

July 16, 2008

Mr. Paul Steiger
Editor-in-Chief
ProPublica
55 Broadway
New York, NY 10006

Dear Mr. Steiger,

Attached is the Middle East Broadcasting Network's (MBN) response to the ProPublica articles *Lost in Translation* and *Alhurra's Baghdad Bureau Mired in Controversy*. Because of the repeated errors and distortions, the articles do not live up to ProPublica's Code of Ethics. MBN requests that appropriate corrections and retractions be made and that this letter and the attachments are posted on ProPublica's Web site.

Regards,

Deirdre Kline
Director of Communications
Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc.



MBN Correction for the Record

Errors in ProPublica's June 22, 2008, *Lost in Translation*

PP: Alhurra and Radio Sawa were meant to counter the wave of global criticism that had been building against the Bush administration.

MBN: Alhurra and Radio Sawa are part of U.S. international broadcasting under the BBG. As such, they are required, by law, to, among other things, “be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism;” and include “news which is consistently reliable” and “accurate, objective and comprehensive.” (See 22 U.S.C. 6202)

The ProPublica statement regarding the purpose of the broadcasts is misleading, and appears to be an attempt to politicize Alhurra and Radio Sawa and represent them as propaganda. In fact, both of these broadcasting initiatives were conceived and executed by the BBG and spearheaded by Norm Pattiz, a Democrat from California who was appointed to the Board during the Clinton Administration. (See the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* June 20, 2005, and testimony before Senate and House committees on June 11, 2002; Feb. 10, 2004; April 1, 2004 and April 29, 2004)

The initial idea for Radio Sawa was conceived – prior to 9/11 – to address a gap in U.S. international broadcasting to a region of growing importance to the United States. The initiative gained bipartisan support in the House and Senate, and led to the establishment of a television component. Rather than being a response to a need to offset “the wave of global criticism” of the Bush Administration, Alhurra is part of a larger repositioning of U.S. international broadcasting assets to reach important audiences in the Muslim world. This repositioning includes the Voice of America’s thriving new television broadcasts to Iran, the *Persian News Network*.

PP: Chart on “Arabic Language Regional Television News”
(<http://www.propublica.org/special/arabic-language-regional-television-news>)

MBN: The chart showing relative costs of operation and viewership for various television stations broadcasting to the Middle East draws a selective picture of the broadcast landscape. Facts that are readily available in the literature and on the public record that indicate higher costs for indigenous broadcasting efforts were not featured on the chart.

ProPublica bases Al-Arabiya’s budget of \$90 million from one anonymous employee. Although Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera do not make their budget information public, there is a variety of information about the numbers including Jordan’s Al-Ghad newspaper (March 10, 2008) that places Al-Arabiya’s annual budget between \$140 and \$160 million, with a start up budget of about \$300 million (Wired magazine, Dec. 2007). According to Mamoun Fandy’s



“(Un) Civil War of Words,” Al-Jazeera has a budget that reaches \$300 million annually (pg. 47).

ProPublica fails to note that Alhurra’s budget supports three networks, (pan-Arab, Iraq and Europe) as opposed to one for the other channels and includes MBN’s administrative costs (which also support seven radio streams.)

ProPublica correctly states that BBC Arabic’s budget is for \$50 million, but fails to note that it is only on the air 12 hours a day, as opposed to 24/7 broadcasts that are found on Alhurra, Alhurra-Iraq and Alhurra Europe. The article does not mention that BBC already had a support system in place and journalists reporting from the Middle East prior to the launch of BBC Arabic.

Research done by ACNielsen for the BBG, which cites audience figures for Alhurra, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, were totally discounted. ProPublica, instead, uses an opinion pollster who has stated in writing that his research measures how audiences’ *form opinions rather than how many people watch the various news channels.*

PP: Alhurra’s reporters and commentators operate with little oversight.

MBN: ProPublica offers a sweeping generalization without any proof, then contradicts itself – namely, its correct statement that MBN’s Vice President of News approves every guest for every show. The story also fails to adequately recognize the recent Office of Inspector General Report that clearly states that checks and balances have been put in place to ensure additional editorial control. ProPublica also fails to note that Alhurra is streamed live on the Internet and English translations—prepared by third party translators—are posted on the BBG’s Web site. (See www.alhurra.com and www.bbg.gov)

PP: Conniff has no journalism experience and worked previously as a government auditor

MBN: The article neglects to note that Mr. Conniff previously directed the International Broadcasting Bureau, an international multi-media broadcasting organization with a budget of \$365 million and a staff of more than 2000. Additionally, he was the Executive Director of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, a key position in the organization that oversees all U.S. international non-military broadcasting. The author never discussed Mr. Conniff’s qualifications with him and never provided MBN the opportunity to respond to their assertions. ProPublica also omits comments made by former BBG Chairman Glassman that the head of a broadcasting organization is a managerial role. ProPublica also failed to mention Ambassador Glassman’s comments that the VOA Director does not speak the many languages his organization broadcasts in. Mr. Conniff’s biography was provided to 60 Minutes/ProPublica.



PP: Daniel Nassif helped to promote the political aspirations in Washington of a Lebanese Christian former general

MBN: Prior to joining Radio Sawa in 2002, Mr. Nassif was active in the campaign to get Syria out of Lebanon. He worked with all groups who had the same goal. In no way was he helping to promote the political aspirations of any individual. Mr. Nassif discontinued all political activities prior to joining Radio Sawa.

PP: Nassif grew up in Lebanon and has no television experience

MBN: ProPublica neglects to note that Mr. Nassif is an American citizen, has lived in the United States for more than 30 years, and holds advanced degrees from the University of Michigan. ProPublica also failed to mention that Mr. Nassif successfully served as News Director for Radio Sawa for the past five years, during that time he has expanded the amount of news and information on Radio Sawa to seven hours a day.

PP: Two people with knowledge said that Ahmed Amin's reports on Radio Sawa had been purged.

MBN: All of Radio Sawa's news broadcasts (including those made by Mr. Amin) have been saved since Radio Sawa merged with MBN in 2005.

PP: Networks five 24-hour radio and television broadcasts

AH: MBN has 10 broadcast streams: Alhurra has three channels (pan-Arab, Iraq and Europe) and Radio Sawa has seven streams (Egypt/Levant, The Gulf, Iraq, Morocco, Jordan/Palestinian Territories, Lebanon and Sudan/Yemen.)

PP: ProPublica /60 Minutes examination of the Springfield, Va.-based Alhurra and Sawa found an untrained, largely foreign staff with little knowledge of the country whose values and policies they were hired to promote.

MBN: This statement presents an inaccurate profile of Alhurra and Radio Sawa's journalists. While at Alhurra, ProPublica spoke with three Alhurra journalists—Larissa Aoun, Sam Menassa and Ephrem Kossaiy—who have a combined 53 years of journalism experience. Alhurra operates under journalistic principles, broadcasting information about the Middle East, the U.S., and the world. Its mission is to promote freedom and democracy. And, like the VOA, RFE/RL, and RFA, it requires the dedication of native speakers in the vernacular language, as well as knowledge of the region's politics and culture, to forge a connection between the United States, its values, and our audiences in the 22 Middle Eastern countries to which we broadcast. This "foreign staff" believes in Alhurra's mission of freedom and democracy, and some have risked their lives to join us. Alhurra's in-depth coverage of the current U.S. election cycle has been commended by Al Hayat newspaper, which recently



published an article praising the coverage of the primaries. According to Al-Hayat journalist Sherzad Adil Alyazidi, Alhurra has distinguished itself among Arabic-language TV networks through its objective and thorough coverage of the primaries. Through this coverage, Alhurra plays an important role in raising awareness among citizens in the Middle East about democracy and how it is practiced.

PP: During their visit in June...Conniff...sat in on the morning editorial meeting

MBN: This never occurred. In fact, 60 Minutes videotaped this meeting, so its own video footage would show that this is inaccurate.

PP: No one offered Conniff a simultaneous translation (of editorial meeting)

MBN: This statement is false. Mr. Conniff did not attend this editorial meeting. All meetings attended by Mr. Conniff are conducted in English.

PP: During its four years, the network has been unable to provide full documentation to auditors to account for its spending, according to two people familiar with the records and a 2006 GAO Report.

MBN: Each year of operation since its creation, MBN has been independently audited by PricewaterhouseCoopers, and each year MBN received an unqualified “clean” opinion on its financial statements. In the past three years, PwC has not found or reported any material weaknesses in the financial statements, grant requirements, or internal controls over financial reporting.

The results of MBN’s annual audits (FY 2005, 2006 and 2007) are available to the public on the Federal Audit Clearinghouse Web site, www.harvester.census.gov/sac. The Federal Clearinghouse records verify that MBN has received an unqualified “clean” opinion each of these years.

The 2006 GAO Report references data from 2004 and 2005; it contains no information about any time period thereafter.

PP: Unpublished reports, audits, and internal government email show a steady stream of concern inside the State Department, Congress, at the government’s broadcasting headquarters and even inside the network itself that Alhurra and Sawa are undermining U.S. policy goals while sometimes promoting the interests of Iran and its allies. ProPublica is making available, for the first time, some of these documents.

MBN: Only three of the 14 documents cited have anything to do with the subject referenced by ProPublica. One is an email saying that the NEA Bureau at the State Department had *heard* that the *former* Alhurra leadership had hired staff that had a political predisposition. The email train



cited by ProPublica also contains Ambassador Karen Hughes' comment that she raised the issue of Alhurra with those concerned and "all felt that Alhurra is improving in its coverage of U.S. policy and news." The other documents include a letter to Condoleezza Rice calling for Larry Register's termination and testimony from the Congressional hearings discussing the editorial errors made by MBN under Larry Register. MBN has repeatedly acknowledged that when Mr. Register served as Vice President of News errors were made. While MBN, like all major organizations, has its critics, there is no "steady stream of concern."

PP: Arabic-language broadcasts are beamed only overseas

MBN: Alhurra and Radio Sawa, like other U.S. international broadcasters, are constrained by law from broadcasting within the U.S. However, given that programs are available via the Internet, they are thus available to U.S. audiences. (See www.alhurra.com)

PP: No one translates the full broadcasts into English

MBN: A factual error. English translations of randomly selected programs are available on the BBG Web site. Each week numerous hours of Alhurra's programming and an hour of Radio Sawa programming are available on the Web. (See www.bbg.gov)

PP: American supervisors aren't monitoring closely and their Arabic assistants sample just a tiny fraction of the broadcasting aired each day.

MBN: In its recent inspection report "Alhurra's Programming Policies and Procedures," the Office of the Inspector General noted that: "New management controls over programming include close supervision by Alhurra's Arabic-speaking vice president for network news. Three daily editorial meetings are used to discuss the rundown for the news and plans for programming. An assignments desk coordinates and controls what goes on the air. The person filling the new position of director of program review and research monitors Alhurra programming and its competition. The director, an Arabic speaker who reports directly to MBN's president, has submitted plans for an in-house program review function."

At Alhurra, Americans and Arabs are not mutually exclusive. Several of Alhurra's senior managers are Arab-Americans. The Vice President of Network News is at the top of the editorial chain and he is proudly American of Arab heritage.

Misleading Reporting

PP: Alhurra programs are not being monitored enough. A speech by Nasrallah speech, a Radio Sawa incident, and a documentary are cited as examples.

MBN

MBN: ProPublica fails to provide appropriate context. When errors have been made at the network, the network has responded to correct them.

O Live coverage of Hassan Nasrallah speech. This occurred more than 18 months ago. MBN has acknowledged this was a mistake, and has since put additional editorial controls in place, including the appointment of Daniel Nassif as Vice President of News, so this type of error does not happen again.

O In ProPublica's final piece of "evidence" about the "lack of supervision" the author cites that Alhurra aired a documentary on the Crusades, and that Muslim staffers saw this program as a reprise of Bush's 2001 comment that the 'war on terror' would be a 'crusade.' We would not equate a documentary to a comment made by President Bush seven years ago.

PP: A guest on a live talk show said that Israel is a "racist state" that "perpetuates a holocaust against 1.5 million Palestinians." ProPublica tries to use this to support their claim that there is a pattern.

MBN: ProPublica cites comment from one of three guests on a live hour-long talk show. This particular program was focused on President George W. Bush's speech at Sharm El Sheik that morning, which Alhurra also broadcast live. The discussion panel consisted of a Palestinian journalist, an Egyptian-American journalist and a respected American Middle East expert, Kenneth Katzman of the Congressional Research Service. When the Palestinian journalist veered off topic and criticized Israel, the program's host steered the discussion back to the original topic and directed a question to the American analyst. While Alhurra, unlike most other Arabic-language networks, seeks a tone of moderation in all broadcasts, it is unable to control every word said in a live program. If Alhurra tried to do so, Alhurra certainly would not be the model of a free press in the democratic tradition. Alhurra's aim, in daily debates such as this one, is to show different sides of an issue, even if we do not agree with them.

PP: Link to a write up about the BBG

MBN: In this case the author chose to use Wikipedia (a flawed source) as a source of information about the BBG, instead of the BBG's actual Web site. The BBG's Web site would have made it clear that Mark McKinnon is no longer a Board member and has not been since Dec. 31, 2007.

PP: Alberto Fernandez wrote Karen Hughes in May 2007 that Alhurra's Baghdad operation was stocked "with radical Shia Islamists who favored their political brethren and discriminated against and intimidated members of other parties."

MBN: ProPublica omits critical context by failing to note that in the very first sentence of this email, Mr. Fernandez indicated that he was passing along complaints received from Iraqis, and that he specifically states that these concerns had to do with the *previous management* at Alhurra. Moreover, the email was not sent in May 2007, as cited by ProPublica, but on March 22, 2007.

MBN

PP: Hughes had instructed an Arabic speaker on the State Department’s media response team to monitor Alhurra for a week during the spring of 2007. The assignment resulted in a brief report that Alhurra’s programming as “very pro-Lebanese,” “pro-Hezbollah.”

MBN: The facts are that Under Secretary Hughes instructed an Arabic speaking team to monitor Alhurra for six weeks (not the one week cited by ProPublica) from March 26, 2007, to May 3, 2007. Those reports show the opposite of what ProPublica claims in its article. In fact, the reports highlight numerous examples of Alhurra carrying policy-related programming not covered elsewhere on Arab TV. At no time did any of the reports describe Alhurra as was cited by ProPublica.

PP: The Sept. 11 attacks changed VOA’s mission.

MBN: VOA’s mission has not changed. Radio Sawa was in the process of being developed before Sept. 11th. By law, all of broadcast entities under the BBG (including VOA and Radio Sawa) operate in accordance with the same broadcasting standards and principles.

PP: Link to a description of VOA

MBN: Again ProPublica uses Wikipedia as a source instead of VOA’s own Web site, leading its readers to outdated and erroneous information about the Voice of America.

PP: Bush Administration officials championed Sawa, but it was immediately criticized by U.S. diplomats in Cairo and Abu Dhabi (link to cables)...complained the quality of the newscasts were poor, the newsreaders seemed unprofessional and lacked credibility.

MBN: The first cable from Abu Dhabi in 2002 does not represent criticism by U.S. diplomats as cited by ProPublica. Instead it conveys criticism made by two *Arab columnists*. Furthermore, the cable makes absolutely no mention of the newscasts or newsreaders on Sawa. The second cable from Cairo concerns Alhurra—not Radio Sawa. The cable says that after six weeks, some people and the media were critical of the channel’s technical glitches and the lack of breaking news. Moreover, at the bottom of the second page, the writer goes on to discuss the positive comments about Alhurra- which continue to a third page— a page that is missing from ProPublica’s Web site and “documents” page.

PP: In addition, a never-released report (link) by the OIG found irregularities in contracting, a hiring process that may have been marred by favoritism toward Lebanese candidates.

MBN: The draft report cited by ProPublica was never released by the OIG and, in fact, was withdrawn by the Inspector General, because it was so flawed that it did not meet the OIG’s

MBN

minimum standards for accuracy and objectivity. Acting Inspector General Hume submitted the report to an independent auditing firm for an objective review. The firm concluded that the draft was flawed and Ambassador Hume sent a letter to the BBG closing the assignment. The public record clearly shows that the cited “draft report” was never issued. Not describing why the report was never released is a serious omission by ProPublica.

PP: (Harb) rented the abandoned studio of a former local television station in Virginia and spruced up the sets.

MBN: The lease was signed by the then president and corporate secretary of Alhurra, not by Mr. Harb, who was neither an employee nor officer of MBN at the time. The notion that all that was done to get the network started was the “sprucing up the sets” is an incredible understatement of the work that went into the launch of Alhurra. The article fails to provide any context of the magnitude of the physical and technical work that was involved and the extremely tight time constraints under which the work was accomplished.

PP: Largely inexperienced Christian Lebanese reporters hired from Beirut

MBN: ProPublica never inquired about the background of any of Alhurra’s journalists. Additionally, all of Alhurra’s journalists have received training from the University of Missouri and George Washington University, which built upon their prior education and experience.

PP: Alhurra was awarded key interviews with senior U.S. government officials.

MBN: Despite repeated requests, Alhurra received very few interviews with senior U.S. government officials during its first two years on the air.

PP: Register says that he was ordered to ‘clean house,’ so he fired employees, renegotiated contracts and questioned deals.

MBN: MBN management stands behind its talented journalists. Mr. Register was never given a directive to ‘clean house.’ Additionally, contract negotiations are done by MBN’s administrative and legal departments; Mr. Register neither “negotiated” nor “renegotiated” contracts while he worked for MBN.

PP: Register said the newsroom was broken into ‘militias’ along ethnic, religious and national lines.

MBN: For Mr. Register to characterize Alhurra employees as “militias” is not only insulting and entirely incorrect, but also plays into anti-Arab stereotypes.

PP: In his first weeks, Register approved a speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.



MBN: The statements Mr. Register made while he was at MBN are inconsistent with the statements he made to ProPublica and 60 Minutes. Mr. Register has stated emphatically that the producer was supposed to take the speech for a few minutes and then end it. He stated repeatedly to Congressional staff members and others that he was not aware the speech went on for the full hour until it was over. ProPublica fails to challenge the significant conflicts in his story.

PP: Three months later, as Register continued to ferret out financial arrangements and side deals at the station...

MBN: If Mr. Register was “ferreting out financial arrangements and side deals at the station” he never shared it with anyone, including his supervisor, the legal department or anyone in accounting.

PP: Alhurra is the #4 network in Iraq behind Al-Jazeera and two others

MBN: According to research by an independent research firm, Alhurra has an impressively large audience in Iraq of 55.7 percent, ahead of Al-Jazeera at 51.9 percent.

PP: Researchers (from the USC team) found that the network’s coverage of the three-day Mideast summit in Annapolis, Md., strongly favored U.S. and Israeli government positions.

MBN: This contradicts ProPublica's earlier arguments that Alhurra is anti-U.S. or anti-Israeli.

PP: Glassman who was the chairman for the last six months

MBN: Mr. Glassman was Chairman for a year.

PP: Alhurra’s four years of operations have been marked by a string of broadcast disasters that government officials believe are as negative as anything on Al-Jazeera.

MBN: ProPublica offers several program examples from among thousands of broadcast hours to conclude there has been “a string of broadcast disasters.” ProPublica later in the article cites the University of Southern California saying that Alhurra’s “coverage of the three-day Mideast summit in Annapolis, Md...strongly favored U.S. and Israeli government opinions.” ProPublica contradicts itself when it first says Alhurra is like Al-Jazeera and then says its coverage is pro-American. The six incidents (occurring over the course of four years of daily broadcasts) cited by ProPublica are:

MBN

- o April 2004—When Israel assassinated the leader of Hamas, Alhurra ran a cooking show. This occurred six weeks after the launch of the channel and Alhurra had not yet established a breaking news capacity.
- o January 2005—State Department officials attribute the poor showing of Washington’s candidate for Iraqi Prime Minister to the negative coverage he received on Alhurra. The author offers no evidence to support this claim. Moreover in making it, ProPublica once again demonstrates its complete lack of understanding of the purpose of Alhurra, which is *not* to support any political candidates, but instead, to offer an example of balanced news reporting to viewers. Throughout the election period, Alhurra provided extensive objective coverage of the election process, the various candidates and the election results, in contrast to the many other stations that provided partisan coverage.
- o December 2006—Live coverage of Hassan Nasrallah speech. This occurred more than 18 months ago, MBN acknowledged this was a mistake and at that time put additional editorial controls in place so this type of error does not happen again.
- o December 2006—Coverage of the Holocaust deniers’ conference. This occurred more than 18 months ago and MBN has acknowledged that this package was flawed and has since that time put additional editorial controls in place so this type of error does not happen again.
- o March 2008—Alhurra aired a documentary on the Crusades, and according to ProPublica, Muslim staffers saw the program as a reprise of President Bush’s 2001 comment that the ‘war on terror’ would be a ‘crusade.’ We would not equate a documentary to a comment made by President Bush seven years ago. It is difficult to understand how the broadcast of a factual documentary constitutes a “broadcast disaster.”
- o May 2008—A comment was made on a live talk show by a Palestinian guest criticizing Israel. The discussion panel consisted of a Palestinian journalist, an Egyptian-American journalist and a respected American Middle East expert. When the Palestinian journalist veered off topic and made a statement criticizing Israel, the program’s host steered the discussion back to the original topic and directed a question to the American analyst. While Alhurra does not agree with the statement made by the guest, it cannot and indeed should not control every comment made by every guest. The practice of journalism requires the presentation of all sides of an issue.

Errors in ProPublica’s June 24, 2008, *Alhurra Paid Former White House Aides, Washington Journalists*

PP: On Jan. 12, (Bill) Sammon published a brief interview with Alhurra employee Julie Zann...Only three days after the Sammon article was published, he appeared on Alhurra...and received \$500.

MBN

MBN: The conflation of Mr. Sammon's interview of Ms. Zann with his subsequent appearance on the network – and the innuendo that these events are related by anything other than time is false.



MBN Correction for the Record

Errors in ProPublica's July 8, 2008, *Alhurra's Baghdad Bureau Mired in Controversy*

PP: ProPublica questions Alhurra editorial decision to invite Mishan Jabouri to appear on the talk show "In Iraq."

MBN: The program aired in April 2007, when Larry Register was MBN's Vice President for Network News. Mr. Jabouri engaged with others discussing the harmful role Al Qaeda plays in Iraq. Mr. Jabouri had fled Iraq to Syria at the time of the interview and was participating in the program via telephone. However, contrary to the impression created by the ProPublica article, Mr. Jabouri was not classified as a "terrorist" until Jan. 9, 2008, by the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control—eight months after the program aired.

PP: ProPublica's article provides a link to former Baghdad Bureau chief Saad Mohan's resignation letter.

MBN: ProPublica requested that BBG and MBN comment on the Baghdad Bureau Chief's resignation letter. MBN provided ProPublica a written response which they chose not to mention in the article or provide the reader access to through a link as they did with the resignation letter. This results in an incomplete presentation.

PP: ProPublica cites Alhurra as being indifferent toward U.S. policy in Iraq and not fully involved in the electoral process during the December 2005 parliamentary elections.

MBN: Alhurra was deeply involved in coverage of the Iraqi election campaigns, and provides thorough coverage of U.S. policy, including full coverage of Congressional hearings on Iraq, as well as in-depth coverage of the Pentagon, State Department and White House. Alhurra had extensive programming leading up to the Iraqi elections, including the broadcast of the first televised electoral debate in Iraq history. The network produced a series of programs dedicated to the upcoming elections including "Iraq Decides," "Vote," "Half of Iraq" (focusing on female voters) and "Elect." The network also broadcast PSAs encouraging Iraqis to go out and vote. In fact, on Dec. 30, 2004, the front page of *The Washington Times* included the article "Alhurra Tunes in to Iraq Election" which stated "Iraq's first democratic elections in 80 years are being heavily promoted by an Arab language television network operating out of Northern Virginia that will offer an American style election night coverage from voting places across Iraq."

PP: ProPublica states when the election season (in Iraq) ended candidates who ran with the support of the White House had done poorly. American fingers that had pointed at Al Jazeera were now aiming at Alhurra.

MBN

MBN: Given the mandate of U.S. international broadcasting, Alhurra does not “back” the U.S.-supported candidate. It does cover the election and the various candidates as thoroughly as it can to provide objective information to its audiences. If Alhurra or other U.S. international broadcasters were to “back” a candidate, it would lose credibility with its audience, and it would fail in its journalistic mandate.

PP: ProPublica charges that the Alhurra Baghdad Bureau tilts heavily toward Iran.

MBN: ProPublica cites unnamed sources in making this claim, as well as the fact that several Alhurra employees lived in Tehran during the Saddam Hussein era. For many who were persecuted by Saddam Hussein, their route of escape was through Iran. Alhurra’s executive producer had been repeatedly threatened by Saddam’s regime and was jailed twice for speaking out against it, and fled to Iran to escape persecution. Ironically, the only program cited in the article concerns an Iraqi Sunni.

PP: ProPublica states that “....financial problems... have plagued the Iraqi broadcast.”

MBN: There is no evidence to support this sweeping statement.

PP: ProPublica states: “Three people with direct knowledge of the operation said tens of thousands of dollars sent to the bureau cannot be accounted for and described financial records in disarray at Alhurra’s headquarters in Springfield, VA”

MBN: Every dollar spent at Alhurra’s Baghdad bureau is accounted for. The Financial Officer (on-site in Baghdad) provides individual receipts for every financial transaction to headquarters monthly.

Every expenditure is reviewed by an MBN Business Manager and any questionable expenditure is discussed with the bureau. The Business Manager approves requests for payment at headquarters only for authorized, appropriate business expenses.

For the past three years, PricewaterhouseCoopers has issued an unqualified “clean” opinion on Alhurra’s financial statements.

PP: ProPublica states: “The business manager, who approves checks, pays bills, and sends thick envelopes of cash to Baghdad each month has never visited the bureau.”

MBN: The Business Manager in Springfield neither approves checks, pays bills, nor has ever sent a thick envelope of cash to Baghdad. Every transaction recorded and submitted by an MBN Financial Officer in Baghdad is reviewed by the Business Manager at headquarters, then sent to the CFO’s office. Every payment request is reviewed by the Chief Financial Officer and the Treasurer – and in their absence one of two other corporate officers. There are only

MBN

four corporate officers who can approve payments or financial obligations for the Baghdad bureau, or any other MBN element. There are internal controls – multiple approvals required before any payment is made to ensure stewardship of U.S. government grants.

PP: ProPublica includes Mr. Register’s allegation that “ghost” employees sometimes appeared on payroll lists and he was never sure how many people worked in the bureau.

MBN: There is an approved staffing pattern for the Baghdad bureau – the total number of positions authorized is 41; the total number of on-board employees at Alhurra’s Baghdad bureau today is 40. The staffing pattern is reviewed and updated monthly. New hires, replacements, and terminations require authorization from headquarters – all employees are under individual contracts.

PP: ProPublica makes several allegations regarding the professionalism of Salam Mashkour

MBN: Mr. Mashkour has 29 years of journalism experience in television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Prior to his work at Alhurra, Mr. Mashkour worked for five years at the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Iraq, was a columnist for the popular pan-Arab newspaper Al-Hayat, as well as being a columnist for As-Safir and An-Nahar newspapers. Mr. Mashkour has also authored the book, “Border Conflict Between Persian Gulf Countries.” We stand behind Mr. Mashkour’s journalistic credentials.