Living in Iraq: The American Media

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The Politics of Reconstructing Iraq
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Michael Massing *The New York Review of Book*

Jack Shafer *Slate Magazine*
“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

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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

Healing Iraq

"It is useless to attempt to reason a man out of what he was never reasoned into." Jonathan Swift

Daily news and comments on the situation in post Saddam Iraq by an Iraqi dentist

Monday, March 21, 2005

Mahdi Army Beats 2 Students to Death in Basrah

No one seems to have reported the latest events in Basrah. Not any of the news services or the blogs.

Students of the Basrah and Shatt Al-Arab universities in Basrah city have been on strike for the last three days as a reaction to the attack last week by Sadrist and Mahdi Army militiamen on tens of students organizing a field trip or a picnic at Al-Andalus park, downtown Basrah.

Hooded men assaulted the students with rubber cables and truncheons which resulted in the death of a Christian girl, Zahra Ashour, and another student who came to her rescue after militiamen had tore off her clothes and were beating her to...

Image: © Healingiraq.blogspot.com
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 anything 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: To 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
    - 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*
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
  ~Fahrenheit 911 DVD Edition
- Fear…
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