



RESEARCH NOTES

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MIDDLE EAST GOVERNMENTS ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

By Jonathan B. Lincoln

Internet use is growing worldwide. Thousands of people are going online everyday, accessing the vast resources of information found on the World Wide Web. The Middle East is no exception. Every Middle Eastern government has deemed it necessary to have an official presence on the web. The following is a current survey of a fast-changing scene.

More and more Middle Eastern states are joining the ranks of countries with an extensive presence on the World Wide Web. The internet is a useful way for countries to offer information from their own point of view, although many of these countries allow few if any of their citizens access to the internet.

Middle Eastern presence on the World Wide Web is relatively new. The internet hardly existed in the Middle East in 1995, although Turkey and Israel had established a sizable presence on the web by this time. The World Wide Web continues to grow at a fast pace as the number of hosts (computer systems connected to the internet) has increased more than seven-fold from 1995 to 1998. Yet, there are many barriers facing the growth of the internet in the region. The most common include the high cost of access and government restrictions on information sources.

The Arab countries with the largest presence on the web today are the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt. Their substantial presence is because of their relatively liberal policy regarding technology.

Still, even in the UAE, which has the largest presence of any Arab country on the web, only some 3 percent of the population has access to the internet.

Depth of Information: It should not be assumed that a country with few users or hosts has little information on its official sites. Nor should it be assumed that a country with an established internet presence has useful official sites. Countries that maintain one or two official sites can provide only a limited amount of information. A truly established official presence on the World Wide Web consists of multiple sites of ministries, municipalities, national institutions, and/or official news sources and political parties.

Language: The fact that the bulk of official information from these countries is in English indicates the information is clearly intended for users abroad, at least as much as for those at home. A problem common to Hebrew, Arabic, and Farsi is that the internet is oriented for text written left to right. Arabic and Farsi have an additional problem because their script is cursive, with letters often taking different shapes depending upon their position in a word.

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TABLE 1. INTERNET HOSTS

COUNTRY	HOSTS 1/95	HOSTS 7/98	COUNTRY	HOSTS 1/95	HOSTS 7/98
World Total	4,851,843	36,739,151	U.S.	2,968,921	25,126,977
M.E. Total	16,362	140,343	Israel	13,251	87,642
Turkey	2,643	27,861	(includes		
Iran	18	262	West Bank		
Arab Total	450	24,578	& Gaza)		
UAE	0	13,519	Algeria	10	19
Bahrain	0	337	Libya	n/a	1
Kuwait	220	15,597	Mauritania	n/a	22
Jordan	0	360	Qatar	n/a	23
Iraq	0	0	Oman	n/a	666
Lebanon	0	1,400	Saudi Arabia	2	42
Syria	n/a	0	Yemen	n/a	14
Egypt	161	2,043	Sudan	n/a	0
Morocco	0	478	Tunisia	57	57

Source: Network Wizards (www.nw.com). Note: A host is any computer system connected to the internet via full or part-time, direct or dial-up connections.

Software companies have been working on solving these problems for some time and it is becoming easier to access information in these languages.

Some Arabic websites use text as graphics or pictures that are scanned into a computer and uploaded as an image. This presents a problem because, as a graphic, it is not possible to search the material. Other sites have Arabic text that requires special software to read. Letters that are normally not used in English like, \ddot{O} , \emptyset , and Ç , are translated by this support file into Arabic, allowing for the searching of Arabic texts. This software is available at www.sakhr.com for Netscape users and at www.microsoft.com/middleeast/ie31.htm for Internet Explorer users.

A support file needed for reading Hebrew text can be found on most Israeli sites.

Sites in Turkish are less problematic because of the Turkish use of Latin letters. Yet, a few Turkish letters could present problems, and software for translating Turkish fonts is available on the Turkish

Ministry of Foreign Affairs site (see the section on Turkey, below).

Many Iranian sites also have Farsi text available in both graphic and textual forms. A support file can be downloaded and is accessible on most sites.

Most government sites are updated at least monthly. As a general rule, the more extensive and organized a government's sites, the more up-to-date information it will contain.

There are two truly comprehensive websites that list links to political resources for most countries. *Governments on the WWW* by Gunnar Anzinger, is a frequently updated list of government-related websites listed by country. Another resource is *Political Resources on the Net*, by Roberto Cicciomessere. Both sites were used extensively in researching this paper. Although these resources are extremely helpful, their listings cannot be considered complete. They are respectively www.gksoft.com/govt and www.agora.stm.it/

TABLE 2: USERS ONLINE BY COUNTRY, 1998

COUNTRY	DATE	USERS	% of POPULATION	SOURCE
UAE	Jan. 1998	89,000	2.9	DIT Group
Bahrain & Saudi Arabia	Jan. 1998	47,000	0.2	DIT Group
Kuwait	Jan. 1998	42,000	2.2	DIT Group
Qatar	Jan. 1998	17,000	3.1	DIT Group
Oman	Jan. 1998	21,000	1.0	DIT Group
Egypt	Jan. 1998	61,000	0.1	DIT Group
Jordan	Jan. 1998	20,000	0.1	DIT Group
Lebanon	Jan. 1998	44,000	1.1	DIT Group
Israel	July 1998	500,000	9.0	Internet Israel
Turkey	May 1997	600,000	1.0	NUA Est
Iran		n/a	n/a	n/a
United States	Aug. 1998	79,000,000	30.0	CommerceNet/Nielsen

Source: Nua, a company that manages online relationships (www.nua.ie).

politic>. Based on these sites and others, the following is a survey of official Middle Eastern government sites on the World Wide Web:

THE LEVANT

Turkey: The Turkish Republic has one of the most extensive collections of official web sites of all Middle Eastern countries. Information is available in both Turkish and English. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs site has a remarkable amount of information on nearly every aspect of the Turkish government. The site is divided into ten sections and includes information on relations with Greece, terrorism and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Caspian Sea oil, and relations with the European Union. In addition, the site has information on Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the Turkish constitution, and social services in Turkey. Moreover, this site has an abundance of links to Turkish education, the Turkish government, press in Turkey, Turkish missions abroad, and international think tanks. All pages can be accessed from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs site at <www.mfa.gov.tr>.

Israel: Israeli government sites are accessible in English, and most are available in Hebrew. Like Turkey, Israel has one of the most comprehensive listings of official sites in the region. A wide array of sites, including universities, the Bank of Israel, ministries, agencies, municipalities, and the Office of the Prime Minister can be accessed via the *Government Gate* at <www.info.gov.il/eng/mainpage.htm>. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the largest of the official sites. This site is available in Spanish or English, and it also has pages available in French. In addition to listings of Israeli embassies and consulates abroad, the site contains speeches by politicians, photographs, and selected publications in Arabic. The site <www.mfa.gov.il> also has a central archive that is full of official government documents and is an excellent source for information on the peace process. Sites for political parties in Israel can be accessed via the Israel page on the *Governments on the WWW*.

Palestinian Authority: The Palestinian Authority has an extensive set of sites. The Palestinian Legislative Council's site is available in Arabic, English and French. The Palestinian Ministry of Information is in English and has access to press releases in Ara-

bic. The official site of the Palestinian Authority (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation) is in English and has a useful page of links at <www.pna.net>. The Wafa News Agency site is in Arabic and English and is accessible at <www.wafa.pna.net>. The following sites are all in English but some have Arabic versions: the municipalities of Al-Bireh, Halhul, Ramallah, and Nablus; the ministries of education, health, and labor; the Central Bureau of Statistics; and others. These sites can be accessed via the most comprehensive Palestinian links page at <www.birzeit.edu/links/gns.html>.

Jordan: Jordanian sites are accessible in English, although the majority of information is in Arabic. The Jordan National Information System has a vast amount of detailed information pertaining to agriculture, economics, industry, communication, education, and government and politics, among others. It also contains links for most official sites, including Queen Noor's page and various newspaper sites such as *Al-Ra'i*, *Al-Dustour*, *Jordan Times*, and the *Star*. This site is accessible at <www.nic.gov.jo>. On the Jordan page of the *Governments on the WWW*, there are links to certain government ministries, the municipality of Amman, and embassies abroad. The most comprehensive links page, which includes tourism, media, medicine, and government sites, and which is the easiest to use, is on the site of the Jordanian Embassy in the United States at <www.jordanembassyus.org/links.htm>.

Iraq: The United Nations (UN) Development Program has developed the site for the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the UN. The information on its page is in English and includes information on Iraq's relations with the UN, UN sanctions, and Iraqi president Saddam Husayn. This site also contains information on historical and cultural aspects of Iraq. Another site of note is called Iraq-Mesopotamia, which focuses on current issues concerning Iraq. This site is based in Jordan and most of the information is in Arabic, although some is in English. The site is not well organized and has some broken links, which means not all of the information is available. The site is at <www.index.com.jo/iraqtoday>. The Iraqi

Mission in New York can be accessed at <www.Iraqi-Mission.org>.

Lebanon: The amount of official information from the Republic of Lebanon on the World Wide Web continues to grow at an increasing rate. Already in the mid-1990s, official websites existed for the Lebanese Parliament, the Court of Audit, the Central Inspection Board, and the Civil Service Board. In 1998 alone, the official presence of the Lebanese government on the web more than doubled. This is possibly the reason why no single, comprehensive page of links concerning Lebanese government sites exists. The Lebanon page on the *Governments on the WWW* has a useful list, and the site for the Lebanese embassy in Washington <www.embofleb.org> offers links to other Lebanon sites. The information is in English, Arabic, or French; however, most of the newer sites offer all three. Some of these sites are the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment, the Bank of Lebanon, the Central Administration for Statistics, and embassies abroad, among others.

Syria: The Syrian Arab Republic has a limited official presence on the World Wide Web. The Syrian Computer Society, at <www.scs-syria.com> has links for many Syria-related sites. The site is in English and has a list of email addresses for some government institutions as well as links to the Ministry of Tourism; the Syrian Arab News Agency, known as SANA (available in English, French, and Arabic); and Tishreen News (English and Arabic). Sites for the Syrian Red Crescent, Syrian Telecom, and the Syrian European Business Center are also available via this site. There is a great amount of up-to-date information on these sites.

Egypt: The official sites of Egypt contain vast quantities of information, but they lack a solid structure. The sites include ministries, state institutions, and embassies abroad. Many sites have Arabic versions but the bulk of official information is available in English. Egypt, like most of the countries in the region, is a country with a fast rate of technological growth, so the number of sites is growing steadily. This may account for the fact that these sites do not seem to be connected to each other. Although the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs <www.mfa.gov.eg> does not seem to be on many Egyptian links pages, it has a good deal of information and probably has the most comprehensive listing of government links. These include the ministries of agriculture, emigration, and education; the presidency, consulates and embassies abroad; and various state-run media sites and universities. The State Information Service site has up-to-date foreign and domestic news from Egyptian sources and is accessible at <www.sis.gov.eg>. Another site called Egypt's Information Highway is part of the Egyptian Cabinet Information and Decision Support Center. This site <www.idsc.gov.eg> is devoted to information concerning tourism, culture, health, government, environment, libraries, and governorates.

THE GULF

United Arab Emirates: The UAE has a useful selection of federal, state, municipal, and economic related sites. All of the sites are available in English and most in Arabic. The UAE page on the *Governments on the WWW* provides access to the state institutions of Sharjah, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi, as well as links to the municipalities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The UAE federal government site at <www.uae.gov.ae> allows access to the Ministry of Finance and Industry, the Ministry of Economy and Commerce, the Ministry of Health, and the Institute of Administrative Development.

Bahrain: Bahrain has a limited official presence on the web. The websites are mostly available in English with some in Arabic. The official sites include the Bahrain Center for Study and Research, the Bahrain Monetary Agency, the Gulf Cooperation Council Commercial Arbitration Center, the Gulf Institute for International Law, the Gulf News Agency, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Naval Regional Contracting Center, among others. The best way to access these sites is via the home page of the nation's only internet service provider, Batelco <www.batelco.com.bh>.

Kuwait: The official pages of Kuwait are available in English and Arabic. The sites available range from representation in foreign countries to the min-

istries of communications, foreign affairs, and planning, in addition to the Central Bank of Kuwait, the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research, the National Committee for Missing and POW Affairs, the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training, and the Kuwait Investment Authority. These sites are available as links on the Kuwait page of *Governments on the WWW*. Other official Kuwaiti sites, such as universities, banking, entertainment, employment, media, and additional government sites, can be accessed via the Ministry of Information at <www.infokuwait.org>.

Qatar: Qatar's official pages are in Arabic and English. These pages have a great deal of information on the ruling family, government ministries, economics, and religion. Both *Governments on the WWW* and *Political Resources on the Net* have links for the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Agriculture, and the Qatar Central Bank, as well as other related links. Access to these sites is also available through the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs site at <www.mofa.gov.qa>.

Oman: The Sultanate of Oman has several official sites. They can be accessed in English and most can be viewed in Arabic. A useful comprehensive listing of Omani government sites is available from *Political Resources on the Net*. An extensive page of links is also available through the Oman Studies Center. Some of the links include the Diwan of the Royal Court, the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of National Economy, the Royal Oman Police, Omani television and radio, the Muscat Municipality, Sultan Qaboos University, and others. This page can be accessed at <oman.org/gov00.htm>.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia has maintained an official presence on the World Wide Web for some time (in English). Yet, very few national institutions have sites. Saudi Arabian sites on the *Governments on the WWW* include the Ministry of Higher Education, Saudi Arabian Standards Organization, and embassies in Great Britain and the United States. The Saudi embassy in the United Kingdom <www.saudiembassy.org.uk> has an extensive page of links to official Saudi sites including the King Abdul Aziz City for Science and Technol-

ogy, the King Faisal Foundation, Saudi Arabian Airlines, U.S.–Saudi Arabian Business Council, the King Faisal Hospital and Research Center, Saudi Aramco, and the Islamic Saudi Academy of Virginia.

Yemen: The Republic of Yemen's presence on the World Wide Web consists of a few government ministries and its embassy in Washington, found at <www.nusacc.org/yemen>. The Ministry of Information's site is available in Arabic and English. This site also has a page of links to other official Yemeni pages including the General Investment Authority, the Social Fund for Development, the General People's Congress party, Queen Arwa University and government businesses like TeleYemen. This page also offers links to state-run newspapers in Arabic and English and can be found at <www.yemeninfo.gov.ye>.

Iran: A limited number of official Iranian sites exists on the web. There is, however, a good deal of information located on the Islamic Republic's embassy pages in foreign countries, including the interest section in the Pakistani Embassy in the United States. Most official Iranian information is available in English, some in Farsi. On *Governments on the WWW*, access for the following sites is available: the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Export Promotion Center of Iran, the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, the Institute for Political and International Studies, the Islamic Republic News Agency (which has links to newspapers), Iranian embassies in Armenia, Canada, and Japan, the interest section in the United States, and the UN mission in New York. Links for the Ministry of Trade and the Parliament Research Center sites can be found at: <www.iranian.com/WebGuide/InternetIran/InternetIran-Government.html>, although it may be necessary to register with the site before accessing the links page.

NORTH AFRICA

Sudan: Sudan has two official sites. The first is for its embassy in Bonn, which is available in German or Arabic. The other site is in English and serves as the site for both the embassy in Vienna and the

Permanent Mission to the United Nations. These sites can be accessed at <members.aon.at/sudanivienna>.

Algeria: Algeria has several official sites, including some embassies abroad and a few national institutions. The information is available in English, French, and sometimes Arabic. Algerian sites do not seem to be connected with each other, and they often have broken links. The best source for official Algerian sites is *Governments on the WWW*. On this page, links are available for the National Office of Statistics, the National Office of Tourism, and embassies in France, Great Britain, Korea, and the UN mission in New York. Additionally some political parties have websites that are also accessible from this page. The National Office of Statistics has a great amount of information and can be reached directly at <www.ons.dz>.

Libya: The Libyan Arab Jamahariya has an official site for its Permanent Mission to the United Nations. The site is in English and has only a limited amount of information. The page links to one site—the National Corporation for Information and Documentation; however, the link often does not work. The website for the UN mission is <www.undp.org/mis-sions/libya>.

Morocco: The official Moroccan pages consist of several ministries related to national infrastructure in addition to a wide array of tourism, economic, and provincial/municipal sites. The bulk of information is available in French, and it is easiest to navigate these sites in French, although some of the ministries have English and Arabic versions. *Governments on the WWW* offers access to various ministries, among them, the ministries of communication, commerce, environment, privatization, population, and foreign affairs, and the national offices of airports, potable water, and youth and the future. A comprehensive links page of Moroccan government sites can also be found in French at the Ministry of Communications page at <www.mincom.gov.ma/french/mol/mol.html>.

Tunisia: Tunisia has a small presence on the World Wide Web. Tunisia's official sites include the National Solidarity Fund, the national television and radio, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and some political parties. The best listing and links

page for these sites is the Tunisia page on *Political Resources on the Net*. The information is available in English, with most in French, and just a few in Arabic. *Tunisia Online* <www.tunisiaonline.com> is a useful site for information on Tunisia's economy, environment, history, and government, among others, and has links to some of the above-mentioned sites.

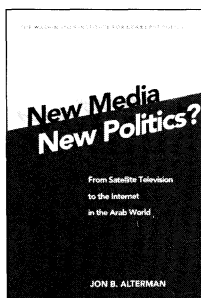
Mauritania: Mauritania has a brand-new official site in French at <www.mauritania.mr>. The site is being constructed by Mauritania's national internet service provider, the *Centre Administratif Internet*. Additionally, the Mauritanian embassy in Washington has a small site in English at <www.embassy.org/embassies/mr.html>.

A Complete List by Country of All Sites in This Research Note

Algeria: www.ons.dz	Morocco: www.mincom.gov.ma/french/mol/mol.html
Bahrain: www.batelco.com.bh	Oman: oman.org/gov00.htm
Egypt: www.mfa.gov.eg www.sis.gov.eg www.idsc.gov.eg	Palestinian Authority: www.pna.net www.wafa.pna.net www.birzeit.edu/links/gns.html
Iran: www.iranian.com/WebGuide/InternetIran/InternetIran-Government.html	Qatar: www.mofa.gov.qa
Iraq: www.index.com.jo/iraqtoday www.Iraqi-Mission.org	Saudi Arabia: www.saudiembassy.org.uk
Israel: www.info.gov.il/eng/mainpage.htm www.mfa.gov.il	Sudan: members.aon.at/sudanivienna
Jordan: www.nic.gov.jo www.jordanembassyus.org/links.htm	Syria: www.scs-syria.com
Kuwait: www.info-kuwait.org	Tunisia: www.tunisiaonline.com
Lebanon: www.embofleb.org	Turkey: www.mfa.gov.tr
Libya: www.undp.org/missions/libya	United Arab Emirates: www.uae.gov.ae
Mauritania: www.mauritania.mr www.embassy.org/embassies/mr.html	Yemen: www.nusacc.org/yemen www.yemeninfo.gov.ye

Jonathan B. Lincoln was a 1997–1998 research assistant at The Washington Institute.

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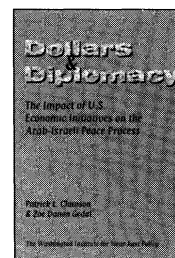
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