

# The Trump Administration Is Shutting Down Alhurra, the U.S. Funded Arabic News Network

Middle East Broadcasting Networks, MBN, which broadcasts in Arabic across the Middle East and includes Alhurra, is facing closure, as are other publicly funded outlets. 'We're a counterweight to Arabic-language outlets that serve extremist regimes and now that's being taken away,' says a manager

[Rachel Fink](#)

Mar 23, 2025 11:12 am IST

As part of sweeping budget cuts by U.S. President Donald Trump, the administration last week announced plans to shut down several publicly funded international news outlets, among them the Middle East Broadcasting Networks – an Arabic-language network that broadcasts across the Middle East and North Africa, mainly through the satellite news channel Alhurra.

Hundreds of employees now face an uncertain future, including dozens living in the U.S. on work visas – some of whom cannot safely return to their home countries due to fears of retribution.

On March 14, the president issued an executive order directing that unnecessary government entities be "eliminated to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law." USAGM, the U.S. Agency for Global Media, was among the agencies targeted.

The directive marked a continuation of Trump's efforts during his first term to bring U.S. international media under tighter political control. In 2020, he appointed conservative filmmaker and Steve Bannon ally Michael Pack as CEO of USAGM, tasking him with [reshaping the agency](#).

Soon after taking office, Pack fired the heads of Voice of America, MBN, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Free Asia, and replaced their boards. His tenure sparked multiple lawsuits and congressional hearings over alleged violations of journalists' First Amendment rights, including censorship and retaliation. At VOA, several foreign journalists also saw their visa renewals delayed.

On his first day in office, President Joe Biden asked for and received Pack's resignation and moved quickly to restore the firewall intended to protect editorial independence at USAGM-funded outlets. But now, with Trump back in power, USAGM is once again under threat – this time with a new loyalist tasked with executing the overhaul.

That responsibility now falls to Kari Lake, the former journalist turned [politician](#) recently appointed as senior adviser to the agency following her unsuccessful bids for governor and senator. (As Lake herself [acknowledged](#), the decision to name her senior adviser rather than director was intended to bypass the requirement for confirmation by seven members of Congress.)

One of the agency's most prominent grantees is the Middle East Broadcasting Networks, created in 2004 under President George W. Bush to improve U.S. public diplomacy and counter anti-American sentiment following the invasion of Iraq.

## 'It's going on an Ozempic diet'

According to MBN president and CEO Jeffrey Gedmin, the network's mission has always been to provide "accurate, objective news" to Arabic-speaking audiences and serve as a credible alternative to state-controlled media in the region. MBN receives its funding through a grant administered by USAGM, the same umbrella agency that oversees Trump-reviled Voice of America.

Despite growing signals of an impending shake-up, Congress had just approved funding for MBN through the end of the fiscal year – finalizing the allocation on the very same day Trump issued his executive order.

The following morning, Lake issued a [press release](#) signaling a sweeping reversal. "This agency is not salvageable," she declared. "From top to bottom, it is a giant rot and burden to the American taxpayer – a national security risk for this nation – and irretrievably broken. While there are bright spots within the agency with personnel who are talented and dedicated public servants, this is the exception rather than the rule."

"If you are an employee of USAGM, please check your email immediately for more information," Lake [instructed](#) on X.

Although Gedmin is not technically an employee – he leads MBN as a grantee – he followed Lake's directive, which is how he discovered that MBN was being shut down. "She informed us that, according to her interpretation of the executive order, she was terminating our grant," Gedmin told Haaretz, adding, "In direct conflict with congressional intent." Gedmin called Lake's decision "bewildering," particularly given that she has never visited MBN's headquarters, located just outside Washington, D.C., nor met with him personally. She has declined to respond to his requests for clarification.

Lake has, however, been more vocal in her media appearances, sharing clips from many of them on her personal X account. In a conversation with Steve Bannon on his "War Room" podcast, she stated, "We are going to be slimming this agency down, way down," referring to USAGM. "It's going on an Ozempic diet," Lake [said](#).

While she told Bannon that the agency's budget "just grows and grows and grows," Gedmin, who took over the reins of MBN eleven months ago after several bumpy years, says that in terms of

his outlet, at least, the opposite is true. The network has recently undergone multiple rounds of layoffs and budget reductions and was already bracing for further cuts even before learning of the grant termination.

"Since I stepped into my role, we have been applauded for our cost-reduction efforts and our efficiency," he said. "I am basically running a staff of 600 in multiple countries for the cost of two Apache helicopters."

"There is something more at play here," Gedmin added. Lake's recent media blitz may offer some clues as to what that might be. Without naming MBN directly, she has referred to "hundreds of millions being spent on fake news companies" and "grantees whose products are not pro-American at all."

It's a characterization Gedmin categorically rejects. "We certainly are not a propaganda wing of the U.S. government," he said. "We are an independent media outlet committed to credible, truthful journalism. Our reporting is in clear and direct alignment with America's public diplomacy."

Gedmin appears committed to that balance of integrity and accountability. Earlier this month, [CAMERA](#), a right-wing pro-Israel media watchdog, accused Alhurra – MBN's flagship Arabic-language satellite news channel – of platforming terrorists. Rather than dismiss the complaint, Gedmin called the concerns "legitimate" and pledged to address them, a response that drew praise from CAMERA president and executive director [Andrea Levin](#).

"As CAMERA and Alhurra editors may understandably come from different perspectives, it's natural that we will not always agree on every single topic," Levin said in a statement. "But an ongoing dialogue that is open and friendly is a welcome indication that Alhurra is on the right track. The recent leadership changes signal a new era for the network, and we are excited to work together."

Now, Gedmin warns that the Trump administration's "slash and burn" approach could have serious consequences. He points to the growing information warfare efforts of global rivals: "Russia, China and Iran are pouring resources into state-sponsored misinformation campaigns," he said. "And now we're abandoning the last line of defense against that."

"Iran is rejoicing over this news," he added.

For now, Gedmin is pursuing every avenue he can. On Sunday, he notified MBN staff that they had been furloughed for at least two weeks. He's appealing the decision both directly to Lake and to Congress.

In a joint statement, Representative Gregory W. Meeks, ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and Representative Lois Frankel, ranking member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, warned that the grant termination could "cause lasting damage to U.S. efforts to counter propaganda around the world and provide audiences in heavily censored countries with trusted, independent information."

"Do not be fooled – what the White House bills as a continuing effort to simply reduce the federal bureaucracy is, in fact, undermining the United States' national security," the statement read.

Gedmin said he appreciated the support but also acknowledged the strain lawmakers are under. "A lot of people in Congress are fighting to keep their heads above water given the tempo of radical change right now," he said.

Still, he made clear he's not backing down. Gedmin said he's fully prepared to sue the Trump administration if necessary. In the meantime, he's focused on reassuring his anxious staff that he's not giving up the fight – a message he conveyed in an internal email to employees.

## **'Alhurra can't be measured on a spreadsheet'**

One of the recipients of the email was Marwan Athamneh, a business manager for Alhurra based in Jerusalem. For the past four and a half years, he's overseen the channel's business operations in the region. In January, he was laid off as part of Alhurra's cost-cutting measures, only to be rehired weeks later as a freelancer to perform the same role.

Athamneh described the news that Alhurra would have to close as "shocking." "After the grant was approved, we thought we were safe, at least until September, especially given the latest round of layoffs," he remarked.

Like Gedmin, Athamneh believes the decision runs counter to U.S. interests. "They're not thinking about the values and benefits this channel provides – things that can't be measured on a financial spreadsheet," he said. "We've managed to remain impartial and fact-based while still representing American values of freedom and democracy. We're a counterweight to Arabic-language outlets that serve extremist regimes."

"And now that's being taken away," he added.

On a personal level, the shutdown marks the end of over a decade of involvement with Alhurra. Athamneh first joined the channel as a reporter in 2011, returning after a brief hiatus to serve as an assignment editor before taking on his current position.

"I'm incredibly proud of what we've built here – the work so many talented people have put in to make Alhurra a serious, respected news outlet," he said. "One that competes with the likes of Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya."

While he's understandably worried about providing for his family if his job disappears, Athamneh remains optimistic about his own prospects and those of his talented colleagues. Back at MBN headquarters in Virginia, Gedmin is more concerned about those who might not be so fortunate: the dozens of employees who came to the United States on work visas as part of their employment contracts with the network.

"These are decent, hardworking people who have built lives here. They have families. Their kids are in school here. And now their status is completely uncertain, compounded by the new administration's hardline stance on immigration." Gedmin said. "Worse still, some of them can't safely return to their home countries after working for MBN. Their lives could be in danger." "It's ghastly, it's disgraceful, and it's just no way to treat human beings."