



**U.S. Senate Committee
on Foreign Relations**
Joseph R. Biden, Jr., Ranking Member
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Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Committee on Foreign Relations
Hearing on Broadcasting to the Middle East
April 29, 2004

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this hearing on U.S. government broadcasting to the Middle East.

In the past three years, starting before 9/11, the Broadcasting Board of Governors has overhauled our broadcasting to the region. And by all indications it is working – and working quite well.

Right now, on the air are two new radio services – Radio Sawa to Arabic-speaking nations, and Radio Farda to Iran. In recent months, a new television service, known as “Al Hurra,” has begun broadcasting. The results have been nothing short of dramatic.

Radio Sawa is now the top international broadcaster in major cities in several countries in the region. A recent survey in Morocco shows that in Casablanca and Rabat, Sawa is the number one station among all listeners over age 15. Some 88 percent of people in those cities under the age of 30 listen weekly, and 64 percent of those over age 30 do so.

The numbers are not as high in other countries – they range from 11 percent in Egypt to 42 percent in Kuwait. But these numbers are phenomenal in a field where you are doing pretty well if you are getting five percent.

The data also demonstrate that those who listen find the news and information to be reliable, and that those who listen to Sawa are more likely to have a favorable view of the United States.

The TV station, Al Hurra, has only been on the air for two months, so it is premature to make any firm judgments. But even there the preliminary returns are positive. The results of a recent telephone survey conducted by an independent firm show that people are tuning in to watch Al Hurra – an average of 30 percent of adults surveyed had watched the station in the previous week. And, as with Sawa, a significant percentage of viewers consider its news “very or somewhat reliable.”

I am heartened by these early results. I visited the studios of Al Hurra last month, and I came away with a very positive impression of both the physical plant that has been constructed

and the professional commitment of the journalists there. I urge my colleagues who have not yet visited to take the time to go out there and see for yourself.

I hasten to add that I believe we should be modest about our objective. We should not expect too much from these broadcasts. They will not cause people in the Middle East to accept American foreign policy, or to embrace our values.

Our goal should be simply this: to get people to listen to and watch the objective news and information that these broadcasts provide.

The great struggle in which we are engaged is, in large part, a battle of ideas. In the region, it is a struggle waged between the moderates and the proponents of a radical view of Islam. Expanding the flow of news and information – from the region and around the world – arms the moderates, not with weapons, but with tools of persuasion.

In my view, we should do a lot more of this type of broadcasting, not just to the Middle East but to other nations with significant Islamic populations. With the help of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, I put forward just such a proposal after 9/11.

I hope that the success of the Middle East broadcasts will increase support from the White House and the Congress for expanded such broadcasts.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

