s publications fall roughly into four groups. State-owned publications including Al-Ahram (http://www.ahram.org.eg), Al-Akhbar, and Al-Gomhuriya, are not censored. However, their editors are government appointees. Reporters and columnists are given a fair amount of latitude in what they write, as long as they avoid certain taboos. Publications owned by political parties like Al-Shaab, Al-Wafd or Al-Watan Al-Arabi is not censored. The party leadership exercises varying degrees of control over editorial policies, which range from hard-line ideology to total chaos. All media are vulnerable to various forms of government pressure if they step beyond certain limits. A license requires informal clearance by all of Egypt’s major security and intelligence agencies. Most Egyptian publications are legally registered abroad because of the difficulties associated with Egyptian registration.

Egypt was the first Arab nation to have its own satellite, Nile sat 101.32 The country’s first private TV stations - Dream 1, Dream 2 and Al-Mihwar TV--came on air in 2001, broadcasting via satellite. The state monopoly on radio broadcasting was broken with the arrival of private commercial music stations in 2003. By offering the use of its media infrastructure and economic support, Egypt aims to attract foreign media

companies to its "Free Media Zone," launched in 2000. In 2003, the International Telecommunication Union estimated that Egypt had around 2.7m Internet users.

Media in Iraq under present conditions; it is still not clear what will look like under the new regime, so the current discussion surveys only the situation under the Saddam Hussain regime. Saddam Hussain used the mass media to communicate his social-economic development goals to the Iraqi population, and to provide instruction regarding the required labor and skills needed to realize these goals. The mass media's role in the process was to document and spread awareness of the development process, to selectively challenge traditional values and practices in society.

Saddam Hussain used broadcasting to visually display successful development projects in order to convince the population of the benefits of its economic achievements. Broadcasting was also used to promote the idea of a nationalist culture by stressing Iraqi's Arab heritage and by spreading awareness of Iraqi's achievements in poetry, literature, theater, and cinema. Television became Iraq's most highly valued communications medium for socio-economic development. The state used television to transmit educational programs to serve a wide range of students and to motivate illiterates to overcome language and mathematics difficulties.33

The role of mass media in Jordan's development has always been recognized. In response to calls from the United Nation Educational Scientific and Culture Organization (UNESCO) for harnessing mass media in the service of national development, Jordan was one of the few countries in the mid-1970s to establish a Development Communication Department at the Ministry of Information. This department produces television and radio documentaries, as well as short messages relating to the environment, public sanitation, agriculture, vocational training, and safety at home and at work.

Mass media in Jordan often carry programs and messages on health, the environment, childcare, and birth spacing. From 1980 to 1986 the Health Education Project carried out by the Ministry of Health with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sought to educate mothers and the public at large via television on basic child care and protection against dehydration.

Jordanian television also cooperates with the Ministry of Education to produce and broadcast educational materials on subjects such as geography, English, physics, and chemistry. These educational programs are directed at morning and afternoon classes and are intended to supplement formal classroom lectures.

In sum, Jordan is no exception to the rule that the social, political, and cultural environments play major roles in shaping the mass media. Newspapers constitute an additional case in point. Since the launching of the first newspaper in the early 1920s, Jordanian newspapers have evolved in tandem with the country's development, echoing national concerns and ambitions. As a result, mass media in Jordan have always reflected this mixed system outlook, with newspapers and other print media falling in the private sector domain, while broadcasting remains a government concern.

Although the Jordanian press enjoyed a considerable degree of freedom in the 1950s, it was not until 1989 that the Jordanian media enjoyed genuine opportunities for free treatment of public affairs in a democratized environment. Three years later, democracy in Jordan withstood a multitude of challenges, the most formidable of which was the Gulf crisis and war. By demonstrating a high degree of responsibility, both the media and the public have proven their maturity and demonstrated a concern for safeguarding democratic values in Jordan.  

Although Lebanon is a media rich country, the mass media institutions have played a less than positive role in areas pertaining to education, training, and national development. The Lebanese broadcasting industry also has done little to advance national development. Both licensed and illegal broadcasting have failed to provide Lebanese citizens with information to satisfy their real societal needs. This fact has been especially evident in television broadcasting. Since its inception, Lebanese television has relied heavily on imported programs, most of which are alien to Lebanese culture. The small number of locally produced programs are either superficial or have no educational value.

The major concern of television officials has been financial gain. The government, in contrast, has remained largely interested in asserting its control, particularly over news broadcasts, while paying little attention to the kind and quality of

programs. Radio broadcasting, both licensed and illegal, differs little from television, except that radio programs are locally produced, mostly for entertainment purposes. The Lebanese mass media, in both print and broadcast, have failed to contribute to societal development.\textsuperscript{35}

In brief, the history of the media in Lebanon reveals an institution with great freedoms, great contributors, and great promise. Many commentators have argued, in fact, that Lebanon was originally the jewel of the Middle East for journalists and other media professionals. The outbreak of the civil war, however, changed the Lebanese landscape in many ways, and the media shared the same fate. A careful analysis of the history of mass media in Lebanon reveals that its structure may have been shaped more by the civil war than by any other circumstances.\textsuperscript{36}

In Libya both the local population and the large community of foreign workers and diplomats, in general, register a high degree of dissatisfaction with the nature and quality of Libyan television and radio programs. One of the main reasons is the hiring of technical and administrative personnel based on political criteria rather than on expertise or knowledge. This fact, in turn, has not only downgraded the quality of the programs, but has also reduced the ability to develop and produce a set of programs of interest to the general population. Another reason for dissatisfaction is the fact that broadcast signals do not yet effectively reach the southern part of the country with its sparsely populated and far-flung villages.\textsuperscript{37}

The Libyan government claimed that the mass media, like many other institutions under the Libyan government’s jurisdiction, have received low priorities for support because of the country’s economic crisis. Only a softening of the economic crisis and the allocation of more money to mass media will revitalize these important institutions and permit development of new telecommunication technologies.

Morocco’s private press is free to investigate and debate many previously taboo issues, including social problems. But freedom of the press has its limits. Low literacy levels limit newspaper readership, and competition among publications for advertising is

\textsuperscript{36} http://www.lebanon.com.
\textsuperscript{37} http://www.free-libya.com.
intense. The Western Sahara, the monarchy and corruption are all sensitive issues. Perceived shortcomings in their coverage have led to the suspension of several newspapers in recent years. Self-censorship by journalists is commonplace.

The government owns, or has a stake in, Morocco's two television networks. The government plans to allow private investment in state-run broadcast media and the official news agency. Broadcasters are tamer in their coverage of sensitive topics than their press counterparts. Satellite dishes are widely used, giving access to a range of foreign TV stations. All aspects of modern Moroccan life are represented among the media available in Morocco. In particular, the press represents a rich sector of the media. Arabic and French are the two prevailing languages. In general, literate Moroccans appreciate their daily newspapers and weekly magazines.

Indeed, the Internet constitutes an important new media player in Morocco. There are excellent Moroccan web sites, which serve fully as information providers. These sites have editorial staffs and impressive technical solutions offering daily updates on topics such as the economy, day-to-day life, and world news. Meanwhile, domestic TVs and radios remain an integral part of the Moroccan media constellation. The introduction of satellite dishes has substantially augmented this variety of media.38

In Palestine because of varying degrees of Israeli occupation, the most important role for the media has been in consolidating Palestinian nationalism. The media contribute their part by helping to define the people, their land, and their leaders. From its perspective, the press transmits lessons from the Palestinian past and projects a vision of the Palestinian future. Therefore, the press is an instrument of Palestinian nationalism. Because of its adversarial role to the occupation, the press has often been reluctant to criticize national institutions or to carry investigative articles on how development aid has been used. Women's groups and health groups use video for both educational purposes and to discuss the political and social issues.


38 http://alanhbaa.info.
In Sudan, since independence in 1956, the mass media have served as channels for the dissemination of information supporting various political parties or official government views. Radio, an important medium of mass communication in the country's vast territory, has remained virtually a government monopoly. Television broadcasting has been a complete monopoly. The official Sudan News Agency (SUNA), first established in 1971, distributes news about the country in Arabic, English, and French, with foreign and domestic services.39

Before the 1989 coup, Sudan had a lively press, with most political parties publishing a variety of newspapers and periodicals. In Khartoum, twenty-two daily papers were published, nineteen in Arabic and three in English. Altogether, the country had fifty-five daily or weekly newspapers and magazines. Since coming to power, the current government has authorized the publication of only a few papers and periodicals, all of which are published by the military or government agencies and edited by official censors. The leading daily in 1991 was “Al-Inqadh al Watani” (National Salvation).

Sudan Television operated three stations located in Omdurman, Al-Jazeera, and Atbarah. The major radio station of the Sudan National Broadcasting Corporation was in Omdurman, with a regional station in Juba for the south. Following the 1989 coup, the new government dismissed several broadcasters from Sudan Television because their loyalty to the new government and its policies was considered suspect.

In Syria the government believes that the mass media can play an important role in both the education and training of its citizens and in national and regional development. The intent is that the media create an appropriate climate for national development. In addition, the media provide non-formal education and training to Syrian citizens in the areas of health and hygiene, agriculture, and child development. Finally, the media are used for enhancing Arab pride and promoting “Pan-Arabism.” It is fair to say that the Syrian media have been successful in meeting at least some of their stated goals, despite criticism that the media are a purely political propaganda apparatus.40

In Tunisia, although freedom of opinion and expression is guaranteed by the Tunisian constitution, the government tightly controls the press and broadcasting. The state-run Tunisian Radio and Television Establishment (ERTT) operate two national TV channels and several radio networks.

Press codes shape coverage and prescribe large fines and prison sentences for violators. Before publication, the authorities screen journals, and the government encourages a high degree of self-censorship. Discussion of corruption and human rights in the media is taboo. Editions of foreign newspapers, including French and pan-Arab publications, are regularly seized. There are several privately run newspapers and magazines, including two opposition party journals.\(^{41}\)

Broadcasting in Yemen began in 1940, when the British established a small radio station at Ra’s Bradley in the Tawahi district of Aden. Transmissions were short and mainly concentrated on military news about World War II, together with information about precautions against air raids.

Sana’a Radio was established in January 1946, but fell silent after two years, resuming broadcasts in 1955. Aden Radio was established on 7 August 1954. Between 1976 and 1990, broadcasting in northern Yemen was the responsibility of the Yemeni Public Corporation for Radio and Television. A similar organization, the Radio and Television Authority, was established in the south in 1988. With the unification of Yemen, these were merged in 1990 to form the Public Corporation for Radio and Television (PCRT), which operates under the Ministry of Information.

In addition to radio, there are two national television channels. Channel 1 (originally the northern television service) began broadcasting on 26 September 1975. The former television service in the south, which is now known as Channel 2, was established on 11 September 1964. Color transmission started in the north on 26 September 1979 and in the south on 8 March 1981.\(^{42}\)

The media role in Yemen is likely the same as in most of the Gulf States. That is, the media stress education, with an emphasis on the national development of Yemen, especially in the fields of health care, childcare, and the environment.

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\(^{41}\) [http://www.tunisieinfo.com](http://www.tunisieinfo.com).

Roles of Media in the Gulf Countries: The media in the Gulf Countries plays very important role in the development of the all sphere in life.

Although in Bahrain newspapers and periodicals may have some application in the classroom, particularly in the study of English, their actual use and extent of effect are unknown. Aside from informational programs on radio and television, telecommunication does not play a significant role in classroom instruction. Media are more likely to have an educational influence on both the young and adult population through individual access to available media.

The role of Bahrain's mass media in national development is primarily played out through announcement and coverage of ceremonial and traditional events. According to Rugh (1987), the private press in Bahrain, not unlike other loyalist press in the Gulf region, is not inclined toward social advocacy that runs contrary to national interests. Activities to develop national awareness are mainly the domain of the government. Part of that task is accomplished through informational publications that document the state's historical, culture, and religious history. Another part occurs through updates on state activities such as defense, industrial, financial, and commercial development. Whatever the subject, media consumers in Bahrain generally have faith in the accuracy and substance of both the private and state media, especially because choice of media and the opportunity for measurement against external media remain unrestricted.43

Mass media are used for both curricular instruction and national development in Saudi Arabia, although the former category is limited to closed circuit television. Because males and females are segregated in Saudi universities, closed circuit television imparts lessons to female students setting in a separate classroom from the one where the teacher lectures to male students. Female students can put questions to the teacher by using a microphone. The use of closed circuit television for such instruction is also attributed to a shortage of qualified people to teach at the university level.

For example, the Saudis do not employ any distance education program of the type provided by the India's Open University (IGNOU). Both of Saudi Arabia's television channels are used, however, to teach Arabic to the expatriate population. Two to three times a week, interested persons can tune in to such lessons of thirty-minute

duration. Formal homework requirements and exams are usually not integral to formal
distance education programs.

Saudi broadcasting, especially television, is used considerably more for national
development. Various campaigns appear in the broadcast media on a daily basis. These
programs include subjects like keeping the environment clean, disposing of garbage
properly, keeping stereo volumes down, respecting traffic laws, wearing seat belts,
donating blood, and reducing electricity consumption. Such campaigns, conducted in the
afternoon and during prime time, are subjects of short public service announcements and
longer discussion programs. The appropriate government ministries fashion public
relations campaigns both to initiate development campaigns and to produce the message
professionally.

According to Kuwait's 1991 constitution, "freedom of opinion is guaranteed to
everyone . . . within the limits of the law." The 1961 Press and Publishing Law
established fines and prison terms for the publication of banned material, including
reports critical of the government. In practice, this provision has been invoked only
rarely, and Kuwait is known for its press freedom. In 1986, however, the government
took a number of measures to repress political dissent. New censorship regulations
formed a part of these measures. The Ministry of Information requires all publications to
submit advance copy to the Ministry for approval. Moreover, the Ministry forbids
criticism of the ruler and his family, other Arab leaders, or Islam, as well as the
acceptance of foreign funding.

In 1990, as a result of the Iraqi invasion, Iraqi forces took over all media. A few
Kuwaiti newspapers and Radio Kuwait managed to operate outside the country. After the
war, in April 1991, the six opposition groups joined in calling for a free press. In January
1992, the government lifted censorship, but journalists continued to experience various
restrictions. After 1993, the press, radio, and television spent considerable time and
resources while recovering and rebuilding facilities the Iraqis had destroyed.44

The Kuwait News Agency (KUNA) is theoretically independent but in practice is
an arm of the Ministry of Information. Newspapers are generally privately owned and
consist of seven dailies, five in Arabic and two in English (the Arab Times and Kuwait

44 http://www.moe.edu.kw
The largest daily is *Al Qabas* (Firebrand), which is independent and had a circulation of about 120,000 before the war of 1990-1991. Two smaller dailies, *Al Anba* (News) and *Ar Ray al Amm* (Public Opinion), each with a prewar circulation of 80,000, are more conservative and support the government. With regard to other information media, the Ministry of Information operates the three stations of Radio Kuwait and Kuwait Television station.\(^{45}\)

**Oman** has made great strides over the last quarter century toward using the media for informational, educational, and entertainment purposes. This growth is reflected in the variety of broadcast media programs. About 74 percent of radio programs are devoted to entertainment, religion, and news, while the same categories represent about 54 percent of all television programs. The remaining 26 percent pertain largely to “information and guidance in such matters as health, education, agriculture, industry, family affairs, and child care in close cooperation with the relevant ministries.” Interestingly, English language radio programming furnishes approximately 47 percent of its output in the form of light and popular music, 33 percent in classic music, and 20 percent in non-musical programs.

The Omani print media demonstrate proclivities similar to the broadcast media inasmuch as they inform, educate, and entertain. This similarity becomes apparent with special reference to magazines. Omani magazines deal with various broad subjects including society, politics, and economics.

Besides its international significance and wealth as an oil producer, the Sultanate of Oman is rich historically, geographically, and culturally. Although the history of Oman goes back to 1200 B.C., the history of the mass media in this land is less than thirty years old.

Omani trends in mass communications suggest a desire to expand current services and to adopt the latest technologies. In 1989, a new comprehensive complex that contains a radio station and studios was opened at Al-Qurm. In 1990, Oman signed an agreement with a French group for the future expansion of television and radio facilities. The project involved the construction of sixteen main stations. It cost Oman about 26 million Omani reals, and reached completion in 1993. If the ongoing progress in the realm of mass

\(^{45}\)ibid
media indicates anything, it is that the Omans have learned adroitly to steer a course that accepts change while maintaining a firm grasp on heritage.\textsuperscript{46}

The initial role of mass media in Qatar was to facilitate the process of building a modern nation. The planned development of electronic media in particular has reflected this fact. The policies and plans of the Ministry of Information are geared toward using media to bridge the gap between the oil boom in the 1970s and early 1980s and lagging internal development. Programmers and editing policymakers have requested priority for education and cultural content over entertainment content. Increased government financial support sometimes serves as a form of positive reinforcement for private newspapers publishing educational supplements or new sections on health or computers.

For a small country, Qatar’s rapid press development has been a function of strong government support and the recruitment of relatively well trained journalists from other less affluent Arab countries. Whether Qatari newspapers and magazines will hold their ground in the future is problematic because dwindling government financial support imperils career prospects for Qatari citizens. The media also confronts a growing pull for the “Qatarization” of media staff.\textsuperscript{47}

In March 1993, the introduction of cable television facilitated both clear reception of satellite television networks and more liberal philosophies. The letter trend also put pressure on the government to ease censorship and other regulations imposed on local print and electronic media. Meanwhile, tough competition among media outlets helped improve the quality of local electronic media productions. This environment produced al-Jazeera, which is considered one of the most watch-able media in the Middle East. Al-Jazeera is not controlled by any government or regime, so the people tend to look on it as a neutral.\textsuperscript{48}

After witnessing a period of steady growth, the mass media industries have entrenched themselves in the political, economic, and culture landscape of the United Arab Emirates. The UAE’s mass media are currently undergoing consolidation and continue to fulfill the communication needs not only of the indigenous population but

\textsuperscript{46} http://www.scienceclub.gov.om.
\textsuperscript{47} https://www.e.gov.qa.
\textsuperscript{48} ibid
also of the expatriate community. Regional cooperation and sharing of information with Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (AGCC) countries are also common.

With reference to employment, the mass media industries have relied inordinately on a foreign work force because of the lack of local training opportunities. For the Arabic press, news people come from countries with older press traditions, such as Egypt and Lebanon. News workers for the English-language press come from Europe, India, and Pakistan. However, this excessive reliance on a foreign work force is changing slowly as local talent becomes available. Given the political stability that the UAE has enjoyed since its inception, it is safe to predict a continued prosperity for the UAE's mass media industries, nurtured and sustained by a pragmatic and benign leadership. The emergence of Al-Arabia reflects these tendencies.49

Emirates Media has been a pioneer in laying the foundations of the Middle Eastern media industry. Its name has become synonymous with advanced broadcast engineering and cutting edge technology. Its future outlook includes strengthening its position as a regional media center and bringing the highest quality standards. In addition, it continues to concentrate on maintaining its role as national broadcaster and journalist, along with the development of its agencies to reach an ever-increasing number of public both in and outside the country.

Transnational media institutions—both print and electronic—have challenged the state's monopoly of information. New "constructions" of "reality" are proliferating, some reinforcing but others challenging the accepted order of things. Little wonder, then, that the Arab media is emerging as a genuine "fourth estate" in Arab public life. As such, social scientists (Arab and non-Arab) are increasingly interested in studying the media as a social institution, and Arab media professionals themselves are reassessing their function and significance in these times of transformation. Among the issues now being raised is the quality and professionalism of the media "industry" itself.

The Arab World in its modern form, and arguably during its entire history, has never been a particularly welcoming place for opinion and opposition. New media such

as print, radio, television, Internet etc, have generally been used to further the objectives of controlling regimes. Saddam Hussein did not allow open criticism in the press, or anywhere really. Egypt owned all media outlets to which its people had access, and these reported largely on the average day of a politician – what meetings he or she might have attended, what phone calls he/she would have received, and other such riveting bits of news.

Equally, events in far off Egypt remained, for locals in a Jordanian or Kuwaiti village, far off in Egypt. There existed little if any shared experience for the Arab world as a whole - or at least on a conscious level - other than the greater cultural similarities. The most memorable shared experience in recent times had been the monthly radio concerts of the legendary *Um Kalthoum*, who, for a brief period in the 1970s united the Arab world on Thursday to listen to her sing. Yes, there existed the shared notions of the Palestinian cause, the shared Islamic identity and perhaps equally the longing for the return of the Golden Era of Islam; however, with regards to actuality and day-to-day existence, the Arab world was largely fragmented.

**Freedom of Press in the Arab World**

In general press freedom means freedom, unless specifically prohibited by laws, to gather, print and publish information and to set up technologies in pursuit of such objectives, to claim and gain access to information. This freedom extends to press photographers too. In practice, freedom of press means freedom of the owner of a newspaper. Journalists enjoy only that much freedom as is given to them by the owner of their newspaper/magazine.

Generally, freedom always means freedom from government. But, it is recognized that there are other agencies too that threatens this freedom, for example, militants, language chauvinists and regional pressure groups. Big advertisers also threaten freedom of the press, as they are important sources of newspaper income.

From the beginning, freedom of the press was sought and obtained on the ground that it was a prerequisite to democracy. Without the medium of the press, people had no means of judging the performance or credentials of aspirants of power in a democracy. Even otherwise, people depend on the press on a daily basis for a variety of needs. It goes
without saying that all freedoms become irrelevant without freedom of the press because denial of this freedom means the strangling of democracy.

The press, including individual journalists and media organizations, demand freedom because of the functions they discharge for the benefit of the society. Both society and the state need information on day-to-day basis. Though government has their own machinery to gather information, they rely on the media as barometers of public opinion. The public or citizenry depend on the media for fair and impartial information regarding the government's activities. As watchdogs and neutral observers, the media are in an advantageous position to monitor and disseminate information relating to government activities.

In today's context, freedom of the press is only an extension of the citizen's right to freedom of speech and expression. It is the press alone that can thwart the attempts of any government to deny this right to the citizen. Governments take daily hundreds of decisions, which affect the citizens directly. It is the press alone which analyses and interprets the consequences of these decisions for the citizens. In every country, its population is dependent on the press and other mass media for information, advice and guidance on a daily basis. Without freedom, they cannot discharge the functions that the society expects from them.

Today, the Press and the electronic media wherever they operate privately, have information gathering networks spread all over the world. They are the eyes and ears of the people everywhere. In addition, they exist solely for the purpose of collecting and disseminating information unlike the government which has more important responsibilities like administration, security of the state, education, health, agriculture, economy etc. the media therefore cannot collect and distribute information unless they enjoy freedom for themselves as institutions, as do individual journalists employed by them. The media accept certain restrictions on these freedoms if they impinge on the freedoms of other individuals, or they are in the public interest.

Freedom of the media, as we understand it, does not exist in the Arabian Gulf. The surprise is not that this is so, but rather in how new shoots of a more tolerant and liberal era is beginning to sprout.
Arab print media can be divided for purposes of analysis into four separate organizational categories. One type can be called the "mobilization press." This type of media is under the tightest government control and supervision. Newspapers of this type never criticize or print negative information about senior officials. They avoid criticism of basic government policy, and only occasionally complain about the way lower level individual government employees manage their responsibilities. There is no significant diversity among newspapers, all of which are owned by the government or by its political agents. The regime in fact controls all essential levers of power in the country, including the press. It sees itself as the vanguard of the people and regards the press as a tool of political mobilization of the public; it is not content with passive acquiescence but expects active editorial support for its policies. This type of print media is found in Syria, Sudan, and Libya.

A second press type can be called "loyalist," because although most newspapers are privately owned, their news and commentary loyally support the government in power. They eschew criticism of the top leadership, although they do complain about shortcomings of the government bureaucracy and express occasional mild criticism of government ministers. There is little diversity among the daily papers except in style. This type of print media is found in the conservative monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, as well as in Palestine. From the final years of the 1990s, however, a more liberal trend began to appear in these countries, initiated by some of the younger leaders who have gained more influence.

The Palestinian press, however, has some unique characteristics. The Ottomans ruled Palestine until 1917, then for thirty years by the British, then by Israel and Jordan until 1967, when Israel also occupied the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinian journalism found outlets in several Arab countries, but not in Palestine itself until the middle of the 1990s, when the Palestinian Authority assumed responsibility for some of the territory, and government-sponsored and private print media emerged there. Palestinian publications as of 2003 remained subject to controls of various kinds not only by the Palestinian Authority but also by Israel, since Palestine has not yet achieved independent statehood.
A third type of print media can be called "diverse," because its most distinguishing characteristic is that newspapers represent a considerable diversity in content, style, and political orientation. Essentially all are privately owned, and many but not all are quite critical of the government. The clearest example of this type of press is found in Lebanon, but during the twenty-first century it is found also in Morocco, Kuwait, and Yemen. Behind the press is a political system that includes active political parties and an environment of freer speech than in most other parts of the Arab world.

A fourth type of print media can be called "transitional," because its structure has been undergoing change in recent years; it is the subject of debate and discussion in the country and may change further. The government, some by private individuals, and some by political parties own some print media. Some freedom of expression exists, but a variety of governmental controls and economic pressures restrict that freedom. Laws on the books allow the government authorities to take action against journalists and editors, and court cases are relatively frequent. This type of press is found in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and Algeria.

Regarding the freedom of press in the Arab World, I would like to confine myself to the Gulf Countries, rather than the wider Arab world in the Middle East, as there have been many positive steps in the Arab media landscape in the last decade than other Muslim countries. New satellite channels like Al-Jazeera from Doha, Al-Arabiya from Dubai, Abu Dhabi TV and Lebanon's Al-Manar TV have stimulated competition for greater professionalism, and given a voice to Arab dissidents. People across the Gulf countries are now more exposed to modes of expression taken for granted elsewhere in the world.

But Arab TV stations still dependent on grants with political strings attached, they have yet to achieve political independence from their paymasters. There are differences as well between one Gulf state and another. Some have taken a bigger leap while others are more cautious and unsure of themselves in political experimentation and in the media.

Kuwait is, in relative terms, much free, a fact that stems from an elected National Assembly, however circumscribed its rules may be. Alone in the Gulf, Kuwaiti newspapers do not feel shy of reporting the hard-hitting speeches of opposition spokesmen, and even their other local coverage tends to be more aggressive.
Other Gulf countries have found other ways of compensating for the restrictions they impose on the media. There are two striking examples. In Qatar, a country not renowned for its free media, the freest media in the Arab world has taken shape in the form of the satellite television channel al-Jazeera, which has won an enthusiastic region wide audience. This channel had been the first pan-Arab TV broadcaster to give a platform to opposition voices, and to provoke discussion on controversial issues.

In Saudi Arabia, whose restrictive norms are well known, some of their innovative leaders have gone to a Western capital such as London to be able to report frankly on Arab developments while observing discretion in relation to events in Saudi Arabia. Beyond its borders, Saudi Arabia exercises tremendous leverage over the regional and international press. For example, the Arabic daily newspaper Al-Hayat and the magazine Al-Wasat, both based in London owned by a Saudi Prince. Similarly, the London based daily Al-Sharq al-Awasat and its sister publication Al-Majallah, belong to another Saudi Prince.

In the United Arab Emirates, a sea change has taken place in recent years over the leadership’s tolerance of dissenting views on different world issues outside the immediate area. Guidelines on local and national coverage, however, are the rule, rather than the exception.

The most dangerous place in the region for journalists in the recent years - the most troubling in terms of press freedom abuses - was the West Bank. Israel’s massive military offensive here, the army threatened, intimidated, and, in some cases physically prevented journalists from covering its military operations. Israel Defense Forces fired at reporters, detained several journalists, confiscated film or press cards from others, ransacked the office of private West Bank television and radio stations, and attacked the Palestinian National Authority’s broadcasting facilities.50

Generally, the leaders in the different Arab countries are mindful of two risks as far as the media are concerned. They feel that foreign, especially Western, values could undermine their traditions and roots. Second, they would like to maintain their citizens’ respectful attitude to their leaders, governed by tribal and religious guidelines. Support

50 Joel Campagna, “Overview: The Middle East and North Africa
for freedom of the media is therefore circumscribed by caveats, the traditional one of "national interest" being only one of them.

Oman's Information Minister, Abdulaziz bin Mohammed al Rowas, perhaps best expressed gulf reservations, he said: "We have a duty to immunize ourselves the way you immunize yourself against diseases. We monitor the foreign media and react to it according to our needs".51

While ongoing utilization of new technologies continues to open pathways into a traditionally closed society, the Arab Countries remain resistant to many aspects relating to freedom of the press and to recognition of human rights. Yet, the Arab citizens have access to a fuller repertoire of information than ever before and the Arab governments have less control over information flows than they ever have. It remains to be seen how or if this will translate into the creation of a more robust civil society with fuller freedoms for the press, for the media, and for all Arab citizens.

**Arabic Media and the Gulf Crisis**

Gulf War presented the most striking example of an international event in which media and especially electronic media played a prominent role in unfolding a war. The Gulf Crisis received extensive media coverage starting with the invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 and continuing even after the ceasefire on 27 February the following year. Newspapers, radios and televisions dedicated a prime slot to every political or military move during this period. The coverage almost reached saturation point in the western media.

People in the region often refer the Gulf war as the “First”, “Second”, and “Third” Gulf wars. The first was the long bloody struggle between Iran and Iraq from 1980 to 1988. The second began with the Iraqi attack on Kuwait and ended with the American and Coalition forces’ defeat of the Iraqi army in 1991. The third was the 2003 defeat and occupation of Iraq by American led forces. More usual in the USA is to call the first the “Iran-Iraq War”, the second the “Persian Gulf War”, and the third “Iraq War” or the “War on Iraq”.

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51 Nihal Singh, Media and Democracy in the Arab World
The Western media, especially radio and television broadcast by its partisan coverage of the crisis during the months preceding the Gulf War, was attempting to prepare their population for a military confrontation in the volatile West Asia. Because of the Western domination of the international electronic media this had profound implications for the rest of the world.

The pattern of radio and television reporting clearly indicated that there was definite preparation for war, both on the ground and in the media. Substantial time had given for discussing military aspects of the crisis at the expense of several other dimensions of the problems in the Gulf. Media was effectively used to impress the point that military was better than the option of strict enforcement of UN sanction against Iraq to resolve the crisis.

The 1991 war exploded onto a mass media environment that had developed significantly since the Vietnam War. If Vietnam was the first "television war" and the 1991 Gulf conflict the first "live television war" then the recently concluded war in Iraq must certainly be the first "international live television war". Coverage of the war was unprecedented. Never before had so many international stations devoted so much time, resources and energy on an event that did not directly involve their countries. Unlike the 1991 war when western media giant provided most of the reports for the rest of the world, the 2003 war saw non-Western stations, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya giving the "big boy" a run for money.

The wars in Iraq, war on terror, Palestine-Israel conflict and recent Israel's attack on Lebanon have had a profound impact on the Arabic Media in the Arab world. War tests freedom of press in the Gulf. The media in Arabian Peninsula is experiencing a new wave of freedom. Normally accused by many of toeing the official line at the cost of compromising on objectivity, crises like the war against Iraq are being used by the press to overcome government--and often self-imposed restrictions.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990, it was days before some of the Saudi Arabian newspapers reported the event, which they referred to evasively as "tension" in the region. In contrast, since Day One of the recent crisis, Gulf newspapers have splashed
reports on their front pages, as was the case with the Israeli bombings in Lebanon and brutal killing of innocent civilians by the Israeli forces.

Independent political analyst Inad Khairallah said the change was a result of the shift in the way the governments in the region have been handling the press in recent years. "There is a sort of freedom that the press didn't have before. Nobody tells editors 'don't publish this' anymore. This is partly because the governments are caught in their own 'trap'—neither can they allow a free rein nor can they check news flow in absolute terms," Khairallah said. 52

Moreover, it is difficult to hide anything by controlling the media because of the technological advancement made by local television stations and the increase in the availability of Western channels. The advent, access and reach of the Internet, have led to a situation where news can't be restrained.

The World Wide Web, with its online newspapers and radio and TV web casting, has dramatically enhanced the diversity of news available to people in the Middle East. The change is especially marked for those living in countries where foreign newspapers are unavailable, expensive, or out-of-date when they arrive.

Most countries that have allowed Internet access have tolerated freer expression online than is permitted in the local news media. Kuwait, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon have all permitted relatively unfettered online speech for the thousands of users in each country, even as they enforce press laws against print periodicals that publish "objectionable" material. 53

Al-Jazeera – New Vistas Opened: Much of the credit for heralding “improvement” in media coverage and “liberating” the press in the Gulf, is attributed to the “CNN of the Arab World”, Al-Jazeera network, the independent Qatar-based Arabic-language TV network.

Al-Jazeera (www.al-jazeera.net) has grown rapidly, increasing programming from six hours a day to 24 hours a day. On January 1, 1999 Al-Jazeera became the first 24-hour Arabic language news channel having 27 offices, for example, in Washington, DC, New York, London, Paris, Brussels, Moscow, Jakarta, and Islamabad. Al-Jazeera, had


gained popularity earlier, broadcasting video and audiotapes recorded by the al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden during the American attacks on Afghanistan. It again took the lead among services based in Arab countries.

Shot in the aftermath of the U.S./British intervention in Afghanistan, the network was openly critical of Arab governments and their Western allies. The station has become perhaps the sole non-governmental voice of opposition in the Arab world to carry some influence. What gives the channel weight is its incredible popularity. As one of the Al-Jazeera journalists explains, "We are the most popular political party in the Arab world. And it's due to the audience's support that we can continue to exist."

There are two distinct traits within Al-Jazeera that make it stand out. Firstly, it has extensive news coverage in Arabic by reporters who know what will appeal to an Arabic public. Secondly, it has political discussion programs, which delve into very controversial subjects and provide a theatre for disparate opinions. Though other Arabic language services provide similar programming, and have done so before Al-Jazeera, the latter has gone further and in a more news-orientated fashion than the entertainment-based channels.

This presentation brought the reality of Arab brethren into the living rooms of the region, much more accessible and appealing than the clinical Western coverage, often framed to satisfy Western interests. Other Arabic newscasts presented much more conservative coverage of the event, perhaps with the intention of avoiding the enflaming of Arab opinion.

Following the Al-Jazeera formula the channels, Al-Arabiya, Abu Dhabi TV, and al-Hayat/LBC were not far behind, and several other Arabic-language services were active on a smaller scale. Much of the growth in the Arab countries' international television news had been fueled between the wars by the need to cover the intensifying Israel-Palestinian confrontation from an Arab perspective.

Western television frequently depended on feeds from these Arabic services, especially later in the war when the Western media had greater difficulty working in Iraq-

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held territory. Charles Gubash, of NBC News, quotes Prof. Hussain Amin of the American University in Cairo, in explaining the different perspective of the Arabic services: “They are all giving news coverage from an Arabic perspective, says Amin, “talking about Iraqi causalities, Iraqi resistance, inviting Arab analyst to comment on US, press briefings and pick out what is wrong with them, just as the British use English experts. In Arab eyes what is fair, in American eyes it is biased.”57