



GOOD NEWS FROM THE MIDDLE EAST

Every night from Battery Street, an unusual news program shows you what the other side of the world is watching.

BY PAMELA FEINSILBER

Mosaic, WorldLink TV, 6:30 WEEK-NIGHTS, DIRECTV CHANNEL 375 AND DISH NETWORK CHANNEL 9410. PREVIOUS NIGHT'S SHOW AND A NEW WEEKLY NEWS PROGRAM CAN BE SEEN AT WWW.WORLDBLINKTV.ORG

At 6 a.m. one April dawn, when news producer Jamal Dajani comes to work on his show at WorldLink TV (“television without borders”), Jalal Ghazi greets him with a telling segment of TV news. Working in a big windowless room filled with television sets, Ghazi has been monitoring broadcasts from 22 Middle Eastern countries, and he’s found an interview with Iraq’s minister of information, Muhammad Said

Al Sahaf, on Abu Dhabi TV. It's taking place in a government office that's supposedly, Al Sahaf says with his now-famous Cheshire cat smile, in U.S. hands. And yet, look, here he is, and here is where he's been sleeping.

Anyone who's followed the news, of course, knows that the U.S. Army has

ments from all over the Middle East—Cairo's Nile TV, Beirut's Al-Manar TV, Morocco's 2M-TV, the Israel Broadcasting Authority—uncut and uncommented on.

Dajani set up these arrangements after September 11, 2001, when the Knight Foundation gave WorldLink just



just taken the Baghdad airport and is practically camped outside Al Sahaf's door. But until American television's embedded reporters arrive with the troops, Abu Dhabi TV, with Qatar-based Al Jazeera, has the pictures from Baghdad, and this interview is the kind of thing Dajani wants for his satellite-TV news show, Mosaic. He doesn't care if Al Sahaf is as false as George Washington's teeth. In the United Arab Emirates, this is the news, and he's gotten it before the other U.S. news shows. "People here will be able to figure out what's true and what's not," he says. "You're telling me when people watch American networks, they believe everything in it?"

To scoop the competition and keep us glued to their coverage, U.S. news shows can become like cheerleaders or controlling grammar school teachers, with visiting generals walking on maps. Dajani lets the Middle East arrive, unadorned, in American homes. Mosaic is a 30-minute compilation of news seg-

two months to start a new program.

"They said, 'Americans need to see Al Jazeera,'" says David Michaelis, an Israeli, who cofounded the network, located near Levi's Plaza, four years ago. "We said, 'We can

show you more than that. We can get you 15 other channels.' The whole idea is to bring you what 280 million people throughout the Middle East are watching." Michaelis sought out Dajani, who divides his time between Jerusalem and San Francisco, for his reputation as a skilled negotiator. And Dajani, a voluble Palestinian American who says he's a news junkie, got the deals done. But he'd never produced a TV program before.

He sits in that windowless room with Nora Alsaïdi, a sweet-faced young woman of Egyptian descent, and Souheila Al-Jadda, whose family is from Syria. Alsaïdi works the videotapes and headphones as Al-Jadda writes news summaries and Dajani studies the translation of the footage that Ghazi found. They don't seem distracted by the changing faces, logos, and footage, the continual talk in various languages, on the rows of televisions behind them. "I'm stocking up stories from minute ten to minute thirty," Dajani says. "I will not decide the final lineup until 4 or 5

p.m., and if something breaks, we have live feed for updates."

One screen shows an "Al Jazeera exclusive," the reporter talking in Arabic with distraught residents of a Baghdad neighborhood that's been bombed. "Wow, this is really bad," says Dajani of the rubble and despair, and he starts taking notes. Compared with U.S. stations, the Middle Eastern news programs show far more decimated buildings, injured Iraqis, and antiwar demonstrations.

The stations cut one by one to a press briefing with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. "We don't have to listen to him in translation," says Dajani, and he turns up MSNBC.

He's not big, though, on the cable news shows. "I like the Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, CBS with Dan Rather. The rest is a whole different, 24-hour production, with the American flag fluttering and too much schmoozing in the studio. On CNN, it's about Aaron Brown and his slick remarks. Then you go to the bottom of the barrel and Fox, where everything is so sensationalized." That style of reporting has not gone unnoticed in the Middle East. The screen showing Iran's state-controlled IRIB leaps with swirling graphics and a brilliant yellow "War for Oil" logo.

A few days later—as the post-Saddam street drama begins filling his show—Dajani has yet to produce a requested videotape of the broadcast with the Al Sahaf interview. No one has had a moment to make one. The mainstream media want to interview him or borrow footage, and people who have heard about the show want to know how to find it. (Mosaic's website has had five times as many visitors since the war began in March.) Explains a harried Dajani, "The whole world has been calling."

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