Iraq's News Media After Saddam:
Liberation, Repression, and Future Prospects

A Report to the Center for International Media Assistance

By Sherry Ricchiardi

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The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA), a project of the National Endowment for Democracy, aims to strengthen the support, raise the visibility, and improve the effectiveness of media assistance programs by providing information, building networks, conducting research, and highlighting the indispensable role independent media play in the creation and development of sustainable democracies around the world. An important aspect of CIMA's work is to research ways to attract additional U.S. private sector interest in and support for international media development.

CIMA convenes working groups, discussions, and panels on a variety of topics in the field of media development and assistance. The center also issues reports and recommendations based on working group discussions and other investigations. These reports aim to provide policymakers, as well as donors and practitioners, with ideas for bolstering the effectiveness of media assistance.

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She is on the advisory committee of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at Columbia University and North Carolina University's Irina Project, a Web-based resource on human trafficking. In 2003 and 2009, she won the National Press Club's top award for press criticism. Ricchiardi has been a Fulbright scholar at Zagreb University in Croatia and serves on the peer review committee for the Fulbright Specialist Program. Before going into media development, she spent 14 years at the *Des Moines Register* as an investigative reporter and Sunday magazine writer. She later became city editor for the *Columbia Missourian*, a newspaper produced at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, her alma mater. During the war in the Balkans, Ricchiardi's stories from the front lines appeared in several American publications, including the *Miami Herald, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, USA Today*, and *AJR*.
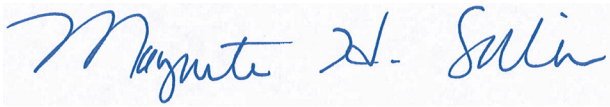
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CIMA Research Report: Iraq's News Media After Saddam

Preface

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) at the National Endowment for Democracy commissioned this study of the state of news media in Iraq as the United States draws down its military presence in that country. The report traces the initial blossoming of independent media in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein and the current challenges that exist.

CIMA is grateful to Sherry Ricchiardi, a veteran journalist, journalism professor, and media consultant for her research and insights on this topic.

We hope that this report will become an important reference for international media assistance.

Marguerite H. Sullivan
Senior Director
Center for International Media Assistance

Executive Summary

After the ouster of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, Iraq's tightly controlled state-run media underwent a transformation on two fronts: one driven by the Americans who made establishing a free press a priority; the other by an Iraqi citizenry that for three decades had been cut off from the free marketplace of ideas under a tyrannical regime.

Overnight, Iraq's media landscape blossomed into one of the most diverse and unfettered press environments in the Middle East. Privately owned news outlets grew from zero to more than 200 in a rush to meet demands for uncensored information. And despite formidable chaos over press freedom, Iraqi citizens suddenly had access to a varied menu of information unimaginable under Saddam Hussein.

Satellite dishes, banned under the Baathists, flew off the shelves. Iraqis, once limited to government-run broadcasting and five newspapers, suddenly had access to a smorgasbord of news from CNN and Qatar-based al-Jazeera to dozens of publications and television channels springing up in their hometowns.

Overnight, Iraq's media landscape blossomed into one of the most diverse and unfettered press environments in the Middle East.

Iraqi journalists who defected during the Baathist era returned. Saad al-Bazzaz, former head of state television and editor of a leading newspaper under the old regime, fled in 1992 and ran a publishing business in Great Britain catering to exiled Iraqis. Soon after the invasion, he moved his operation to Baghdad. Al-Bazzaz told London's *Independent*, "We can't train staff fast enough … People are desperate here for a neutral free press after 30 years of a totalitarian state." [1]

 This euphoria over a "neutral free press" was short-lived.

The reality on the ground today is a far cry from what Pentagon planners envisioned for Iraq's reconstituted press system. Despite massive infusions of cash from the U.S. government for media development–more than a half billion dollars by most estimates–the future of the country's media does not look promising on several fronts. Many of Iraq's media outlets have become mouthpieces for ethno-political factions with the potential to inflame sectarian divisions that have led the country to the brink of civil war. In his groundbreaking study on Iraq's press system, Middle East scholar Ibrahim al-Marashi warned that "ethno-sectarian 'media empires'" were providing the psychological groundwork for bitter divisiveness and conflict and needed to be addressed for the sake of the country's stability. [2]

Any escalation of violence would be bad news for journalists who already work in a climate of terror and impunity. A record number of media professionals, the majority of them Iraqis, were killed in Iraq between 2003 and 2008, making it then the world's deadliest spot for the press.

Those who target journalists have little reason to worry. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, none of the 93 murders of journalists that have occurred In Iraq over the last 10 years has been solved. Iraq's press corps has faced setbacks on other fronts.

The Iraqi government has employed laws from Saddam Hussein's era to muzzle media as well as some put on the books by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) during the occupation. The Iraqi Media Network (IMN) and Communications Media Commission (CMC), part of the CPA's makeover of Iraq's press system, were turned over to the government years ago. Both were designed to foster free expression and provide a multiplicity of views. It has not always turned out that way.

The CMC has used its regulatory powers to shutter media operations and restrict news coverage. National Public Radio's Deborah Amos, who covered Iraq for NPR, reported in June 2010 that Iraq's state television, part of IMN, reflected the views of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's government and had become known in Iraq as "Maliki TV."[3]

Amos pointed out in a research paper she wrote while a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University that "Iraq's state-run system failed to offer a neutral media space to all of the candidates and parties running in the election, despite a $500 million U.S. effort to make the Iraqiya a national public service system."[4]

"It was the highest amount ever spent on media development anywhere," she said in an interview.

The judiciary also has been used to silence media. Iraqi news organizations continue to be plagued by lawsuits brought by the highest powers in government to intimidate and, in some cases, close them down. Journalists have been arrested, their equipment confiscated, and exorbitant fines leveled against them. All this has been occurring in a country ranked the fourth most corrupt in the world by Berlin-based Transparency International's 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index.[5]

February 2011 was a terrible month for Iraq's journalists.

As protests swept the country, Iraq's security forces turned on them with a vengeance. Nalia, Kurdistan's first independent TV station, had been filming unrest in Sulaymaniyah when 50 masked gunmen raided the studio, destroying equipment and setting the building ablaze. Three days later, men in uniforms, some wearing a skull-and-crossbones insignia on their helmets, stormed the Baghdad headquarters of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, a prominent Iraqi press freedom group. Among materials stolen: archives that documented abuses against the media.

A CPJ report released on February 25 told of military and security forces preventing cameras from entering Baghdad's Tahrir Square where thousands of protesters had gathered and of dozens of journalists being assaulted, arrested and their film confiscated. "We are particularly disturbed that a democratically elected government such as that of Iraq would attempt to quash coverage of political protests," Robert Mahoney, CPJ's deputy director, said in the report.

On top of it all, more journalists were murdered. Veteran reporter Hilal al-Ahmadi, well known for his coverage of financial and administrative corruption, was gunned down outside his home in Mosul on February 17. Mohamed al-Hamdani, a reporter for al-Italijah satellite TV, was killed in a suicide bombing in Ramadi on February 24 while covering a religious celebration. Two other journalists were wounded. [6]

Even before February's surge of violence, the deteriorating situation had caught the attention of the world's media monitors.

- A year earlier, the New York–based Committee to Protect Journalists warned that Iraq's new media rules reflect "an alarming return to authoritarianism." CPJ noted that the rules had been drafted by Iraq's CMC, the regulatory body formed by the CPA with the "narrow mandate to administer broadcast frequencies and other technical issues." The rules "would effectively impose government licensing of journalists and media outlets," a tool of authoritarian regimes worldwide. They bar coverage deemed to be an incitement to violence and require media organizations to submit lists of employees to the government. Beyond privacy concerns, that is particularly ominous in a country where so many local journalists have been killed in the line of duty.[7]

The U.S. State Department's 2009 human rights report on Iraq criticized laws that prohibit reporters from publishing stories that "insult" public officials, a notion open to broad interpretation by enforcers.

- The U.S. State Department's 2009 human rights report on Iraq criticized laws that prohibit reporters from publishing stories that "insult" public officials, a notion open to broad interpretation by enforcers. That, the report said, "prevented them from freely practicing their trade by creating strong fears of persecution…[and] widespread self-censorship." [8]

- In April 2010, Human Rights Watch submitted a letter of protest to the CMC and called on the Iraqi Parliament to "take all feasible steps to stem acts of violence, intimidation and abuse aimed at muzzling members of the media who have written or broadcast information about governmental corruption or criticized government policies or officials." The letter stated that CMC regulations represent a "general and ugly turn of tide for freedom of expression in Iraq." [9]

In July 2010, the Iraqi Supreme Judicial Court announced creation of a new court, the first of its kind in Iraq, to handle media offenses such as defamation and libel. Baghdad's media advocacy group, Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, called it a move to control the media.[10] Although many media outlets are controlled by special interests and only champion certain political and religious views, consumers do have a choice: They can read only what reinforces their beliefs or seek a variety of opinions. That was sorely lacking under the old regime.

Iraq's public can express opinions and criticize powerbrokers through editorial pages, call-in radio, and TV programs. Most Iraqi newspapers have websites with online discussion boards. Yet often, there is a price to pay. The government closed the studio of the popular satellite channel al-Baghdadiya on November 1, 2010, under the guise that it had aided terrorists. The real reason: The channel hosted a popular show where angry Iraqis could sound off about their government.[11]

Iraq's journalists face stark realities:

- Police and Iraqi military have been particularly brutal to media.

- Draft press laws under debate could further squelch press freedom and give greater rise to self-censorship.

- An increase in sectarian violence could place journalists in greater danger from extremist militias, terror groups, and other elements who view the messenger as the enemy.

This report examines the state of Iraq's media and provides a prognosis for the future as seen through the eyes of Iraqi journalists, international media developers on the scene, and scholars who have studied the dynamics of Iraq's nascent independent press. It addresses the question: What kind of media will be left in the wake of the U.S. military and donor drawdown?

Iraq's Media Landscape

Every morning, Muhammad al-Qaisi climbs out of bed before the school bus arrives to pick up his children. He grabs a broom handle, stands as far back from the front door as he can, and pokes it wide open several times to make sure no one has crept up under cover of darkness and attached a bomb.

Once the kids are safely on their way, the freelance reporter heads to work, but not before he gets down on all fours to check under his Kia for an explosive device. "This is my life–I am caught in a game of cat and mouse," al-Qaisi wrote in a November 7, 2010, e-mail. "Murdering a journalist is easier than running a red light in Iraq."[12]

The reporter was responding to the question: "What is life like for Iraqi journalists today?" His responses were translated from Arabic to English, and he chose to use a name he often writes under to protect himself and his loved ones. That is the lot of Iraqi journalists today.

It wasn't always like this.

Under Saddam Hussein, the state had a stranglehold on media. Journalists were required to belong to the Baath Party and the Iraqi Journalists Union, chaired by the dictator's son Uday, notorious for his brutality. The Ministry of Information wielded control over the newspapers and government channels.

> *"I am caught in a game of cat and mouse. Murdering a journalist is easier than running a red light in Iraq."*
>
> — *Muhammad al-Qaisi, Iraqi freelance reporter.*

Some journalists were loyalists, rewarded by generous salaries, cars, and land. Those who strayed faced arrest, torture, and execution along with other dissidents. Many fled into exile. Western and Arab newspapers were banned, signals of foreign radio and TV stations were scrambled, and satellite dishes were forbidden. Neighborhood snitches kept watch on the ground; military helicopters spied from the skies. Hussein's reign of terror lasted 30 years.[13]

Then came the communications revolution.

Media Boom

After Baghdad fell on April 9, 2003, restrictions on free expression evaporated overnight. A dizzying array of information flooded Iraq's airwaves, including music videos with sexy singers, soap operas, and news and entertainment sites long blocked from view. Al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera, two Arab-owned satellite channels based in the Persian Gulf region, quickly became popular news sources. The media free-for-all was an anomaly for an Arab nation.

During this time, more than 200 Iraqi-owned and operated publications swamped the market, although some were rudimentary at best and had meager circulation. Within six months, about one-third of Iraqi households had satellite TV access. Dozens of local radio and TV stations sprouted, broadcasting in Arabic, Kurdish, and other local languages. For Iraq, it was a golden age of journalism.

Some of these fledgling media ventures were short lived; others, such as al-Sharqiya TV and the independent Iraqi satellite TV network al-Sumaria have become staples in Iraqi society, according to readership surveys.[14] Al-Sharqiya, Iraq's first privately owned satellite channel, was the brainchild of Iraqi entrepreneur Saad al-Bazzaz, a former editor under the Hussein regime who defected and returned soon after the fall of Baghdad. The station was launched in March 2004 and quickly gained a following with a mix of local news, music videos, reality shows, soap operas, and satire, such as the program *Caricature*, which was a takeoff on *Saturday Night Live*.[15] Audience surveys place viewership of al-Sharqiya at around 82 percent.

Al-Bazzaz also is the publisher of Azzaman, one of the country's most popular newspapers. For Iraqis, access to information was a 180-degree turnaround.

To researcher Ibrahim al-Marashi, that was a bright spot, despite the "media empires" forming around political ethno-sectarian factions. "At the same time, media have also emerged independent of Iraq's political mosaic, and seek to provide a public space for education, entertainment and cathartic release for the daily violence that dominates Iraqi public life," he wrote in his study of the Iraqi press. Al-Marashi cautioned there also could be "negative aspects of pluralism when it emerges as a result of chaos" as in Iraq. For instance, he found a common perception among Iraqi citizens, and some journalists, that different factions were using media as "tools of war."[16]

Al-Marashi reported that "While observers … argue whether a 'civil war' has emerged in Iraq, a 'civil war of words' has at least emerged in the Iraqi media according to some Iraqi journalists I interviewed." He laid out four phases necessary for media to help foment conflict: strong ideology, control over mass media, psychological preparation to hate, and a call to violence. "I would argue that Iraq's ethno-sectarian media has entered phase three," he wrote.[17] Al-Marashi noted in his report that the four factors were adopted from an International Media Support Report explaining the emergence of a conflict media in Rwanda.[18]

Echoes of Saddam Hussein

While the Iraqi government boasted of freedom of the press and the variety of media outlets, the freedom of journalists to cover certain stories or have access to information remained severely restricted. Warning bells also were sounding over changes in Iraq's legal and regulatory framework.

Iraq's new constitution, ratified in October 2005, provided a framework for the protection of basic human rights and free expression. However, criminal laws that were holdovers from Hussein's era remained on the books along with some put in place by the CPA, such as Order 14, which has been used to shut down media.

A draft "Journalists Protection Law" has drawn fire from free expression advocates. Although the government claimed the draft legislation would guarantee journalists' rights and improve security, the document contained provisions that would seriously impact media freedom.

London's Article 19, a free expression advocacy group, issued a report in August 2009 outlining its concerns, including how the draft law defined media professionals under the section "regulation of the profession of journalism." The draft legislation states: "A journalist is one who works for press (outlets) that may be read, heard, or viewed, and who is affiliated with the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate."

That, said the Article 19 report, "effectively establishes a form of licensing" and places an enormous amount of political power in the hands of the journalism syndicate. Article 19 recommended that part of the law be deleted. [19]

In an August 10, 2009, article, the Vienna-based International Press Institute (IPI) pointed out that one provision of the draft law provided that protection of sources should be guaranteed unless "the law requires the source to be revealed," effectively removing protection for sources. The draft law also stipulated that the right to publish can be suspended if a publication makes "provocative or aggressive statements," a subjective and vaguely worded phrase, according to IPI. At the same time they were introducing legislation to curb press freedom, Iraqi authorities were dangling a carrot to the country's journalists in a practice that was a throwback to Hussein's time.

On January 28, 2009, the *New York Times* reported that Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met with the Iraqi Journalists a month before provincial elections and pledged land for a nominal price or perhaps even free with an admonition to "focus on stories of progress and reconstruction."

The syndicate's president, Moaid al-Lami, whose organization represents 10,000 employees of state, party, and independently owned media, told the *Times* that journalists were entitled to the land for all the hardships they faced. Ziad al-Ajili, who manages Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, a Baghdad-based advocacy group, retorted he would rather "live in a tent … As soon as you do it, it will be the end of Iraq's independent journalism."[20]

 On December 28, 2010, the Iraqi news agency Aswat al-Iraq reported that al-Lami announced that patches of land would be distributed starting the following Sunday. [21] A photo in *Awene*, a Sulaymaniyah-based independent newspaper, showed journalists signing up for land back in March. [22]

Mariwan Hama-Saeed, a free press advocate in Kurdistan, said that in March 189 plots of land were given away to journalists in that region. Around 1,000 applicants signed up, so it had to be done by lottery. "I think it would be an interesting study to see if the positions of those journalists who got land have changed toward government officials," said Hama-Saeed, who directs the Metro Media Center to Defend Journalists.[23]

Iraqis are a prime audience for a diverse media market. The country has a literacy rate of slightly over 74 percent. The highly partisan nature of media outlets complicates the situation. If Iraqis want a broad overview of what is going on in their country, they need to read four or five publications a day and watch news on several TV channels to make up for the lack of balanced reporting.

The BBC's 2009 Media Environment Guide to Iraq showed that media owned by or affiliated with political ethno-sectarian factions dominated Iraq's print and broadcast scene. The BBC counted 200 print titles, 60 radio stations and 30 TV channels in Arabic, Syriac, Turkmen, and two Kurdish dialects. The guide provided a list of media and affiliations. The BBC survey showed that most Iraqis get their news from television, with radio audience in decline.[24]

With the highly politicized media, "Iraq's citizens are caught in the middle," says Bassam Sebti, an Iraqi journalist who has worked for the International Center for Journalists in Washington, D.C. "The media have become a dividing factor, promoting their own agendas rather than what is good for Iraq. Iraqis try to make sense of the situation, but they can't. In general, the audience is suffering. They are interested in what's going on, but they feel like, 'I can't trust you,' when they watch TV news or read a newspaper," said Sebti, who regularly monitors Iraq's news media. [25]

So what are Iraqis reading, watching, and listening to?

If Iraqis want a broad overview of what is going on in their country, they need to read four or five publications a day and watch news on several TV channels to make up for the lack of balanced reporting.

A survey released in April 2010 by the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) sheds light on media usage and trust in Iraq. The research, conducted by D3 Systems of McLean, Virginia, had three target groups: media outlets that could use the information to improve responsiveness to Iraqi audiences and inform sales and marketing strategies; advertisers who could use the research to inform their media purchasing strategies; and media development professionals working in Iraq.[26]

Among Iraqis surveyed, daily usage of media sources for news and information about current events were summarized as follows:

> Iraq-based TV (used by 100 percent)
> Iraqi Satellite TV (72 percent)
> International Satellite TV (Arabic language) (46 percent)
> Aerial TV (32 percent)
> Iraqi-based Radio (24 percent)
> Foreign-based Radio (17 percent)
> Foreign Satellite TV (Other language) (17 percent)
> Subscription Cable TV (7 percent)

Iraqi Newspaper (3 percent)
Internet (3 percent)
Blogs (1 percent)
Mobile Phone (1 percent)

The study found that a strong majority–72 percent–of respondents do not use the Internet. While the Internet tends to be an elite, urban medium, virtually all respondents have a television in their household; 79 percent own one or two. On an average day 62 percent of respondents watch more than five TV channels. The survey confirmed that trust of media remained low. The highest rated TV network in Iraq, al-Sharqiya, was trusted by only 33 percent of Iraqis.

Newspapers didn't fare any better. Thirty-seven percent of those who use newspapers as a news source never find it reliable, while another 37 percent believe it is reliable "only sometimes." The distrust of media does not reflect Iraqis interest in news. Seventy-five percent of Iraqis believe it is important to stay informed about news and current events in their country.

According to survey findings, top stations watched by Iraqi viewers include:

Al-Sharqiya (82 percent)
Al-Arabiya (74 percent)
Al-Sumaria (72 percent)
Al-Hurra (71 percent)

Top five newspapers:

Al-Sabah al-Jadeed (49 percent)
Azzaman (42 percent)
Lvin Magazine (35 percent)
Hawlati (34 percent)
Al-Sabah (33 percent)

How Free Is Iraq's Media?

Freedom House's reports and the IREX Media Sustainability Index are two main evaluators of press freedom around the globe.

In Freedom House's annual press freedom index, countries are rated in three areas – economic, legal, and political environment for the media. Scores are combined to indicate the level of press freedom: 0 to 30 free; 31 to 61 partly free; and 61 to 100 not free. [27]

In 2009, Iraq scored 65, which placed it in the "not free" category; the score was two points higher than the previous year. Iraq ranked 144th out of 196 countries in the table of global press freedom rankings. Among Freedom House's findings:

- "Old laws that restrict the press remain on the books, including articles in the 1969 penal code that criminalize libel, defamation, the disclosure of state secrets, and the spreading of 'false news.' These provisions set harsh penalties for press-related offenses, including fines and up to seven years in prison for anyone who insults the parliament, the government, or public authorities."

- "Orders left over from the from the U.S.-led Coalition Provisional Authority prohibit demonstrating support for the Baath Party; inciting violence; rioting, or civil disorder; and demonstrating support for altering Iraq's borders through violence. Such legal constraints contribute to widespread self-censorship."

- "In several instances during 2009, high-ranking officials used lawsuits or threats of lawsuits to intimidate journalists. In April, a lawsuit was filed against al-Diyar television for broadcasting interviews with employees of the Ministry of Transportation who claimed they had been unjustly fired … In May, the trade minister filed three defamation suits against the daily newspaper *al-Mashriq* after it published articles alleging corruption in the ministry."

Hundreds of print publications and dozens of private television and radio channels operate all over the country, but most are associated with a political party, ethnic group, labor syndicate, or social organization.

- "Hundreds of print publications and dozens of private television and radio channels operate all over the country, but most are associated with a political party, ethnic group, labor syndicate, or social organization. In addition, most print outlets suffer from precarious finances, meaning their circulation remains extremely small and they do not publish regularly."

- "Only slightly more than 1 percent of Iraqis had access to the Internet in 2009, though online access has been relatively free in recent years, unlike in many other countries in the region. However, in August 2009, authorities announced plans to increase censorship of websites and online content, and to require Internet cafes to register or face closure."

- "In August, hundreds of Iraqi journalists, academics, and human rights activists protested against draft legislation that would tighten restrictions on print and online media, including censorship of publications, blocks on websites that are deemed offensive, and a rule prohibiting journalists from 'compromising the security and stability of the country.'"

Freedom House reported that more than "40 percent of Iraqis had access to foreign satellite television in 2009. Media infrastructure has improved with the spread of digital communication technologies and new printing presses in Baghdad and Basra. However, many journalists remain

poorly trained, resulting in a lack of balanced journalism and greater reliance on transnational satellite television channels, such as al-Jazeera or al-Arabiya, for comprehensive and accurate news."

IREX's MSI analyzes five indicators: free speech, professional journalism, plurality of news sources, business management, and supporting institutions. Based on their scores, countries fall in one of four categories:

- Unsustainable, Anti-free press (0-1): Country does not meet or minimally meets objectives.

- Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2): Country minimally meets objectives with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system.

- Near sustainability (2-3): Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media.

- Sustainable (3-4): Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives.

The MSI panel agreed that the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraqi cities would provide greater opportunities for the authorities to increase restrictions on journalists.

With an overall score of 1.61 Iraq ranked in the unsustainable mixed system, scoring a high of 1.92 in plurality of news sources and low of 1.25 in business management. Scores illustrated significant progress from the 2006–07 when free speech, plurality of news sources, and business management were rated as "unsustainable, anti-free press."[28]

Among findings from IREX's MSI:

- Indicators of freedom of speech have declined in the face of suppression, prohibition, beatings, arrests, and prosecutions by state authorities in general and various ministries in particular. In a message to Prime Minister al-Maliki, the Committee to Protect Journalist and Journalistic Freedoms Observatory said that many journalists have faced harassment and in some cases assault by Iraqi security forces.High-ranking government officials have used lawsuits as a political tool to obstruct and silence the media.

- "The MSI panel agreed that the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraqi cities would provide greater opportunities for the authorities to increase restrictions on journalists and prevent them from exercising a real supervisory role over the government's performance."

- "Article 38 of the Iraqi constitution, adopted in 2005, provides for freedom of the press. But other rules and regulations dealing with media amount to a confusing mix of recent legislation, orders issued by the US-led civil authority that held power after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and laws that date back to the rule of Saddam Hussein–and before."

- The government "continues to operate under the emergency law ratified by the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority in 2004, which allows the minister to close down any media outlet that, according to the government, 'might provoke violence.'"

- "Iraqi media outlets cannot be relied on to be actually independent, because even if the means of production were not state-owned, they would nevertheless be in the possession of a political party or an organization, which would inevitably give rise to questions about neutrality… Ownership of media outlets in Iraq is not transparent, nor is management of those outlets, which always keep quiet about themselves and about the bodies funding them."

Both reports pointed out that security conditions and government restrictions continue to pose significant challenges to viable press freedom.

America's Flawed Approach

While media operations in Iraq's private sector were mushrooming, the U.S. Department of Defense worked to build a national press system. Much has been written about the "chronology of embarrassments" in Iraq, as Peter Cary, a former Pentagon correspondent for *U.S. News and World Report,* labeled it in his 2010 CIMA report on the Pentagon's activities in media development. [29]

Based on the belief that freedom of expression is fundamental to all other freedoms, the CPA made rebuilding Iraq's media a priority with the goal of establishing new media outlets and a new legal and regulatory framework. What the CPA put in place back then has had a dramatic impact on the Iraqi press today.

Months before the invasion, Department of Defense (DoD) planners presented an in-house briefing on how to create a post-Hussein independent media network and control information. They "recommended forming a 'Rapid Reaction Media Team' to serve as a bridge between Iraq's formerly state-controlled news outlets" and free media operations.

Documents from that briefing, obtained by the National Security Archive, a non-governmental research institute at George Washington University, show a serious disconnect. An article on its website noted that DoD "planners envisioned a post-invasion Iraq where the U.S., in cooperation with a friendly Baghdad government, could monopolize information dissemination. They did not account for the independent media outlets, the Internet, and all the other alternative sources of information that are available in the modern world." [30]

"The United States spent $200 million in two years on media development in Iraq–six times more than it has ever spent in any other nation."

— *David Rohde,*
New York Times *reporter*

Almost from the beginning, the Department of Defense's plans took a turn for the worse. *New York Times* reporter David Rohde examined media development in Iraq from 2003–2005 while a fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, at Harvard University. He concluded the American approach was "rife with problems" and missed opportunities.

Rohde reported that "the United States spent $200 million in two years on media development in Iraq–six times more than it has ever spent in any other nation." The project was "the largest attempt ever by the United States, or any country, to help create independent media in another nation. Run by the Pentagon, it was a near total failure in its first year, with Iraqi journalists, American trainers and U.S. government officials assailing it as wasteful, amateurish and counterproductive," according to Rohde.[31]

The Pentagon got off on shaky footing by choosing the wrong service provider.

Days before the invasion, the DoD awarded a $15 million no-bid contract to U.S. defense contractor Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to create the independent Iraqi Media Network (IMN), patterned after the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the American Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). SAIC had no experience in media development and relegated the duties to media consultants. The IMN created al-Iraqiya television network, two radio stations, and the newspaper *al-Sabah*.

On October 29, 2003, the *Washington Post* reported that a DoD office that "specializes in psychological warfare operation, or psyops," ran SAIC operations and IMN was jokingly referred to as "psyops on steroids" by some Pentagon staff.[32] In the meantime, the American government was portraying IMN as a public broadcast system that transcended political and sectarian divides.

According to Rohde, "a subsequent audit by the Defense Department inspector general's office found that Pentagon officials awarded the contract without following Pentagon rules … It also questioned the decision to declare SAIC," a McLean, Virginia, company with close ties to Washington power brokers, "the only acceptable contractor and issue it seven no-bid contracts," including the one for media. [33]

In his report for CIMA, Cary noted that "by the end of 2003, SAIC had spent $82.3 million to establish what some characterized as being not much different from what had existed under Saddam Hussein–a state-controlled media network."

SAIC's contract expired in 2004. This time, the DoD put the contract out to bid and awarded $96 million to Florida-based Harris Corporation for one year to manage IMN and provide physical infrastructure needed for expanding the network. In June 2004, the CPA was disbanded, and the interim Iraqi government took over the network.

IMN fell under the tight control of the Iraqi government and become a propaganda tool for Iraq's Shiite politicians. Gary C. Gambill, editor of the *Mideast Monitor*, an online publication about political and strategic developments in the Middle East, described the state-run IMN as a "quasi-governmental media conglomerate–centered around al-Iraqiya TV and *al-Sabah* newspaper–with a discernible sectarian bias." The situation worsened when Shiite parties took control after the 2005 elections.[34]

Aidan White, director of the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists, said in an interview that when IMN was formed he hailed the network as "perhaps the international community's single greatest contribution" to reconstructing Iraq's media system. Today he sees it differently.

"What I would have regarded as a model for the creation of an independent public service broadcast system for the Arab world is in danger of being lost. Political hands on the controls of

the media are evidently everywhere in Iraq," White said. He added that IMN's potential to bolster free expression is "seriously threatened … there is no guarantee it will survive."[35]

Orayb Aref Najjar, a journalism professor at Northern Illinois University, analyzed U.S. attempts to rebuild Iraq's media from 2003 through 2008. Her study concluded "that post-invasion media development was so poorly structured and implemented that it was doomed from the start."[36]

From her research, Najjar identified factors that contributed to the weakening of the U.S. media project in Iraq. Among them:

- Pre-planning for Iraqi media reform from Washington rather than the Arab world.

- Arrogance that led to the exclusion of well-known and seasoned Iraqi and Arab media professionals from much of the decision-making process.

- Lack of knowledge regarding Iraqi and Arab media environment, leading to an underestimation of existing Arab media capacity, legitimacy, and appeal.

- Failure to differentiate between free media with content designed wholly by Iraqis, and media designed to place U.S. actions in Iraq in favorable light.

- Positioning of the needs of the occupation over the needs of Iraqis.

Najjar concluded the Pentagon's involvement in Iraqi media development can be "fairly described as a squandered opportunity for all parties involved–especially the Iraqis." What does she feel needed to be done to stabilize Iraq's media?

"What will encourage a free press is a stable Iraq, with no foreign forces that act as a magnet for jihadists looking for a cause. The Iraq most likely to develop a free press is one with a functioning government, and an effective and non-sectarian police force. We are not there yet," she said in October 2010.[37]

Iraqi Government Repression

Some of the orders issued by CPA head L. Paul Bremer during the occupation have been used against Iraq's journalists by their government.

One of the most problematic was Order 14, which allowed the CPA to shutter media outlets accused of incitement to violence, civil disorder, rioting, or actions against coalition forces. Using Order 14, Bremer quickly moved to close down *al-Hawza*, a newspaper controlled by Moqtada al-Sadr, the outspoken anti-American religious leader. Order 14 remains on the books, and Iraqi authorities continue to use it. [38]

In a recent example, on November 1, 2010, the Iraqi government shut down the studio of the independent satellite channel al-Baghdadiya, which broadcasts out of Cairo, ostensibly for its reporting during the October 31 assault on our Lady of Salvation Church during which militants took hostages and killed dozens inside.

The *New York Times* reported that "security forces arrested two of the station's employees," accusing them of "working with terrorists, and during a broadcast the next evening … shut off power to the Baghdad studio… 'They want to stop us because Baghdadiya is embarrassing them,'" Talib al-Sadoon, chief of the newsroom, told the *Times.* [39]

The *Times* story explained that during the church attack, perpetrators called the station, identifying themselves as members of the Islamic State of Iraq, a terrorist group affiliated with al-Qaeda, and demanded "the release of all Qaeda members detained in Arab countries. The station announced the demands on air… 'Baghdadiya breached professional standards and regulations adopted by the Communications and Media Commission,' said Juma Hilfi, media adviser to the licensing commission."

On paper, the regulatory agency sounded good. It required broadcasters to provide equitable access to political parties and to show balance in news programming. In reality, at times, it works in reverse.

There could be other reasons for the closure. A few days earlier, the *Washington Post*'s Leila Fadel wrote about an al-Baghdadiya TV program that allowed Iraqis to voice their anger on the air. The show's host, Minas Suheil, told her: "We don't limit the people. They can say whatever they want against the government, the prime minister and the corruption." Suheil has survived numerous beatings by security forces and thousands of threats. Several of his colleagues have been killed. He sleeps at the station for security reasons. [40]

Other CPA orders continue to be used against journalists by the Iraqi government.

Order 65 established the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission on March 20, 2004, stipulating that the commission should not advocate the positions or interests of any particular political and religious group. Rather it was to ensure that Iraqi citizens were aware of differing views in order to create an informed public discourse. [41]

On paper, the regulatory agency sounded good. It required broadcasters to provide equitable access to political parties and to show balance in news programming. In reality, at times, it works in reverse.

The CMC played an obstructionist role in the run up to the March 7, 2010, elections, imposing new restrictions on media outlets to counter what it called incitement to sectarianism by broadcasters, according to news reports. The new rules required all media members to register

with the CMC and pledge not to incite violence or sectarianism. There are plans to replace the CMC with an Iraqi-crafted law, but so far there are no plans to dismantle Order 65.

When Iraq's newly elected government began a media crackdown in 2006 under the pretext of national security, officials were in an ideal situation to muzzle the press, according to Joel Simon, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.

 "They have an absolute smorgasbord of laws they can use–Saddam Hussein era laws when they're useful, the laws that were put in place by the CPA, and their own newer laws. Sometimes they will pass a reasonably progressive law and tout that. Then when they actually need to take action, they'll use more repressive laws on the books. That's the reality. No one has any incentive to change it," Simon said. The Iraqi media landscape is "pluralistic, but it is not necessarily free." [42]

Voices of Iraqi Journalists

For Iraqi journalists, survival strategies are as much a part of the news business as assignments and deadlines. They are not being paranoid; they have every reason to worry.

For six consecutive years from 2003 to 2008, Iraq ranked as the deadliest country in the world for the press. Journalists were beaten, kidnapped, tortured, and killed by various militias, criminals, and terrorist groups. At times, security forces and the military attacked them. Although foreign journalists also lost their lives, the Iraqi press corps was hardest hit.

Of the 145 media professionals killed from 2003 through 2010, 117 were locals, according to a tally by the Committee to Protect Journalists. The state-run Iraqi Media Network, which includes al-Iraqiya TV and *al-Sabah* newspaper, lost 14, the most of any news organization in what has become the deadliest conflict for the media in recent history. Of the total number of deaths, 93 were murders.

The conviction rate for the murders stands at an unimaginable zero–not a single perpetrator has been convicted. [43]

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Iraq also has been the world's biggest market for hostages, according to an August 2010 report by the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF in its French initials). More than 90 media professionals were abducted from 2003 to 2010, and at least 42 were later killed. According to RSF, 14 still are missing. [44]

The deaths dropped from a record high of 32 in both 2006 and 2007 to 11 in 2008. Despite the sharp decline, the 2008 toll "remained among the highest annual tolls in CPJ history." All of those killed in the last three years were Iraqis. In 2009, the Philippines replaced Iraq as the deadliest spot for media.

The decline in media deaths is consistent with an overall improvement in security conditions. In 2009, four journalists were killed, the lowest number since the U.S.- led invasion, according to CPJ and RSF.

Iraq's journalism community could be facing more hard times. In 2010, RSF reported the number of journalists' deaths rose to seven. Five of those occurred from September to December, a period of a noticeable uptick in sectarian violence, indicating a connection.

The increase in journalists' deaths, although slight, has drawn the attention of media monitors. "You have to assume journalists once again will be in greater danger precisely because they are

perceived as partisan and allied with the different political and sectarian interests in Iraq. If those special interests once again come into open conflict, journalists will be targeted," CPJ director Simon said. [45]

Overall, the Iraqi journalists interviewed for this report showed little confidence that the situation would improve in Iraq's current political setting. Freelance reporter Muhammad al-Qaisi offered a particularly grim comparison between life in pre-war Iraq and today.[46]

In Saddam Hussein's era, "we didn't publish many stories out of fear that we would be arrested, interrogated, and either forbidden to continue working as a journalist, imprisoned, or sentenced to death," al-Qaisi wrote. As bad as it was back then, the journalists knew where they stood. Now they are vulnerable from all sides.

What existed before "seems favorable compared to today's situation, with the country running amok in violent chaos. Today we don't publish freely and don't investigate any 'hot' story out of fear of accusations of terrorism or espionage, imprisonment, or assassination, all of which are common in Iraq," al-Qaisi wrote in November 2010.

Overall, the Iraqi journalists interviewed for this report showed little confidence that the situation would improve in Iraq's current political setting.

Reports from CPJ and other media observers support al-Qaisi's contention that certain types of reporting are likely to land journalists in deep trouble. Records show that covering corruption in Iraq can be a death sentence.

Two cases in point: Reporter Soran Mama Hama, 23, was gunned down July 21, 2008, weeks after he published an article in the independent Kurdish-language magazine *Lvin* (Move) about the "complicity of police and security officers" in a prostitution ring in Kirkuk. Often Hama wrote about local corruption and had received threats ordering him to stop his investigative reporting.[47]

Imad al-Ibadi, director of al-Diyar TV, survived shots to the head, neck, and chest in November 2009 after reporting about financial corruption in the president's office and making charges that Iraqi security forces were acting "illegally and outside the Iraqi constitution." Al-Ibadi had gained a reputation for "forthright" journalism.[48]

Attacks can come from anywhere, and that's what keeps Muhammad al-Qaisi poking at his front door with a broom handle each morning.

In a November e-mail, al-Qaisi described the hoops he jumps through to avoid a run-in with the wrong side. Generally his workday begins at 8 a.m. unless insurgents get started earlier with attacks or Iraqi security forces decide to conduct operations during curfew hours. He owns a helmet and bulletproof vest but hasn't worn them in years. They only attract attention and don't

provide much protection, said the reporter, who was wounded while covering the bloody battles in Fallujah early in the war.

As part of on-the-job survival while on assignment, al-Qaisi uses four different names and identity cards as he moves through checkpoints in neighborhoods and towns of various sectarian and political persuasions. Depending on the circumstances, he changes his appearance and takes refuge in places where he knows he will be safe in Baghdad, Mosul, Fallujah, and the town of Abu Ghraib.

"One is my real identity, and a friend helped me to forge the other three," al-Qaisi explained. "The first is of a Sunni man who works for an extremist Sunni newspaper. The second is of a Shiia man who works for a newspaper with powerful connections with the Iraqi government. The third is of a freelance journalist, which I use when I am going to mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhoods. The fourth–my real identify–I use only with U.S. military, the Iraqi parliament, and in the Green Zone.

"Yes, I lie when working as a journalist. I am forced to lie to al-Qaeda when I tell them I work for al-Jazeera in order to avoid accusations of espionage and assassination. I am forced to lie to the Shiite militias when I tell them that I work for the Lebanese television station al-Manur, which is run by Hezbollah and is supportive of their cause, in order that I may return to my house at night safely.

"I often let my beard and mustache grow out for several days in order to change my facial features. I then find myself shaving and wearing jeans, only to don the traditional Iraqi robe on a different assignment a few days later."

Al-Qaisi, the father of three, said his wife has recurring visions that he will be killed on the job and his murderers will go "scot-free," which would be highly likely in light of Iraq's dismal record on bringing the killers of journalists to justice.

Danger doesn't always come from outside. Journalist Muhammad Fowzi faced bullying in his Baghdad neighborhood after rumors spread that he was working for Americans, which was not true at the time. He was jolted awake in the middle of the night by a ringing cellphone and greeted by a voice saying, "We know who you work for. We want to talk to you. Stay away from the neighborhood."

"To me that was like a death threat," said Fowzi, 30, who was working for Eye Media Agency, a private Iraqi company founded in October 2004. The reporter, who lived in a Shiite section of Baghdad, moved into his highly secure office building for the rest of 2007. He shared a small room with a colleague who'd had a similar experience. Thinking ahead is vital to staying alive, the journalist said.[49]

 "At checkpoints, [security forces] ask, 'Where are you from?;' 'Where do you work?;' 'What are you doing?' If you give the wrong answer, they can beat you or kill you just like that. You have

to know who you're dealing with and have a plan before you go," Fowzi said. "I tell them we are just going to do positive stories and not to worry about anything."

On a scale of 1 to 10, Fowzi placed the danger for journalists at the highest level during the brutal sectarian fighting in 2006-2007. "The violence was random. There was no control," he said. Today he says it is down to four and rising due to renewed hostilities. "Sometimes when we are working on a story, we stop and think, 'This thing I am reporting could end my life.' We have learned to live with this," the reporter said.

There is plenty evidence to support Fowzi's contention that Iraq's security personnel regularly harass media workers. In January 2010, RSF reported that violence and threats from security forces, mostly the police and army, had become a major problem for journalists. [50]

The report listed incidents brought to RSF's attention in January alone. Among them:

- "Police in the province of Maysan … Issued a decree on 7 January banning journalists from…reporting in public places–including photographing public buildings or organizing meetings–without prior permission from provincial authorities." The journalists "now need a permit to gain access to information."

- "After a bomb went off in a market in Najaf … on 14 January, many journalists were prevented–on the provincial governor's orders–from covering the scene of the explosion or going to the hospitals where the victims were taken." Police beat cameramen from three TV stations.

- Army personnel prevented an al-Baghdadiya TV crew from continuing to film in the city of Mahmoudiyah," 15 miles south of Baghdad, on January 16. Soldiers demanded the crew produce permits from city authorities. The crew had been videotaping the daily program *Good Morning Iraq* which the station "broadcasts live from the streets of different cities every" day. [51]

Rough treatment by security forces is "part of the routine. We are used to it," said Fowzi, who grew up with conflict on his doorstep, including the Iraq-Iran war, which lasted from 1980–1988 and resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties.

In the majority of cases, the murder of journalists in Iraq was premeditated. Of the 146 killed, 93 were targeted, according to CPJ.

What neophyte journalist Mazin al-Baghdadi, 18, might have done to bring assassins to his doorstep on November 21, 2010, remains a mystery. According to news accounts, on a Sunday around 6 p.m., three men in civilian clothes approached al-Baghdadi's home in the northern city of Mosul and spoke with his father. They told him they were military intelligence and urgently needed to see his son. When the reporter for al-Mosuliya TV came to meet them, the gunmen opened fire in front of his family.

Baghdadi's work seemed innocuous enough. He hosted two talk shows, *Sabah al-Kheir* (Good Morning) and *Mosul fi-I Usbu* (A Week in Mosul) and reported news for al-Mosuliya, a private channel. He had worked at the station seven months when he was killed. Authorities have disclosed no motive for the killing, which occurred two months after another al-Mosuliya journalist was gunned down.[52] In September 2010, assailants firing from a speeding car shot and killed Safa al-Din Abdel Hamid, a father of six, as he left for work in the morning. Hamid's program on al-Mosuliya, *Our Mosques*, detailed the history of religious sites in the area. No one claimed responsibility.[53]

Riad al-Saray, an anchor and reporter for state-run al-Iraqiya TV, was shot and killed the day before Hamid's murder in September. Gunmen struck in western Baghdad as he was in en route to Karbala. Saray hosted political and religious programs at al-Iraqiya. Police reported that a silencer was used in the attack.

In October, Tahrir Kadhim Jawad, a freelance cameraman, was killed when a bomb attached to his car exploded as he was driving to Baghdad to deliver footage. Jawad had a reputation for filming sensitive topics and working in conflict zones.

Some who survive assassination attempts are left permanently maimed. Omar al-Jabouri, public relations director for al-Rasheed TV, was driving to work in April when a magnetic bomb placed under the driver's seat exploded. Al-Jabouri later described the scene to the BBC: "I found myself lying in the street. I couldn't work out what had happened. But when I saw one of my legs in the car and another lying in the road, I understood. I put my hand on whatever was left of my leg. I took off my belt and wrapped it around my leg," he recalled. Al-Jabouri is back at work in a wheelchair. No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.[54]

International Press Institute press freedom manager Anthony Mills issued a statement the day after al-Baghdadi's assassination: "It is truly disappointing to see the numbers of journalists

The 'Grittiest' Journalist

Some Iraqi journalists defy the odds. In July 2010, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a story[1] about Falah Azzawi, a reporter "decked out in a ketchup-colored shirt and tie," prowling Baghdad's alleyways with his microphone.

The *Times* reported that "Azzawi represents the grittiest of the country's reporters." He spends his time investigating corruption and reminding officials about their shortcomings on the air. He has gained a loyal following for his program, *Among the People*, broadcast on a small independent channel, al-Diyar.

Azzawi, 48, has managed to stay alive. "Last year, gunmen shot and wounded a colleague … who had criticized relatives of government officials" in a story. Azzawi boasted to *Times*' reporters that the people's love will protect him. "If private militias return, he may slow down," he says but "vows never to stop." In Iraq, Alah Azzawi has become a true anomaly.

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1. Ned Parker and Raheem Salman, "Iraqi Reporter Risks It All for the Story," Los Angeles Times, July 15, 2010, http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jul/15/world/la-fg-iraq-press-20100715

murdered in Iraq rise again. We should take no comfort in the fact that the figure remains well below the peak following the U.S.-led invasion. Iraq is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, and the killers continue to operate with impunity." [55]

Falah al-Mashal, editor of *al-Sabah*, put the constant threat to journalists in perspective. In a 2008 interview, he told the BBC: "Journalism all over the world is known as the business of trouble. In Iraq, it is the business of death." Al-Mashal spoke from experience. [56] The year before, *al-Sabah*'s managing editor was shot in the head after being abducted by gunmen from his home in a Baghdad neighborhood. His body was dumped in the city morgue.

Kurdistan: The other Iraq

In a February 2007 segment of *60 Minutes*, CBS News correspondent Bob Simon sang the praises of Iraqi Kurdistan, a semi-autonomous region where there was "nation-building everywhere … more cranes than minarets" with malls and apartment complexes springing up.

"And distinct from much of Iraq, the security forces in Kurdistan are disciplined and loyal. And they're all Kurds. There are no ethnic divisions here, so the violence stays on the other side of the border," Simon reported then. [57]

Of the nearly 900 publications available on newsstands, the overwhelming majority are mouthpieces for political parties.

Four years later, the mountainous area in northeastern Iraq has experienced widespread media repression and violence against journalists. In a December 2010 article for the Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), journalist Mariwan Hama-Saeed described Iraqi Kurdistan's media as "deeply divided between party-owned and independent outlets." Of the nearly 900 publications available on newsstands, the overwhelming majority are mouthpieces for political parties. [58]

The Metro Center to Defend Journalists, which Hama-Saeed directs, documented biased and volatile news coverage by party-controlled media leading up to the March 2010 parliamentary elections, including "smear campaigns and personal attacks against politicians and rival" news operations. They found "50 cases of police, security forces, and party members harassing and beating journalists and preventing them from covering stories. It was a trying time for the media and set the tone for the rest of the year," Hama-Saeed said in December.

May 2010 marked another turning point for the Kurdish media.

Human rights and press freedom advocates took to the streets to protest "the torture and slaying" of Sardasht Osman, 23, who was abducted in the Kurdish capital, Irbil. "His battered body was found … with two bullets through the mouth" on a road near Mosul, 50 miles to the west. [59]

Osman's friends told *New York Times* reporter Sam Dagher they believed "his satirical and irreverent articles" about Massoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, and his family had angered the two parties that long have run Kurdistan.

"Now his death is underscoring the limits of free expression and igniting an angry debate about what issues could cost journalists their lives," wrote Dagher in a story filed from Sulaymaniyah on May 18. He reported that those in power "have actively sought to undercut independent media by starting countless television stations and newspapers and luring journalists with generous salaries." [60]

The standoff between media and government had been brewing before Osman's murder. On February 24, 2010, *Hawlati*, a Sulaymaniyah-based independent newspaper, staged a bold protest. The slogan "You have guns. We have pens" was emblazoned across an otherwise blank front page.

The journalists were protesting a rash of threats, physical violence, and legal harassment in Iraqi Kurdistan in the run-up to the March elections. At the same time, Kurdish media outlets were being hit by lawsuits brought by government and party officials. One stands out as particularly blatant.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by President Barzani, filed a defamation suit under the Hussein-era penal code seeking $1 billion in damages and the closing of the opposition weekly newspaper *Rozhnama*. The damages claim was believed to be the largest in Iraq's history.[61]

"The absurd damage claim reveals that this is not a serious lawsuit but a crude attempt to use the judiciary to silence a newspaper," said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, Middle East and North Africa program coordinator for CPJ, in an August 2010 report "Barzani's KDP Targets Paper That Alleged Oil Smuggling."

This case was particularly sensitive. *Rozhnama* had published a report accusing the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the two ruling parties, of profiting from illegal oil smuggling to Iran. Based on information from several sources, journalist Sirwan Rasheed reported that the parties had made millions from the practice, according to CPJ. Both parties denied the charge.

Other extravagant lawsuits also were pending, including a half a million dinar ($427,000) against the weekly *Awene*, an independent publication published in Sulaymaniyah. *Awene* was being sued over a March 9 article titled, "Opposition Parties Say Irbil Is No Exception as Regards Electoral Fraud." A column in the same edition "questioned whether Massoud Barzani should continue as" president of the Kurdistan Regional Government.[62]

Awene's editor-in-chief, Shwan Mohamed, told IWPR that there were 20 lawsuits pending against his newspaper. "They have affected our work. We are more careful of what we publish,

even through we are certain of the accuracy of the information," he said. RSF warned in a report issued in September 2010 that the wave of defamation suits was eroding press freedom in Kurdistan.

The legal harassment has deepened tension between the two ruling parties and the media, according to Hama-Saeed, who is also vice-chair of the Baghdad-based Journalistic Freedoms Observatory. "[The politicians] are afraid. They are worried they will lose power. Even the most liberal ones believe there should be limits on press freedom. By filing excessive lawsuits, they want to send a chilling message that journalists should back off reporting on issues they don't like or find themselves in trouble. They accuse journalists of being traitors," the journalist said in December.

On January 10, 2011, Hama-Saeed reported that in a surprise move, the Kurdistan Democratic Party decided to withdraw all lawsuits it had filed against the media. Why did the party change its mind?

Hama-Saeed saw three possible reasons: The party was under pressure from insiders who were against the lawsuits, there was a strong local and international outcry, and a new committee had been chosen in an internal election to head the KDP. "But, let's see if the party really is going to drop the lawsuits and most importantly, if the cases will be closed in the courts," the journalist said.

"When it comes to a fight with government officials, I don't think journalists will ever win."

— Mariwan Hama-Saeed,
Press Freedom advocate in Kurdistan

Hama-Saeed was critical of the government on another front: the investigation of Osman's murder. After five months, the Kurdistan Regional Government issued a scant 430-word report claiming "Osman was killed by a member of Ansar al-Islam," a radical Islamist group, "for not carrying out work he had promised to do" for them. There was no evidence to support the accusation. Ansar al-Islam denied any role in the murder. [63]

"Even for us it was a shock for them to claim this young journalist was a terrorist. The president assigned the committee. No one knew the names of the members. Nobody believes the investigation," said Hama-Saeed. "When it comes to a fight with government officials, I don't think journalists will ever win."

Dogged local journalists find a way to shine but often pay a personal price. In 2009, the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory in cooperation with IREX hosted the first Press Courage Awards for Investigative Journalism, with $3,000 top prizes.

One of the medal winners was Imad al-Abadi for articles uncovering financial corruption in the presidency. The stories were published on the website Kitabat. A month later, gunmen with

silenced weapons attacked him. Three bullets grazed his head and one passed through his neck. "I am lucky to be alive," Abadi told National Public Radio in October 2010.

While completing a master's degree in journalism at the University of Colorado, Hama-Saeed teamed up with Hun Shik Kim, a professor at the university, to study the state of press freedom in post-Saddam Iraq. Their research included interviews with 22 Iraqi journalists in February and March 2007.[64]

The journalists were concerned that Iraq's media were hampered "by political or sectarian affiliations and that [the] public trust in the press [was] low." They were troubled by what they described as "invisible censors." One respondent likened the power political parties and religious sects now have over the propaganda and censorship to Hussein's era. "There are issues journalists can't report on, and there are lines we can't cross," the respondent wrote.

Some journalists described "withholding or dropping stories about government officials who support violent, lawless militia groups… for fear of reprisals. One journalist" reported on the militias' "involvement in murders and kidnappings of civilians," but the stories never appeared "in his newspaper because his editor [feared] the consequences."

There was strong agreement on the need for more media training to bring Iraq's journalism up to international standards. "Most of the senior editors and managing editors are old-generation journalists who stick to the outdated writing style and don't meet the standards of new developments in the field," wrote one reporter. That's where NGOs like IREX and IWPR enter the picture.

The Impact of Media Development: Key Players

Two distinct tracks of media development have played out in Iraq. One was initiated by the U.S. Department of Defense after the government of Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003. Civilian media trainers who braved suicide bombs, kidnappings, and assaults to work at the grassroots level with Iraq's budding independent media fueled the other.

The Pentagon's plan to rebuild the country's national media system and provide a multiplicity of voices over the airwaves began almost immediately. Saddam Hussein's despotic Ministry of Information was abolished and the state's antiquated media apparatus confiscated. At the same time, NGOs were creating strategies for media development in the private sector. Only a handful came and stayed for the long haul, but they left an indelible mark.

The London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting was one of the first to put boots on the ground. Veteran journalist Maggy Zanger was hired in August 2003 to direct IWPR's Baghdad program. The media boom was in an early stage when she began visiting newsrooms and asking managers, "Why don't you send us a couple of your people?"

At first, it was slim pickings. "Oh my god! Some of them worked under the Baathist regime and had no real sense of what journalism was. We were starting from super scratch," Zanger recalled. "Early on, we switched over to trying to identify younger people with no background and experience in journalism. We trained them from the bottom up, and they were fantastic." [65]

IWPR trainers operated on the principle that short-term training programs could be effective in post-authoritarian or post-conflict societies to quickly develop a cadre of journalists able to inform the public with accurate, balanced news during a time of transition.

The hands-on approach included workshops, two to three weeks long, emphasizing newsgathering skills and time-honored journalistic values such as truthtelling and fairness. Neophyte reporters worked under the supervision of experienced international journalists. When one of their articles was accepted for publication they were paid $50, and it was syndicated nationally and internationally. In early 2004, a subsidiary office was established in Sulaymaniyah, in Iraqi Kurdistan. A year later, IWPR began radio broadcast training.

Security was a constant worry, dictating where and how programs could be carried out. In 2004, the IWPR board temporarily closed its Baghdad operation because of concern for the safety of its personnel and the journalists. At the time, home invasions, kidnappings, and targeting of foreigners and those associated with them were on the rise.

"We just hated to let the bastards win. This is exactly what they wanted–to chase out anyone who might make a positive difference," Zanger remembered thinking at the time. The team moved to the less dangerous city of Sulaymaniyah, about 130 miles north of Baghdad, until security improved.

Strategies constantly were being tested to keep the student-journalists out of harm's way. Zanger's IWPR reporters dubbed her "auntie" in Arabic, a term they used when they called on cellphones to avoid drawing attention to themselves or to her.

"They didn't want to say an English name in case someone might hear," explained Zanger. "Yes, that is how bad things were. They stopped carrying … satellite phones that we and other news agencies would give them; they would tell me, 'If you call and I don't speak English to you it is because someone might overhear me.'"

Reporters talked to people in the streets then ran around the corner and scribbled down quotes so they wouldn't be seen carrying a notebook. If they thought they were dealing with Sunnis, they would say they worked for the Arabic news network al-Jazeera. With the Shiites, it would be an organization friendly to their cause.

"We had a lot of discussion about the ethics of these practices, but the bottom line is, dead reporters don't tell stories, and we thought the story was really important. Anything that might make it seem like they were consorting with the 'infidel' foreigners they stopped doing," Zanger recalled.

IWPR made press passes in English so reporters could maneuver through U.S. checkpoints and go to the Green Zone for press conferences. They also made them in Arabic so they could get by the Mahdi Army and Sunni roadblocks. Then it became too dangerous to carry either, because, according to Zanger, "any journo was suspect."

Zanger recounted her experiences in a paper in 2005 on lessons learned from the Iraq training. Early sessions, she noted, were less than successful. The first journalists to be trained all had worked under the Baath regime and had few skills in balanced, neutral reporting. The short workshops were not sufficient for them to overcome bad habits and approach their work with a more professional attitude, Zanger said.[66]

Case in point: One newspaper sent three "reporters," who actually were columnists. As it turned out, the small weekly ran mostly columns and editorials but very little news. One of the journalists described a typical workday: He sat at a desk, listened to radio news, and when something caught his attention, he wrote his opinion about it.

"For 'reporters' accustomed to this type of lazy journalism, it is nearly impossible to convince them that they should instead go out daily into the hot, dangerous, traffic-jammed streets to talk to a variety of different sources to gather a dizzying array of information and then write up a concise story in 600 words," Zanger wrote in her 2005 paper.

"We had a lot of discussion about the ethics of these practices, but the bottom line is, dead reporters don't tell stories, and we thought the story was really important."

— Maggy Zanger, Institite for War and Peace Reporting

After those initial sessions, IWPR switched emphasis. Instead of retooling the old guard, trainers sought out fresh faces. Most recruiting was done by word of mouth and, at times, under odd circumstances. Zanger recalled a gas deliveryman who spotted the notice of a new class posted on the gate of the rented house where IWPR operated. He related it to all the young men on his route; many of them signed up and became star trainees.

Fostering development of media advocacy groups was part of IWPR's mission. In 2004, the group partnered with local media professionals to form the Baghdad-based Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, which has become a leading voice of press freedom in Iraq.

Five years later, when conditions for the press worsened in Iraqi Kurdistan, IWPR worked with local media to create the Metro Center to Defend Journalists in Sulaymaniyah. It merged with the observatory in July 2010 to provide Iraq's journalism community with a more unified voice to protest government oppression and promote media law reform.

According to an IWPR report, the observatory "has tracked hundreds of cases of attacks against the press." The group lobbies the Iraqi government to protect reporters and organizes demonstrations calling for greater media rights and more access to information. [67]

Ammar al-Shahbander, the head of IWPR's mission in Iraq, cited some of the organization's latest activities. Chief among them was the Center for Media Law and Safety in Baghdad, a hub for providing legal protection and training for journalists working in hostile environments. The center has offices in Irbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Basra and branch offices in most other provinces. Part of the agenda is to strengthen the media's understanding of their rights under current Iraqi law.

IWPR reported in 2010 that at least 900 journalists have been trained in reporting, editing, and news management over the past few years.

Since 2003, IWPR has received around $28.2 million for media development in Iraq, the majority of it from the U.S. State Department, according to Shahbander. Of the total, only $3.2 million came from other sources such as the UK's Department for International Development, the International Republican Institute, and the Open Society Foundations. From 2007 to 2010, IWPR received $19.4 million from the State Department. A $4 million grant from the State Department covers 2011 and 2012. [68]

As for future funding, "yes, we do have big concerns in this regard. Our own portfolio in Iraq is down from $6 million per year to $2 million. I'm sure we will get more this summer, but it is a big risk. And yes, I do think NGO funding is going to be more difficult in the future, everywhere. But maybe funding for operations in crisis areas like Iraq and Afghanistan will still be available… we will have to wait and see," al-Shahbander said.

By early 2005, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), another media development powerhouse, had begun operations in Iraq.

In March of that year, USAID provided $6 million for media development under a contract with America's Development Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in Alexandria, Virginia. IREX received $1.69 million of that as a subcontractor to handle staffing, consulting, and training journalists and news business managers. That jump-started the organization's long-term commitment in Iraq. As of January 2011, IREX had received around $24.2 million, much of it from the State Department.

For January 2010 to June 2012, IREX received an $8.5 million grant from the State Department for the Media and Technology for Community Development project. Five million of that was earmarked for media development in Iraq.[69]

In 2010, IREX helped develop the Irbil Technical Institute as a training center for media and new media technologies. IREX will continue to work with the institute in supporting training sessions, according to Mark Whitehouse, IREX's vice-president for media. The organization is working with local media advocacy groups to push for press law reform and is conducting market research to help media outlets find markets for their content and generate income.

The journalists' syndicate is overseeing the distribution of land to its members by the al-Maliki government, a throwback to the days when Hussein rewarded loyal media with such perks.

Will the U.S. military drawdown affect what IREX does in the future? "We've seen surges in violence over the last six months. The biggest question is what will happen with the security environment. That could affect what we do," Whitehouse said in November 2010. He estimates his organization has trained 4,500 journalists since it began work in Iraq.[70] Not everything has gone according to plan.

With the assistance of USAID funding, IREX helped create the National Iraqi News Agency (NINA) with plans for the agency to be self-sustaining within three years. NINA ended up in the hands of the Iraqi Journalists Syndicate, which has close ties to the al-Maliki government. "They sold themselves to the journalists' union, so we ended our support as we had planned to," said Whitehouse.

"The verdict's not in, but I could ask why a journalists' union would want to run a news agency. From a practical point of view, I need time to see if, one, they know how to run it, and two, if they are running it professionally," Whitehouse said.

He already has had one indication: The journalists' syndicate is overseeing the distribution of land to its members by the al-Maliki government, a throwback to the days when Hussein rewarded loyal media with such perks.

IREX has provided support for the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory and other media advocacy groups. In January 2008, IREX staffers began working with the Iraqi Journalists Rights Defense

Association to provide pro-bono media law attorneys to Iraqi journalists accused of defamation, libel, and slander. The group has taken 12 cases, resulting in the acquittal of six journalists. The others are pending.

In October 2010, IWPR and IREX teamed up for a pioneering conference on information technology's place in Iraq's budding democracy. The conference highlighted access to information, social media, and new media's role in facilitating dialogue between the government and citizens. The two organizations plan follow-up activities this year on a topic that is just catching on in Iraq.

IREX supported a series of 10 shows over 10 weeks on election issues for each of three satellite channels. The programs addressed such questions as: How do you vote? How do you register to vote? How do you get out the vote? There were discussions of political issues and party platforms. Whitehouse has seen the need for voter education decrease, a sign that the educational programs have worked.

> *"People know there's a lot of self-censorship, but with that said, there is a lot of courageous journalism out there."*
>
> *— Jackie Frank, IREX*

IREX's former country director, Jackie Frank, says she saw progress in media professionalism during her 18-month tenure in Iraq, which ended in May 2010. Beat reporting and investigative reporting had improved along with other basic journalistic skills, Frank said. "The problem is journalists really do get killed and beaten up, and nobody does anything. People know there's a lot of self-censorship, but with that said, there is a lot of courageous journalism out there." [71]

IREX's new country director, Jacky Sutton, provided a list of future objectives, including training in new media, legislative drafting and advocacy, and support for the legal defense of journalists. IREX, with offices in Irbil, Najaf, Basra, and Baghdad, has developed the first media training program for 50 Iraqi journalism students, providing media mentors and placing them in newsrooms to work during the summer, a new concept for Iraqi students.

IREX has secured grants through 2012 and will stay beyond that, "if the security situation is adequate to protect our staff–Iraqis and expatriates–and if there's funding. The Iraqi media is going to need years of reform to move forward. So, yes, we are going to stay and help as long as we're welcome," Whitehouse said.

Monir Zaarour, Middle East and Arab World coordinator for the International Federation of Journalists, ranked some of the main players in media development in Iraq. IREX, he says, is "the biggest by far." IWPR also was high on his list, which included the BBC World Service Trust and the Reuters Foundation.[72]

In summer 2005, BBC World Service Trust established an independent radio station, al-Mirbad, in the southern city of Basra, which has been its "biggest media project [in Iraq] to date …

al-Mirbad broadcasts live and pre-recorded [programming] 12 hours a day, covering the three southern provinces of Basra, Missan, and Dhi Qar … Local income is [earned] from advertising and the provision of production services," according to the BBC World Trust. The UK's Department for International Development has invested $18 million in the al-Mirbad project since 2004. [73]

"The al-Mirbad Organization for Media Development has been created as a local association, in which all staff will eventually become voting members" to direct the future of the station.[74]

The Reuters Foundation helped create an independent national news agency, Aswat al-Iraq (Voices of Iraq), in 2004, funded through a contribution from the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation and the European Commission. The agency, with correspondents throughout the country and from three Iraqi newspapers, produces stories in Arabic, English, and Kurdish and has an archive searchable on its website: www.aswataliraq.info.

Aswat was hard hit by the wave of violence in 2007. Three of the agency's journalists were killed that year, including award-winning reporter Sahar Hussein al-Haydari. She was slain in a Mosul shopping mall by unidentified gunmen. Besides working for the news agency, Haydari was an IWPR trainee and correspondent. [75]

In January 2009, Aswat achieved the status of implementing partner of the United Nations Development Programme and was registered as an Iraqi NGO. By the end of that year, the Aswat Foundation had won contracts worth $1 million for media development activities from the U.S. Institute of Peace, UNESCO, and the European Union. In early 2010, the company had a roster of 40 national and international subscribers for the news services, generating $80,000 in income.

Press Now, based in Amsterdam, began media training in Iraq in 2005. Three years later, it helped set up the Independent Media Center in Kurdistan under the direction of Judit Neurink, a correspondent in Iraq for the Netherlands' *Trouw* newspaper. Located in Sulaymaniyah, the center was registered as a Kurdish organization in May 2009. It has an annual operating budget of around $1.3 million.

The center has conducted more than 100 projects, training journalists on the job or in groups on special subjects such as photography, Internet courses for newspapers, and media training for politicians and the police on how to work with the media.

Press Now and the Foundation of Democracy and Media in Amsterdam provide basic organizational costs. Funders for projects include the Dutch embassy in Baghdad, the British consulate in Irbil, the Open Society Foundations, the Belgian embassy in Jordan, and the U.S. Regional Reconstruction Team in Irbil.[76]

Internews has not had a major project in Iraq so far, but the California-headquartered organization is planning to launch a "Covering Energy" program in 2011 with a $2.4 million grant from the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. The 20-month program will

bring a core of carefully chosen reporters to international level expertise, according to Jamal Dajani, Internews vice-president for the Middle East and North Africa.

They will be mentored, face-to-face and online, by regional and global experts, given access and exposure on a series of field trips, provided with a platform through local and regional syndication, and coached on how to market their newfound skills to new audiences. The goal of the program: to enhance government accountability in the critically important oil industry by improving oil reporting as a specialization in Iraqi media and building awareness of this specialization across Iraq more broadly. [77]

Looking to the future

Funding for media development in Iraq will be a major challenge in coming years.

The economic crisis in the United States and Europe and the U.S. military drawdown in Iraq have been key factors. "Those are going to be the crucial issues from the donor side, and that is likely to get more serious," IREX's Whitehouse said. "Our funding and others' who are involved has been fairly stable and relatively sufficient. We're doing our work. But over the coming years, as people look where can they cut the budget, Iraq's going to be high on the list."

> *"The [Iraq] government has a major financial say in which media survive."*
>
> — Osama al-Habahbeh, International Media Support

There already are clear indications: United States government funding for media development in the Near East peaked in 2008 and has declined over the past two years, from $42.7 million to an estimated $29 million in 2010, according to a CIMA report on U.S. government funding for media development published in December 2010. The bulk of U.S. government media development funding for the Near East goes to Iraq. [78]

Beyond cuts for training and media development, independent media operations–those not owned or supported by special interests–could have a tough time surviving. Private investors are not rushing to buy up fragile media operations, and the advertising market remains slim. The government has extraordinary powers over where advertising revenue is spent.

In March 2010, Denmark's International Media Support group reported that the March 7, 2010, elections in Iraq "brought several independent media to their knees. In the run up to the general elections … the government ran national electoral advertising campaigns for [favored] candidates in state media" already on the government's payroll. For the few independent media, "it was a death blow," the report said. Without a share in the national advertising campaigns, several newspapers were forced to close.

"The government has a major financial say in which media survive," said Osama al-Habahbeh, who is responsible for International Media Support work with local media in Iraq. [79]

Conclusion

There are no easy solutions to the problems Iraq's journalists face, yet despite the atrocities committed against them, Iraq's press corps refuses to fade away. A cadre of feisty media practitioners remains steadfastly committed to the watchdog role and to press freedom in their conflict-plagued country of 31 million.

The crushing numbers of abductions, beatings, arrests, and murders of journalists since 2003 underlines their courage and tenacity. Since 2008, the number of journalists killed has dramatically declined, a sign that overall security in the country had improved. That sigh of relief may be short lived.

News reports in recent months have chronicled an upsurge in targeted killings, terrorist bombings, and civilian deaths across Iraq. On December 2, 2010, Reporters Without Borders issued an alert "that al-Qaeda was planning a campaign of car bombings against" several groups, including the media. The report was based on information from the Iraqi Interior Ministry. [80]

Baghdad's Journalistic Freedoms Observatory chronicled a rise in attacks on journalists from May 2009 to May 2010. The watchdog group documented 262 violations of press freedom, including four reporters kidnapped and tortured; 83 cases of assaults by military, security forces, and others; and 10 failed assassination attempts. One reporter was kidnapped and murdered.[81]

Iraq receives failing grades on several fronts for press freedom.

A teenager caught stealing a bag of potato chips is more likely to go to jail than someone who murders a journalist.[82] Iraq is the worst country in the world for bringing killers of journalists to justice. Of the 93 murdered from 2003 to 2010, there have been no convictions.

Iraq also is one of the world's most corrupt countries. The Berlin-based Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Iraq 175 out of 178 countries. Iraqi journalists often pay a high personal price for airing the dirty laundry of local and state officials.

Freedom House listed Iraq's media system as "not free" in its latest report. Another indicator, IREX's Media Sustainability Index (MSI), labeled it an "unsustainable mixed system."

"Any optimism regarding the prospects for freedom of media [in Iraq] would be very much an exaggeration," panelists wrote in the MSI report. "The drawdown of U.S. troops from Iraqi cities would provide greater opportunities for authorities to increase restrictions" on the press, the report said.

Still there is a bright spot. A new generation of journalists has taken the lead in championing and defending press freedom. These new journalists hold public protests and lobby government for press law reform. They team up with NGOs to plan strategy, work on professional development,

and publish reports that thrust the government's draconian practices into a global spotlight. The MSI report singled out the training for praise.

"There is now a significant number of young journalists who have been trained by such organizations and have quickly shown themselves capable of working for major Iraqi news organizations, and who have had a clear impact," wrote Ahmed Alaa al-Yassiri, a noted Baghdad journalist and MSI panelist.

Only a handful of NGOs specializing in media development have been committed to Iraq for the long haul, IWPR and IREX chief among them, but their impact at the grassroots level has been noteworthy.

Muhammad al-Qaisi counts himself among the new media generation. Al-Qaisi was trained by IWPR and continues to report for them and for local and Western media outlets. In an e-mail, he described his hopes for the future:

"Through [our] experience with American colleagues, Iraqi journalists have learned the value of a free press and the professional journalistic standards necessary for a watchdog media. These are the brave souls that await the opportunity to establish a national press in Iraq that is truly free and that will garner the public's trust."

If freedom of the press loses out, it will not be for lack of will among Iraq's journalists. It will be due to circumstances beyond their control.

Recommendations

▶ The U. S. Department of State, supported by NGOs working in media development in Iraq, should make every effort to persuade Iraqi authorities to end repression of the country's journalists. Strong local advocacy groups such as the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory and Metro Center to Defend Journalists are appropriate partners to lobby the al-Maliki government for press law reform that fosters a Fourth Estate as an underpinning of democracy, but they need the loud voice of the U.S. government and others behind them. Iraq's government must be held accountable for its deplorable treatment of media.

▶ Due to constant danger to journalists from many different forces, including Iraq's military and police, more attention needs to be paid to safety training and trauma issues as part of the overall media development strategy. Journalists need to understand the ripple effect of violence in society and the impact on their own psyches, including potential for post-traumatic stress disorder. There are resources, such as the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma based at Columbia University, to help educate media about the emotional impact of conflict. The International News Safety Institute, headquartered in London, provides support and training for journalists working in conflict zones.

► Mental health experts have designed and implemented workshops that deal with the various aspects of journalism and trauma, including interviewing victims and survivors, reporting about violence in the homeland, and self-care. Consideration should be given to providing this kind of service to Iraqi journalists in the near future. Online courses in crisis reporting are available through the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and Poynter Institute for Media Studies. These could be translated into Arabic and promoted to journalists in Iraq. ICFJ's International Journalists' Network (IJNet) offers online courses in Arabic for journalists.

► Emphasis should be placed on improving media education in Iraq's universities and other institutions. Journalism schools during the Baath era focused on instruction that promoted the views of the Baath Party. Today, ethno-sectarian reporting is important to the role of media. Journalism students and media practitioners need to be educated on social responsibility and reporting during times of conflict.

An assessment on core curricula in Iraq's main journalism schools should be carried out with the goal of raising awareness of international standards of journalism education. Courses offered at leading journalism schools in the United States and Europe could be used as models.

► Middle East scholar Ibrahim al-Marashi recommends developing a "peace media" strategy in countries where conflict is part of the social order.[83] This could work in Iraq. Media trainers and local journalists might consider the techniques al-Marashi recommends, including workshops to educate media owners and news managers "on how to defuse inflammatory coverage," facilitating meetings between owners of independent and ethno-sectarian media, and radio and television programs that foster dialogue and cooperation between journalists from different groups. The Center for Media, Conflict and Peacebuilding at the U.S. Institute of Peace has been working in Iraq since 2009 as part of an initiative to mitigate media incitement to violence (www. usip.org).[84]

Iraq's journalists might also tap into the following organizations to find educational materials and human resources:

International Center for Journalists: www.icfj.org
Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma: www.dartcenter.org
Committee to Protect Journalists: www.cpj.org
Reporters Without Borders: http://en.rsf.org/
International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies: www.istss.org
International News Safety Institute: www.newssafety.com
International Crisis Group: www.crisisweb.org
International Federation of Journalists: www.ifj.org
International Freedom of Expression Exchange: www.ifex.org
Article 19: www.Article19.org

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        Annenberg School for Communication to conduct a content analysis of the pre-election
        newscasts from five of the most watched Iraqi TV channels. The analysis indicated
        the extent and context of the inflammatory reporting evident during the run-up to the
        elections. When presented with the results of the study as part of a subsequent training
        program, news directors from each of the five channels monitored were able to develop
        ways to improve their own news coverage. Iraqi regulators and civil society watchdogs
        were also able to strengthen how they monitor Iraqi media outlets.

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