4

The al-Jazeera Era

On December 20, 1998, after the final withdrawal of UNSCOM, four days of American and British bombardment of Iraq, and massive Arab protests, al-Jazeera broadcast an episode of *Sharia and Life* featuring Yusuf al-Qaradawi.[1] The host, Ahmed Mansour, began by invoking the outrage felt by Muslims at an attack on Iraq during Ramadan, and quoted former Algerian Prime Minister Ahmed Ben Bella asking whether the attack on Iraq was "an extension of the crusader campaign which began against the Islamic world after the fall of Granada." But Mansour was dubious: "Is this the truth of what happened to Iraq at American and British hands?" Carefully framing the debate, Mansour wondered: "If there are those who blame the Iraqi regime for the crisis which the *umma* has lived through since 1990 because of the invasion and aggression against Kuwait, will they object to this destruction now of the regime or the capabilities of Iraq? . . . But at the same time, what responsibility does the Iraqi regime bear for what has happened to Iraq since 1990?"

Qaradawi endorsed Muslim outrage that in 1998 "Ramadan begins with fear instead of hope, with war instead of peace, with destruction instead of birth, with death instead of life." Openly identifying with the Iraqi people, Qaradawi bemoaned that "this is what our brothers the Iraqi people suffer under. . . . We find ourselves now attacked during Ramadan." He blasted the United States for setting itself above God in determining matters of life and death, while explaining the attack on

Iraq as primarily about defending Israel. Qaradawi praised the Arab street for protesting, even if it had no effect on American actions, in an exquisite illustration of the expressive logic of action discussed in earlier chapters. There was value, he argued, in simply declaring that even where "the weak cannot stand in the face of power . . . he is able to say no. . . . With our limited capabilities to say no, we say to America no, we don't accept this."

But Qaradawi refused to offer a simple pro-Iraqi stance. Far from defending Saddam Hussein, Qaradawi repeatedly and insistently distinguished the Iraqi people from a regime he despised. "We are against Saddam Hussein, but we are not against the Iraqi people," he explained. "We consider the Iraqi regime a criminal and harmful regime for its people." Directly addressing Saddam, Qaradawi said, "I call on the Iraqi president to allow freedoms inside of Iraq and to allow the Iraqi people a voice. . . . If he is truly a strong ruler then he would know that the people are confident in him . . . and if not . . . " But he nevertheless condemned the bombings: "I do not permit a hostile power to use this to attack the Iraqi people."

Did the al-Jazeera audience take umbrage at Qaradawi's hostility toward Saddam Hussein? The first question to Qaradawi came over fax from Iraqi opposition figure (and former head of Saddam's military intelligence) Wafiq al-Samarrai: "What is the position of the Sharia on this: if there is an unjust ruler as is the case in Iraq, is it permissible to leave a killer to kill and a criminal to commit crimes, which is what will happen if Arab states don't intervene?" Qaradawi agreed that "we cannot leave the killer in place, we must use force to remove him," but insisted that such action must come from within and not from American-backed opposition groups: "It is not permissible for a Muslim to make himself an agent of a power that is hostile to Islam." A debate ensued over the phones, with several callers blasting Samarrai for his Baathist past, and Qaradawi ultimately defending Samarrai's right to change his views. Ahmed Mansour explained to a seemingly confused Qaradawi that "this question is always posed to Samarrai in every dialogue we have, that he was a part of the regime . . . and he participated in great crimes against the Iraqi people"—which must surprise the vast array of commentators who later accused al-Jazeera of ignoring the crimes of Saddam's regime.

Some callers echoed the position of the Iraqi opposition: "The whole Iraqi people beg to be rescued from this repressive regime, I call on our beloved Shaykh to see that there is a solution to this problem for the Iraqi people, which is to save the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein, who has done far worse to them than has the United States." Others bemoaned the sanctions, and Arab inaction in the face of Iraqi suffering: "Is it permissible for the Muslim to leave his Muslim brother suffering under the blockade and not help him?" Over the course of an hour and a half, virtually every position was expressed, as Arabs openly grappled in public over an issue about which they clearly disagreed. The only point on which all seemed to agree was that Arab regimes had failed miserably to deal with the Iraqi situation, to listen to their people, and to stand up for Arab interests—however those interests might be defined.

These open dialogues—heated, contentious, and contemptuous of the political status quo—constituted a public sphere very different from the one described in chapter 3, of private deliberations of elites and carefully modulated editorial debates in the elite press. These new public arguments were open, heated, and unrestrained. If anything, critics worried that they focused too heavily on confrontation and polar opposition. In their pursuit of entertaining television, the talk show hosts much preferred high intensity arguments between an Iraqi official and a Kuwaiti parliamentarian to a calm discussion between detached intellectuals. One of the first high-profile controversies generated by al-Jazeera's talk shows came in March 1997, when Faisal al-Qassem hosted a program asking why Kuwait refused to reconcile with Iraq, leading Kuwaiti officials to angrily protest to the Qatari government and sparking dozens of hostile commentaries in the Kuwaiti press (Zayani 2005: 95). In January 1999 *More Than One Opinion* pitted the Arabist editor of *al-Quds al-Arabi* Abd al-Bari Atwan against the Kuwaiti information minister Saad al-Ajami and the Egyptian journalist Mahmoud Attallah.[2] The next month, Faisal al-Qassem hosted a debate between Sami Mahdi, editor of the Iraqi newspaper *al-Thawra*, and Egyptian academic Gihad Awda on the question of whether "the blockade on Iraq is an Arab conspiracy more than an American or Zionist one."[3] In March *More Than One Opinion* returned to contemplate "the war of attrition against Iraq" with Iraqi professor of military science Mazen al-Rama-

dani and former American ambassador David Mack.[4] In August Qassem hosted a discussion of the sanctions on Iraq featuring a pro-regime Iraqi expatriate and a member of the Kuwaiti parliament.[5] In another program, the Jordanian radical Layth Shubaylat squared off against Ayad al-Manaa, a leading Kuwaiti journalist.[6] Such direct, impassioned arguments offered a stark change from decades of Arab public politics. They tapped into the raw emotional identification many Arabs felt with the Iraqi people, giving an outlet for the anger and frustration built up by the graphic news coverage on the station.

The period from 1997–2002 well deserves the much-abused title of "the al-Jazeera Era." Building on its successful coverage of Iraq, as well as the second Palestinian Intifada and its exclusive access to Afghanistan after 9/11, al-Jazeera dominated Arab public discourse for these crucial years, before—as described in chapter 2—competing stations emerged to challenge its hegemony. Its live coverage of these contentious events, in real time, with graphic imagery and openly supportive and engaged commentary, defined those conflicts for viewers in intensely personal and vivid ways.

Over the course of the period described in this chapter, the Palestinian and Iraqi issues increasingly merged into a common narrative, with the United States playing the villain's role in each. This convergence was graphically embodied by the juxtaposition of the Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank and the American push for a confrontation with Iraq in the spring of 2002. It is often forgotten that the initial Arab response to 9/11 was marked by considerable ambivalence, with a wide range of important Islamist and Arab figures condemning those attacks and expressing profound sympathy with the victims, even as significant numbers of Arabs doubted al-Qaeda's responsibility for the attacks. The debates over the invasion of Afghanistan were similarly ambivalent, with public debates marked by intense disagreements between those who rejected any American military action in the Muslim world and those who saw it as a justifiable response to al-Qaeda's assault on America. Anti-American sentiment spiked only after the combination of President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech, the Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank—during which Bush famously declared Ariel Sharon to be a man of peace—and the beginnings of the campaign against Iraq.

The Arab public sphere thus literally defined the response to the American mobilization against Iraq in 2002–2003 by placing it within this particular context. In the narrative that developed and hardened over the course of the 1990s, American arguments were automatically discounted and nefarious motivations ascribed. The profound differences in American and Arab perceptions of the relationships among events in Israel, Iraq, and the war on terror opened what al-Jazeera host Ghassan bin Jadu called "an epistemological chasm between the Iraqi opposition and Arab elites"—a gap that was even greater between the United States and the Arabs.[7] Participants in the Arab debates routinely invoked articles published in the Western press, reports issued by the United Nations or Western think tanks, and interviews with Western officials or personalities. The Arab public paid close attention to American politics, and could not help but note Congressional and media criticisms of the Clinton administration's alleged lack of seriousness in moving against Saddam. At the same time, Clinton's ostentatious public support for the Iraqi opposition—as a way of deflecting this Congressional criticism—rebounded against that opposition by heightening the sense of many Arabs of its inauthenticity. But Americans largely ignored Arab debates, which left them painfully unaware of how their initiatives would be received, how much their credibility had eroded, or how toxic America had become in Arab eyes.

Another major difference between the American and Arab understanding of Iraq has to do with its salience. After the collapse of the UN inspections and the four-day bombing campaign against Iraq, the Iraq issue transformed in a number of ways. The Clinton administration sought to remove Iraq from the headlines, with a low-intensity bombing campaign that rarely reached levels deemed newsworthy by American media. It proved slow to appreciate the new importance of Arab public opinion. Most of 1999 was taken up with the tortuous negotiation of resolution 1284, which ultimately passed over the abstention of three permanent members of the Security Council. Ironically, given later events, George W. Bush's initial approach to Iraq emphasized a revamping of the sanctions regime—"smart sanctions" rather than military confrontation. Only after September 11 did American attention turn again to Iraq as a front-burner issue.[8]

For Arabs, on the other hand, Iraq never retreated to the periphery

of their concerns. As Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskander argue, "Al-Jazeera first realized it had the opportunity to consolidate Arab audiences when it covered the Desert Fox U.S. military operations against Iraq in 1998. . . . From that point forward, footage from the raids and extensive discussion of the sanctions on Iraq fed Arab fury. The UN-sanctions economic embargo seemed, in a word, unjustified" (2001: 58). Iraq by this point had been well established as an Arab core concern, with the United States increasingly placed at the center of the problem. Well before September 11, more and more Arabs openly talked about the plans of "the American Enemy" to attack Iraq.[9] Discussion of a coming American attack on Iraq was common in the summer of 2001.[10] After September 11, arguments about al-Qaeda and the war in Afghanistan quickly merged into fears of an American expansion of the war into Iraq. As early as October 16, 2001, *The Opposite Direction* discussed whether America would "widen the war on terror to Iraq"; on November 28 *No Limits* focused on "American plans on Iraq after Afghanistan"; and a December 4 *The Opposite Direction* asked whether America could "Afghan-ize Iraq."[11] Untold numbers of writers in the Arab press similarly asked whether—often, simply when—the Bush administration would turn toward Iraq.[12] When Osama bin Laden invoked the suffering of the Iraqi people in a tape broadcast by al-Jazeera in November 2002, he clearly saw the usefulness of tapping into this widespread Arab conviction.

Perceived American double standards stood at the heart of Arab complaints. Arabs constantly pointed out that Israel routinely ignored UN resolutions, while Iraq was expected to live up to the letter of these resolutions. These double standards became increasingly central as the Palestinian uprising began in the fall of 2000. The no-fly zones were a particular example, especially after the United States began a punishing campaign of bombings, ostensibly to enforce them, after Desert Fox. The no-fly zones were not established by the Security Council, Arabs pointed out, and as such had dubious legal justification. American manipulations of the UN Sanctions Committee fed the outrage.

At the same time, Arabs constantly pointed to American regime-change declarations as evidence that the United States itself had little

regard for UN resolutions. Assertions by officials such as Madeleine Albright that the sanctions would not be lifted as long as Saddam remained in power (see chapter 3) quickly solidified into an absolute conviction—one which damned the United States, while at the same time in Arab eyes justifying Iraqi refusals to cooperate with the inspectors.[13] The Iraqi Liberation Act, passed with bipartisan support in October 1998, served as a final proof for most Arabs of their belief in American intentions on this point. Lebanese columnist Raghid Saleh summarized this widespread interpretation: "The position of the United States on the embargo is not based on international law. The US says that it will not lift the blockade and will not revisit the questions of sanctions until the regime in Iraq falls, and international law does not say that."[14]

Between 1998 and 2003 the emerging triumphalism of the new Arab public sphere, as it recognized its own growing influence, gave way to a dangerous frustration when its efforts failed to translate into real political outcomes. The public witnessed startling successes: the Arab street did protest in force, an Arab public consensus did form, and all states—from America to the Gulf—were forced to alter their strategies to the new reality. But for all the "victories," the Palestinian uprising failed to accomplish its goals, instead sinking into nearly unfathomable violence. Arab governments refused to become more democratic; indeed, in response to the crisis atmosphere generated by the Palestinian uprising and then by September 11, many governments clamped down and became even more repressive. And not only did the sanctions on Iraq remain in place, but in 2002 the United States began mobilizing the region and the world for a war to topple Saddam Hussein. In all the areas of greatest concern to the new Arab public, then, movement and argument and even consensus failed to translate into real political success. Such frustration—which may be structurally endemic to a weak international public sphere—had an inevitable effect on the tone, content, and pitch of argument in the Arab public sphere. By the end of the period discussed in this chapter, the Arab public sphere had passed from a moment of enthusiasm to a grinding despair and a resurgent politics of identity.

The New Public Sphere and Iraq

The emergence of al-Jazeera coincided remarkably with the beginning of the collapse of the system of sanctions and inspections maintained over the previous six years. Chapter 3 argued that the years 1991–1997 followed roughly realist lines of state behavior, while opinion slowly shifted from below. The major states dominated the action, as they pursued strategic interests in private diplomacy and at the United Nations. While the beginnings of public discontent over the human costs of the sanctions could be seen distantly, this emerging Arab public opinion had no effective outlets to express itself or to influence policy. Arab states, like the United States, largely ignored this Arab sentiment.

The emergence of al-Jazeera radically transformed the political and strategic environment, bringing into the public eye not only graphic footage but also arguments that had previously taken place only in the elite press and in private forums. The hothouse environment of an Arab public sphere dominated by questions of identity and a sense of subordination nurtured a particular kind of Arabist identity and sense of interests. al-Jazeera did not create Arab views toward the core shared policy issues, but it did reshape the background assumptions and the intensity of Arab views (Nisbet et al. 2004; Telhami 2005).

Building on the ideas spread from below (as described in chapter 3), the suffering of the Iraqi people became a core touchstone of debate, one which all speakers hoping to be taken seriously had to acknowledge regardless of their personal beliefs. For example, as a preface to a discussion about the strategic aspect of the sanctions, one al-Jazeera host described the sanctions as "this embargo which has imposed harsh suffering on the Iraqi people, which weighs heavily on the souls even of Washington's friends in the region, this embargo which continues without any legal or moral excuse."[15] This led even Kuwaitis to change their argumentative style. Within the domestic Kuwaiti media, the standard fare was attacks on "those who oppose overthrowing the Iraqi regime[, who] embody a repressive style and a culture of dictatorship, and give tyrannical regimes the legitimacy to continue in dominating their peoples and stealing their wealth."[16] But when appearing on al-Jazeera, Kuwaitis would preface their remarks with con-

cern for "the long suffering of the Iraqi people."[17] Even Kuwaitis found it necessary to position themselves as defenders of the Iraqi people, however improbably, as in the following hallucinogenic exchange on *The Opposite Direction*:[18]

> Abd al-Muhassan Jamal: I speak with the tongue of the Iraqi people . . .
>
> Faisal al-Qassem: [*interrupts*] You speak in the name of the Iraqi people?
>
> Jamal: In the name of the Iraqi people, because I am part of the Arab people.
>
> Qassem: [*incredulous*] You are a member of . . . a member of the Kuwaiti Parliament!

For all their centrality to Arab debate, the Iraqi people themselves lacked any real voice. This was not because of a conscious attempt by al-Jazeera to exclude them: Iraqis living in exile appeared frequently, and were a constant presence calling in to the programs. But the tyrannical nature of Saddam's regime made it impossible for Iraqis living inside Iraq to freely speak their minds to the Arab media. The unpopular opposition in exile could not credibly speak on their behalf, despite their efforts to do so, while few accepted the representativeness of Saddam's tyrannical regime. As a result, all parties felt free to speak on behalf of the Iraqi people, to claim to authentically represent them. The frustration this engendered among the actual Iraqi people would only be genuinely exhibited after the fall of Baghdad, as ordinary Iraqis vented their rage at the Arab media and at the Arab political system as a whole. But from the early 1990s through 2003, Arabs of all political persuasions were free to project their own preferences onto this object of identification and sympathy. As Iraqi opposition figure Abd al-Halim al-Rahimi tellingly described it, everyone in Arab debates "ignores the opinion of the Iraqi people . . . while at the same time pretending that their positions express the interests of the Iraqi people. . . . This ignores the opinion of Iraqis, deputizing themselves to speak on their behalf." Rahimi, equally tellingly, then did exactly what he accused others of doing, assuring readers that "the reality is that the vast majority of the Iraqi people, inside and outside, of all political and

ideological trends, and all nationalities and religions, not only want but are working to overthrow Saddam's regime."[19]

While al-Jazeera covered the humanitarian side of the Iraqi issue intensely and sympathetically, and gave a platform to voices highly critical of the United States, this does not mean that al-Jazeera was an Iraqi instrument or "pro-Saddam." Intense and fierce arguments about the regime of Saddam Hussein punctuated its programs. Almost every program on Iraq featured Kuwaitis or Iraqi opposition figures, as well as live callers, who insistently turned every issue—whether a confrontation with the United States or the effect of the sanctions—into accusatory dissertations on the evils of Saddam's tyranny (*al taghiya*). Of twenty-three guests who appeared on Iraq-themed al-Jazeera talk shows in 1999, for example, five were Kuwaiti (including the minister of information and several members of Parliament), five were pro-regime Iraqis (including Tareq Aziz), seven were figures identified with or sympathetic to the Iraqi opposition (including Wafiq al-Samarrai, Ghassan Attiyah, and Hamid al-Bayati), three were Arab journalists who tended to side with the Iraqi opposition, and six were Arab writers who tended to be critical of the sanctions and the United States (including several appearances by Abd al-Bari Atwan, editor of *al-Quds al-Arabi*).

When Iraqi officials appeared on al-Jazeera talk shows, they usually received tough questioning quite unfamiliar to them in the tightly controlled Iraqi media. For example, in January 2000 host Jumana al-Namour repeatedly challenged Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohammed Said al-Sahhaf.[20] When Sahhaf claimed that other governments knew "that Iraq has implemented all the demands in the Security Council resolutions," Namour interrupted him to say, "But this is not what the Security Council says." When Sahhaf claimed that current Security Council demands exceeded the terms of the original resolutions, Namour demanded specific examples, and was visibly unsatisfied with his responses. "If there are no weapons present," she demanded, "then why are you afraid of an inspections team entering Iraq?" On another program, Namour interrupted Riyadh al-Qisi's defense of Iraq's oil policies to ask whether he had any documentation to back up his claims, or any proof for viewers who doubted what he was saying.[21] When al-Qisi cited "UN officials" as blaming the United States for the

suffering of the Iraqi people, Namour reminded him that the same official (Hans von Sponeck) had also accused the Iraqi government of some responsibility for that suffering.[22] To be consistently challenged on facts and arguments in public, by a beautiful young woman no less, was not the norm for a senior Iraqi official.

In his program discussing the ninth year of sanctions, Faisal al-Qassem noted the UNICEF report stating that sanctions were responsible for the death of more than half a million Iraqi children, but also noted that the report showed that children were doing better in the areas outside the control of the regime. "Does this not show," asked Qassem, "that the regime plays some role in the worsening of conditions? . . . Isn't the regime primarily responsible for the suffering of the children?"[23] When a supporter of Saddam's policies claimed that Iraq had been placed under an embargo for no reason, Sami Haddad openly mocked him: "Do you really expect to convince me that . . . [despite] the invasion of Kuwait . . . [and Iraq] not implementing UN resolutions . . . to which it agreed, . . . do you really expect to convince me that [the embargo] came out of nothing?!"[24] Listening to another, Haddad threw up his hands: "After ten years, you have a blockade and sanctions, containment, so many losses . . . isn't it time to speak in a realistic fashion, not with sentiments about the poor Iraqi people suffering under blockade?"[25]

Not every encounter was so contentious, of course. On a September 17, 1999, program, for example, host Jamal Rayan openly identified with the Iraqi regime, repeatedly coming to its defense against criticisms voiced by the guests, and sharply challenged anyone who did not support the immediate lifting of sanctions. Ahmed Mansour—later to become notorious among Americans as the al-Jazeera correspondent in Falluja in April 2004—tended to be far more forthcoming with Iraqi official guests on his program *No Limits*. In a program broadcast in June 2000, Mansour posed tough questions to Nabil Najm from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, such as "What does America really want from Iraq?" and "How can there be a dialogue [with the United States] when the United States is spending tens of millions of dollars to overthrow the Iraqi government and declares that goal openly?"[26]

But the key to what made al-Jazeera different is that in their live broadcasts, even a friendly environment could quickly turn heated.

A caller to Mansour's program began by affirming the reality of Iraqi suffering under the sanctions, but then said that "this unjust blockade imposed on our people has only one cause and that is Saddam Hussein because of his invasion of Kuwait and his opposition to international society." Mansour quickly responded that he would not permit any head of state to be discussed in such an inflammatory way on his program, and told his viewers to frame their questions in a respectful fashion, but the challenge had been issued and heard by all viewers. And even Mansour infuriated his guest by asking about a rumored deal to resettle Palestinian refugees in Iraq, and by saying that "there are many accusations that you entrench and deepen the embargo, because it allows you to exercise greater control over the Iraqi people." When Najm tried to browbeat Mansour for raising such subjects, Mansour stood fast: "I represent the other opinion, I'm sorry, and I am presenting to you what others say, regardless of whether it pleases you" (*No Limits*, June 28, 2000).

In addition to al-Jazeera, the elite Arab press debated Iraq furiously, with dialogue taking place both within single newspapers and between the different widely read newspapers. While my analysis draws on dozens of Arabic newspapers, for the purposes of systematic analysis I focus here on two major London-based newspapers: *al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-Arabi*.[27] I collected 643 op-eds about Iraq in these two newspapers between January 1999 and July 2002, making every effort to include all relevant essays.

Table 4.1. Op-Eds on Iraq in *al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-Arabi*, January 1999–June 2002

	al-Hayat	*al-Quds al-Arabi*	Total
January–June 1999	59	80	139
July–December 1999	43	44	87
January–June 2000	23	46	69
July–December 2000	30	44	74
January–June 2001	42	84	126
July–December 2001	18	29	47
January–June 2002	47	54	101
Total	262	381	643

To give a sense of the extent to which Iraq became an "Arab" issue, in these two newspapers 158 different writers from 19 countries (as well as a number of self-described "Arabs") contributed their opinions on the Iraqi issue. Fewer Kuwaitis appeared in this press than on al-Jazeera, with only 23 columns by self-identified Kuwaitis appearing in the two papers in this period—of which 15 were by Mohammed al-Rumayhi in *al-Hayat*; by contrast, 136 essays by self-identified Iraqis appeared. *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, while fiercely critical of American policy, published a surprisingly large number of Iraqi critics of Saddam Hussein—including Ghassan Attiyah, Abd al-Amir Rikabi, and Burhan al-Jalabi. The regular columnists of *al-Quds al-Arabi*, such as Muta al-Safadi, Adli Sadeq, and Rashad Abu Shawar, as well as the chief editor, Abd al-Bari Atwan, all tended to take a highly critical line toward the sanctions and a pro-Iraqi orientation in general.

In *al-Hayat*, by contrast, far more pro-sanctions voices were routinely published. *Al-Hayat* aspired to be the *New York Times* of the Arab world, and as such sought to present an authentic "mirror" of respectable Arab debates—which meant both pro-sanctions and anti-sanctions voices. On the ten-year anniversary of the invasion of Kuwait, for example, *al-Hayat* invited Madeleine Albright to explain and defend American policy toward Iraq, with the counterpoint offered by the Kuwaiti Mohammed al-Rumayhi.[28] Regular columnists such as Ragheda Dergham and Jihad al-Khazen were often critical of American policy, but were also scathingly critical of Saddam Hussein; al-Khazen famously once wrote that Saddam was personally responsible for virtually every ill of the Arab world for two decades.

The Arabist hope that "taking a firm stand on Iraq could usher in the regaining of conscience to the Arab order" was not realized, however.[29] The reconstruction was limited to the popular level. As chapter 3 demonstrated, the Iraq issue remained divisive at the official level, as states aligned with the United States or genuinely fearful of Iraq clashed with those interested in rehabilitating Iraq for political or economic reasons. Arab states lagged behind European and Asian states in challenging the sanctions. When Iraq was invited to participate in the Arab summit of October 2000, it explicitly promised not to raise the divisive issues of the sanctions or its disagreements with Kuwait, in order to prevent these differences from destroying the summit.[30]

Arab League Secretary-General Amr Musa's visit to Baghdad in January 2002—the first such visit since the invasion of Kuwait—failed to persuade Kuwait to pursue reconciliation, despite widespread hopes and expectations that it would.[31] The impact of Iraq was far greater at the level of the public sphere, generating a unified Arab dialogue and identity rather than consistently driving state policies.

Normalizing Iraq

> Is it rational that the horrible Arab silence about the escalating destruction of an Arab country such as Iraq continues? About the slow death of the Iraqi people? About a war of mass extermination unprecedented in human history against an Arab and Islamic society? Why do some Arabs not mind the death of Iraqis and the absence of Iraq from the Arab arena? . . . Why is it upon Iraq, a country with a million killed, to implement Security Council resolutions to their letter while ignoring Israel's real violations of resolutions half a century old? . . . Why are foreign voices raised to lift the blockade of Iraq while the Arab regimes compete to demonstrate their fealty to the monstrous American position against Arabs?
>
> But on the other side: isn't the blockade of Iraq an international blockade before it is Arab? Isn't it a mistake to violate international resolutions? How can we call on the UN to deal with situations [like Israel] and then ignore its decisions? Doesn't Iraq have its own role by not cooperating with Arab or international initiatives to end the suffering of its people? Didn't one Iraqi official say that if forced to choose between keeping the blockade and readmitting inspectors it would choose the former? Doesn't the regime benefit from keeping the blockade because it consolidates its hegemony over its people . . . and gives it an excuse to not carry out reforms? Isn't the regime responsible before anyone else for the suffering of its children, because it has not given their mothers and fathers anything but torture? . . . Is it possible to reevaluate the Iraqi regime when it is increasing its terrorizing of the Iraqi people?
>
> —Faisal al-Qassem, December 2000[32]

Qassem's introduction to a December 2000 program nicely captures the frustrations of the Arab intellectual and political stalemate over Iraq. In a May 2000 episode of *More Than One Opinion*, host Sami

Haddad raised the possibility that a seminar hosted by the Kuwaiti parliament on the future of relations between Kuwait and Iraq might signal a new willingness to talk about normalization—a taboo in Kuwaiti politics. His first guest, Mohammed Jassem al-Saqr, immediately corrected him: the Qatari foreign minister "was the lone voice which called for normalization; . . . Americans and Iraqis and Kuwaitis all by complete consensus were against normalization."[33]

More interesting than the Kuwaiti's defense of his country's position was the highly public character of what would in the past have been a private discussion among elites. The "private" seminar received extensive coverage, not only from al-Jazeera but from numerous commentators in the Arab press. *Al-Hayat* alone published essays by half a dozen writers discussing the seminar and its implications. Similarly, after an Iraqi opposition figure in *al-Hayat* criticized an Arab Nationalist Conference held in Baghdad in May 2001 for its implied alignment with Saddam Hussein, the newspaper published replies from several participants, and commentaries from a variety of perspectives appeared in numerous Arab papers.[34] In the age of the new Arab public sphere, nothing related to Iraq could remain private, and everything was up for discussion before an intensely engaged audience.

The entrenched consensus on the suffering of the Iraqi people defined the terrain of legitimate Arab political debate. Popular sympathy with the Iraqi people made opponents of the reconciliation appear heartless and cruel, and as fundamentally detached from the sensitivities and concerns of "real" Arabs. But, as powerful as this consensus was, it did not foreclose debate. The anti-Saddam camp responded by affirming their sympathy for the Iraqi people, but focused attention on Saddam Hussein as the cause of that suffering. The Kuwaiti writer Mohammed al-Rumayhi's concern about this trend in the Arab media was palpable: "Yes, the Iraqi people are suffering, . . . but whose fault is that? Saddam's. . . . And the Arab media should say so."[35] Rumayhi attempted to turn the suffering of the Iraqi people back against critics of the sanctions, by asking a series of questions leading toward a plea for regime change: can Saddam Hussein be accepted or ignored? Can the sanctions continue forever? Can the sanctions overthrow Saddam?[36] If Arabs really wanted to save Iraqi children, argued Rumayhi, they should do so by backing the overthrow of Saddam—which would

save all Iraqis, not only the children.[37] One al-Jazeera caller articulated the oft-heard refrain, "There is a solution to this problem for the Iraqi people, which is to save the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein."[38]

Emotions ran high in these arguments about Iraq. It was not uncommon for talk shows devoted to Iraq to degenerate quickly into screaming matches and insults.[39] These public arguments were not always the highest examples of critical rationality—though they seldom failed to provide entertaining television. Many Arabs, desperate for a reconciliation, found themselves frustrated by the extreme polarization. In an al-Jazeera poll taken in January 2002, more than 90 percent of respondents supported the efforts of the Arab League to bring about an Iraqi-Kuwaiti reconciliation. When Saddam Hussein lashed out violently at Saudi Arabia in August 2000, even *al-Quds al-Arabi* was taken aback, while the usually sympathetic Mohammed al-Musaffir begged for an end to the "media wars between Riyadh and Baghdad."[40] In a September 2000 program dedicated to the "crisis in relations between Iraq and the Arab League," Qassem sharply questioned his Iraqi guest about "this senseless media campaign against the Secretary-General of the Arab League," and asked, "Why doesn't Iraq know anything other than the language of escalation and hostility?"[41]

In short, the interests of the new Arab public and those of Saddam's regime were not identical: for most of the Arab public, alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people was the overwhelming priority, with backing Iraqi diplomacy a means to that end; for the Iraqi regime, on the other hand, easing the sanctions—or promoting the evidence of their devastating impact—was only a means to the end of staying in power.

Official Arab *silence* was a prominent theme in these public sphere discussions, with many seeing its primary mission to be forcing Arab leaders to take some position about the "noise of the silent war over Iraq."[42] "When will the voices of Arab officials rise up over the misery of 26 million Arab Iraqis?" asked Amar Najib.[43] The United States, argued Yusif Nur Awadh, did not fail to gain public support for American policies from Arab rulers, but only "to guarantee Arab silence and to prevent the raising of voices of protest in the event of an attack."[44] In addition to the heartfelt anguish over the sanctions, the new Arab public expressed outraged over official Arab silence about the regular bombings of Iraq through 1999. This media coverage put considerable

pressure on governments that clearly would have preferred that the bombings remain "silent."[45] Others were outraged at "the silence of Arab rulers about the scenarios for dividing [partitioning] Iraq," especially after the American-backed Iraqi National Congress endorsed the principle of federalism for the Kurds.[46] For Burhan al-Jalabi, "every Iraqi cries, 'how long will the embargo last,' . . . but the Arabs support the United States."[47]

Others were more struck by hypocrisy than by silence—not only the hypocrisy of Arab states sympathizing with Iraq in public but supporting America in private, but also the hypocrisy of Arabs who claimed to detest Saddam Hussein but who strengthened his hand in practice. As Kuwaiti Ahmed al-Rubai complained, "There is a contradictory Arab language toward Iraq, a language that is sympathetic on the surface but tortured beneath it; a language that cries tears of compassion for Iraq and demands no attack against it . . . but at the same time fails to distinguish between the tyrannical regime and the oppressed people."[48] Others complained that Arabs could hardly demand that Israel live up to UN resolutions while "encouraging Iraq to violate them."[49] And, on the other side, staunch defenders of Iraq complained that Arabs said all the right things, but in the end did nothing. A cartoon in *al-Quds al-Arabi* portrayed an Arab leader shouting "No to USA" to an angry crowd, but with "Yes to USA" written across his back.[50] Subhi Hadidi marveled that "American officials openly say that the public positions of some Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia, do not resemble their private positions which they express . . . away from the lights of the cameras."[51] 85 percent of more than 37,000 respondents to a January 2003 online al-Jazeera poll said that Arab leaders were insincere when they publicly proclaimed their refusal to participate in a war on Iraq.[52] Did breaking the wall of silence mean only producing more hypocritical rhetoric?

The arguments over Iraq increasingly revolved around *identity* as much as around interests. These critiques insistently equated the hugely unpopular American policy with the support—tacit or vocal—of that policy by Arab regimes. With the dying Iraqi children having become the "greatest Arab issue," complained Abd al-Wahhab al-Affendi, "the Arab regimes have become the primary defenders of the interests of the West against the interests of the Arabs."[53] The sanc-

tions survived only because Arab states enforced them, these critics pointed out. "Even the cultural embargo on Iraq is Arab," complained Abdullah al-Hourani.[54] It became increasingly common to refer to the sanctions as "an American and Arab aggression against the Iraqi people."[55] Frustrated with Kuwait's rejection of Amr Musa's reconciliation efforts in early 2002, Jordanian writer Fahd al-Fanik observed that "Musa should realize that Arab reconciliation is an American affair decided in Washington and not in Arab capitals."[56] The equation of direct American intervention with the Arab opposition to rehabilitating Iraq framed the issue as "Arab" versus "not Arab"—a deadly equation in the new Arab public. As Mohammed Abd al-Hakim Diyab put it, "The Saudi-Kuwaiti veto [over Iraqi participation in an Arab summit] translates the American desire to isolate Iraq . . . and is clearly against Arab public opinion."[57]

Support for the Iraqi people became a key marker of Arab identity—which implicitly defined those who publicly supported the sanctions as *non-Arab*. In April 1998, a writer in *al-Quds al-Arabi* set off a controversy with a series of articles questioning whether Kuwait could still be considered Arab given its position on Iraq; while numerous people complained that the newspaper had "no right to raise such sensitive issues," Kuwaitis themselves fiercely debated the same question.[58] A Saudi writer worried about this new trend, in which positions on the attack on Iraq, for example, were used to say, "this one is an Arab and this one is not an Arab and this one is a semi-Arab, . . . this is less Arabist, this is more Arabist."[59] The new media proved particularly conducive to this politics of identity, as the images on television stations conveyed a powerful emotional impact. Vivid footage of the suffering of fellow Arabs broke through the abstractions of strategy and high politics, which empowered those speakers who could tap into those emotional connections of identity and authenticity.

That the new public sphere enabled both a new kind of open public argument and a more potent politics of identity would over time develop into a major contradiction. During the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the struggle between the politics of identity and the public sphere imperative of rational discourse would come to define much of the debate over the performance of the Arab media.

The Iraqi Opposition

> How fortunate Saddam is in his opposition. . . . How miserable Iraq is in its *umma*.
>
> —Khalid al-Shami, *al-Quds al-Arabi*[60]

> We expected from our Arab brothers and sisters a clear position toward the mass extermination, . . . at least some observation of the crime of chemical weapons in Halabja, the crimes of Anfal, the crimes of draining the marshes, the killing of 400,000 people in the intifada of 1991, the killing, the attacks, the repression . . . all of this without a word of condemnation from the Arab League.
>
> —Biyan Jabar, *Behind Events*[61]

Many Arabs bemoaned the absence of good choices, complaining about the impossibility of the options presented them—intolerable Iraqi suffering, a despised Iraqi regime, a distrusted America, an ineffective and silent official Arab order, a widely ridiculed opposition. For many of these voices, moreover, Saddam's regime was only a slightly harsher face of the tyranny of almost all Arab governments. As Egyptian journalist Mahmoud Attallah explained, "The Arab people go down into the street to protest attacks on Iraq, but this does not mean that they support the Iraqi regime, but this confusion is exploited by extremists on both sides, those that want to support Saddam Hussein, and those who hate everything Iraqi."[62] Ragheda Dergham's formulation captured a vital sense of this Arab middle ground: "The Iraqi people are victims of both Washington and Baghdad."[63] Or, more starkly, Mohammed Abd al-Hakim Diyab described "the difficult choice between the Satan of the rulers and the Satan of the opposition."[64]

The Iraqi opposition was famously divided, torn between competing personalities and agendas, and legendarily unable to unite. These internal struggles consumed much of the opposition's time and effort. Some of the differences were over matters of real political significance: should the Iraqi opposition align itself with the United States, gaining power and resources at the risk of being labeled American puppets? Should it support the sanctions as a means of putting pressure on Saddam, or oppose them out of concern for the well-being of the

Iraqi people? Should it call for a loose federalism or a strong central state? Should it advocate a military coup, American invasion, or popular revolution? How important was democracy as a goal? What role should be played by people who once held high positions in the Iraqi regime? Underlying many of these substantive arguments were personal rivalries and ambitions, to the extent that disentangling them sometimes seemed impossible. These internal divisions and endemic rivalries both made it easy to dismiss the Iraqi opposition as ineffectual and offered entertaining political theater for the new Arab public sphere. Some Iraqi opposition figures proved quite skilled at speaking to Arab audiences, while others did not.

The Iraqi National Congress (INC) was formed in June 1992 under American patronage as an umbrella for the Iraqi opposition. A wide range of groups participated in the early negotiations, which culminated in an October 1992 meeting of some 234 delegates from parties including the two main Kurdish parties (the KDP and PUK) and a major Shia opposition party (SCIRI) in Salahuddin, in Iraqi Kurdistan. This original moment of unity—frequently invoked by all factions—soon gave way to internal power struggles and disagreements. Fierce fighting broke out between the PUK and KDP in May 1994, while in 1995 member groups such as the important Shia Dawa party, the Iraqi Democratic Union, and the Arab Nationalist Party pulled out of the INC and SCIRI suspended its membership in the executive council.

A coup attempt led by Major General Wafiq al-Samarrai failed in March 1995, after the United States pulled out based on intelligence that the coup planning had been badly compromised. In August 1996 Iraqi forces sacked the INC's base in Salahuddin after the KDP invited Saddam's army into Kurdistan to assist it against its rivals in the PUK. By the mid-1990s, much of the American foreign policy establishment, including the State Department and the CIA, had come to despair of the INC's endless internal divisions, its shady accounting practices, and its inability to deliver results inside Iraq. Some preferred the Iraqi National Accord (al-Wifaq; INA), established in December 1990 with the help of Saudi Prince Turki bin Faisal, appealing primarily to Sunni ex-Baathists, and led by Iyad Allawi; the INA's own coup attempt failed in June 1996, again compromised by Iraqi intelligence. A wide range of other factions operated outside the INC

umbrella, refusing to be publicly aligned with the United States and fiercely critical of those who were.

For all of its organizational incompetence and unpopularity on the ground, the Iraqi National Congress—with help from the American public relations firm the Rendon Group—proved masterful at producing and distributing propaganda in the American and global media (McCollam 2004). While ineffective in influencing Arab opinion, Chalabi and the INC very effectively shaped American public opinion in what the editor of Lebanon's *al-Safir*, Joseph Samaha, describes sarcastically as the most effective Arab public diplomacy campaign in history.[65] Chalabi, by far the least popular of the Iraqi opposition figures among the Arab public (see below), was well connected in Republican party circles, with neo-conservative writers and pundits, and with the neo-conservative civilian leadership in the Pentagon. He was despised by the CIA and the State Department, however, and roundly distrusted by most Arab leaders—particularly in Jordan, where he faced a standing arrest warrant for embezzlement for his role in the collapse of Petra Bank in the 1980s.

The Iraqi opposition faced enormous difficulties moving between the American and Arab public spheres, as the arguments made to win support in the United States rebounded against them among Arabs. The INC proved far more effective in marketing itself to American audiences than to Arab audiences, which only exacerbated its problems in the Arab public sphere. Chalabi's friendly public position toward Israel, helpful for building support among American neo-conservatives, badly damaged his image in the Arab world. For example, in March 2002 Sadiq al-Musawi explained on al-Jazeera that the INC agreed with the international consensus against attacking Iraq, but also agreed with the "very strong" international consensus for changing the Iraqi regime.[66] When host Jumana al-Namour challenged him to reconcile this position with Ahmed Chalabi's statement that he was ready to support America if it attacked Iraq, Musawi retreated to emphasizing the need to overthrow Saddam and create a democratic regime in Iraq. When she pressed him further, he explained that the Iraqi opposition opposed "any attack that does not have the goal of overthrowing the regime" and would support an attack that did target the regime.

Most Arab public opinion condemned or ridiculed the official Iraqi opposition as pawns of the United States who commanded little real support inside of Iraq: "They wake up in America and breakfast in Kuwait."[67] The alleged "inauthenticity" of the Iraqi opposition was their Achilles heel; as Joseph Samaha warned, "The United States' designating some Iraqi opposition as its protégés weakens them."[68] The INC was routinely mocked as the "supported Iraqi opposition," as being "outsiders," as "failing to understand Iraqi realities."[69] Calls by some members of the Iraqi opposition to intensify the sanctions made them seem heartless toward their own people.[70] For Abd al-Wahhab al-Affendi, that parts of the Iraqi opposition supported the sanctions at a time when people all over the world were doing everything they could to help the suffering children of Iraq proved "its isolation, not only from Iraq and its realities, but from humanity."[71] In short, the Iraqi opposition over time not only lost the argument about Saddam, but came to be seen as fundamentally non-Arab. Such views were reinforced by calls made by Iraqi opposition figures such as Kanan Makiya and Ahmed Chalabi for a post-Saddam Iraq to be "a federal, *non-Arab*, demilitarized Iraq."[72]

Few in the Arab public sphere criticized opposition to Saddam Hussein in principle. A desire to overthrow a hated dictator was not out of line in the new Arab public sphere, which prided itself on its comprehensive rejection of the repressive Arab status quo. Mohammed al-Musaffir acknowledged, "There is no controversy that there are noble Iraqi opposition figures . . . who live in exile out of hatred for what has happened and is happening to their comrades and who do not want their Iraq to be destroyed, . . . and they can hold their heads high. . . . The regime in Baghdad should respect them and listen to them when they call for reforms."[73] But these noble figures, Musaffir asserts, should not be confused with those opportunists who sell out their country to the United States and beat the drum for a war against their own people. How could such well-intentioned figures fail to see the contradiction between American declarations of love for the Iraqi people and "the reality that every Arab can see," of the American role in the violence against the Palestinian people?[74] Change, for this line of thinking, must come from within and not from American support.

The new Arab media served as a vital forum for the Iraqi opposition factions to bring their arguments directly to an Arab public. Competing editorials in Arab newspapers, or public arguments on al-Jazeera, offered a powerful tonic to the back-room politicking and secretive deal-making commonly attributed to the Iraqi opposition (especially Chalabi and the INC). In 1999 alone, *al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-Arabi* published some forty essays about the Iraqi opposition. Each encouraged dialogues and challenges to its own editorial line. When a regular columnist denounced Iraqi opposition figures who supported attacks on Iraq, for example, *al-Quds al-Arabi* published a lengthy response by Ala al-Lami, which insisted that "friendship with the Iraqi people cannot mean friendship with the Iraqi regime."[75] At almost the same time, two columnists debated each other on the editorial page over the urgency of demanding democracy in Iraq before supporting the Iraqi regime.[76] Writers such as Ghassan Attiyah and Haroun Mohammed wrote sympathetically about efforts to unify the Iraqi opposition and to give it a message that could appeal to an Arab public opinion that had little use for Saddam but even less confidence in the United States.[77] Entifadh Qanbar, Hamid al-Bayati, and Ghassan Attiyah were among the most frequent guests on Iraq-related al-Jazeera programs. Iraqi opposition voices were hardly silenced in the new media, even if they convinced few.

The press allowed Iraqi exiles to openly speculate about the future of Iraq, to lay out their aspirations, and to wage their private battles. For example, Abd al-Amir Rikabi wrote in February 1999 wondering about the commitment to democracy of the Iraqi nationalists in the opposition. A November 2001 essay in *al-Hayat* by Abd al-Halim al-Rahimi frankly dissected the different trends within an Iraqi opposition deeply conflicted over the possibility of an American invasion of their country.[78] Rahimi identified three major opinion groups: those who opposed any attack which did not remove Saddam, since such a weak attack would only strengthen Saddam and mobilize public support in his favor; those who opposed any attack on Iraq from the outside, preferring that change come from within; and those who supported any strike against Iraq.

The crucial point here is that the new Arab media brought publicity to the closed world of the Iraqi opposition, making their private ar-

guments and disagreements more visible to a suspicious Arab public. Portraying these differences within the opposition served a useful purpose in distancing the opposition to Saddam from generic support for American policy. Indeed, what emerges from the Arab public sphere is less a distaste for opposing Saddam as for the American-backed Iraqi National Congress and its leader, Ahmed Chalabi.

Two American-sponsored Iraqi opposition meetings in 1999, in London in March and in New York in October, offered a revealing public window into the personalities and political struggles inside the opposition. The meetings received a great deal of attention in the new Arab media, and were the occasion of considerable discussion and debate. After the New York meeting, for example, *More Than One Opinion* hosted a discussion that pitted Iraqi participants in the meeting against dissidents who had either chosen to not participate or had not been invited, giving ample time for both INC members and their critics from other factions of the Iraqi opposition to defend their positions.[79] In the press, Adil al-Qiyar voiced a common complaint, noting that "despite the material, media, and political support that American intelligence has contributed to help the Iraqi National Congress and the factions of the so-called Iraqi opposition in exile, it was not able to unify their ranks."[80] Ghassan Attiyah noted a dramatic change from the unified, inclusive vision of the Iraqi opposition embodied in the 1992 Salah al-Din meeting in Kurdistan to the restrictive, controlled, and—in his view—American-orchestrated meetings in New York.[81] The exclusionary and undemocratic quality of those meetings received a great deal of attention: power was centralized in the hands of a small number of figures with close relations to the United States while other Iraqi opposition factions complained of being shut out.

Members of the Iraqi opposition bitterly resented their perceived treatment by the Arab media—but this had less to do with their access to the media than with the hostile reception to their ideas. In the INC newspaper *al-Mutamar*, for example, Daoud al-Basri complained that in his own recent appearance on *The Opposite Direction*, Faisal al-Qassem had asked him to avoid insulting the Iraqi regime—which Basri interpreted not as an attempt to maintain civil discourse but as an "absurd" and biased attempt to protect Saddam from criticism.[82]

This particular episode, in December 2001, offers an instructive example of negative interactions between a very present Iraqi opposition and a hostile Arab public sphere. Fa'iq al-Shaykh Ali of the Iraqi opposition had been invited to present the case for an American invasion of Iraq against Maan Bashour, president of the Arab Nationalist Forum. After Shakykh Ali had held the floor for the first segment, Qassem took a phone call from former Iraqi ambassador Salah al-Mukhtar, who denounced any opposition that took money from the United States and rejected any claim they made to speak for the Iraqi people on those grounds. Shaykh Ali responded by yelling, "Why don't you go back to Iraq and be killed!", and then accused al-Jazeera of being on the payroll of the Iraqi mukhabarat and of being an insult to the sacrifices of the Iraqi people. As the discussion degenerated into a screaming match, Shaykh Ali repeatedly accused al-Jazeera of insulting the Iraqi people because "most of your guests are from the Iraqi regime or are friends of it." An exasperated Qassem challenged him: "Why do you always run away from the question and change the subject? . . . We have presented many programs on this topic, and every time you resort to avoiding the topic of the discussion."

Basri called in to the program to defend Shaykh Ali and to object to the form of Qassem's question: "Of course no sincere Iraqi supports bombing or destroying his country, but such slogans as 'Afghanizing Iraq' . . . are just false slogans inflamed by the Iraqi regime and its Arab supporters. . . . We are of course pleased at the absence of officials from the Iraqi regime [on the program], but they leave that task to their well-known allies and friends in the Arab arena." Basri then launched into a personal attack on Bashour and accused the Arab Nationalist Forum of being "against the Iraqi people and against the Arab umma," along with a fierce attack on Saddam's regime and anyone who failed to back the Iraqi opposition against it. It was at this point that Qassem invoked al-Jazeera's consistent rule of avoiding personal attacks, urged Basri to stick to the topic, and finally took a different caller.

This incident captures a number of essential points: that the Iraqi opposition had ample opportunity to make their case in the Arab media, that they largely failed to persuade, that they bitterly resented this failure, and that they often blamed that media for their own failures.

As Kanan Makiya of the INC complained, "The Iraqi opposition is ostracized in the Middle East. It's worse than not having support. It's an actual sort of an assumption that it doesn't even exist, that it's not relevant. When the Arab world talks about Iraq, it excludes the fact that there is an opposition."[83] While Makiya exaggerates the exclusion of the Iraqi opposition from Arab debates, this self-perception among the Iraqi exiles was widespread and deeply held. The opposition denounced the Arab League for refusing to meet with it or to support its calls for regime change in Iraq; Arab League spokesmen pointed out in response that the League represented the Arab states who were its members.[84] Virtually every appearance by an Iraqi opposition figure on al-Jazeera soon degenerated into a catalogue of grievances against the Arab states, the Arab media, and all of those they described as supporters of Saddam.

The Iraqi opposition, frustrated at the lack of public enthusiasm for war, did not lack for opportunities to challenge Arab leaders. But the distinction drawn by most Arabs between the Iraqi regime and the Iraqi people posed a nearly insoluble dilemma for opposition figures. Ghassan Attiyah wondered whether the Arabs declaring their sympathy with the Iraqi people really wished Saddam Hussein on them, or were they perhaps simply ignorant of the suffering imposed on them by Saddam?[85] Others expressed less doubt, reducing the question to its barest terms: "Do you support Saddam or the Iraqi people?"[86] But most Arabs simply did not accept the claim that opposition to an attack on Iraq "came on behalf of the interests of Saddam and at the expense of the interests of the Iraqi people."

Iraqi Arguments

Opinions about Saddam Hussein in the new Arab public sphere varied widely, from uncritical praise for a perceived hero holding out against American power to bitter attacks against a reckless lunatic who persecuted his own people. Sanctions critics and regime critics alike found Saddam's behavior baffling and exasperating, repeatedly undercutting his own presumed objectives. In the words of long-time Saddam critic Hazem Saghiyeh, "nobody can understand Saddam's behavior"—nei-

ther his supporters nor his enemies.[87] Even *al-Quds al-Arabi* declared Iraq's decision to cease cooperation with UNSCOM in August 1998 as "suicidal."[88] But at the same time, the powerful impetus in the Arab public sphere toward sympathy with the Iraqi people served as an important strategic asset to the Iraqi president. Iraq tailored its rhetoric with an eye toward the priorities of the Arab public sphere, nurturing Arab public sympathy with a clear eye toward its strategic value and attempting to leverage it into pressure on other Arab leaders and to undermine compliance with the sanctions regime.

Iraq argued that its rehabilitation served Arab strategic interests and that only Kuwaiti and Saudi intransigence stood in the way of achieving a united Arab front. A strong Iraq would benefit Arab power and security, against Iran, against Turkey, against internal division, and against Western domination: "For Iraq to resume its regional and international role would be in the interests of all the [Arab] brothers. . . . We must move toward the future and whatever is in everyone's interests. We should realize that what happened between us is not the first in the history of the nations, in order to enable ourselves to turn the page of the past and open a new page based on all that is in everyone's interests."[89] Rhetorical attacks on Gulf states undermined these arguments about collective security, however, by casting doubt on the sincerity of Iraqi reassurances. Tariq Aziz argued that despite the remaining differences between Arab states, "many say, mostly in secrecy and sometimes in the open: Iraq's absence has humiliated and weakened us; we need Iraq to return and play an effective role in Arab life and affairs. This has been reflected everywhere. Of course the masses had a clear stand. Even official stands of Arab leaderships and decision makers reflected this: the press, research centers, and influential political figures."[90]

The Iraqi regime attempted to manipulate and use the Arab public sphere to its own ends, with direct efforts at propaganda as well as more subtle strategies of manipulating and controlling information. As described in chapter 3, it encouraged reports on the sanctions, providing access and information to reporters who spread the news, but this did not minimize the reality of the humanitarian crisis. Iraq appealed to Arab brotherhood to work to end Iraqi suffering, pointing out dual standards with regards to Israel, challenging the integrity of

UN operations, and calling to rally Arab forces against the West. Iraqi argumentation improved over time, perhaps as Iraqis gained a better sense of the resonance of different frames, and as sympathetic Arabs outside Iraq helped to spread their message.[91]

Establishing that "authentic Arab" public opinion was with Iraq was central to the Iraqi regime's strategy. As Tariq Aziz put it, "all the people of the Arab nation call for lifting the siege. Most Arab governments—with the exception of two governments whom you know—are calling for lifting the siege. . . . Our calls for lifting the siege . . . are in line with the Arab people's will as well as that of the international community."[92] Establishing that the Arab public sided with Iraq was a major component of Iraqi strategy, and to that end it did everything possible to overload the system with information to that effect. One method was to host "popular summits" in Baghdad that would bring together popular (and less well-known) opposition figures from all over the Arab world to build pro-Iraqi coalitions; the largest of these, in July–October 1999, included delegations from more than half a dozen Arab states. To establish a since of progress and momentum, Iraq heavily publicized every visit by any delegation. Another method was to work through a wide array of pan-Arab organizations, such as the Arab Parliamentary Union, which regularly issued statements of support for Iraq. Yet another was to invite Arab journalists to visit Iraq, showering them with attention and gifts. The cash awards for Palestinian suicide bombers was part of this strategy (see below), aimed far more at Arab public opinion than at the Palestinian arena itself.

American military attacks against Iraq that left the regime in place generally served Iraq's interests by mobilizing a sense of Arab outrage, and putting pressure on Arab governments to distance themselves from American policy.[93] In general, Iraq proved far more successful when working to shape this Arabist worldview than when it attempted direct appeals for Arab political action. Whenever Saddam Hussein attempted a Nasser-style direct appeal to the Arab people to rise up against their rulers, he not only failed to win support, but generated significant opposition. In January 1999, for example, Iraq launched a violent rhetorical attack calling for the Arab street to rise up against rulers who continued to support the sanctions. The chief editor of Egypt's MENA responded: "Don't labor under the illusion that un-

leashing your media apparatus . . . would get you off the hook. . . . The sympathy and outrage felt by the Arab street in the wake of the U.S.-British bombings were motivated by support for the Iraqi people and feelings of disillusionment and revulsion. . . . Neither this anger or sympathy was meant to support you."[94]

Iraq's violent rhetorical attacks on other Arab state were generally counterproductive. When Uday Hussein threatened Kuwait in January 2001, *al-Quds al-Arabi* complained that "there is no excuse for this . . . it sets back all our efforts against the embargo."[95] Iraqi calls for the masses to overthrow regimes that continued to support the sanctions—as in January 1999—almost certainly drove wobbling states back toward a hard line by enhancing their perception of threat. After the Arab Summit in Cairo in October 2000, Iraq celebrated its return to the Arab order by calling for the masses to rise up against the Arab regimes: "Some Arab rulers have again submitted to the will of the enemies of the Arab nation and disregarded the Arab masses. . . . We urge the masses of our nation . . . to undertake the responsibility of exposing those who betrayed the nation . . . to stage a revolution and punish the traitorous rulers."[96] While it is hard to imagine how such an argument could fail to persuade said traitorous rulers, most remained curiously unmoved.

Iraq, Israel, and the Palestinians

The belief that the Iraqi and Palestinian issues were related is almost universal in the Arab public sphere. Most Arabs believed that American policy toward Iraq was—to a greater or lesser extent—motivated by its pro-Israeli sympathies. The power of the "Jewish lobby" over American Middle East policy was a matter of faith, as was the hostility of this lobby to Arab identity and interests. Since a weak or divided Iraq served Israel's interests in the regional power equation, it seemed plausible that Israel played some role in driving the containment of Iraq.

Arabs picked up on American media discussions of "neo-conservative" influences on Bush's foreign policy as confirmation of these suspicions. From time to time, controversies broke out over alleged Israeli plans to resettle Palestinian refugees in a post-Saddam Iraq.[97]

Chalabi's widely reported promise that an Iraq led by the INC would recognize and have friendly relations with Israel, and would be willing to resettle Palestinian refugees in Iraq, fueled these speculations, while also doing much to discredit Chalabi in the eyes of Arab public opinion. Richard Butler's warnings in January 1998 that Iraqi chemical weapons could reach Tel Aviv immediately suggested to many Arabs that Israeli security was the real motivation behind the Iraqi file.[98] The revelation of Scott Ritter's reliance on Israeli intelligence in his UNSCOM inspections confirmed what had been widely alleged in the Arab media—with many commentators declaring themselves vindicated against Western denunciations of their "conspiracy theories."[99] When Iraq was bombed by the outgoing Clinton administration in January 2001, one writer described the attack as "fifty-six cruise missiles on Iraq to prevent it from supporting the Intifada."[100]

Saddam understood that Iraq could benefit by linking the Iraqi issue to the Palestinian one, about which Arabs were far more unanimous and politically mobilized. When Palestinians were the first to publicly protest the possibility of an attack on Iraq in early 1998, it had a greater effect than protests almost anywhere else would have. Palestinian activists formed a Palestinian Committee for Solidarity with the Iraqi People in January 1998; the sight of Palestinian children, with all of their difficulties and with all their symbolic weight, collecting humanitarian supplies for Iraqi children struck a powerful chord.[101] Iraq's opposition to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process won it gratitude among Arab and Islamist critics of the negotiations, even if Iraq's centrality to that opposition has been vastly overstated by Americans who saw "the road to Jerusalem leading through Baghdad."

Some Palestinian hard-liners actually worried that Saddam might offer peace with Israel as an incentive to reconcile with the United States, while Palestinian supporters of the peace negotiations resented Iraqi support for the hard-liners. In this environment of violence and despair, Iraq did what it could to keep the "Arab street" agitated and to be seen as doing what it could to assist the Palestinians. Its much-publicized payments to the families of Palestinian "martyrs" were expressly aimed at Arab public opinion—to demonstrate that Iraq, even as it suffered under sanctions, would still do more to support the Palestinian struggle than did other Arab states. Similarly, its decision to stop pumping oil

temporarily to "support the Intifada" in April 2002 was widely seen as a publicity stunt, but as a valuable and praiseworthy one all the same.

After September 2000, growing numbers of Arabs believed that they could effectively support the Palestinian uprising only by closing ranks and putting the Iraq war divisions behind them. Divisions over Iraq, according to this argument, must be set aside in the face of a greater common threat to Palestine—over which a genuine consensus existed. Some Palestinian and Iraqi partisans worried that more concern for one issue would detract from the other. But the opposite seems to have been the case within the new Arab public sphere, as the two issues together created a multiplier effect, strengthening Arab public support for both Palestine and Iraq.[102] Rather than making a choice between the two issues, the Arab public insisted on the intimate linkage between the suffering of the two peoples, with the United States being the key actor in each.[103] As Mohammed al-Musaffir scathingly complained, "The United States of America deals with Arabs with the worst and most vicious kind of terrorism just as Israel does toward the Palestinian people and the Lebanese people. . . . America is doing the same thing with its near daily bombings."[104] The Arab public drew direct comparisons between the suffering of Iraqis and Palestinians, while blaming their governments for doing too little about either. As Ghassan Attiyah noted with some concern in the spring of 2000, "Iraqi suffering is joining Palestinian suffering as a card in the hand of the Islamists."[105] Such an equation could be found in the state media as well as the new public sphere, with a growing focus on the American role linking the two crises.

As the United States began pushing for war with Iraq in 2002, the Arab public sphere drew ever tighter linkages between Iraq and the Palestinian issue. Contrary to the arguments of many American conservatives that displays of American power would win Arab respect, it is clear that American support for Israel deeply undermined its credibility with Arab audiences (Gerecht 2002). As one writer bluntly put it, "After all that the United States has done for Israel, how can it possibly have good intentions in attacking Iraq?"[106] The grinding violence in the West Bank, and especially the bloody Israeli re-occupation in April 2002, ensured that any American moves on Iraq would be viewed through the lens of Palestinian suffering.

U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney's visit to the region in March 2002 brought all these trends to a head, and serves as an excellent window into a transformed normative and strategic environment that the United States badly failed to understand. While Cheney came to marshal support for action against Iraq, he found instead a region consumed with concern over the escalating war between Israel and the Palestinians (Woodward 2004: 111–112). As Jordanian columnist Fahd al-Fanik put it, "Cheney said to the Arab leaders: Iraq, and they said to him: Palestine. He said to them: Saddam, and they said to him: Sharon."[107] A cartoon published in *al-Hayat* showed Cheney walking through a puddle of blood in the West Bank; looking down at the bloody footprints tracking behind him, Cheney says "I'm sure that Saddam did it."[108]

In an almost unprecedented acknowledgment of the new power of public opinion, even pro-American Arab leaders made clear that they could not be asked to publicly support a war against Iraq while the United States supported the Israeli re-occupation of the West Bank. Even Saudi Arabia and Kuwait demurred from supporting an attack on Iraq at that time, "because it would harm the Iraqi people and not its regime."[109] Even Kuwaiti writers who had long strongly supported overthrowing Saddam's regime refused to step forward. For example, Ahmed al-Rubai, while affirming the deep Kuwaiti gratitude to Cheney personally, complained that "you know that you have many friends in Arab governments who find themselves always in a difficult position toward the United States, for one simple reason, which is that the American position toward Israel cannot be defended."[110] As Said al-Shihabi observed, "Despite the efforts of some Arab rulers to conform to the American agenda, there is a general feeling of deteriorating conditions because of the crimes committed by 'Israel' against the Palestinian people, and the unlimited American support for that aggression. . . . Washington realizes the existence of popular anger against its policies, which is why one of the goals of Cheney's visit was to put pressure on Arab governments to support its policies toward Iraq and Palestine."[111]

The Arab public, astounded by its own success, celebrated its newfound power in frustrating Cheney's mission—although at the same time, most of that public assumed that war with Iraq was inevitable

nonetheless. Most simply assumed their leaders would be hypocritical: "Cheney did not expect to receive public support from Arab states. . . . Arab media support is not what he wanted, but rather tactical and logistical support for the American war machine . . . and that, in private, he probably received."[112] Expressions of opposition to a war on Iraq, complained the skeptics, "were strictly for local consumption."[113] Even where leaders scrambled to meet the expectations of the new public, the gap between regimes and publics remained vast.

The UN Weapons Inspections: From Crisis to Crisis

From the summer of 1997 onward, a more-or-less perpetual crisis between Iraq and the UNSCOM weapons inspectors kept Iraq at the front of the Arab and international publics. When tensions began to rise over a series of controversial inspections, the most common interpretation was that the United States was seeking a confrontation.[114] From the American perspective, the crumbling sanctions and insistent divisions in the Security Council were making the containment policy unworkable, leading to a difficult choice: to keep sanctions or to keep inspections (Byman 2000). Worried that the inspections might prove ineffective without a Security Council united in backing them with force, the Clinton administration chose to sacrifice the inspections in order to keep the sanctions and to pursue regime change options. The culmination of these crises—the withdrawal of UNSCOM and four days of massive bombing by the United States and the United Kingdom—followed by revelations of American and Israeli misuse of UNSCOM vindicated many Arabs in their convictions. This served Iraq very well in the Arab context, as public opinion grew first frustrated and then infuriated at the seeming intransigence and irresponsibility of the United States, which deflected attention from Iraq's own continuing defiance of the inspectors.

By the time of the UNSCOM crises of 1997–1998, many Arabs had already been convinced of the political bias of UNSCOM. Richard Butler's style certainly aggravated these convictions. Even the Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* complained that Butler "did not bother on any occasion to win the good opinion of Iraqi citizens or ordinary

people anywhere in the Arab world. . . . Butler's words were music to Baghdad's ears."[115] Arab support for easing the sanctions most likely entered into Saddam's strategic calculations in his decision to challenge the inspections process beginning in late 1997. Each successive crisis strengthened the general popular background consensus among Arab publics about American unilateralism and the injustice of the sanctions.

Most actors, both Arab and Western, expected the "Arab street" to be controllable by Arab regimes, which were expected to cooperate with the ongoing American demand for Iraqi cooperation with UNSCOM inspectors. Most expected Arab opinion to be against bombing, but doubted that this opinion could be expressed effectively or that Arab leaders would respond to public opinion. Adli Sadeq articulated the general public sentiment, "It seems clear that the official viewpoint of the GCC and other Arab states is . . . that bombings of Iraq that do not remove Saddam are inflaming the public mood" but that they would "support a U.S.-U.K. attack that successfully targeted Saddam personally.[116] Or, in the words of another critical writer, "The main concern of Arab regimes is how to best submit to America's demands."[117]

As the year progressed, an unusual Arab consensus emerged "on the need to lift the blockade on the starving, tortured Iraqi people. . . . The United States imagines that it can separate the Arab regimes from their people . . . and force them to act against the peoples' feelings, . . . but the gap [between regimes and the people] is not nearly so great as imagined by current American policy."[118] As *al-Quds al-Arabi* explained, "With the exception of Kuwait, the Gulf states are hesitant to back any U.S. military action against Iraq that would not bring about the hoped-for change at the helm. . . . Limited strikes have been proven to strengthen the Iraqi leader and boost his popularity both inside and outside Iraq, while weakening Gulf governments and putting them in an embarrassing position vis-à-vis their citizens and other Arabs."[119]

In February 1998, however, Arab political behavior took a different turn—because, I argue, of the new strategic and normative environment created by the new Arab public sphere. While the resurrection of "the street" in most Arab countries is often believed to have begun with the Palestinian uprising of September 2000, it actually dates to these February 1998 protests against an American strike against Iraq. In

mid-February, after a period of surprisingly little public mobilization, large rallies in support of Iraq began to break out throughout the Arab world. The February 12 rally in the Palestinian territories received the greatest notice, but there were also protest rallies in Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Morocco. As one observer put it, "Arab opinion expressed itself by any means available despite the obstacles placed before it by the Arab officials. . . . The greatest contradiction was between the direction of the Arab street and the official direction."[120] Arab regimes were no less shocked than was the United States, as many Arab writers and commentators noted, by this sudden appearance of popular mobilization. Citing these demonstrations, Arab commentators overwhelmingly concluded that "Arab public opinion is beginning to move with force and to put pressure on its governments."[121] CNN, as well as the emerging Arab satellite television stations, played an important role by broadcasting footage of these rallies across the Arab world, inspiring imitation demonstrations and encouraging ordinary Arabs to act in ways that in the past would have seemed too dangerous.

This new Arab public opinion shaped the strategic calculations of all actors in the escalating Iraq crisis, even if the Arab media itself failed "to realize the importance of the political success it accomplished in frustrating the project of a third Gulf War."[122] Arab rejection of the legitimacy of the sanctions, and their insistence on action to rescue the Iraqi people from their misery, fatally undermined the status quo in spite of the preferences of most Arab regimes. As Ghassan Attiyah warned, "Pictures of Saddam Hussein are raised today in protests in Gaza and Jordan, and some Arab leaders are presenting themselves as sympathizing with the ruler of Baghdad in order to be closer to that street."[123] The open arguments on al-Jazeera could not be restricted to just the television screen, and soon began to spill out into open political mobilization in almost every Arab country. These protestors used a common language and employed similar imagery, with their actions in turn rebroadcast on the Arab media—providing inspiration for others in a virtuous circle of activism. It was quite common for guests and callers on al-Jazeera to directly address this "Arab street," to call on the street to rise up, or to invoke its desires. And, in this period, the "Arab street" did reappear, giving political substance to the consensus emerging in the public sphere.

In response, not a single Arab state—not even Kuwait—agreed to participate actively or passively in an attack on Iraq. Even those regimes that longed to be rid of Saddam were "forced to use two voices, one in public and one in private," by the strong Arab consensus.[124] In response, Arab regimes moved swiftly and firmly to regain control before the next crisis, banning demonstrations and establishing redlines for public demands on their policies. But an important signal had been sent, which gave much greater political weight to the opinions and arguments now being heard on satellite television and in the press. When crises hit in Iraq Arab states had little choice but to take into account the very real presence of a mobilized and angry Arab street.

The February 25, 1998, "Memorandum of Understanding" negotiated by Kofi Annan that defused the crisis was received enthusiastically by Arabs desperate to avoid a war. As *al-Quds al-Arabi* pointed out, however, it was striking that the crisis was resolved "with the near-complete absence of official Arab diplomacy."[125] Iraq, worried Ghassan Attiyah, had "succeeded in mustering Arab public opinion, benefiting from sympathy which far exceeded that of the Arabs who traditionally support the Iraqi regime."[126] Beyond the concessions about inspection protocols encoded in the MOA, Iraq had broken its Arab isolation, driven a wedge between Washington and its Arab allies—or else between those regimes and their publics—focused global attention on the sanctions, and (in some eyes) humiliated the Clinton administration. While few doubted that the United States would look for another opportunity to attack, the unexpected outcome—and the role played by Arab public opinion—surprised everyone. The lesson taken away from this crisis for the new Arab public was the stark contrast between an effective Arab street—one which protested vigorously and captured the attention of the global media and of the United States—and silent, ineffective Arab regimes.

Arab public opinion played a key role throughout the year of crisis, as all strategic actors attempted to manipulate or position themselves in response to it. Even if many Arabs believed that America had sought out a confrontation, savvy observers saw that Iraq "welcome[d] missile strikes because this convince[d] the Arab street of American hostility, . . . and Saddam Hussein [saw] the Arab street as key to his strategy."[127] When the Clinton administration contemplated military action

against Iraq, therefore, it received virtually no public support from Arab regimes—in sharp contrast to years past, when its efforts received public backing from the Gulf Cooperation Council states and, often, Egypt. Many Arab commentators saw it as an attempt by Clinton to distract attention from his domestic political problems—a notion that Operation Desert Fox, coinciding exactly with Clinton's impeachment trial, did little to dismiss. Few believed that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were the real issue in this crisis, or those to follow. Most considered the American goal of overthrowing Saddam Hussein to be the real driving force. This consensus, established through years of intense public argument in the new Arab public sphere, would return to shape the Arab reception of the Bush administration initiative in 2002.

The February crisis framed expectations for the next major crisis, which erupted in November 1998. In contrast to the earlier period, when Arabs overwhelmingly called for Iraqi defiance, this time Arabs desperately urged Iraq to cooperate with the inspections. Convinced of the American intent to attack, Arab leaders scrambled to avoid war. With the memory of the February protests vivid in Arab minds, there were virtually no major demonstrations or protests. Many regimes clamped down hard on protests. In Palestine, for example, there were "efforts to limit protests. . . . Arafat has told police and top political activists that this is not a good time for such public displays."[128] While Iraq did back down, preventing war for another month, many Arabs grew ever more bitter at their impotence in the face of the Iraqi-American power struggles: "As developments have come to a head, Arab citizens—whether ordinary people or officials—discover that Arab feelings, interests, security, or sovereignty do not carry any weight in American decision making. . . . Arab sovereignty, dignity, and lives are so cheap in the eyes of U.S. arrogance," complained one Palestinian writer.[129]

In December the Desert Fox bombings announced the American-British decision to abandon the UN Security Council, sacrifice the inspections, and to simply use military force. That Saddam Hussein survived the four days of bombing was taken by many Arabs as an Iraqi victory and an American defeat. A bombing campaign that left Saddam in power while inflaming the Arab street fulfilled the worst fears of many of America's Arab allies. In response to the bombings, massive protests broke out across the Arab world. These demonstra-

tions served to punctuate the radically transformed role of Arab public opinion—which in turn served as a clear precedent for the behavior of Arab publics and governments during the Palestinian uprising and the war in Iraq. Saudi writer Fawzia Abu Khaled noted in *al-Hayat* that for the first time since the 1991 Gulf War there was "clear American concern about the movement of the Arab street. . . . American policy makers have realized the political weight of the Arab street and the need to take it into account."[130] This newfound concern extended to Arab rulers, argued Abu Khaled, who "had themselves not valued these popular forces adequately, . . . [which] followed from their policies of marginalizing that street." Al-Jazeera and other satellite television stations played a crucial role in this, she argued, by showing the simultaneous demonstrations in one Arab capital after another to protestors themselves fixated on the television coverage.

These demonstrations targeted not only the United States and Great Britain, but also Kuwait, for allowing its airspace to be used in the campaign and—tacitly—all other Arab governments who failed to act effectively in response to the attack. Observers of the protests and of the subsequent post mortems all agreed on the remarkable impact of al-Jazeera and other television coverage in the crisis. In Kuwaiti *diwaniya* (political salon) discussions, according to one writer, "Al-Jazeera had a large share of the dialogue and commentary and discussion. . . . I did not attend a single *diwaniya* in Kuwait in which al-Jazeera was not on the television. . . . But there was some displeasure with the style of al-Jazeera, which they saw as not objective . . . and as contributing to the incitement of the Arab street against Kuwait. . . . And they had some objections to the objectivity of some of the presenters and some of the regular guests."[131] Even al-Jazeera's critics, he noted, had to admit that its undeniable success shed cruel light on the shortcomings of the traditional Arab media. In contrast, a former GCC secretary-general lambasted al-Jazeera across the board as "harming Gulf relations."[132]

The contrast between an Arab street that had acted to the limits of its ability and Arab governments that stood weakly by and did nothing could hardly have been more prominently aired.[133] Yusuf Nur Awadh powerfully expresses this sense of possibility and the reach of the Arab public critique: "A new stage of Arab consciousness began to appear after the latest attack on Iraq, a stage imposed by the Arab street, which

raised its arms against the policy of Arab governments. . . . But do not understand from that that the Arab street demands only a change in the positions of governments toward Iraq or toward holding an Arab summit. . . . The Iraqi crisis points rather toward holding up a mirror to force the Arabs to see their own monstrous face reflected, . . . and the Arab street demands a comprehensive review of the entire Arab condition."[134]

Hopes that this mobilized Arab public might push Arab regimes to take action were quickly frustrated, however. The negotiations that began immediately after Desert Fox—to hold an Arab summit that would finally formulate a unified Arab position regarding Iraq—while in line with the agenda pursued by Egypt and others for several years, clearly responded to highly mobilized Arab public opinion: "The momentum for holding such a summit was provided by the impressive display of public opposition throughout the Arab world to the latest Anglo-American strikes. . . . By spontaneously taking to the streets in solidarity with the Iraqi people, the Arab peoples showed they are more politically mature than their rulers. . . . They also reaffirmed their shared sense of Arab identity."[135]

More skeptical observers saw the Iraqi government's demands, building on its perceived victory, to be "yet another theft and cynical exploitation of genuine Arab feelings about the suffering of the Iraqi people."[136] When the Iraqi regime lashed out at Arab rulers, calling on the Arab street to rise up against them, it triggered a powerful backlash. Saddam's regime overreached and, as Ragheda Dergham argued, badly misread the Arab public, whose intense sympathy for the Iraqi people and rejection of the bombing campaign simply did not translate into support for Saddam Hussein, or make the Arab street into a political weapon he could wield.[137] In the end, no Arab summit was held to commence Arab reconciliation, nor did a push begin to lift the sanctions. Ultimately, the Arab foreign ministers' meeting in Cairo in late January produced a document that pressed tough demands on Iraq and offered little concession to the public demands about the sanctions. Much of the Arab public blamed this failure on American pressure.[138] As one Arab writer despaired, "The meetings behind closed doors at the Arab League in Cairo showed the lengths to which the bootlickers would go to escape the extraordinary consensus of the

Arab people . . . [and] showed the difficulty in translating an Arab position into resolutions that express the united Arab will."[139]

Over the course of 1999, UN diplomats struggled with what would eventually become Security Council Resolution 1284—an attempt to comprehensively rethink the Iraqi issue in all of its dimensions: disarmament, sanctions, and the internal problems of Saddam's regime. In December 1999, a nine-month effort by the United States and United Kingdom to rebuild Security Council consensus on the weapons inspections regime failed, with three permanent members of the Security Council (and Malaysia) abstaining from the key resolution and Iraq refusing to cooperate with the new UNMOVIC inspection team.

The Arab debate about these negotiations offers a window into how the new public sphere had changed Arab politics. In earlier UN debates, Arab publics had little information about deliberations in New York beyond the highly controlled snippets offered in the official media or else the highly partisan information to be found in Iraqi propaganda. In 1999, however, the new Arab media reported on and discussed these ongoing negotiations vigorously. In June 1999 Tariq Aziz appeared on *More Than One Opinion* to discuss the negotiations.[140] As in the examples noted above, Sami Haddad vigorously challenged Aziz on both factual claims and on his arguments. Haddad asked Aziz how Iraq could reject a plan that could immediately relieve much Iraqi suffering, and interrupted him to correct inaccurate claims Aziz made about the contents of the draft resolution. When Aziz tried to stand on the principle of sovereignty, Haddad refused to back down, pointing out that Iraq had accepted other deals, such as the oil-for-food program. Throughout, Haddad demanded that Aziz explain how Iraq could place political considerations ahead of the humanitarian crisis, which most concerned the Arab public. Such an encounter demonstrates the ways in which the new Arab public sphere challenged Iraqi diplomacy at the same time that the focus on the humanitarian crisis helped it.

The Sanctions

While street protests against American military strikes in Iraq demonstrate one aspect of the new public's concrete political impact, another

crucial aspect was the delegitimation of the sanctions regime and the growing pressure on Arab states to challenge the embargo. The mobilization from below described in chapter 3 blossomed in this period, with the suffering of the Iraqi children publicized across the Arab and Muslim world in a variety of creative and evocative ways. From collection boxes outside mosques, to dramatic posters of starving Iraqi children covering the walls of professional association offices, to cultural exhibits featuring Iraqi artists and poets, to screenings of brilliantly polemical documentary films, Iraqi suffering permeated the cultural consciousness. The business sector, aware of the vast economic opportunities on the horizon, often supported these efforts, while governments that preferred such quiet activity to dangerous demands to act against Israel largely stayed out of the way. Both formally—through Arab professional associations or popular conferences or official committees to coordinate solidarity with Iraq—and informally, Arabs organized themselves to bring relief to the Iraqi children.

Concern for the Iraqi people was not limited to Arabs and Muslims, of course. Those involved directly with the UN humanitarian program in Iraq were "traumatized" by the humanitarian catastrophe related to sanctions (Minear et al. 1998: 9). Reports by the FAO, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children, and others painted an increasingly coherent picture of a humanitarian crisis that could not be dismissed as Iraqi propaganda. Dennis Halliday forced the internal UN dissatisfaction into the public arena with his highly publicized resignation in September 1998. Distressed by the inability of the humanitarian program to alleviate the suffering of Iraqi society, largely because of political interference from the Security Council Sanctions Committee, Halliday unleashed a highly public blast of moral outrage that generated considerable public attention. Halliday's successor, Hans van Sponek, resigned a year later for identical reasons and joined Halliday in publicly attacking the UN for its role in the humanitarian problems in Iraq, as did Jutta Burghardt of the World Food Programme. These critiques received support from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who implored the Security Council to improve its procedures and allow humanitarian work to proceed. In August 2000 Belgian law professor Marc Bossuyt stirred up a diplomatic storm with a report commissioned by the UN Human Rights

Subcommission that attributed the humanitarian disaster in Iraq to the sanctions and called them "unequivocally illegal."[141] A quote attributed to a senior UN official, saying that "the Americans are, I'm afraid, the real villains in all this," captures the prevailing sense of anger and frustration within the UN bureaucracy.[142]

The UNICEF report concluding that half a million Iraqi children had died as a result of the sanctions was prominently discussed in the new Arab media. Even on the suffering of the Iraqi people, the new Arab public sphere refused to uncritically accept assertions, particularly on the question of who bore responsibility for the tragedy. The August 24, 1999, episode of *The Opposite Direction* explored at great length the difference between infant mortality rates in the northern Kurdish areas and in the areas under Saddam's control. On the October 4, 1999, *More Than One Opinion* program, Sami Haddad challenged guest Abd al-Bari Atwan when he invoked the figure of 8,000 Iraqi children dying a month due to the sanctions, noting that "it is strange, though, that the level of infant deaths in northern Iraq is much less than in the south."[143] Even defenses of the sanctions could still be heard, albeit infrequently. For example, Raghid al-Saleh, a frequent critic of Saddam, cited a range of American scholars to argue that despite the problems, sanctions often did work and could be justified in the case of Iraq.[144] Dozens of columns in the press blamed Saddam, often noting that a major problem with the imposition of sanctions was that it strengthened his regime even as it harmed Iraqi civilians.

As Western activists began to openly question the sanctions, the Arab media pointedly asked why Arabs were doing less than non-Arabs to challenge an embargo they claimed to despise. When an Italian plane landed in Baghdad, *al-Quds al-Arabi* pointedly asked, "Why couldn't the plane be Arab instead of Italian?"[145] The Arab media lingered over visits by Venezuela's Hugo Chavez, Indonesia's Abd al-Rahman, and Malaysia's Mohammed Mahathir, each time pointedly noting the absence of their Arab counterparts. During a controversy over a scheduled visit to Iraq by the Pope, Abd al-Bari Atwan told Sami Haddad, "I had hoped that if the Pope visited Iraq in December he would be joined by the Shaykh of al-Azhar, and Ali Khameini . . . and Shaykh Hussain Fadlallah, and all religious leaders in the Arab world . . . to go to see the suffering of more than 22 million Arabs and

Muslims and Christians suffering from starvation and poverty and killing and blockade."[146] Publicizing non-Arab activities shone an indirect but glaring spotlight on official Arab inaction, which mobilized pressure on them to match words with deeds. Arab opinion, which had coalesced over the 1990s (as described in chapter 3), now became a primary concern for even powerful states. Even Kuwait and Saudi Arabia reluctantly acceded to the premise that Iraqi suffering could not continue indefinitely.

As Mohammed al-Musaffir urged, "We will break the embargo peacefully, through trade and noncompliance."[147] Perhaps the most visible example of this strategy came with a series of "airplane challenges" to the sanctions. In 1993, at a time when the normative consensus supporting the sanctions remained strong, Pakistan petitioned the UN for permission to fly worshipers to Iraq to visit important religious centers. This request received considerable support from the Islamic world, given its humanitarian and seemingly nonpolitical mandate. After the UN grudgingly allowed one flight, several other states followed suit. Attempting to exploit the wedge, states tried to send flights full of dubious "pilgrims"—politicians, journalists, movie stars, businessmen. When the UN barred one of these flights, Pakistan backed down and the pilgrimage flights ended. In April 1997 Iraq sent an airlift of pilgrims to the Haj in Saudi Arabia in defiance of the southern no-fly zones. When the United States abstained from shooting down planes full of religious pilgrims, some hastened to describe this as a weakening of the sanctions. *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, for example, described it as "another small but significant step in the process of loosening the political and economic noose."[148] Even more, it argued, "even while hungry and besieged, Iraq has succeeded in drawing attention to Washington's hypocrisy and double standards, . . . which has earned it the sympathy of millions of Arabs and Muslims and earned the United States yet another dose of revulsion and hostility from the Arab street."

In 2000, at a time when the normative consensus had dramatically shifted against the sanctions, a challenge had a dramatically different outcome. On August 17, 2000, Iraq announced the reopening of Baghdad International Airport for the first time since the Gulf War. Two days later, Russia dramatically flew the first flight into Baghdad, pointedly not requesting permission from the UN on the grounds that

nothing in the Security Council resolutions prevented humanitarian flights. Over the next month, a heated debate took place concerning the appropriate response to the Russian flight and about the procedures by which such humanitarian flights might be governed. With no consensus reached in either direction, France sent a second flight on September 22. This triggered a cascade. On September 27, Jordan sent the third flight—and the first Arab flight. It was followed in short order by Yemen (September 28), Morocco (October 4), the UAE, Algeria, and Tunisia (October 6), Syria (October 8), Turkey (October 9), the Sudan and Lebanon (October 13), and Bahrain (October 16).

Once the precedent was established, states that hoped to demonstrate their support for Iraq against the sanctions felt urgent pressure to act—and to act quickly, before the flights became routinized and therefore carried little political value. Many states sent multiple flights, or attempted to innovate in some way in order to stand out from the thickening crowd: on October 6, the UAE trumpeted the fact that its flight was the first from a GCC state; on October 17, Syria sent the first large jet; Jordan always tried to have sent the most flights. The second airplanes challenge demonstrates well the cascade dynamics that could be triggered under conditions of systemic hypocrisy. It also shows how such a cascade could overwhelm the power of the United States, which was reduced to focusing its energies on establishing that allowing the flights was not a signal of the impending collapse of the sanctions regime. As Salah al-Nasrawi argued, the sanctions would actually end only when Arab governments directly challenged the United States, but in the interim such a public initiative would "create a psychological atmosphere helpful to the Iraqi leadership in its efforts to rally Arab and international public opinion on the necessity of lifting the blockade."[149]

By 2000 the sanctions on Iraq were collapsing from below, losing legitimacy and facing increasingly public challenges. Sanctions violations were skyrocketing, and American officials frankly recognized that the sanctions could not be sustained indefinitely (Cortright and Lopez 2000: 2). As Kofi Annan put it, "The humanitarian situation in Iraq posed a serious moral dilemma for the United Nations, which was in danger of losing the argument—if it had not already lost it—about who was responsible for the situation: Saddam Hussein or the United Nations."[150]

In the spring of 2001 the United States and the United Kingdom ex-

pended considerable political capital on an effort to reform the Iraq sanctions in ways precisely calibrated to respond to the humanitarian critique of the anti-sanctions network while retaining more tightly focused military sanctions. The efforts followed from widespread recognition that the sanctions were becoming unsustainable as they lost legitimacy: smuggling increased, Iraq worked out deals with "middlemen" to gain oil revenues outside the UN framework, and humanitarian missions from dozens of nations challenged U.S. interpretations of the UN rules to travel to Baghdad to demonstrate solidarity with the Iraqi people.[151]

From an American policy perspective, "smart sanctions" had many merits. This seemed to respond to European and Arab concerns about Iraqi suffering, which would presumably blunt pressures for lifting the sanctions. It could potentially rebuild a Security Council consensus behind American goals of containing and undermining support for Saddam's regime. It maintained what Washington saw as vital: control over the disposition of Iraqi oil revenues, effective prevention of potential military imports, and enhanced surveillance over what passed through Iraqi borders. The smart sanctions proposals responded to growing pressure in international civil society, and drew heavily on ideas developed in a wide range of international agencies and working groups concerned with making sanctions more effective and less deadly. Despite all of these merits, however, the smart sanctions proposals failed (Lynch 2001). In part, they were simply a casualty of great power politics, as Russia held out in defense of its own self-interest and other countries looked ahead to vast profits if the sanctions were lifted rather than refined. A significant number of states, including three permanent Security Council members, along with an increasingly vocal international civil society, challenged U.S. justifications for the sanctions.

But even if they had won Security Council support, smart sanctions would still have failed because they commanded no support among the Arab and other neighboring states that would have to enforce them for them to succeed. Across the board, Arab states rejected the enhanced monitoring and border control demanded of them in the proposed smart sanctions regime. This rejection was almost entirely a product of the dramatic shift in the public sphere consensus about the sanctions and the United States. In short, the Arab debate about smart sanctions revolved not around whether they would make the contain-

ment of Iraq more effective and sustainable. Instead, Arabs focused on the injustice of the sanctions and the need to remove them entirely.

Toward War

When U.S. President George W. Bush announced his determination to combat an "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union Address, it seemed clear that Iraq would be the primary target in the new campaign. The administration's mobilization of support was initially derailed by the violence in the West Bank, which led to the failure of Vice President Dick Cheney's March visit to the region. But in the early fall, the Bush administration began an aggressive campaign to muster support for a decisive confrontation with Iraq. After winning Congressional support, Bush turned to the United Nations to attempt to build an international consensus for military action. His failure to do so—discussed in the next chapter—profoundly shaped the course of the conflict that followed.

The emergence of the Arab public sphere at the end of the 1990s, and its growing emphasis on the United States as the cause of Iraqi and Palestinian suffering, deeply shaped the reception given the American drive toward war with Iraq. As described above, the Arab public sphere had for years been arguing about American support for Israel, the hypocrisy of American enforcement of the sanctions and no-fly zones, American indifference to the deaths of Iraqi children, the unprecedented American military presence in the Gulf, and official Arab subservience to American policies. American support for Israel and for Arab dictators left Arabs almost universally skeptical of a moralizing American rhetoric about democracy and human rights. The enormous public attention to American manipulation of UNSCOM and the Security Council in the late 1990s ensured Arab incredulity over American claims to be motivated by the need to enforce UN resolutions. And the Bush administration's nonresponse to Israel's reoccupation of the West Bank cemented deeply felt resentments about American policy and doubts about American intentions. In short, the developments in this period established the narrative context for the great arguments about the invasion of Iraq.