

The Saudi Cables: Buying Silence. How the Saudi Foreign Ministry controls Arab Media

By [Global Research News](#)

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[WikiLeaks](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

by Wikileaks

On Monday, Saudi Arabia celebrated the beheading of its 100th prisoner this year. The story was nowhere to be seen on Arab media despite the story's circulation on wire services. Even international media was relatively mute about this milestone compared to what it might have been if it had concerned a different country. How does a story like this go unnoticed?

Today's release of the WikiLeaks "Saudi Cables" from the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs show how it's done.

The oil-rich Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its ruling family take a systematic approach to maintaining the country's positive image on the international stage. Most world governments engage in PR campaigns to fend off criticism and build relations in influential places. Saudi Arabia controls its image by monitoring media and buying loyalties from [Australia](#) to [Canada](#) and [everywhere in between](#).

Documents reveal the extensive efforts to monitor and co-opt Arab media, making sure to correct any deviations in regional coverage of Saudi Arabia and Saudi-related matters. Saudi Arabia's strategy for co-opting Arab media takes two forms, corresponding to the "carrot and stick" approach, referred to in the documents as "neutralisation" and "containment". The approach is customised depending on the market and the media in question.

"Contain" and "Neutralise"

The initial reaction to any negative coverage in the regional media is to "neutralise" it. The term is used frequently in the cables and it pertains to individual journalists and media institutions whose silence and co-operation has been bought. "Neutralised" journalists and media institutions are not expected to praise and defend the Kingdom, only to refrain from publishing news that reflects negatively on the Kingdom, or any criticism of its [policies](#). The "containment" approach is used when a more active propaganda effort is required. Journalists and media institutions relied upon for "containment" are expected not only to sing the Kingdom's praises, but to lead attacks on any party that dares to air criticisms of the powerful Gulf state.

One of the ways "neutralisation" and "containment" are ensured is by purchasing hundreds or thousands of subscriptions in targeted publications. These publications are then expected to return the favour by becoming an "asset" in the Kingdom's propaganda strategy. A document listing the subscriptions that needed renewal by 1 January 2010 details a series of

contributory sums meant for two dozen publications in Damascus, Abu Dhabi, Beirut, Kuwait, Amman and [Nouakchott](#). The sums range from \$500 to 9,750 Kuwaiti Dinars (\$33,000). The Kingdom effectively buys reverse “shares” in the media outlets, where the cash “dividends” flow the opposite way, from the shareholder to the media outlet. In return Saudi Arabia gets political “dividends” – an obliging press.

An example of these co-optive practices in action can be seen in an exchange between the Saudi Foreign Ministry and its Embassy in Cairo. On 24 November 2011 Egypt’s Arabic-language broadcast station ONTV hosted the Saudi opposition figure Saad al-Faqih, which prompted the Foreign Ministry to task the embassy with inquiring into the channel. The Ministry asked the embassy to find out how “to co-opt it or else we must consider it standing in the line opposed to the Kingdom’s [policies](#)”.

The document reports that the billionaire owner of the station, Naguib Sawiris, did not want to be “opposed to the Kingdom’s policies” and that he scolded the channel director, asking him “never to host al-Faqih again”. He also [asked](#) the Ambassador if he’d like to be “a guest on the show”.

The Saudi Cables are rife with similar examples, some detailing the figures and the methods of payment. These range from small but vital sums of around \$2000/year to developing country media outlets – a figure the Guinean News Agency “urgently needs” as “it would solve many problems that the agency is [facing](#)” – to millions of dollars, as in the case of Lebanese right-wing television station [MTV](#).

Confrontation

The “neutralisation” and “containment” approaches are not the only techniques the Saudi Ministry is willing to employ. In cases where “containment” fails to produce the desired effect, the Kingdom moves on to confrontation. In one example, the Foreign Minister was following a Royal Decree dated 20 January 2010 to remove Iran’s new Arabic-language news network, Al-Alam, from the main Riyadh-based regional communications satellite operator, [Arabsat](#). After the plan failed, Saud Al Faisal sought to “weaken its broadcast [signal](#)”.

The documents show concerns within the Saudi administration over the social upheavals of 2011, which became known in the international media as the “Arab Spring”. The cables [note](#) with concern that after the fall of Mubarak, coverage of the upheavals in Egyptian media was “being driven by public opinion instead of driving public opinion”. The Ministry resolved “to give financial support to influential media institutions in [Tunisia](#)”, the birthplace of the “Arab Spring”.

The cables reveal that the government employs a different approach for its own domestic media. There, a wave of the Royal hand is all that is required to [adjust the output of state-controlled media](#). A complaint from former Lebanese Prime Minister and Saudi citizen Saad Hariri concerning articles critical of him in the Saudi-owned Al-Hayat and Asharq Al-Awsat newspapers prompted a directive to “[stop these type of articles](#)” from the Foreign Ministry.

This is a general overview of the Saudi Foreign Ministry’s strategy in dealing with the media. WikiLeaks’ Saudi Cables contain numerous other examples that form an indictment of both the Kingdom and the state of the media globally.



رئاسة الاستخبارات العامة

٣٨٥٦/٥٠٥٥٤/٩/١١/٣٥ :

خ : ١٤٣٣/٠٤/٠٥ :

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم



المملكة العربية السعودية
رئاسة الاستخبارات العامة

الموضوع: مركز البحوث حول العولمة

برقية سرية

١٠١

خادم الحرمين الشريفين رئيس مجلس الوزراء حفظه الله
نسخة مع التحية والاحترام لسيدى صاحب السمو الملكي ولي العهد
نائب رئيس مجلس الوزراء وزير الداخلية حفظه الله
نسخة مع التحية والاحترام لسيدى صاحب السمو الملكي وزير الدفاع حفظه الله
نسخة مع التحية لصاحب السمو الملكي وزير الخارجية

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

إحاقاً لما تشرفت برفعه للمقام السامي الكريم بالبرقية رقم (٢٢٣٥/٩/١١/٣٥) وتاريخ (١٤٣٣/٢/١٧ هـ) بشأن المعلومات المتوفرة عن (مركز البحوث حول العولمة) في (كندا) .

أتشرف بأن أرفع للمقام السامي الكريم ما استجد من معلومات لدى رئاسة الاستخبارات العامة عن بعض الناشطين في المركز والمتضمنة الآتي :

- ١ . يقوم على المركز ويرأسه المدعو (ميشال شوسو دوفكي) يساري متطرف ومتشدد في رفضه للسياسة الأمريكية ولظاهرة العولمة ومعروف بقناعاته الماركسية المناوئة للنظام الإقتصادي الرأسمالي ومنتدى (دافوس) ويؤيد وبحماسة السياسة الإيرانية والسورية و (حزب الله) .
- ٢ . يشارك في المركز أيضاً المدعو (جول دوفور) وهو من مقاطعة (كيبيك) الكندية من أصول فرنسية ومن معارضي السياسة الكندية العسكرية تجاه مشاركتها في حلف شمال الأطلسي ، ومؤيد للثورة في (تونس) ومعارض لها في (ليبيا) و (سوريا) .
- ٣ . المدعو (مهدي نازمرويا داريوس) كاتب في المركز من أصول إيرانية وتدور الشكوك حوله بأنه يعمل لحساب النظام الإيراني .
- ٤ . المراسل الأيرلندي المدعو (فنيان كوينفهام) محرر لدى المركز المذكور ، ومقيم في مملكة (البحرين) مدافع عن السياسة الإيرانية وبتهم إدارة الرئيس الأمريكي (أوباما) بإغتيال العلماء الإيرانيين والسعي لشن حرب ضد (إيران) ويندد بشدة بالملكية في (البحرين) وبتهمها

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