

My name is Spencer Osberg. My career for most of the past two decades has revolved around the Middle East, where my work has included being a freelance journalist and photographer based in Lebanon, a film maker with a Syrian documentary team, the chief editor of a Yemen-based research centre, among various other roles. Since the pandemic, I have been largely based in and working remotely from Halifax, where I was born and raised.

Canadian and Western media coverage of the Middle East has long been problematic, typically devaluing Arab lives and reducing their experiences to easily digestible tropes, such as the violent jihadist, the victimized refugee, the underdog activist, etc. As an antidote to this, MidEast Mic Check was envisioned as a stage to spotlight the nuance, complexity, and humanity of the many different societies and peoples that call this region home.

The mix of in-depth interviews and music is intended to offer audiences both insights into the pertinent issues of the day, while also conveying a taste of the human experience in each region through the creative and emotional depth of its artists.

(The following reel and description was edited and written by Kheaven Brasier, CKDU's Programming Director.)

This reel of MidEast Mic Check, hosted by Spencer Osberg, is compiled from episodes broadcast on November 1, November 15, and November 29, 2024. The topics covered include: Yemen's Houthi movement and their oppressive governance style through insights from expert Farea Al-Muslimi; Yemen's rich musical heritage featuring traditional songs and commentary from Aisha Jamal, a former Sanaa Center program manager; the Palestinian shift from a two-state solution to a civil rights framework as detailed by Palestinian American journalist Ahmed Moor; and a firsthand account of Lebanon's divided wartime reality from journalist Adam Chamseddine, where normal life continues in some areas while others face daily destruction.

The reel begins with host Spencer Osberg's introduction and theme, as he previews for us his focus on Yemen that was broadcast on November 29, 2024. His first guest is Farea Al-Muslimi, who details Houthi oppression of independent voices. He compares Houthis to a combination of FARC and the Taliban in their governance approach, and highlights their goal to isolate Yemeni citizens from the world, similar to the North Korean model. He describes their mass arrest campaign of researchers, activists, and aid workers. Farea himself was targeted as an enemy of the state and is currently in exile. We learn how the Houthis used state TV to label independent researchers as foreign agents, following Russian-style tactics—noting they cannot tolerate an environment with free speech or access to independent information. As a research fellow at Chatham House's Middle East and North Africa Programmer, it is incredible to hear Farea Al-Muslimi describe Yemen's current situation with Spencer. This is just the first example of Spencer's determination to bring high-caliber speakers to Halifax's airwaves.

In addition to this serious political analysis, Spencer combines his regional focus with deep dives into cultural content like the Yemeni music curated by guest Aisha Jamal in his segment, "People's Playlist." The next clip, from the same episode, is just one such example of

these inspiring segments which highlight the beauty, joy, and creativity of Middle Eastern artists, in contrast to most coverage only focusing on war and horror. This balanced coverage of hard news with cultural content provides a more complete picture of Yemen for our listeners, and is a unique perspective in comparison to similar current affairs programs covering the Middle East. Furthermore, Spencer demonstrates his interest in timely coverage of current events, rooting his listeners in the present-day experiences of the people.

The clip immediately following the music was broadcast on CKDU on November 1, 2024. Spencer's guest is Palestinian American writer and activist Ahmed Moor, who was born in Gaza, and has been published in Al Jazeera, Washington Post, The Guardian, among many others. Moor emphasizes that Palestinians are unlikely to achieve statehood under current conditions. He proposes a civil rights framework as an alternative to a traditional two-state solution, and outlines a strategy focusing on organizing for individual rights, securing international support, and aligning with groups able to exert external pressure on elites who should be paying a price for the current power imbalance. This is based on the successful civil rights movements from both the US and South Africa. This episode deserves high praise for tackling complex geopolitical issues with detailed analysis and solutions not typically heard in mainstream media coverage of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

The final clip is taken from the episode that aired on November 15, 2024. Spencer introduces Adam Chamseddine, a war correspondent for the Wall Street Journal from South Lebanon. Chamseddine gives listeners insight into the conditions on the ground in Lebanon—which he describes as schizophrenic. This is because of the stark contrast between areas experiencing conflict versus normal life within the same city. In sharing his own experience taking his son to a school which currently operates normally, he brings our attention to those currently displaced from southern suburbs and south Lebanon. The official count currently says 1.2 million people are now displaced.

Spencer Osberg's program, MidEast Mic Check, offers first-rate investigative journalism sharing diverse perspectives, cultural sophistication, timely relevance, balanced reporting from experts in the region, and a fresh analysis for understanding issues in the Middle-East. As a current affairs program, MidEast Mic Check has professional production and a well-structured format alternating between interviews, analysis, and the popular People's Playlist music segments that spotlights local artists. The local-global connection of broadcasting from Halifax while covering international issues with global implications is something we are very proud of here at CKDU. This reel makes it obvious that MidEast Mic Check is indeed this year's best Current Affairs or Magazine Show. Thank you for considering Spencer Osberg for this award.