

Dear Mr Conniff;

Its now just over a year since I joined Al Hurra as Chief of the Baghdad Bureau, the largest and most important bureau Al Hurra has outside its headquarters in Springfield, Virginia. I joined with high hopes and enthusiasm that I will be part of a professional media organization that is free, fair and impartial; an organization that serves the truth and rewards hard work, talent, experience and dedication; a place where I can work free of any pressure, apart from that of finding the truth and telling it to the audience. I joined on that basis, and it was very encouraging at the time to be accountable to a professional, experienced and fair management. I worked very hard, almost all the available hours of the day, with the exception of a few hours for sleep. After a few weeks in the job, I managed to improve professional standards, raise cooperation level with staff in Washington and unify the media operation which was in tatters when I joined since most people worked on their own with no guidance or work patterns and certainly with the minimum adherence to journalistic rules. Some employees only turned up once a week just to show up and go. The news department didn't know what the programs department was doing and vice versa. Soon after I took charge of the office, the whole Baghdad Bureau was working like one harmonious unit and this was reflected in the standard of our output. I recommended scrapping the expensive and unpopular programs and replacing them with new, relevant and cost-efficient ones, and all this was done in cooperation with management in Washington, when cooperation, coordination and professionalism were the order of the day. We scrapped two programs (Between Two Generations and The Newspaper) which cost between them around \$800,000, and I planned to replace them with four programs (Achiever's Biography, Daily Press Review, Face to Face, and Half of Society), all four programs, together with the five-day-a-week 'In Iraqi', would have been produced through the then-existing agreement with APTN with no or minimal extra cost. That deal with APTN was agreed 3 years before I joined, but only one program was produced through it, while others were done by other production companies. No one noticed it until the beginning of May 2007, when Mr Hamid Alkifaey, the then-Managing Director of Al Hurra-Iraq, who was himself new in the post, informed me that we could make use of the existing agreement that allowed Al Hurra 10 hours of TV production every day, instead of unnecessarily paying for production companies to produce programs. I saw American tax-payers' money unnecessarily wasted and I worked hard to save it. Unfortunately, Mr Nassif didn't allow those programs, bar one, to go ahead when he took over in mid June 2007. His reasons for not allowing those excellent programs are still a mystery to me, although I could guess why after I got to know him later. Whatever his reasons were, it was a missed opportunity for Al Hurra Iraq and its wider audience and wasted valuable efforts and resources.

In addition to all my managerial work, which was all-encompassing, I produced another weekly program, Special Dialogue, which I presented for no fees whatsoever, even though other colleagues who were also paid employees of Al Hurra, got paid for the reports they produced in addition to their salaries. I appointed 8 new correspondents across Iraq in order to widen the coverage area and include the news of other hot spots such as Basra, Diwaniyya, Karbala, and Babylon. I also appointed 3 reporters in Baghdad and another one in Irbil, the capital of the Kurdish region, where the reporter there was

not doing a good job. Without those extra courageous reporters, especially in Diwaniyya, Babylon, Karbala, and Basra, where there have been continuous security problems, our coverage of Iraq would have been seriously lacking. In November 2007, I appointed a fourth reporter in Baghdad to compensate for the two reporters who left us, but this appointment was turned down by Danny Nassif for reasons not known to me till today. Correspondents are normally paid by piece which means a correspondent will only get paid if his/her reports are accepted editorially as well-done and necessary. The new correspondent would have been a valuable asset to Al Hurra since he has wide connections within government circles.

In September-October 2007, I sent a team to Syria to record interviews with Iraqi achievers, who left the country due to escalating violence at the time, and the team recorded at least 30 episodes in around a month time, with the most famous of Iraq's literary and artistic talents, two of whom, comedian Rasim Jumaili and world-class novelist Fuad Tikerly, died later and Al Hurra was the only TV channel to have recorded the last media interviews with them shortly before they passed away. Those interviews were repeated after their death and drew millions of viewers. The projected cost of the task was \$100,000, but I managed to produce it for half of that amount, again, saving American tax-payers' money. During the last Eid of Ramadan, in mid October 2007, I managed to organize a concert over three days on the Banks of the Tigris – a concert that was the first of its kind in Iraq. It really made people feel there is more to Iraq than violence and bombs. It was attended by government ministers, MPs, politicians, academics, poets, musicians, singers, sportsmen, and many others. In that concert, a famous, popular, and hugely influential Iraqi singer, Fadhil Awad, appeared in public for the first time in 15 years, and that was on Al Hurra screen. He sang and talked about his life and finally commended Al Hurra on camera for defying terrorism and for raising the morale of Iraqis by organizing such an outdoor concert. He was so impressed that he asked to speak to Hamid Alkifaey in Washington to thank him personally, and he did. It was an excellent promotion for Al Hurra. The projected cost for that concert was \$100,000. I managed to produce it for half of this amount. I would like you to compare production cost during my period in office with that before me. The accounts department should have the all the accounts.

The 5-times-a-week program, In Iraqi, was very weak when I joined Al Hurra a year ago, and only a few people wanted to participate in it. It had one very weak presenter and interviews were conducted through the phone as very few people were willing to make the journey to the studio. I worked hard to improve the program, with the support and guidance of Mr Alkifaey, and appointed three new excellent presenters, Emad Jassim, Omar Muhammed, and Saadoon Muhsin. Now the program hosts ministers, academics, politicians, executives, MPs, writers, artists and journalists on a regular basis and senior people now even request to appear on it due to its popularity, relevance, and influence. This is all due to my hard work and dedication to Al Hurra.

After six months of hard work at the Baghdad Bureau, and specifically after the departure of Hamid Alkifaey, I began to feel the plots of certain individuals in Washington to undermine my efforts through interfering with the bureau's work and directly contacting

members of staff to advise them not to listen to me. This interference led to attempts to create a rift between the news and programs departments again and the Bureau's news director started acting alone and dealing with Washington directly and doing things without even informing me. When I informed the Deputy President for Network News in Washington, Mr Danny Nassif, he indicated that he approved of this new situation. Later on, the Deputy President, who hardly knows Iraq or Iraqi affairs, started giving instructions to the Bureau's news director directly, whether to conduct interviews or to cover certain issues, so I was being bypassed intentionally. I spoke to the Deputy President several times from Baghdad and told him that the Baghdad Bureau needs to have a coherent and strong management on the ground in Baghdad and what he is doing is not serving the smooth running of the bureau and it will lead to confusion and failure. Every time I spoke to him on an issue, he would agree with me to my face, yet he would do something different. Every time I confronted him regarding certain issues, he kept giving me different excuses. I always felt he was saying something while doing another. Other things have also been happening. For the first time, I started getting bills for outgoing expenses rejected by the accounts department in Washington, including the cloths allowance, which has been paid to all TV presenters over the last four years. These were rejected by Mr Sharif Abboud. No explanation was given. The accounts manager, Mr Nabil Arif, who is a professional person, faced a real dilemma knowing what expenses to authorize and what not to authorize. On some occasions, I had to pay out of my own pocket to cover certain bills for Al Hurra just because a certain individual sitting in Washington didn't approve of these bills or didn't understand them, or he was asked not allow them by his superiors to put undue pressure on the management of the bureau. This is a very difficult situation to be in when you are supposed to be a manager of an important and big operation at a critical time and during exceptional circumstances.

Security was another problem in Baghdad. For the first few months after I started working there, there was virtually no security arrangement and I had to resort to my contacts among army commanders of the Iraqi army to provide some protection. I managed to get a military unit placed next to the Palestine Hotel in order to protect Al Hurra bureau. We had some guards but they were internal and couldn't really provide a strong defense if there was a major terrorist attack on the building. They could, however, deal with individual attackers or nuisance people. Then, management in Washington contracted security of Al Hurra Bureau to a security company, Sandy, which improved security a great deal, but only outside the hotels compound. When this happened, I recommended a reduction in the security personnel in the bureau in order to save money. But I wanted to keep at least half of the guards to work at reception and also accompany presenters or guests when needed, but I was surprised to learn that the chief of staff in Washington decided to end the contracts of all the 11 security officers without any consideration for our security needs and with no consideration to my recommendations and no consultation with me at all. This left Al Hurra office with NO security at all within the compound of the hotels and also no security personnel to accompany and provide close protection to presenters or managers if and when needed.

When a decision was taken by the Chief of Staff to use an alternative production company to APTN in Baghdad, I tried to help out and I got cost estimates from different

companies, one of them was a company that Al Hurra has been dealing with for the last four years, Samiramees, which is a capable company with experience in the field. It also provided the lowest cost estimate for program production. Yet management in Washington decided to deal with another company that provided a higher cost estimate. My informed advice was totally ignored once again, and that company was contracted to do work for Al Hurra in Baghdad by management in Washington who have not met any of their staff or managers in Baghdad and know nothing about their professional record. In the end, the views of the Baghdad Bureau were disregarded. Even during the times when I was asked by Mr Sharif Abboud for some information about production companies in Baghdad, my role was effectively limited to providing information or sending someone to test systems or look at office buildings, which means my role and that of the bureau was transformed from taking decision or participating in taking them, to receiving orders to view sites or test machines or systems. This is certainly not the role I was appointed to play.

I put up with all these problems and lots more hoping that I will get solutions once I meet up with you, Chief of Staff and Deputy President for Network News in Washington, but it was not to be. On the first day I visited Al Hurra headquarters, and while I was at the office of Mr Danny Nassif, I was insulted, abused, shouted at and accused of all sorts of accusations by Mr Salem Mashkour, who has been trying to undermine my work and efforts since I joined a year ago, and especially in the last six months. His shouting was heard by almost everyone at the organization and I believe you have also heard it. Mr Danny Nassif was present yet he didn't interfere in any way to stop him nor did he investigate the issue afterwards. The whole affair leads me to believe it was all setup to undermine me on my first day at Al Hurra headquarters. Most people at Al Hurra, whether in Baghdad or in Washington, know that Mr Mashkour has been, still is, and will always be, as long as he stays at Al Hurra, an impediment to the progress of the organization. He is a liability since he is not a professional journalist and his biased programs and interviews testify to his failure. Yet, Mr Nassif favors him over other professionals in the organization, listens to his views, and insists on letting him present two important weekly programs, in addition to other separate interviews. He even let ask him to write letters to staff reversing my instructions as was the case with the last reporter I appointed and disallowed by Mr Nassif. I was hoping that Al Hurra will hold Salem Mashkour to account for treating me like this on my first day, but it was not to be.

I submitted a report in Arabic and English with some views and suggestions to improve work and performance in Baghdad. The proposals included, among other things, improving working and pay conditions for correspondents and staff in Baghdad who work under very difficult circumstances as they live in daily fear for their lives and that of their families. Everyone knows the dangers journalists in general, and journalists associated with the US in particular, face in Iraq. At least 250 journalists have been killed in the last five years alone. I heard no comment, positive or negative, from Mr Nassif about my report. I also discussed the remit, terms of reference and authority of the Baghdad Bureau chief with Mr Nassif, as I wanted to know exactly what I can or cannot do, but I was surprised to hear Mr Nassif say, in the presence of Mr Sharif Abboud, that 'we can give you nothing in writing'! This means, I may take decisions but only to be

reversed by him or any other person. I may authorize certain payments, but only to be rejected by Sahrif Abboud or some one else in the accounts department. I find it extraordinary that, after four years in existence, Al Hurra doesn't have clear procedures for remits or terms of reference for its managers or staff. How are they expected to work efficiently if they do not know what they can or cannot do? When I discussed matters with Mr Nassif, he told me that the news department in the Baghdad Bureau will be directly managed by him and 'you may inform me if there are any violations or wrong doing'!!! He also wants to interfere in the fine detail of program making, and demanded the names and CVs of guests of programs in advance. This effectively means my role as bureau chief has been abolished, even though my contract clearly says that the bureau chief directly oversees all activities in the bureau, including the news.

I conclude from all this that Mr Nassif doesn't really want a professional media operation. Rather, he wants to run things by whim. This is not acceptable to me at all, nor should it be acceptable to any media professional. I believe this management style, if it can be called as such, will create chaos in Baghdad, with different groups of staff working separately or, worse still, against each other. Micromanaging the Baghdad Bureau from Washington by any person, let alone someone who doesn't know Iraq at all and has not worked as journalist in the field, is a recipe for chaos. It will no doubt lead to creating an unhealthy and unprofessional environment where unprofessional people will misuse resources as well as their positions. With this bizarre approach taken by Mr Nassif, I feel professional standards in the bureau and Al Hurra in general will fall dramatically. What is worse is that management in Washington may not even notice it since they are faraway and detached from what is happening in Iraq.

Since I joined Al Hurra, my family and I have been living in constant danger of being killed or kidnapped. My family has been changing houses constantly and I never visited my own house for almost one year, as I was afraid of being kidnapped or assassinated. I sent my son to Ukraine to study after he was kidnapped and released. I endured all these dangers because I loved working for an independent and free media organization, and because I was hoping matters might improve. But having endured so much in one year, and after I realized that current management is not really interested in maintaining a professional media service that will fulfill the mission statement of Al Hurra and satisfies the conscience of any professional journalist, I have decided to resign my post as Al Hurra Bureau Chief in Baghdad. I do this with regret, but I have no doubt it's the right decision. I hope my resignation will encourage the BBG and MBN management to reconsider their current policies and look seriously into the problems facing Al Hurra and attempt to address them. Al Hurra's image has been dented over the last year or so after the departure of many upstanding professionals, who, like me, were unhappy about the management style of Mr Danny Nassif. I really hope BBG and MBN would do something, even at this late stage, to halt the deterioration that is caused by having the wrong people in the wrong places.

Yours sincerely;
Saad Mohan Dukhan
Alternatively known as

Saad Al Rubaiei