

Iraq: A Diverse Media

In 2004, William Rugh published an influential and comprehensive study of Arab newspapers, radio and television. His book, *Arab Mass Media*, examines the media organizations in 18 Arab countries and places each country into one of four categories, based upon varying degrees of government influence, freedom of the press and other factors (Rugh, 25). When Rugh came out with this study, the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime, and the accompanying transformation of the media scene, was hardly a year old. Rugh separated Iraq into two time periods and classified the Iraqi media prior to the 2003 invasion as the quintessential "mobilization media", due to its complete manipulation by the government. The Iraqi media which arose subsequent to the invasion was classified as a "diverse media". However, too little time had transpired since the invasion for Rugh to confidently declare Iraq a diverse media, or discuss at great length the most successful newspapers, radio stations or television broadcasters which have emerged and dominate the Iraqi media environment today. This paper is an attempt to pick up where Rugh's study left off in 2004, and analyze the most successful media sources in the new Iraq and effectively demonstrate that Iraq is indeed home to a "diverse media" similar to those found in Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco and Yemen.

Since 2003, Iraq has moved from a media environment completely dominated by the government to one which includes sources controlled by a spectrum of players. On the eve of the invasion, the Baathist government was running five daily newspapers, four radio stations and a handful of television stations, which accounted for all of the daily sources available to the Iraqi public outside the de facto independent Kurdish region in the north (Sinjari, 479). Each of these media sources was terminated in April 2003, as Coalition forces took control of Baghdad and ended the reign of the Baath Party. In the power vacuum left behind by the removal of the Baathist regime and with the greater freedoms permitted by Coalition forces, newspapers, television stations and radio stations sprouted up swiftly all over the country. Based upon the ownership and financing of these media sources, they can all be placed into one of three distinct categories (Allen, OneWorld US).

The first type of media is governmental. Coalition forces found it necessary to communicate their policies to the Iraqi people and seek their compliance with their vision for the new Iraq shortly after the occupation of Iraq began. These media continued after the dissolution of the Coalition Provisional Authority and are some of the most successful media outlets today. The second type of Iraqi media which has emerged is private and party-oriented. Most political parties were outlawed by the Baathist government, and when parties were created or returned from abroad in 2003 they quickly established themselves and their own visions for Iraq in the media market. The final type of media in the new Iraq is private and truly independent. These media do retain varying degrees of bias in their coverage of events, but they are not tied to the government or a political party in any major way and are, most importantly, profit-driven. For the most part, they look at Iraq and the world from a general Iraqi perspective in order to reach the widest audience possible.

Government Sources of Media

The government of Iraq currently publishes one daily newspaper, and operates three television stations and two radio stations. The fact that the government currently operates some of the most successful media in the country does not disqualify Iraqi media in general from being classified as diverse. Rugh states in his book that newspapers in a diverse press are "all privately owned" (Rugh, 87). Nevertheless, he also explains that within a diverse press, there can be individual newspapers which are strong supporters of the regime in power (Rugh, 87) and it is hard to conclude that the Iraqi press is not diverse based solely upon the existence of a handful of government media sources. If that is truly a disqualifier, what would we say about the U.S. Public Broadcasting System or the British Broadcasting Corporation? Moreover, in Morocco, which Rugh argues is host to a diverse

media, the government operates Maghreb Arabe Presse (a news agency), the daily newspaper *Al-Anba*, and supports at least two other daily publications (Rugh, 111). Government control of a few newspapers, radio stations or television stations alone does not determine which of the four categories the country should be placed within.

The Iraqi government's daily newspaper, *Al-Sabah* (The Morning), was established almost immediately after Coalition forces occupied the country. The United States government hired a contractor, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), to establish major media outlets in Iraq. With their technology and expertise, SAIC founded the Iraqi Media Network (IMN). The Iraqi Media Network focused primarily on rebuilding Iraq's television and radio broadcasting systems, which had deteriorated significantly during Saddam Hussein's reign or had been destroyed in some instances during the invasion or had even been vandalized or looted in the aftermath. The IMN began to fund *Al-Sabah* and placed its headquarters in the former offices of the Baathist newspaper *Al-Thawra* (Badrakhan, 472), but in many respects the paper was an Iraqi creation. *Al-Sabah's* first issue came out on May 17, 2003, but within months the newspaper experienced a dramatic shakeup which put it more under the control of Iraq's temporary government, the Coalition Provisional Authority.

SAIC's contract in Iraq ended in early 2004 and the Pentagon awarded a second contract in January to the Harris Corporation in order to bolster the Iraqi Media Network. The Pentagon was unhappy with *Al-Sabah's* limited success, as it was unable to dominate the emerging Iraqi media scene and it became simply one of two dozen competing newspapers. When the Harris Corporation officially took over the Iraqi Media Network from SAIC in February, it sought to make *Al-Sabah* a permanent component of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the future Iraqi government. This aspiration became explicit on March 20, 2004, with CPA Order No. 66, which declared that the IMN was to be the public service broadcaster for Iraq. This cemented *Al-Sabah's* role as spokesman for Coalition forces and for the future Iraqi government, and it destroyed any hope maintained by *Al-Sabah's* staff that it might become an independent newspaper once Iraq regained its sovereignty.

CPA Order No. 66 created a schism amongst *Al-Sabah's* staff, and led directly to the creation of a new independent newspaper, *Al-Sabah Al-Jedid*. Once the news of *Al-Sabah's* fate reached its editor, Ismael Zayer, he left the newspaper with a significant portion of its staff, citing as reasons for their departure its lack of independence and the failure to take into account their ongoing desire to privatize *Al-Sabah*. Zayer and elements of *Al-Sabah's* staff made good on their promises in May 2004 and published the first edition of their independent newspaper, contemptuously naming it *Al-Sabah Al-Jedid* meaning *The New Morning*. Since then, the newspaper has enjoyed relative success and has established offices in Baghdad, Erbil, Beirut, Damascus, the Gulf countries, London, Washington, Brussels and Amsterdam, according to its own website. It is perceived to be a fair and balanced newspaper which respects Iraq's current political climate by addressing Iraqi affairs and those of the Kurdistan region in separate sections. Like almost all of Iraq's newspapers though, it has been a victim of the country's ubiquitous violence. On top of this, there have been repeated attempts to assassinate Ismael Zayer, prompting him to leave the country.

Al-Sabah is currently one of the most widely read and successful newspapers in Iraq, but it has had to overcome a series of hurdles to improve its reputation, which suffered from allegations that it was a propaganda tool. From its birth, a great number of Iraqis considered *Al-Sabah* to be the mouthpiece of the United States and the Coalition forces. It routinely avoided publishing negative stories about Coalition forces and about horrific events which were happening in Iraq. Iraqi perceptions of *Al-Sabah* and the rest of the Iraqi Media Network's programs improved tremendously however when it was placed under the authority of the Iraqi Interim Government in the summer of 2004. Despite the new-found trust which the newspaper is establishing with the Iraqi public, it is still seen by many as a symbol of the occupation. Within a three-month period in 2006 alone, two suicide bombers attacked *Al-Sabah's* headquarters, killing and wounding several employees (Von Zeibauer, NY Times).

The Iraqi Media Network's television programs have followed a path almost identical to that of its newspaper, *Al-Sabah*. The IMN broadcasts three channels: *Iraqiya TV*, *Iraqiya TV2* and *Iraqiya Sports TV*, which I will refer to together as *Al-Iraqiya*. *Al-Iraqiya* was set up in 2003 by SAIC with the intention of establishing a 24-hour news channel in the mold of the United States' PBS and the United Kingdom's BBC. From the beginning *Al-Iraqiya* struggled to maintain credibility with Iraqis because it too was seen as a propaganda tool and a mouthpiece for Coalition forces. In fact, many Iraqis have scornfully referred to it as 'America Television' (Badrakhan, 472). Like *Al-Sabah*, *Al-Iraqiya's* reputation began to improve after the Iraqi Interim Government took control of the IMN, but as late as December 2005 it was being accused of taking money from the U.S. military to run positive stories (Cochrane, TBS Journal). It is also still perceived to be a symbol of the occupation by some Iraqis, and their employees have suffered more fatalities than any other television station in Iraq, including foreign channels such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya* (Cochrane, TBS Journal).

Al-Iraqiya is currently the most watched station of all domestic and foreign news networks in Iraq. This is partially attributable to the improvement in its reputation, but it largely stems from accessibility. Iraqis do not need a satellite receiver to view *Al-Iraqiya*, as they do with many local and foreign television stations. One study found that 93% of Iraqis have access to *Al-Iraqiya*, which is significantly more than for any other news channel (Cochrane, TBS Journal). *Al-Iraqiya's* advantage though may not last much longer. The Baathist government banned satellite dishes, so initially *Al-Iraqiya* did not have to compete with the region's established satellite news networks, such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. But ever since the ban was lifted in 2003, satellite dishes have been spreading rapidly into Iraqi homes and in the near future *Al-Iraqiya's* competitors could be equally accessible.

Finally, the Iraqi Media Network runs two radio stations: Republic of Iraq Radio and Holy Quran Radio. Republic of Iraq Radio provides listeners with the news, much in the same manner as the IMN's other programs, and Holy Quran Radio is a religious station about Islam.

The United States is not the only country to found and promote news programs in Iraq. The BBC World Service Trust, with funding from the British government's Department for International Development, established *Al-Mirbad* in the summer of 2005. When Coalition forces occupied Iraq in 2003, British forces were given command of Iraq's southern region, centered on the city of Basra. They therefore established *Al-Mirbad* in Basra, which has both a television and radio station. *Al-Mirbad* focuses on cultural and social issues, broadcasting everything from children's shows to documentaries on architecture. In addition, all of the station's programs are produced in Basra or the surrounding area, giving it a unique southern flair which is popular with many of the locals. *Al-Mirbad's* television station broadcasts for four hours a day and its radio station for eight hours a day. Unlike the CPA's projects -- *Al-Sabah* and *Al-Iraqiya*, the BBC and the British government have been working hard to make *Al-Mirbad* a private, independent media outlet, reliant solely on profit. As of July 2006 though, the BBC and the British government were still working closely with *Al-Mirbad* to develop a dependable profit base (BBC News, "Al-Mirbad: Choice of Southern Iraq").

Party Oriented Media Outlets

One common goal shared by all of Iraq's major political parties and players is to set up private news organizations to promote their ideologies. Especially in this respect, Iraq's media scene shares many of the divergent and sectarian traits exhibited by the Lebanese media scene, which Rugh refers to throughout *Arab Mass Media* as the best example of diverse Arab media. These media tend to be quite biased in their coverage of events and highlight stories which reflect favorably upon their own worldviews. These media sources are private and receive some of their funding from advertisements and sales. However, a large percentage of their income is derived directly from the political party they support.

One of the most successful Iraqi political parties engaged in the production of media is the Supreme Islamic Council of Iraq (SICI) (formerly known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq). As one of the country's two major Shi'ite parties, it publishes the bi-weekly

newspaper *Al-Adala*, but it puts far more energy into broadcasting three separate satellite channels. It is common for political parties such as SICI to focus more heavily on their satellite channels, rather than on their print media. Newspapers such as *Al-Adala* cannot reach as many individuals as the satellite channels for two primary reasons. Firstly, the violence throughout Iraq has hindered distribution of the physical newspapers to vendors in many of Iraq's cities and towns. The satellite channels can bypass hazardous alleyways and military checkpoints to give people breaking news as soon as possible. Secondly, not all Iraqis are literate so, although many newspapers such as *Al-Adala* do maintain websites, some Iraqis would still find it easier to watch a television program.

The most successful SICI satellite channel, and perhaps the most successful party-oriented satellite channel in Iraq, is *Al-Furat* (The Euphrates). Most of its viewer are Shi'ites in Basra and southern Iraq and it runs for 24 hours a day, focusing primarily on politics and religion. It differs from other media sources, such as *Al-Iraqiya*, in both its style and content. For instance, from the start of *Al-Furat* it has repeatedly referred to any Iraqi killed by Coalition forces, including insurgents and militia members, as martyrs (Cochrane, TBS Journal). This station also, in contrast to other Iraqi stations, uses a great deal of its prime air time for religious programs. Every evening, it runs a religious program called *Fiqh Al-Mustafa* for 30 minutes. The host, Rashid Al-Husseini, researches religious topics and answers email questions about Islamic jurisprudence, usually while sitting at a desk with one or two books in front of him. Email questions which the program receives vary widely in content, and range from one instance of a man asking about what he should do if he forgot to pray, to another where a young woman asked if she should marry a man who didn't have extensive knowledge of the Quran.

Fiqh Al-Mustafa is one of *Al-Furat*'s most popular shows, but more importantly to this study, it demonstrates the similarities between the Iraqi and the Lebanese media environments. Like the SICI, Lebanon also has a major Shi'ite party which has burst on to the media scene, targeting a religious Shi'ite audience within a generally secular and diverse society. *Al-Manar* is the satellite station operated by Hizbullah, and it runs a religious program called *Fikhul Hayat*, which also has a religious scholar fielding questions from Lebanese viewers. *Fiqh Al-Mustafa*, like its sister Lebanese program *Fikhul Hayat*, is an overt attempt to keep the party's narrowly defined base mobilized by watching this channel, whether or not members of the base are even interested in political events. The fact that *Al-Furat*'s management broadcasts this program, knowing full well that a great number of Iraqis would not be interested in watching any religious Shi'ite program, demonstrates the diversity of private Iraqi television today.

Iraq's other major Shi'ite party, the Dawa Party, also produces its own newspaper and satellite station. The Dawa Party and its leader, Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki, have a long history of producing newspapers. Throughout the 1980s when the party was exiled, Nouri Al-Maliki was the chief editor of the party's newspaper in Syria, *Al-Mawqif*. Today the party publishes inside Iraq *Jareedat Al-Dawa*, a daily newspaper which has produced over seven hundred issues since the fall of the Baathist government. The Dawa Party's satellite channel, *Al-Masar TV*, is also quite successful and has been very competitive in Iraq's satellite news market. It focuses primarily on Iraqi politics and current events. In addition to the news, *Al-Masar TV* runs television programs such as *The Victims of Terrorism*, *Freedom Forum*, *Citizen at the Heart of Responsibility* and *From the Provinces*, which tend to publicize the party's position as the head of the Iraqi government.

Some media outlets which fall under the category of "party-oriented" may not support a political party at all, but instead support a single political figure. One example of this phenomenon is the satellite television station *Ahlul Bayt TV*, which is largely funded by Shi'ite cleric Ayatollah Hadi Almodarresi. The most famous Iraqi media sources funded or controlled by a single political figure is perhaps the weekly newspaper *Al-Hawza*, which became the mouthpiece of popularly supported Shi'ite cleric Moqtada Al-Sadr in his resistance to the presence of Coalition forces in the first year of the Iraqi occupation. Paul Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, signed a letter ordering *Al-Hawza* to be shut down indefinitely on the grounds that the newspaper had regularly fabricated lies and promoted acts of violence against Coalition forces (Gettleman, NY Times). On

March 28, 2004, U.S. soldiers shut down the newspaper, and thousands of protestors took to the streets shortly after.

The fact that the Coalition Provisional Authority and the new Iraqi government shut down several newspapers such as *Al-Hawza* since the fall of the Baathist government does not however mean that Iraq is host to a “transitional media”, another category of media that Rugh describes in his book. Rugh defines a transitional media as a “complex system that contains strong elements favoring governmental control over the press, alongside elements that provide some measure of freedom” (Rugh, 121). Each of the four countries which Rugh argues have diverse media have seen news organizations shut down or suspended from time to time. As Rugh points out, throughout the 1990s the Lebanese government suspended newspapers and in 1993, the government closed *Nida Al-Watan* for 38 days because it had heavily criticized Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (Rugh, 97). According to Rugh’s own study, government closure of newspapers, radio stations and television stations does not disqualify the media in that country from being classified as diverse.

Kurdish political parties had a significant head start over the rest of Iraq in establishing media outlets, due to their autonomy and the de facto independence of the Kurdish region in the 1990s. The Kurdish region is dominated by two political parties, both of which have established their own radio stations, newspapers and satellite channels. The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which were founded in 1946 and 1975 respectively, printed party papers before the 1990s, but the longest surviving media outlets run by both parties are their radio stations. The KDP first began broadcasting “The Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan” in 1968 and the station was supported heavily by the Iranian government in the 1970s and 1980s. (ClandestineRadio.com). In the early 1990s, it moved to Sulaymaniyah and has been broadcasting from there ever since. In 1988 the PUK started broadcasting its own radio station, *Voice of the People of Kurdistan*, which called for the complete independence of Iraqi Kurdistan, broadcasting in both Kurdish and Arabic (Peterson, ClandestineRadio.com). In addition to each party’s own radio stations, the Kurdistan regional government, which was essentially 50 percent KDP and 50 percent PUK, began broadcasting from its own station in 1997. The station is known as *The Voice of the Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan*, or more commonly as *Harim Radio*.

Shortly after establishing these radio stations, the KDP and the PUK formed their own satellite channels and newspapers. The KDP’s satellite station, *Kurdistan TV*, was the first satellite station broadcasting out of Iraqi Kurdistan. It first aired in 1999 and the majority of its programs are in Kurdish. The PUK followed *Kurdistan TV* with an array of its own satellite channels. The PUK broadcasts, funds or at least supports *PUK TV*, *Al-Hurriyah TV* and *KurdSAT*. (Cochrane, TBS Journal). The KDP’s newspaper, *Khabat*, has been published for years, but has been coming out with regular issues since May 12, 2006. The PUK’s newspaper is called *Al-Ittihad*, and it has been producing newspapers twice a week since November 2005. Overall, the Kurdish media is dominated by the KDP and PUK and offers a distinctly Kurdish perspective of events, differing from Arab Iraqi media in both content and style.

The media outlets provided by Iraq’s Sunni political parties are significantly less developed than those of the Shi’ite and Kurdish parties for several reasons. Sunnis are a minority in Iraq and the Baath Party had been in control of the Iraqi government until the 2003 invasion. Other than a few non-secular, Islamist political parties, such as the Iraqi Islamic Party, Sunnis did not have the same degree of underground organization as the Shi’ite and Kurdish parties. In this context it is noteworthy that the most successful publishers and broadcasters today were organized before the fall of the Baathist government. Moreover, many Sunnis boycotted the 2005 elections and denied the legitimacy of the new Iraqi government. Emerging Sunni political parties suffered from their constituency’s lack of participation in the political process and could not realize their full potential to reach audiences. Lastly, Iraq’s de-Baathification laws prevented many prominent Sunnis with political backgrounds from participating in the new government. All of these factors put the media of Sunni political parties at a great disadvantage.

Despite the difficulties which many Sunni parties have faced in establishing their own media outlets, the Iraqi Islamic Party offers one example of a success story. The party, which was founded as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s, had been banned from Iraq until 2003. It currently publishes a newspaper called *Dar Al-Salam*, which has origins going all the way back to the party's exile in Britain during the 1970s. Their first issue produced in Iraq came out on May 15, 2003, and it has been printing three times a week ever since. The Iraqi Islamic Party also runs a radio station, *Radio Dar Al-Salam*, which concentrates on recent party activities and the importance of Islam.

The party's satellite television station is equally successful and has gained the attention of audiences all over Iraq. *Baghdad TV* focuses on cultural, social and political issues in Iraq and has been commonly referred to as "Baathist TV" by many Shi'ites for its Sunni bias, despite the fact that the Baath Party considered the Iraqi Islamic Party to be an enemy (Cochrane, TBS Journal). It runs Sunni-centrist programs such as *Mapping Sunni Movements in Iran*, which documented Sunni political organizations inside Iran since the 1979 revolution. It also broadcasts other specials about neighboring countries, such as Turkey and Jordan, analyzing the relationship between them and Iraq. Because of its Sunni bias and success, *Baghdad TV* has received much attention from the Iraqi government and Shi'ite organizations. In January 2007 the Iraqi government shut down *Baghdad TV* for airing footage of people mourning the execution of Saddam Hussein. A few months later, on April 5, 2007, *Baghdad TV's* headquarters was attacked by a suicide truck bomb which killed the deputy director and injured twelve others (CPJ, "Deputy Director of Iraqi TV Channel Killed"). Today the channel is back up and running and the station's sponsor, the Iraqi Islamic Party, is a member of the ruling government coalition under Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki.

The new Iraq has made it possible for smaller parties to establish media outlets and reach broad audiences as well. For example, the Iraqi Communist Party, a significant political force until the Baath suppressed it in the 1970s, still makes its voice heard by publishing a weekly newspaper called *Tareeq Al-Sha'b*. Similarly, the Kurdistan Communist Party, which has been almost completely eclipsed by the KDP and PUK, found it difficult to disseminate its message before it established its satellite channel, *ATB TV*. Another party that never took hold with Iraqis after 2003 is that of Ahmed Chalabi, former close associate of the U.S. Defense Department. His party, the Iraqi National Congress, and its paper, *Al-Mutamar*, suffered due to its long ties with the U.S. government. Nevertheless, the party paper still prints *Al-Mutamar* five times a week, hoping to one day establish itself as a legitimate party. Finally, Turkmens make up less than five percent of the Iraqi population and media was never published or broadcast in their Turkic language under Saddam Hussein's government. However, the Iraqi Turkmen Front has recently established its own newspaper (*Sada Tall Afar*), a radio station (*Turkmeneli FM*) and a satellite TV station (*Turkmeneli TV*). The Iraqi Turkmen Front often uses these media outlets to dispute the virtues of federalism in an effort to resist the trend towards Kurdish autonomy.

Independent Media Outlets

After the Baathist government fell in April 2003, independent media outlets popped up all over Iraq because of the unprecedented freedom permitted by the Coalition Provisional Authority and the new Iraqi government. They were driven by a desire to voice opinions long suppressed by the Baathist regime and, of course, for profit. Despite this high level of freedom, Iraq's new administrators did lay down some limits which the domestic media could not cross. On June 10, 2003, the CPA issued Order No. 14, which prohibited media organizations from broadcasting or publishing material that incited violence against any individual or group, civil disorder, or violence against the CPA or advocated a return to power by the Baath Party. As Rugh discusses in his book's segment on the new Iraq, this order led directly to the closure of several newspapers, such as *Al-Mustaqilla*, which published an article calling upon Iraqis to kill anyone who cooperated with the CPA or Coalition forces (Rugh, 116). CPA Order No. 14 would be used repeatedly over the following years as a basis for temporarily and permanently shutting down a variety of media organizations

This was not the only CPA order designed to limit the freedom of the emerging Iraqi media. On March 20, 2004, the CPA issued Order No. 65, which created the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission. It was intended to be an independent and non-profit organization responsible for the licensing and regulation of telecommunications and broadcasting information services. Shortly thereafter, the CPA handed over power to the Iraqi Interim Government, which expanded on the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission by creating the Higher Media Commission. This commission retained the power to regulate or shut down domestic and foreign media sources operating in Iraq. The creation of this commission led directly to the infamous temporary closures of *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* in Iraq soon after.

Rugh argues that the use of legal means to influence and silence independent media sources is yet another major characteristic of a transitional media, but the Iraqi government's use of this policy does not automatically make the Iraqi media transitional. Rugh states that countries with transitional media have "many laws on the books which give the government the power to take action against newspapers and journalists for what they publish" (Rugh, 121). This form of soft power nevertheless is not exclusive to transitional media. As a result of similar laws and institutions, the Moroccan press avoids direct criticism of King Mohammed VI, Islam and the government's policy in the Western Sahara (Rugh, 102). Likewise in Kuwait, the press is actually forbidden by law from criticizing the emir or quoting him without authorization (Rugh, 108). Legal barriers created by government do indicate transitional tendencies in Rugh's study, but when it comes to the classification of a country's media, Rugh appears to place much more importance on qualities such as political diversity and the degrees of open debate. That is why the Kuwaiti and Moroccan media can still qualify as diverse media; that is why Iraq's is also a diverse media.

The most successful independent media outlets in the new Iraq are those headed by Saad Al-Bazzaz, Iraq's own Rupert Murdoch (Pallister, *The Guardian*). Al-Bazzaz has a long history with the Iraqi media. He was the head of radio and television stations for the Baathist government, as well as being one of Saddam Hussein's most important press advisors. In 1992, after the Gulf War, Al-Bazzaz left Iraq and his position in the Baathist government behind and eventually settled in the United Kingdom. He became a British citizen and set up the newspaper *Al-Zaman*. Shortly after the invasion he moved his newspaper to Baghdad, where *Al-Zaman* quickly became one of the largest and generally most trustworthy papers in Iraq. Since relocating to Iraq, *Al-Zaman* has established offices in every major Iraqi city and enjoys one of the broadest audiences in the country.

After bringing his newspaper to Iraq, Saad Al-Bazzaz established a satellite station in spring 2004 named *Al-Sharqiya TV*, which quickly became a great success and obtained a huge following because of its presentation of current events and its distinctive comedy shows which satirize post-Baathist Iraq. One popular show, *Nightwolves*, was a drama series which had armed men driving around cities, abducting Iraqi civilians, putting them in precarious situations and leaving the audience guessing what would happen until the next week's episode (Usher, BBC News).

Both of Al-Bazzaz's creations, *Al-Zaman* and *Al-Sharqiya TV*, have criticized the occupation and the new Iraqi government, but more criticism has often been directed at *Al-Sharqiya TV* itself. Because of Al-Bazzaz's history with the Baathist government and *Al-Sharqiya TV*'s reputation for having a Sunni bias, some Iraqis have referred to this channel as "Al-Baathiya" (BBC News, "One Day in Iraq"). Like the Iraqi Islamic Party's satellite station *Baghdad TV*, *Al-Sharqiya* was shut down by the government in January 2007 because of the way it covered the execution of Saddam Hussein. The anchors who were covering the story of the execution wore all black clothes, a clear display of mourning. *Al-Sharqiya*, which was already planning to take its headquarters out of Iraq because of the increasing violence, relocated to Dubai, where it continues to be an extremely popular station.

One other notable independent satellite station which has emerged in the new Iraq is *Al-Baghdadiya TV*, which was founded by Iraqi businessman and lawyer Aoun Hussein Al-Khashlok and began broadcasting on September 12, 2005. Broadcasting from Cairo, this station gained

popularity for shows such as *History*, which airs every night and discusses major events of the war in Iraq as well as other current affairs related to economics, religion and international relations. *Al-Baghdadiya TV* recently received international attention when on December 14, 2008, one of its journalists, Muntadhar Al-Zaidi, took off his shoes and threw them at U.S. President George W. Bush.

Iraq is also home now to a vibrant independent radio broadcasting scene. “Voice of Iraq” became one of Iraq’s first independent radio stations when it began broadcasting from Baghdad in August 2003. It reports on Iraqi news from an international perspective in Arabic, English and Turkish, but it has been known to play Shi’ite religious and patriotic songs. Another successful independent radio broadcaster is *Radio Dijla*, named after the Tigris River. It began broadcasting in the spring of 2004 and quickly rose to fame for its open discussions of topics ranging from politics to electricity blackouts. It has both male and female radio hosts, and within two months of broadcasting, it became the most popular radio station in Baghdad and received about 18,000 to 19,000 callers a day (Mite, Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty).

The dozens of independent newspapers which have sprung up throughout Iraq now dominate much of Iraq’s print media scene. Over two hundred independent newspapers were created in 2003 and 2004, but that number has steadily declined for several reasons. The new newspapers varied widely in both substance and quality, and the newspapers with poorest substance and quality are naturally being weeded out by free market forces. Another problem that has plagued Iraq’s newspapers and caused them to lose readership is sensationalism. Many newspapers have attempted to grab the attention of readers with irresponsible headlines and photos that erode their trustworthiness. For example, on January 13, 2004, the Baghdad newspaper *Al-Fourat* published a doctored picture on its front page of Saddam Hussein firing a rocket propelled grenade, while wearing an eye patch with an American flag on it in the shape of the Star of David. The accompanying article discussed Saddam Hussein’s future trial and did not really correlate with the picture. The existence of newspapers such as *Al-Fourat* further supports the argument that Iraq has a diverse media. As Rugh argues in *Arab Mass Media*, Lebanon is host to some of the best and most irresponsible newspapers in the Arab world because of its freedom (Rugh, 90).

One other strategy used by independent newspapers to rise above their competition is specialization. The newspaper *Al-Muda* began publishing on August 5, 2003, and has sought a narrow target audience by writing a majority of its articles on culture and art. Other papers seek local audiences and do not attempt to become nation-wide newspapers. In Iraqi Kurdistan, there are fewer truly independent newspapers than in the rest of Iraq because the media outlets of the KDP and the PUK have dominated the region since the 1990s. But despite the stiff competition, Asos Hardi founded a successful newspaper, *Al-Hawlati*, in 2000. It publishes in both Kurdish and Arabic, and focuses on a spectrum of Kurdish issues, including on occasion the struggle of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in neighboring Turkey.

Despite the promising landscape even Iraq’s most trustworthy and first-rate newspapers are struggling today because of their inability to make a profit. Violence has prevented the distribution of newspapers, stopped potential readers from going into the streets to buy the newspapers and prevented journalists from traveling safely to the scenes of news stories. Iraqi journalists often have to rely on foreign news agencies, and stories are copied and pasted over and over throughout a range of Iraqi newspapers. The cost of production is also crippling Iraq’s independent media organizations. According to William Warda, the general director of Ashur TV, his satellite station spends 15 to 20 percent of its budget on security-related issues alone (Metcalf, BBC News). Additionally, Iraq’s independent newspapers suffered indirectly from the sectarian conflict in that many private companies are not expanding and advertising their businesses. Advertising is the prime source of income for private independent newspapers and they often have to rely on government advertising or subsidies to keep them afloat. One study in 2008 found that independent Arabic newspapers in Iraq receive 40 to 70 percent of their income from government advertising, which was recently cut by the Maliki administration (Schewe, Editorsweblog.org). Iraq’s

independent newspapers find it hard to thrive in the current climate of violence.

Conclusion

Iraq now has one of the most diverse media environments in the Arabic-speaking world. According to Rugh's own definition of a diverse media, the government must have a limited influence over the media and the differences in the content and style of news outlets should outweigh their similarities (Rugh, 26 and 87). This is true for Iraq, where media organizations broadcast in an array of languages and take up political positions stretching from pro-government to anti-government, Islamist to communist. Some are extremely partisan, while others are neutral.

The most important aspect of this new media is that the success of media outlets is being driven by the free market, and not by the government's policies. The current government-run sources of media in Iraq, namely *Al-Sabah* and *Al-Iraqiya*, received vast amounts of funding from the United States government in their nascence. Yet this was no guarantee of their success, and they have become successful today only because they have worked hard to develop a reputation for fairness in their coverage. Party-oriented media sources, although private, also have an apparent advantage over independent sources of media because they are not dependent on profitability. But their biased coverage of events is not nearly as popular with Iraqis as the fair and balanced coverage from independent sources. If party-oriented media sources want to survive and remain relevant, they must tone down their partiality. Lastly, independent media has firmly established itself in the new Iraq, but their long-term success is threatened by the enduring conflict. They can be profitable, and they will remain independent of the government's influence so long as the level of violence in Iraq continues to fall. Iraq's media is still young and vulnerable, but its variety and liveliness have certainly made it a diverse media.

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