

Living in Iraq: The American Media

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The Politics of Reconstructing Iraq
MIT Spring 2005

Michael Massing *The New York Review of Book*

Jack Shafer *Slate Magazine*

Thomas Jefferson

“the basis of our government being the opinion of the people, the very first objective should be to keep that right; and were it left for me to decide whether we should have a government without out newspapers or newspapers without government, I shall not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

Mainstream Media

01 left

Washington Post
New York Times

Air America Radio
NPR

CNN

02 right

FOX News
Talk Radio

Lack of experienced American media in the Middle East

- Unfamiliar with Arab history, roots of Islamic Fundamentalism and a lack of knowledge of Arabic
- Can't speak directly to people, read newspapers, watch Arab TV, etc...
- Even the Washington Post only had a few people fluent in Arabic and only one was stationed in Iraq for the war.

» Massing, Michael, *Now They Tell Us*

Main Entry: blogger

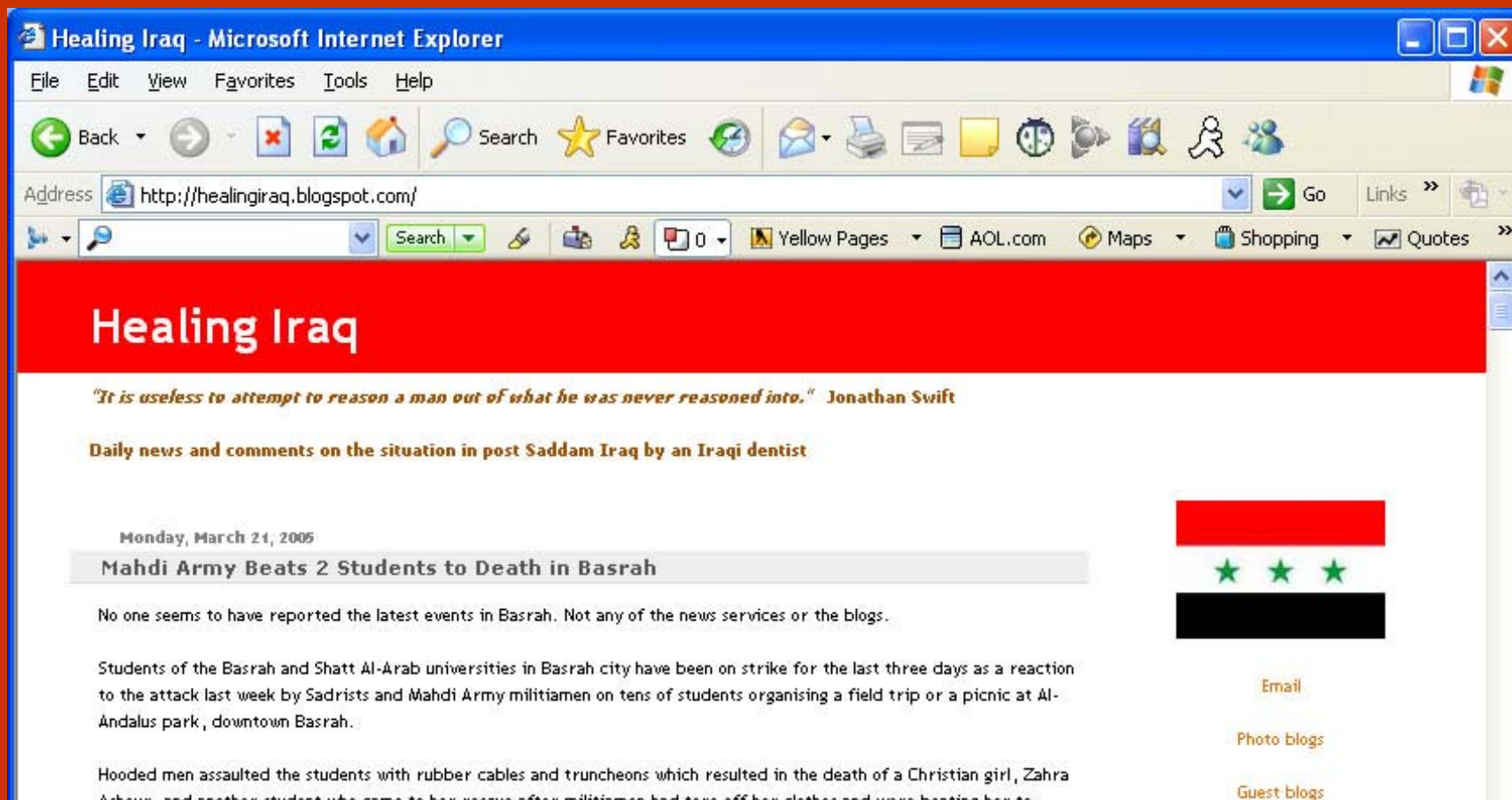
Part of *noun*

Bloggers

Definition: a person who keeps a Web log (blog) or publish an online diary

Don't Fear The Blogger

Jack Shafer



Farnaz Fassihi

Correspondent for *the Wall Street Journal* in Baghdad

Late September 2004

- Email to 40 friends spread by Bloggers
 - “Despite President Bush’s rosy assessments, Iraq remains a disaster. If under Saddam it was a ‘potential’ threat, under the Americans it has been transformed to ‘imminent and active threat,’ a foreign policy failure bound to haunt the United States for decades to come.”
 - "Being a foreign correspondent in Baghdad these days," she wrote, "is like being under virtual house arrest.... I avoid going to people's homes and never walk in the streets. I can't go grocery shopping any more, can't eat in restaurants, can't strike a conversation with strangers, can't look for stories, can't drive in any thing but a full armored car, can't go to scenes of breaking news, can't be stuck in traffic, can't speak English outside, can't take a road trip, can't say I'm an American, can't linger at checkpoints, can't be curious about what people are saying, doing, feeling. And can't and can't."
 - Who did this war exactly benefit? Was it worth it? Are we safer because Saddam is holed up and Al Qaeda is running around in Iraq? Iraqis say that thanks to America they got freedom in exchange for insecurity. Guess what? They say they'd take security over freedom any day, even if it means having a dictator ruler. I heard an educated Iraqi say today that if Saddam Hussein were allowed to run for elections he would get the majority of the vote. This is truly sad.

Farnaz Fassihi

Correspondent for *the Wall Street Journal* in Baghdad
Late September 2004

- Reader Complaints: Too biased to report objectively from Iraq
- Fassihi pulled out of Iraq “Vacation”
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*
- Wall Street Journal responds to pressure
 - (Pre email) Sept 15 Headline: “Steady rise in violence in Baghdad reflected growing cooperation among Iraq's once highly fragmented insurgent groups”
 - (Post email) Lack of critical articles and a focus on conservative opinion page.
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*

Bush Administration's attempt to manage flows of information out of Iraq

- Green Zone (Journalists must be accompanied by a US official at all times)
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*
- Can not talk to people in bars and restaurants
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*
- Workers for Halliburton's Kellogg, Brown & Root, of Bechtel, and of all the other private companies responsible for rebuilding Iraq
 - Told they would be fired if they spoke to the press
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*
- Fabrication of news stories written by the state department
 - **THE MESSAGE MACHINE: How the Government Makes News; Under Bush, a New Age of Prepackaged News**
 - » New York Times 03-13-05
- Variation in Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's assessment of security
 - Allawi told President Bush of the conundrum facing him and the coalition -- that the insurgency required forceful action, but that any such action could further alienate the population, thus fueling the insurgency.
 - » Nov 1 2004 *New Yorker*

Image: © CNN.com

Iraqi Civilian Death Tolls

- Difficult to quantify totals
 - 17,000 conservative count
 - 100,000 John's Hopkins
 - American Media is restricted from entering areas where most casualties occur
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*
 - Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya interview people directly in hospitals
 - » Massing, Michael, *Iraq, the Press and the Election*



Image: © iraqbodycount.net

Physical Threat to Media

- 63 journalists killed in Iraq since the start of the war
- Nineteen by insurgents
- Paul Taggart seized in the Hamra Hotel Complex (Where most foreign journalists live)
- Captors had floor plans of the hotel with names of reporters
- Despite attacks reporters stay
 - New York Times staff of 40-50 in Baghdad
 - Reporters/ translators significant impact
- Increased Responsibility for Translators (Special Correspondents)

Self Censorship?

- Survey of 300 journalists from local and national news
» *Columbia Journalism Review* April 30, 2000
- Urban Hamid – Swedish journalist films ambush of civilians
 - One soldier admits that he's surprised they didn't find more weapons. "The sad thing for these guys is that we'll probably let them go because their names don't match up," he says.
- No American or Swedish Television Outlet would air the footage
- Released as a special feature with the *Fahrenheit 911* DVD
- Fear...

– *Fahrenheit 911* DVD Edition

Three Kinds of Self-Censorship			
<i>Avoidance of stories that audience might find ...</i>			
	All	Natl	Local
	%	%	%
<i>Too complex</i>			
Commonly	12	15	10
Sometimes	40	47	33
Rarely	33	28	37
Never/Don't know	15	10	20
	100	100	100
<i>Important but dull</i>			
Commonly	27	30	25
Sometimes	50	54	46
Rarely	16	13	20
Never/Don't know	7	3	9
	100	100	100
<i>Avoidance of stories that could damage ...</i>			
	All	Natl	Local
	%	%	%
<i>News organization or parent co.</i>			
Commonly	6	5	8
Sometimes	29	28	31
Rarely	40	44	37
Never/Don't know	25	25	24
	100	100	100
<i>Advertisers</i>			
Commonly	6	3	9
Sometimes	23	20	26
Rarely	44	47	41
Never/Don't know	27	30	24
	100	100	100
<i>Friends of the boss</i>			
Commonly	2	2	2
Sometimes	16	16	14
Rarely	46	48	48
Never/Don't know	36	34	36
	100	100	100
<i>Avoidance of stories that would hurt reporter's ...</i>			
	All	Natl	Local
	%	%	%
<i>Relationships with sources</i>			
Commonly	6	4	8
Sometimes	36	36	35
Rarely	45	46	45
Never/Don't know	13	14	12
	100	100	100
<i>Standing with other journalists</i>			
Commonly	7	6	8
Sometimes	31	32	31
Rarely	38	39	37
Never/Don't know	23	23	24
	100	100	100
<i>Career</i>			
Commonly	5	6	4
Sometimes	33	35	31
Rarely	36	35	38
Never/Don't know	26	24	27
	100	100	100

Columbia Journalism Review April 30, 2000

Washington Post's Headlines

October 22 to October 26 2004

Massing, Michael, Iraq, the Press and the Election

- a poll showing that US-backed political figures were losing ground to religious leaders
- how the war in Iraq had diverted energy and attention from the fight against al-Qaeda
- how the CIA was secretly moving detainees out of Iraq--a "serious breach" of the Geneva Conventions
- administration plans to ask for an additional \$70 billion to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Reconstruction Headlines

April 17th 2005

- *Rethinking Reconstruction: Grand U.S. Plan Fractures Again*
New York Times
- *In Fallujah, U.S. Envoy Greeted by Complaints*
The Washington Post
- *Charlie Daniels Entertains the Troops*
Fox News
- *Are Iraqis Better Off?*
CNN

Headline Comparisons

April 19th 2005

- *Iraqi Lawmakers Stall Gov't; Attacks Kill 12*
FOX News 04-19-05
- *Attacks on Iraqi Army Continue as Bomb Kills 4*
New York Times 04-19-05
- *Iraqi MPs demand US apology*
Aljazeera.net