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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-762](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Broadcasting Board of Governors' (BBG) broadcasting services, Radio Sawa, and the Alhurra satellite television networks—collectively known as the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc. (MBN)—currently aim to reach Arabic speakers in 19 countries and areas throughout the Middle East. Annual spending for current activities amounts to about \$78 million.

GAO reviewed MBN's (1) strategic planning to address competition in the Middle Eastern media market, (2) implementation of internal control, (3) procedures MBN has developed to ensure compliance with its journalistic standards, and (4) performance indicators and whether targets have been met.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making several recommendations to the chairman of the BBG to improve the efficiency and operations of MBN. These include fully implementing strategic planning, internal control, and regular program reviews, as well as addressing weaknesses in the conduct and reporting of its audience research.

The BBG generally concurred with our recommendations, although it disagreed with some of our analysis.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-762](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-762).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

# U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

## Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved

### What GAO Found

MBN faces a number of competitive challenges in carrying out its mission of broadcasting in the Middle Eastern media market and has taken some steps to address them. However, MBN lacks a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan. As MBN emerges from its start-up mode and faces future challenges, a long-term strategic plan will be important.

While MBN has developed financial and administrative controls to manage and safeguard its financial resources, it could take additional steps to strengthen its system of internal control. For example, the MBN has not (1) convened a meeting of its internal control board to formally develop its controls and coordinate audits, (2) completed an internal control plan, (3) completed a risk assessment to address potential risks to its operation, or (4) developed a comprehensive training program for its staff.

MBN has procedures in place to help ensure its programming meets its journalistic standards. However, MBN lacks regular editorial training and has not fully implemented a comprehensive, regular program review process to determine whether its programming complies with those standards or with MBN's mission. While the BBG calls for its broadcasters to undergo an annual program review, Radio Sawa has only held one such review, and Alhurra has not completed one to date.

The BBG has developed several performance indicators and targets for MBN's Radio Sawa and Alhurra services, including measures of audience size and program credibility. However, it is not clear whether the Radio Sawa and Alhurra performance targets have been met because of weaknesses in MBN's survey methodology and documentation. The BBG did not take certain steps that could have explained and increased the reliability of its estimates, such as by fully documenting its research and estimation methods, measuring the level of uncertainty surrounding its estimates, disclosing significant limitations, and consistently implementing policies and procedures for verifying data.

### Alhurra's Broadcast Center in Springfield, Virginia



Source: GAO.