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## Al-Jazeera English to air in San Francisco

By Joe Garofoli

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Al-Jazeera English, corporate cousin to the Arabic-language network, is nearly 3 years old and available in 100 countries but only a smattering of U.S. homes - until Monday, when San Francisco's Link TV will begin carrying "World News," its 30-minute daily news program.

The move not only gives Al-Jazeera English a foot in the door to the 31 million U.S. homes that Link TV reaches, but it is symbolic of a growing thaw in the post-9/11 feelings toward the Arab and Muslim worlds since President Obama's election, observers say.

In his latest outreach, Obama will give a speech in Cairo next week in which he said he will outline how "the United States can change for the better its relationship with the Muslim world. That will require a recognition on both the part of the United States as well as many majority Muslim countries about each other, a better sense of understanding."

That lack of understanding helped to hinder Al-Jazeera English's growth in the United States, says Kimberlan Daley, head of North American distribution sales for Al-Jazeera Network.

While major cable providers told the fledgling news outlet they didn't have space in their lineups or bemoaned a lack of interest in foreign coverage among the U.S. viewers,



Courtesy Al Jazeera English

**Correspondent Kimberly Halkett, in the Washington, D.C. newsroom of Al-Jazeera English, will be seen in San Francisco when the network is carried on Link TV starting Monday."**

there was also a "reluctance" to pick up Al-Jazeera English because of the reputation of its Arabic-language counterpart, Daley and analysts say.

In the days after the Sept. 11 terrorists attacks, Al-Jazeera (Arabic) became best known for carrying videotaped anti-American messages and threats from 9/11 mastermind Osama bin Laden (which were later rebroadcast by many American news outlets).

In 2004, during the height of the Iraq war, then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld accused Al-Jazeera (Arabic) of "vicious, inaccurate and inexcusable" reporting on the war.

"There was a stigma attached to Al-Jazeera English, deserved or

not," because of its relation to the Arabic version when they launched in 2006, said Mark Jurkowitz, associate director of the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism.

Before recommending that its cable system retain Al-Jazeera English on its cable lineup last June, the City Council of Burlington, Vt., approved a resolution saying that while council members acknowledged that the outlet was funded by a constitutional monarchy "that applies Islamic law and is perceived by many as being restrictive of human rights, we cannot draw any conclusions as to whether or to what extent these particular characteristics have impact on the content of AJE."

But Jamal Dajani, senior director of Middle Eastern programming for Link TV, which already carries much Middle Eastern coverage, said those post-9/11 fears are fading with the changes in the White House. Obama has made a point to reach out to Middle Eastern leaders and gave his first formal interview as president to the Arab network Al-Arabiya.

And there is a need for more foreign coverage. With most U.S. newspapers and TV networks pulling back their overseas operations, coverage of international events fell by about 40 percent in 2008, according to Pew's annual State of the News Media report.

The English and Arabic versions of Al-Jazeera are "two different networks," Dajani said. The Arabic version is more of a regional network focused the Middle East, he added, while the English language version is "more global" with bureaus in Washington, D.C., London, Doha, Qatar, and Kuala Lumpur.

Earlier this month MHz Networks, an educational broadcaster from Falls Church, Va., began carrying Al-Jazeera English programming in the Washington, D.C., area. Over the next few months, MHz plans to send the programming to public television stations in 20 cities that could reach a potential audience of 18 million homes.

Before that deal was struck, only small cable operators in Vermont and in Ohio carried Al-Jazeera English programming, which is also on YouTube.

"It's definitely a breakthrough in terms of access to American audience," said Mitchell Bard, a foreign policy analyst with American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise who has found its "coverage to have a

semblance of balance" when he was interviewed on it. "But I don't know how many people interested in Middle Eastern coverage will go there."

Jurkowitz said "many obstacles" face Al-Jazeera English even as its access to U.S. audiences grows and its 70 foreign bureaus offer a wider picture of the world. Viewers are going to have to find it in an increasingly niche-driven media world where even the largest cable news shows draw just 500,000 to 3 million viewers a night.

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## Al-Jazeera English coming Monday

**What:** Beginning Monday, the 30-minute Al-Jazeera English news program "World News" will air nightly on LinkTV at 7 Pacific time, followed by the 30-minute "Mosaic: World News from the Middle East."

**On satellite:** Link TV is available on Channel 375 on DirecTV and on Channel 9410 on Dish Network.

**On digital cable:** Link TV is available on KRCB, Channel 22, in parts of the Bay Area from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m. Monday through Friday.

**Help:** For information on how to receive LinkTV, go to [www.linktv.org/reception](http://www.linktv.org/reception).

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