5

Baghdad Falls

During the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, the performance of the Arab media became the subject of intense debate. Whereas it had already been singled out as a source of anti-Americanism and political radicalism after 9/11, now it seemed to pose a major and direct obstacle to the American military campaign. The protests over the Israeli-Palestinian issue had made Americans and Arab regimes alike painfully aware of its mobilizing potentional and its influence on Arab public opinion. The Arab media therefore itself became a central front of political conflict during and after the war.

Al-Jazeera in particular was accused of actively supporting the Iraqi regime with its skeptical reporting on the case for war and its heavy coverage of the conflict's human impact. The complexities of al-Jazeera's coverage of Iraq (see chapter 4), and the diversity of opinions found on its talk shows, faded away in the eyes of many observers in the harsh light of war. Almost every aspect of its coverage came under criticism: the word choices of news presenters who used terms such as "invasion" rather than "liberation"; the guests on the talk shows, many of whom were fiercely critical of the war; the broadcasting of footage of Iraqi civilians in agony or of American prisoners of war. After the war, al-Jazeera came under even more intense scrutiny, accused of aiding and abetting the Iraqi insurgency and of undermining the transition to Iraqi democracy.

The Arab public sphere did play a major role in shaping the political and normative environment, but in more complex and ambiguous

ways than its critics recognize. For one, 2003 represented precisely the point of transition away from al-Jazeera's hegemony in the Arab media realm. While it remained the most popular and influential satellite television station at the time the war broke out, al-Jazeera now faced potent competitors such as al-Arabiya, as well as smaller but effective rivals such as Abu Dhabi TV and al-Manar. Their struggles for market share meant that they both led and followed public opinion, as they competed to position themselves within a rapidly evolving political environment.

The ways in which the Arab public sphere discussed the possibility of a war with Iraq can be understood only in the context of the emergence of the new public and its engagement with the Iraqi issue over the preceding years. The issue of Iraq had by 2002 been well established as a core aspect of an Arab identity about which every Arab should and did have an opinion. While Arabs disagreed and argued intensely over the appropriate course of action, American policy toward Iraq generated almost universal condemnation and hostility. The sanctions and regular bombings combined to deeply entrench the Arab conviction of American hostility toward the Iraqi people, which rebounded harshly against the United States when it tried to make the case that its war would be a liberation for the benefit of the Iraqi people. Furthermore, the escalation toward war coincided with intense agitation over the horrifying stalemate between Palestinians and Israel, which led most Arabs to link the question of Iraq to the suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation, American support for Israel, and official Arab impotence. The close identification between the Bush administration and Ariel Sharon in this Arab consensus badly tarnished American credibility on any regional topic, from invading Iraq to spreading democracy. The Arab public sphere interpreted each development through the filter of a narrative that had been finely tuned through years of public argument.

This chapter examines the engagement of the Arab public sphere with the American invasion of Iraq, from its introduction onto the agenda in 2002 through the summer of 2003. As with earlier chapters I do not present a comprehensive history of the war, or of the diplomacy surrounding that war. Far more than the other chapters, this one focuses on al-Jazeera rather than the Arab press, and particularly the remarkable open talk shows aired in the month after the fall of Baghdad,

in which uncensored callers debated the meaning of Iraq live night after night in what may be the truest public sphere in Arab history. While I do pay some attention to the news coverage of al-Jazeera, I am more interested here in the evolution of a public opinion through arguments and dialogue within the new Arab public sphere.

Before the War

As chapter 4 documented, Iraq had become a central element of the new Arabist identity that had developed through the public arguments of the new Arab public sphere. In the last months of 2001, at a time when Iraq was hardly on the American public agenda, the Arab public was openly discussing what it saw as the real possibility of an American attack on Iraq. Even before the Afghan campaign had ended, Ahmed Mansour hosted Iraqi Vice President Taha Ramadan (November 2001), and a few days later Faisal al-Qassem hosted a discussion of whether "America could Afghanize Iraq." In January 2002, a program surveyed the question of international inspections and their prospects for avoiding a crisis. Even at the height of the focus on Afghanistan, then, Arabs never lost sight of Iraq.

American credibility, which was a near obsession for many war advocates in the United States (and, reportedly, for some Arab leaders) was hardly an issue in the Arab public sphere: virtually everyone assumed that the Bush administration was determined to invade Iraq no matter what, and most discussion revolved around how this might be prevented (Woodward 2004: 228–231). This included widespread calls for the Iraqi regime to avoid giving the United States an excuse for war. In the November 2001 program, for example, Qassem wondered why Iraq did not simply readmit the inspectors and pull the rug out from under American plans, while on the other hand asking whether America had not already done enough to the Iraqi people with twelve years of sanctions and bombings.

Outside the Arab public sphere, concerns about American credibility had more serious ramifications. Iraqis bitterly remembered the experience of 1991, when they rose up in response to the first President Bush's calls and then found themselves alone to be massacred

by Saddam's military. Many Arab leaders similarly feared a replay of the end of the first Gulf War, where the United States defeated Iraq but left Saddam in power. American rhetoric meant to reassure Iraqis and Arab leaders about the "seriousness" of American intentions reinforced the convictions of the Arab public, fueling their deep suspicions about American arguments concerning WMD, terrorism, or spreading democracy.

Bush's "Axis of Evil" State of the Union Address fueled an Arab argument that had already been raging. Numerous talk shows asked about "the American agenda for Iraq" (*First Wars*, February 15), "the possibility of an American attack against Iraq" (*First Wars*, February 18; *First Wars*, March 6), and "the position of neighboring states on an attack against Iraq" (*First Wars*, March 11). In a March 15 program, for example, Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Policy and Abd al-Rahman al-Rashed, the pro-American editor of *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, faced off against more critical figures. On March 22, Sami Haddad invited the British military expert Simon Henderson to explain Britain's position. These programs, as well as dozens of op-eds in the Arab press, offer a clear picture of elite public discourse on the topic.

Almost no Arabs took seriously the idea that Iraq was a legitimate front in the war on terror, or that Saddam's regime might have ties to al-Qaeda or have had a hand in 9/11. But after years of criticizing the sanctions and worrying about American regime-change efforts in Iraq, most of the Arab public fully believed that the United States would eagerly exploit the opportunity to go after Saddam. After years of experience with what was widely considered to be an arms inspection process fatally compromised by its subservience to American foreign policy (the opposite of general American views of the inspectors), few Arabs took the Bush administration's demands for Iraqi disarmament or renewed inspections seriously. After years of denouncing American support for dictatorial Arab regimes and hostility to the aspirations of the Arab people, not even the most committed liberals believed that the United States was motivated by humanitarian concerns in Iraq or that it really hoped to spread democracy in the region. The Bush adminstration did not face a generic, irrational hatred and mistrust of America in its campaign against Iraq—it faced a specific, deeply entrenched narrative about the preceding decade that almost guaranteed

a negative reception for its arguments. Since almost nobody believed that the campaign to act against Iraq was really about spreading democracy, or about Iraqi WMD, or about ties to al-Qaeda, attention inevitably turned to motives such as oil and Israel. There was near-complete consensus that the Bush administration had long decided on war and that all the rest was only for show.

Public opinion surveys suggest that general views followed the public discourse. In an April 2002 opinion survey, only 3 percent of Egyptians favored an American attack against Iraq and 84 percent were against; 7 percent of Lebanese for and 84 percent against; 11 percent of Saudis for, 80 percent against; 13 percent of Kuwaitis for and 61 percent against.[1] On American policy toward Iraq, 4 percent of Egyptians found it excellent or good, while 83 percent found it so-so or poor; 4 percent and 90 percent in Lebanon; 17 percent and 55 percent in Kuwait; 9 percent and 83 percent in Saudi Arabia. The Zogby poll found that 80 percent of Egyptians said that their opinion of the United States would improve if it lifted the sanctions on Iraq, as did 77 percent of Saudis and 75 percent of Lebanese. The Pew Global Attitudes survey released in March 2004 offered a stark picture of Arab opposition not only to the war, but to American policy more broadly.[2] 66 percent of Moroccans and 70 percent of Jordanians said that suicide bombings against Americans in Iraq were justifiable. 70 percent of Jordanians and 48 percent of Moroccans thought Iraqis would be worse-off post-Saddam, while 76 percent and 72 percent thought that America was "overreacting to terrorism." Only 3 percent of Jordanians and 9 percent of Moroccans thought that their country had done the wrong thing by refusing to participate in the war. Only 5 percent of Jordanians and 27 percent of Moroccans—close American allies—had favorable views of the United States.

The arguments in the Arab public sphere revealed genuine uncertainty and a real variety of viewpoints, despite an overwhelming consensus on the overarching narrative. Al-Jazeera online polls—which are not scientific, but which often receive tens of thousands of responses and can serve as useful snapshots of at least the preferences of al-Jazeera viewers—produced outcomes skewed overwhelmingly (usually about 90 percent to 10 percent) against any American position, but divided much more evenly on internal Arab questions. Unlike questions related

to Israel, there was no smothering consensus governing Iraq discussions. For example, asked in January 2003, "Do you support the Iraqi president stepping down from power to save his people from war?," 39.6 percent said yes and 50.2 percent said no (with 56,662 responses). When asked in December 2002 whether Iraq should continue to cooperate with inspectors in the face of American threats, 54.9 percent said yes and 43.4 percent said no (with 40,800 responses). In a poll concluded on March 20, 2003, more than 111,000 respondents divided closely over the question of whether the United States would succeed in overthrowing Saddam Hussein (42.1 percent said yes, 51.5 percent said no). In late November 2004, opinion divided almost evenly (48 percent–52 percent) on the question of whether the Iraqi elections should be postponed. Such results suggest that while the Arab public sphere overwhelmingly accepted a particular identity and narrative, this did not lead automatically to consensus on specific issues or policies.

The Arab public struggled to make sense of American intentions, of the calculations of their leaders, of what could possibly be done. But then the Israeli reoccupation of the West Bank drove Iraq from the headlines and from the talk shows, while transforming everyone's evaluation of the strategic significance of the "Arab street." The furious demonstrations and protests in March and April 2002 startled virtually everybody: not only regimes, but also the Arab public itself, which had come to expect its own impotence. This time, massive street protests exploded across the Arab world, in Bahrain, Jordan, Tunisia, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, the UAE, Egypt, and the largest demonstration (over a million people) in Morocco's history.[3] Tence face-offs with police and military, particularly in Jordan and Egypt, where protestors sought to march on the Israeli embassy, focused attention on regimes that seemed unable to act. Even Bush administration officials, who had since the 1991 Gulf War been dismissive of Arab public opinion, began to take note.[4] Arab leaders were clearly worried, as Jordanian Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher admitted: "The demonstrations are getting stronger by the day. . . . The street is literally boiling. We are being forced to take steps we don't want to take because people are angry and public opinion in the Arab world cannot be ignored."[5]

Most observers credited the Arab media with fueling this newfound mobilization, as the Palestinian issue—with graphic images of civilian

casualties as well as live footage of protests in other countries—dominated the satellite television broadcasts. As Shibley Telhami observed, foreshadowing the coverage of the Iraq war, "Arab satellite television stations . . . carry live pictures of the horror in Palestinian cities and live phone calls from Palestinian men and women calling events massacres and atrocities."[6] Egyptian analyst Mohammed Sid Ahmed nicely captured the qualitative difference in the intensity of this experience: "The enmity between the Arabs and Israel has been there, but before an Israeli was imagined in Cairo like someone on the moon—inaccessible, unseeable. Now, the hatred is closer."[7]

Concerns about this newly potent Arab public opinion threw the American mobilization toward war with Iraq off track in 2002, at least for a time. As discussed in chapter 4, when Vice President Cheney came to the Middle East in March 2002 to win support for an attack against Iraq, an Arab public as skeptical of their own rulers as of America wondered whether Arab regimes would—in their view—sell out the Iraqi people to the Americans. To everyone's surprise, leader after leader told Cheney that Israel's actions toward the Palestinians made it impossible for them to consider participation in any initiative toward Iraq. Arab leaders took several symbolic steps toward Iraq, including inviting Iraq to an Arab summit for the first time since the 1990–1991 Gulf War and engineering a symbolic (if largely meaningless) reconciliation between Iraq and Kuwait. Egypt canceled regular flights to Israel by its semi-official airline. During a visit with the President in Crawford, Texas, Crown Prince Abdullah bluntly warned Bush about the ramifications of his support for the Israeli actions. But, as Hosni Mubarak frankly said in January 2003, no Arab government could or would stand in the way of an America resolved to go to war—leaving the Arab public with no means by which to act effectively.[8]

For all their public rhetoric, however, Arab states did not act on demands to confront Israel, begin an oil boycott, and expel American diplomats, or other concerns of protestors. As Abdullah Sanawi put it, during the run-up to war Arab regimes "were not even able to support the European position out of fear of angering the United States."[9] The Arab public was left with a baffling but heady mixture: a new self-confidence based on its unprecedented display of strength in April; enormous anger and frustration at the inability to actually help the Pales-

tinians or stop the Israeli offensive; an ever greater sense of distance from their own rulers; and intense fury with the United States for the Bush administration's perceived unqualified support for Ariel Sharon.

As American discussion of a possible invasion of Iraq increased in the late summer, so did the Arab debate. Once again, these debates included a wide range of voices and a variety of perspectives—but all within this evolving narrative of despairing fury with the United States over Iraq and Palestine. When discussing Security Council resolution 1441, for example, Sami Haddad made a point of reminding viewers that resolution 242 (passed after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war) had never been implemented, and emphasized the differences between the American-British and the French-Russian interpretations of the resolution. Some argued that the resolution had prevented a war—the Syrian explanation of its vote—and that the inspections would prevent America from invading. Most Arabs doubted this, arguing—correctly, it turned out—that the Bush administration would wage its war regardless of what the inspectors did or found. Haddad spoke for many in declaring that the choice was "between bad and worse."[10]

It is worthwhile reviewing at some length the programs aired in this crucial period to show the range of discussion that actually characterized al-Jazeera's talk shows. On July 18, Jumana al-Namour hosted the Iraqi opposition figure Mustafa Bazarghan on the subject of overthrowing Saddam Hussein. On July 27, Ghassan bin Jadu explored the regional implications of the Iraqi issue, with guests including the Iraqi opposition figure Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim of SCIRI. On August 2, Hafez al-Mirazi invited Scott Ritter, Iraqi opposition figure Rand Rahim, and former UN humanitarian coordinator Hans von Sponeck to discuss American relations with Iraq. On August 6, Faisal al-Qassem provoked a minor crisis between Qatar and Jordan with a program on Jordan's role in a war, with the leftist Asaad Abu Khalil facing off against Mahmoud al-Khurabsheh from the Jordanian Parliament. On August 8, Edmund Ghareeb appeared to talk about the American perspective on inspections. On August 11, Danielle Pletka from AEI (one of the leading American advocates of an invasion) and a former Egyptian diplomat debated Iraq's future in the face of American threats. On August 22, Jumana al-Namour hosted the Egyptian analyst Hassan Nafia to discuss the Arab position toward an attack, while on August

30 *More Than One Opinion* invited Mohammed Idris from Egypt's *al-Ahram*, Mohassen Khalil (Iraq's representative to the Arab League), and a Russian analyst to discuss the same question. American academic Laura Drake (September 4) and British analyst Rosemary Hollis and Rachel Bronson from the Council on Foreign Relations (September 12) discussed the impact of a war on the future of the Middle East. On September 20, Hafiz al-Mirazi discussed a possible war with *al-Ahram*'s Mohammed al-Sayd Said, Muwafic Harb (who became the director of programming for Radio Sawa and al-Hurra), Amru Musa (Secretary-General of the Arab League), and American Congressman Nick Rahall.

After the United Nations passed resolution 1441 in November, Haddad invited Iraqi opposition figure Majid al-Samara'i to argue with Abd al-Bari Atwan, and a Syrian analyst to explain why Syria did not vote against it. A September 27 program on the confrontation between the United States and Iraq hosted Mike O'Brian, British Minister of State for Near Eastern Affairs, along with a Russian policy advisor and two prominent Arab political analysts. A December 2002 program invited a British government spokesman along with a representative of Amnesty International to present the report on human rights issued in support of war, in which the crimes of Saddam's regime were fully aired, although host Sami Haddad's introduction was frankly skeptical of its timing and intention, and a guest bitingly asked how anyone could take British concern for the Iraqi people seriously after it had spent thirteen years defending the sanctions. Douglas Feith, one of the key architects of the Iraq war in the American Department of Defense, appeared in January 2003 to present the American case for war, while a different program on the same day hosted the prominent Kuwaiti columnist and Parliamentarian Ahmed al-Rubai.[11] And in a remarkable program in early October, Qassem pitted former American ambassador Edward Walker against Iraq's oil minister, Omar Rashid, in a rare direct public debate.

Even before al-Arabiya launched in February 2003, al-Jazeera's talk shows featured a wide range of voices, Arab and non-Arab, for and against the war. These debates featured serious disagreement and often violent argument about what should be done, even as they were structured by an overall Arabist narrative frame that established the kinds of

arguments and evidence most likely to persuade. Anger at the United States and fear of the possible consequences of a war permeated these discussions, as did profound skepticism about American justifications for the war and its intentions in the region. The core concern with the suffering of the Iraqi people under sanctions translated into great fears about what would happen to them in a war. Arabs expressed deep fears about the risk of anarchy in a post-war Iraq, of ethnic and religious conflict and civil war. Many Arabs feared that the United States intended to partition Iraq into ethnically defined states—Kurdish, Sunni, Shia—in order to prevent the reemergence of a powerful Arab state in Iraq. Others feared that an invasion of Iraq would be only the first step toward attacks on other Arab states, or that it would establish a permanent American occupation in the Arab heartland.

Calling this Arab consensus "pro-Saddam" is misleading. Most mainstream commentators insistently distanced themselves from Saddam's regime even as they argued on behalf of "the Iraqi people." In late April Ghassan bin Jadu challenged several leading Islamists for claiming to be opposed to tyranny everywhere, asking whether their opposition to the war did not contradict this. One responded: "I think that you would not be able to find among all the demonstrators in the Islamic street, the Arab street, even the global street, anyone who stands with Saddam Hussein. All of their slogans were standing with the Iraqi people . . . with the people and not the regime."[12] While among independent Arabists who despised all authoritarian Arab regimes there was an important undercurrent that welcomed the idea of removing Saddam Hussein, few wanted this to take place by American military means. That these opponents of an American role in toppling Saddam had no real alternative to offer, no pathway by which Saddam might be removed without such an intervention, represented a fundamental flaw in their position. Criticism without offering a practical alternative should be seen as a typical pattern in a weak international public sphere: since the public lacked any means for actually influencing official policy, its incentives pushed toward such expressive critique and away from the hard work of actually developing alternatives, which would likely not be adopted in any case.

That these highly mobilized Arab publics showed so little support for Saddam Hussein, especially compared to their positions in

1990–1991, sharply contradicts a conventional wisdom that confuses their opposition to the war with support for the "tyrant." This, I would argue, was a direct result of the new Arab public sphere. In sharp contrast with 1990–1991, when the Iraqi regime had seemed powerful and modern from afar, the new Arab media had brought Arabs much closer to the reality of the regime. Saddam's tight control over all foreign (and domestic) media prevented al-Jazeera—like virtually all media, Western or Arab—from freely reporting on the internal repression in Iraq or on the horrors of the Iraqi regime's depradations (Katovsky and Carlson 2003). But at the same time, al-Jazeera's reporting on the human cost of the sanctions put the suffering of the Iraqi people at the center of Arab concerns, even as its talk shows gave free voice to the regime's critics. Al-Jazeera viewers regularly heard Saddam's regime described by guests and callers as *al-Taghiya* (the tyranny), and his rule was assigned at least some blame (alongside the Americans, British, and Arab regimes) for the suffering of his people. In contrast to the earlier war, where many Arabs supported Saddam as an Arab hero, in this crisis most such Arabs tried—with mixed success—to detach their real and intense sympathy with the Iraqi people from support for Saddam's regime. Fear of America and sympathy with the Iraqi people now drove Arab opinion far more than did solidarity with Saddam.

The discontent of the Arab public sphere focused on their own regimes as much as it did on the United States. For years Arabs had argued that the embargo on Iraq was really an "Arab" one since it would collapse if the Arab states stopped enforcing it. As the United States and its British ally prepared for war, Arab commentators acidly noted that it would be the tacit or active cooperation of Arab regimes—air bases, staging grounds, overflight rights—that would make the military campaign possible (quite ironically, Qatar—the host country of al-Jazeera—hosted a major American base). Even when Arab regimes took popular positions against a war they tended to be perceived as insincere. While most Arabs accepted that their rulers were genuinely worried about the possible consequences of a war—refugee flows, the partition of Iraq, general instability—few believed that the regimes had any real concern for the Iraqi people, or any ability to or interest in standing up to the United States.

Analysts from across the political spectrum agreed on the hypocrisy of official Arab rhetoric. For example, Ahmed al-Rubai (a prominent Kuwaiti supporter of war) told al-Jazeera in late January 2003, "I have recently visited several Arab states, and listened to officials directly, and what is said in the media is not the reality."[13] Abd al-Bari Atwan, Rubai's polar opposite in Arab politics, frequently said essentially the same thing: "Arab officials don't say in public what they agree upon in private."[14] The complete failure of the Arab League, or of an Arab summit, to prevent the war—as well as what most perceived as the near-complete irrelevance of Arab states to the global debates over the war—fit perfectly within the core Arabist narrative of the incompetence and corruption of their leaders. Several programs explicitly asked whether there was any value at all to Arab rejection (*Weekly File*, September 7). As Arabs failed to act, a growing disillusionment permeated public discourse. In January 2003, for example, Faisal al-Qassem declared it "humiliating" that non-Arab Turkey stood up to the United States while the Arab states collectively did nothing. It was not only the rulers who came in for abuse; an October program on "European rejection and Arab silence" focused on the failure of the Arab people to protest in any significant way, in contrast both to the April 2002 protests over Palestine and the massive marches for peace all over the world.

As the crisis escalated, Iraq overwhelmingly became the topic of discussion on the talk shows, driving out even Palestine as the central issue of debate. In 2003 an astonishing 44 percent of the major talk shows focused on Iraq. These programs covered virtually every possible aspect of the crisis. In the month of March, as war drew near, talk shows discussed such topics as an Arab summit (*Issue of the Hour*, March 1), the Iraqi opposition (*Issue of the Hour*, March 3), Turkey's decisions about American troops (*No Limits*, March 5), the Islamic Summit's position toward Iraq (*Issue of the Hour*, March 6; *More Than One Opinion*, March 7), the role of intellectuals in the crisis (*Open Dialogue*, March 8), divisions in the Security Council (*Issue of the Hour*, March 10), the future of the Kurds (*The Opposite Direction*, March 11), and last-minute diplomacy (*Issue of the Hour*, March 13). In one remarkable program (February 22), Ghassan bin Jadu hosted live from Baghdad a discussion between Iraqi students from Baghdad Univer-

sity and American students from George Mason University (shortly thereafter, bin Jadu left Iraq due to Saddam's attempt to interfere with the content of his program).

Even on the brink of the war, however, a variety of perspectives still appeared on al-Jazeera: on February 21, the Kuwaiti Saad al-Ajami defended the official Arab position on the war as realistic; on March 3, a variety of Iraqi opposition figures discussed their hopes and fears for the future; on March 12, Iraqi Foreign Minister Naji Sabri discussed Iraq's strategy; and on March 17 Iraqi Information Minister Mohammed Said Sahhaf appeared. As war approached, however, the tone of discourse grew uglier, louder, more radical, and more prone to expressions of helplessness and blanket condemnation. Hosts, guests, and callers alike reflected an overwhelming level of anxiety, with reasoned dialogue declining and angry outbursts and wild conspiracy theories noticeably ascendant. When an emergency Arab summit in Sharm el-Sheikh (Egypt) collapsed into angry accusations between Libyan President Moammar Qaddafi and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, live television coverage of the summit abruptly ended.

With the outbreak of war, al-Jazeera shifted to an all-news format, with the public conversation resuming only after the fall of Baghdad.

The Iraqi Opposition

Even as war drew near, supporters of overthrowing Saddam continued to be well represented in the Arab public sphere. Along with being routinely published in *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, Iraqi opposition figures appeared frequently on al-Jazeera, where they had the chance to present their views and to defend them against challenges.

Iraqi opposition figures cannot honestly claim to have lacked for an opportunity to make their case prior to the war. On July 27 Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim of SCIRI made a powerful case for removing Saddam Hussein. On the same program, Mohammed Sadiq al-Husseini argued that the Iraqi people had every right to demand internal change and reform and even revolution, but that Arabs primarily feared and opposed an American role. When Husseini then complained about the opposition using American support to achieve its goals (to dif-

ferentiate himself from the INC), Ghassan bin Jadu challenged him: "You talk as though the Iraqi opposition were leading the charge and using the United States, so what is wrong with that? If they can use American power, why shouldn't they?" On August 2, Iraqi opposition spokeswoman Rand Rahim Franke made the case for war eloquently by emphasizing the urgency of removing Saddam by any means available. On the August 11 episode of *Issue of the Hour*, war advocate Danielle Pletka of the American Enterprise Institute espoused the standard arguments made in the American media to a frankly skeptical reception—suggesting in part the striking disparities in the argumentative expectations of the Arab as opposed to the American arena.

The American reliance on the Iraqi opposition to make its case proved highly detrimental to its position in the Arab public sphere. The main advocates of war in the Arab arena were individuals and figures who commanded little respect, and often were met with outright disgust, among Arab audiences.[15] Their unpopularity tarnished the war effort by association, leaving it with few effective public defenders. As this became clear, the long-existing anger felt by many Iraqi opposition figures at their rejection by the Arab public began to simmer over. In an appearance on al-Jazeera in November 2002, for example, Iraqi opposition figure Mawfiq al-Rabii denounced his host for making unwarranted assumptions about what the "Arab street" thought, and for employing an inflammatory and inciting style of argument that harked back to the days of Ahmed Said and Voice of the Arabs.[16] Such hostile encounters built on themselves, so that even as al-Jazeera continued to invite Iraqi opposition representatives onto their programs, their appearances often only made things worse for their cause. On April 16, 2004, the INC newspaper *al-Mutamar* published documents alleging that Faisal al-Qassem's hostility to their cause was attributable to payments received from Saddam's regime—a charge believed by almost nobody (and denied by Qassem), but indicative of the depth of antagonism felt by the Iraqi opposition toward their perceived tormentors.

The dividing lines between the dominant Arab consensus and the arguments of the Iraqi opposition appeared constantly in the al-Jazeera programs, both among the invited guests and in the live phone calls. While the Iraqi opposition insisted that an attack would target the Iraqi regime, most Arabs felt that an attack would target and would

primarily harm the Iraqi people. And while the Iraqi opposition described an attack as a liberation on behalf of the Iraqi people, most Arabs called it an attack on the Iraqi people. Heavily laden terms such as "liberation," "invasion," and "occupation" were hotly contested in these programs, with few word choices or arguments going unchallenged. In an entirely typical episode of *al-Jazeera's Platform*, a caller from Qatar declared that "the Arab people oppose and reject an attack on Iraq, because an attack on Iraq means an aggression against all Arabs."[17] An Iraqi caller from London responded that "with all respect for the other Arabs and their feelings toward the Iraqis, I think that Iraqis know their suffering the most, and know their own interests better than do the Arabs." Iraq was already occupied by Saddam Hussein, he argued, and the suffering of Iraqis under his tyranny justified any decisive action to liberate them—even if at American hands. A third caller responded that "with regard to changing the regime, this is the responsibility of the Iraqi people themselves on the inside and not an American responsibility." Such arguments raged almost every night as the war approached, even as positions palpably hardened and few minds remained to be changed.

Impact?

> Only two places in the world have not seen protests against the coming American invasion of Iraq . . . Israel and the Arab world!
>
> —Faisal al-Qassem, November 5, 2002

Still reeling from the turbulence of street protests in December 1998, the fall of 2000, and the spring of 2002, Arab regimes were now highly sensitive to any mass mobilization that might get out of control or put untoward pressure on them to act against American interests. As a result, the "Arab street" was rather less visible than might have been expected in the run-up to the war, particularly in comparison to the massive peace rallies across the world. While many American conservatives took this as proof that Arab public opinion did not matter, far more was going on. As Mohammed Krishan observed, "The Arab street remains restless between the fear of repression and feelings of frustration."[18]

The muted public Arab response was partly due the aftermath of this intense activity in the spring, as wary regimes kept a tight lid on political parties, civil society activists, and local media. One caller to al-Jazeera claimed, for example, that after the last round of large protests, "most of the protestors went to prison, most were beaten, tortured."[19] American pressure on regimes, and their repression of public opinion in turn, played a primary role in minimizing public protest. And the exhaustion and trepidation felt by publics weary from their fruitless protests over Palestine should not be discounted. As one Saudi caller complained, "What can demonstrations do if the rulers with their armies and missiles say no, no, no, and America will attack? . . . There is no value to these words or demonstrations."[20]

Most Arab governments took advantage of the long run-up to the war to clamp down hard on political opposition and on the domestic media. Almost every government forcefully suppressed mass protests, with techniques ranging from denying permits to direct repression. In Egypt, for example, after two days of massive protests in central Cairo on March 20–21, the police and the military violently suppressed anti-war protests, using a surprising level of force and arresting thousands of protestors (Schemm 2003; Moustafa 2004). There were regular small demonstrations in most Arab countries throughout the war, but considerably greater unrest than was expressed in public demonstrations. Protests in Morocco punctuated the month of January, culminating in late February with about 100,000 Moroccans protesting in Rabat. But still there was nothing to compare with the massive protests that swept the world on February 15, 2003.

But the absence of protests should not be taken to mean that the new public opinion did not matter. Indeed, the fact that Arab governments felt the need to clamp down as fully as they did offers a counterfactual suggestion about the perceived threat of a mobilized public. The emergence of a powerfully expressed public consensus clearly shaped how leaders approached the realm of political possibility. While most leaders carefully formulated their sense of the national interest with a clear eye on their relations with the United States and general issues of regime survival, most also paid far more attention to public sentiment than they had in previous crises.

Similarly, the anxiety of these regimes to prevent public discussion

of their roles in the war and their loud rhetoric—however insincere—against the war both speak to their real concern with the new public sphere. In contrast to the 1990–1991 Gulf War, when a significant number of Arab states—including the major powers Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria—joined the American coalition, in this crisis no Arab state other than Kuwait *publicly* supported the war. Many assisted the war effort in private—Jordan and Qatar being primary examples—but the urgency placed on keeping these actions secret is indicative of regime sensitivity to public opinion. As one Saudi explained, "From the Saudi government's point of view, the ideal situation would be to let the Americans know how much we are cooperating, while keeping the Saudi population completely in the dark. But you can't do that in an age of satellite television and the Internet."[21] Arab leaders, while ultimately avoiding confrontation with the United States, proved more resistant than at any time in memory—an outcome that can be explained only by the rising power of the public sphere. But, in the end, they did cooperate, and often played important supporting roles in the war—suggesting the limits of this power.

One exception to this pattern of showing greater attention to public sentiment was, ironically, the country often considered the most liberal and democratic in the region: Jordan. The Hashemite Kingdom had refused to join the American coalition against Iraq in 1990–1991, a decision that won King Hussein extraordinary levels of public support but cost Jordan significant financial and political relations with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United States. This time, the young King Abdullah opted to cooperate closely with the American campaign despite the overwhelming opposition of the Jordanian public. This decision reflected several trends, including the increasingly autocratic and repressive domestic political arena and Abdullah's strategic choice to position himself as a key American friend and interlocutor in the region (Lynch 2002b). Jordan was rewarded for its efforts with significant American economic assistance, and largely avoided the feared negative effects of war in its neighbor. When the occupation of Iraq proved difficult, bloody, and expensive, Jordan emerged as one of the main Arab "winners" of the war when its long-time adversary Ahmed Chalabi lost out to Jordan's candidate, Iyad Allawi, in the struggle to become Iraq's new leader.

The War

As demonstrated to English-speaking audiences in the popular documentary *Control Room*, American and Arab television portrayed strikingly different wars. The American media featured "embedded" journalists, news anchors with American flags on their lapels, and a frankly patriotic identification with the American troops (Katovsky and Carlson 2003; Massing 2004). News coverage emphasized the high-tech American war, successful military campaigns, and then the carefully stage-managed toppling of Saddam's statue in Baghdad. In the Arab media, in general, there was far more emphasis on civilian casualties, on the fear and stress of wartime, and on Arab anger and resentment. While the Arab stations ran long interviews with American officials and offered live coverage of American press briefings, they also ran endless footage of grieving, wounded, screaming Iraqis. While this book is not primarily about news coverage, it is important to describe these differences here in order to establish the frame within which Arab opinion about the war formed and developed.

As Rami Khouri put it, "For different reasons, Arab and American television . . . broadly provide a distorted, incomplete picture of events, while accurately reflecting emotional and political sentiments on both sides."[22] But, as Khouri pointedly notes, "We in the Arab world are slightly better off than most Americans because we can see and hear both sides, given the easy availability of American satellite channels throughout this region; most Americans do not have easy access to Arab television reports, and even if they did they would need to know Arabic to grasp the full picture." Nabil Sharif, editor of Jordan's *al-Dustour*, argued that "the air of Western media superiority is gone, as proven by the way they covered the Iraq war. The Arab media did a very remarkable job, while their Western counterparts were dependent upon the U.S. defence and state departments." [23] Many images and footage from al-Jazeera did filter into Western media, given that station's access to powerful and even sensational imagery. Indeed, the seepage of these images into the Western press arguably angered and worried American and British officials more than did the Arabic broadcasts themselves, since they tended to assume Arab hostil-

ity anyway but were deeply concerned about losing domestic political support for the war. As al-Jazeera's Faisal Bodi put it, "My station is a threat to American media control. . . . People are turning to us simply because the Western media coverage has been so poor."[24]

The Arab media posed a serious challenge to the American strategic objective of maintaining information control. The bombing of the al-Jazeera offices in Afghanistan—twice—and in Baghdad were widely seen as direct attempts to shut down the station's reporting from the ground. In stark contrast to the 1991 Gulf War, when the coalition forces did manage to maintain near-complete control over information and imagery, in 2003 the Arab media simply made this impossible. With correspondents on the ground and a vast audience, Arab television stations complicated American efforts at information dominance.

For all the problems of its identity-driven and emotional portrayal of events, the Arab media sometimes offered a more accurate portrait of some aspects of the war than did the American media, which more often relied on CENTCOM for its information.[25] For example, when American media repeated CENTCOM reports that fighting had ended at the port of Umm Qasr, al-Jazeera was broadcasting live footage of an ongoing battle. At another point, American officials denied that any U.S. soldiers had been taken captive, while al-Jazeera showed pictures of five captured American soldiers. Al-Jazeera's minimal coverage of the toppling of Saddam's statue in Baghdad is often held up as examples of its reporting bias, but subsequent reporting has largely validated the station's editorial judgment. When rumours of a popular uprising in Basra swept through the American media, al-Jazeera broadcast live footage of a deserted and quiet city center. Tim Judah (2003) evocatively described this process: "At the beginning of the campaign, the Americans and British had made all sorts of overblown claims—about, for instance, having pacified towns on the way to Baghdad and neutralized Basra—which had later been proven to be altogether untrue or vastly exaggerated. By contrast, Mr. al-Sahaf's statements during the first ten days or so of war had given him a measure of credibility, so people came to believe what he was saying. Reality then overtook him. His claims became ever more fantastical, but ordinary Baghdadis did not realize this—until they saw the tanks for themselves."

Coverage of the war was tightly controlled not only by CENTCOM but also by the Iraqi authorities. Al-Jazeera and Abu Dhabi TV were the only stations permitted to operate outside the purview of the Iraqi Ministry of Information, and even they faced considerable pressures. Despite this privilege, al-Jazeera's relations with the Iraqi regime were strained. Al-Jazeera during the war did not have "better access to senior Iraqis than the other channels" (Miles 2003). Taysir Alouni, al-Jazeera's star journalist in Afghanistan, was forced to leave Iraq after only a few days when the regime objected to some of his reporting, as were several other correspondents. At one point in the war, Mohammed Said Sahhaf reportedly stormed into the al-Jazeera offices in Baghdad with a gun and "threatened to kill the station's employees, cut off their arms, and throw their corpses into the desert if they reported that the American forces were approaching Baghdad."[26] Well into 2005, al-Jazeera's promotional clips (aired frequently throughout the day) proudly interspersed footage of Sahhaf raging against al-Jazeera with clips of interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi and other officials in the interim Iraqi government making similar complaints. When al-Jazeera reporter Majid Abd al-Hadi filed a report that the departure of Western journalists from Baghdad hinted that war might be imminent, he was brought in by the Iraqi authorities and threatened with deportation if the story continued to be aired.[27] On March 8, Ghassan bin Jadu was scheduled to broadcast an episode of *Open Dialogue* live from Baghdad, but was forced to relocate to Beirut after the Iraqi authorities tried to place unacceptable restrictions on the broadcast. The Iraqi regime's attempts to use al-Jazeera as a weapon to mobilize the "Arab street" against the war clashed dramatically with the norms of the new Arab public.

The Arab media struggled to find an appropriate balance between an emotional response to traumatic events, the generic pressures of covering a war in progress, and the relentless pressures of the marketplace. Arab reporters had better access to events on the ground, and regardless of their political sympathies simply had more opportunities to witness civilian casualties. Emotionalism and sensationalism were common accusations against al-Jazeera, and it is quite clear that many Arab reporters found it difficult to separate their coverage from their own deeply held feelings and identities. Its decision to show

footage of dead American soldiers and POWs shocked and horrified many observers. Still, it is important to recall that the gap between the war seen by Arab journalists and and that seen by American journalists was not simply an artifact of different mental imagery: embedded American journalists saw far less of the impact of the war than did Arab journalists moving freely through Iraqi streets. Mohammed el-Nawawy points out, "As disgusting as these gory images were, not showing them would have been a denial of the reality witnessed by Arab reporters."[28] Abdallah Schleifer's (2003) summary judgment effectively captures al-Jazeera's reporting: "There is no question in my mind that al-Jazeera does not make up facts or deny them and there is no question in my mind that many of al-Jazeera's presenters indulge their emotional commitments . . . to such a degree that at times the spin they put on the facts can be scandalous."

The focus on Iraqi civilian casualties was both the most controversial aspect of al-Jazeera's reporting and the easiest to explain. The emphasis on portraying civilian casualties, while infuriating to an American military determined to control the information environment, only reported a different side of reality rather than manufacturing untruths. On the other hand, Americans complained that these images often lacked context—i.e., that al-Jazeera showed a bombed out mosque, but not the Iraqi soldiers who had been firing from inside of it. Recall that "the Iraqi people" had become a touchstone of Arabist identity and political argument over the preceding decade. Most Arabs thinking about the war approached it from a perspective molded over these years, which led them to care about some things more than others. That al-Jazeera focused less on the horrors of Saddam's regime was not because it sought to downplay or ignore these unsavory issues. On the contrary, for al-Jazeera viewers this was an old story, which had been thoroughly aired and discussed and which had far less urgency to most Arab viewers than the immediate threat of an American invasion and the current threats facing the Iraqi people.

Word choice also emerged as a major point of contention. As Mohammed el-Nawawy recalled, "When an Iraqi cab driver blew up his taxi, killing four U.S. soldiers at a checkpoint . . . he was described as a 'terrorist' by US networks and a 'freedom fighter' by most Arab networks."[29] In official American discourse the American campaign was

insistently described as a "liberation," a war in defense of the Iraqi people against the Iraqi regime. The Arab media described it as an "invasion" producing an "occupation"; while this word choice was a red flag for critics of al-Jazeera, within months even President Bush routinely referred to the American "occupation." Most provocatively, the Arab media applied the same terminology—martyrs, occupation—to the American campaign in Iraq that it had long used with regard to Israel and the Palestinians, thereby subtly equating the two issues, to devastating effect.

The increasingly competitive Arab media market played an important role in shaping news coverage. Just as CNN tailored the domestic version of its broadcast to be more "patriotic" in response to its losing market share to Fox News, Arab satellite television stations increasingly took market pressures into account (Massing 2004). If al-Jazeera chose to abstain from broadcasting sensational images, it now had to fear that it would lose market share to other, less abstemious stations. Al-Arabiya, during the war, battled with al-Jazeera by competitive outflanking, raising the ante for al-Jazeera and all other stations. Even after Abd al-Rahman al-Rashed, a fierce critic of the Arab media, took over the programming of al-Arabiya, that station continued to air graphic videos of violence and gut-wrenching clips of hostages begging for their lives—showing the power of market pressures over editorial decisions. Others, such as Abu Dhabi TV, attempted to establish credibility through a more sedate presentation.

This market competition, based on frank evaluations of what would draw Arab audiences, had as much to do with broadcasting choices as did political preferences or identity. Arab channel surfing was the reality of the war, as satellite television viewers—both at home and in public spaces such as cafes—voraciously consumed and compared not only the Arab stations but also CNN, Fox, BBC, and more. The available evidence suggests that al-Jazeera was considered the most credible news source and remained the most-watched station, albeit with considerable regional variations (Abu Dhabi TV did better in the UAE than elsewhere, for example, and LBC in Lebanon). For example, Mohammed Ayish (2004) found that students at the University of Sharjah (UAE) considered al-Jazeera the most credible source of news in the war, with Abu Dhabi TV a close second and all other stations (including al-Arabiya) trailing far behind.

Discussion of the war passed through three phases with remarkable rapidity, in line with events on the ground. With the immediate outbreak of the war, and the "shock and awe" bombing campaign over Baghdad, Arabs watched with dread, fury, and trepidation. The second phase came with the unexpected resistance to the invading forces, as Arabs almost wanted to believe—even if few really believed—that Iraq might actually win. The early days of the war gave Arabs unexpected hope, as the American and British forces struggled to establish a beachhead at Umm Qasr and made little tangible progress. Arabs were astonished—and delighted—at Iraqi resistance, and talk began to circulate about how Iraq might even in defeat offer a glorious legend of Arab pride. But this hope remained mixed with deep foreboding and horror at the certainty of massive destruction and death. In the third phase this tentative hope gave way to astonishment and humiliation at the sudden fall of Baghdad on April 9. A June 2003 Pew survey found enormous disappointment among Arabs at the rapid end to the war, with 93 percent of Moroccans, 91 percent of Jordanians, and 82 percent of Lebanese expressing disappointment with the outcome. And while 80 percent of Kuwaitis thought Iraq would be better off without Saddam, substantial majorities of Jordanians and Palestinians thought otherwise.

Conversation Resumes: After the Fall of Baghdad

> Many who have been following the entry of American tanks into the center of Baghdad ask, where is the Iraqi resistance? Why are the streets of Baghdad empty of Iraqi dead? Where is the political leadership?
>
> —Jumana al-Namour, April 11, 2003[30]

In the first talk show broadcast after the fall of Baghdad, Jumana al-Namour spoke for millions of bewildered Arabs. A few days later Mohammed Krishan began an episode of *Behind Events* with almost identical questions: "Where was the battle of Baghdad that would slaughter the enemy in the streets? Where was the Republican Guard? Where were the Fedayin of Saddam? Where was Saddam himself? What happened to all the pillars of the regime? Did the earth open and swallow

them up? Were they all killed? Did they flee? Where?"[31] The sudden collapse of Iraqi resistance around Baghdad was almost unbelievably shocking and deflating after the build-up of the second phase. Al-Jazeera devoted nearly two dozen talk shows in a week to the question of why Baghdad fell. In the remainder of this chapter, I focus primarily on these al-Jazeera programs, for three main reasons: first, because they reached the widest audiences; second, because of the availability of full transcripts; and third, because they were broadcast live and uncensored, offering an unmatchable window into Arab public political argumentation.

On the very first program broadcast after the fall of Baghdad, studio guest Mahmoud al-Muraghi surveyed the disappearance of the Iraqi regime without any immediate coalition alternative, and prophetically voiced his fears of how people would behave in the absence of any authority. With the outcome uncertain and a near-complete power vacuum, Muraghi feared ethnic and civil strife, and violent struggle for power, but above all feared that various elements would take advantage of the absence of authority—a fear amply confirmed by the looting campaign that swept through Baghdad as American forces stood by. But host Jumana al-Namour challenged Muraghi's use of the term "occupation," pointing out that "the Americans present themselves as a liberating power which will surrender authority very quickly, giving authority to Iraqis." Muraghi demurred: "Liberation does not come with bombs. . . . Nobody believes that the issue is one of liberation and modernization, building a democratic society. . . . They went to Iraq to plunder its wealth and to occupy Iraq, and therefore the question: when will the occupation end? When will the Iraqi resistance begin?"

Namour then opened the phone lines, and a remarkable outpouring of views unfolded. The first caller to the program began by saying: "Sister Jumana, you grieved over the fall of Baghdad, but I celebrated the fall of the tyranny, I'm sorry I mean the fall of Baghdad. . . .We hope that this tyrant is slaughtered in the streets of Baghdad." Namour interrupted him to point out the uncertainty surrounding the fate of Saddam Hussein, as well as about the future of Iraq, and then asked the caller what he hoped for Iraq's future. He responded: "I have a message from the Iraqi people, with all frankness. . . . We will not be satisfied with an American occupation, not a British and not a Zionist

and not any fortress on Arab soil." The second caller, an Iraqi Shia in Germany, declared that he was trapped between two conditions: joy at being released from the tyranny and dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and fear that the Americans would remain in Iraq. When he admitted that an American presence would be necessary for a short while to prevent communal strife, Namour pushed him on whether he expected violent conflict between Sunnis and Shia. The third caller came from Saudi Arabia and again declared that "we want in every sense of the word to celebrate this victory over the tyranny . . . this liberation of Iraq, this new Iraq." Namour asked him whether he felt any fears or doubts about who might rule Iraq or for Iraqi unity; the Saudi responded, "I fear that the forces came to Iraq to protect the oil, and will abandon Iraq to civil war."

After three successive calls celebrating Saddam's fall, the fourth caller was a Palestinian who mourned that "the issue is not the future of Iraq . . . it is the slaughter of Muslims and Arabs at the walls of Damascus, at the walls of Beirut, at the walls of Jerusalem, and now the slaughter of Muslims and Arabs at the walls of Baghdad. . . . I say to those who follow al-Jazeera who attack the tyranny, who is it, and how does it rule?" A Tunisian caller urged Arabs not to think of the Americans as enemies or friends, but to think in terms of interests and power. A caller from the Emirates worried that what was unfolding on television screens was worse than what had existed before, and hoped only for a rapid solution to restore order and peace to Iraqis. A caller from Jordan declared that he was not satisfied that Saddam had been overthrown, because all the other Arab regimes remained in place, all of which were no better than or worse than Saddam. When one caller mentioned the looting in Baghdad as a form of resistance against the American forces, Namour pointed out that "the thieves are probably Iraqis, but the victims are Iraqis too." As the calls poured in, a rough sense began to emerge of the variety of Arab responses to the fall of Baghdad—most notably, the widely held contempt for Saddam's regime and the fears of American intentions.

A similar story repeated itself on subsequent nights, with the personality of the host and the day's news shaping the character of the discussion. On April 12 discussion revolved around the looting and chaos in Baghdad, with fears of ethnic conflict between Sunnis and Shia

emerging as a primary topic of concern. The first caller, from Jordan, denounced the looting as an American plan to destroy Iraqi culture and civilization, and to make the Iraqis look so backward and uncivilized that a long-term American presence would be required. A Saudi caller said that the chaos and looting of Baghdad should be seen as a clear warning to the Arab peoples to "hold on to their rulers and support them, to stay far away from inflaming anarchy [*fitna*]." Host Fayrouz Ziyani responded that many people "see a hidden hand behind the actions," a suggestion with which the caller quickly agreed. An Iraqi living in Saudi Arabia declared that "I express the feeling of many Iraqi Sunnis that I never wanted to see such a dark day as the fall of Baghdad."

Talk Shows as a Public Sphere

During the war, news coverage drove out talk shows. After the fall of Baghdad al-Jazeera dealt with the war by placing most of its regular talk shows on hold and running one program—*al-Jazeera's Platform* [Minbar al-Jazeera]—every night. While its regular host, Jumana al-Namour, appeared frequently, the star hosts of other programs rotated through as well, with the contents often reflecting the personality of that host (Ahmed Mansour tended toward the more sensational and anti-American topics, while Faisal al-Qassem looked for the most controversial and unsettling topics). Al-Jazeera also ran frequent episodes of *Behind Events*, again featuring a rotating cast of its star hosts, as well as *Issue of the Hour*, a program devoted to Iraq that began shortly before the war (March 7). After the war, it created several new programs broadcasting from Baghdad—*Iraqi Voices*, which featured interviews with ordinary Iraqis on the streets during and after the war; *Iraq After the War*, featuring Mohammed Krishan and Maher Abdullah (the regular host of *Sharia and Life*), which ran until early June 2003 and focused on a wide range of topics, from security to the economy to the cultural scene to the media and more; and *The Iraqi Scene*, which continued broadcasting through the time of writing this book. After the regular talk shows resumed in mid-May 2003, a wide range of programs focused heavily on Iraq.

Al-Jazeera viewers were therefore offered at least one live talk show about Iraq, and often two or three, almost every night of the week

from March through early June 2003. Between April 11 and May 31, almost one hundred talk shows aired, with some two hundred different guests, ranging from Iraqi opposition figures to prominent Arab and Muslim political figures and journalists to Americans to ordinary Iraqis. Few topics seemed off-limits in these programs, whch featured a wide range of Iraqi guests (although some Iraqis complained about the identity and politics of the Iraqi guests, accusing it of favoring Sunni Arabs and of contributing to ethnic conflict).

Immediately after the war an unusual number of these programs eschewed studio guests in favor of exclusively relying on live callers—perhaps the closest thing to a true public sphere in the history of the Arab world: open to all on an equal basis, unscripted and uncontrolled, in a dialogic format broadcast to an enormous audience. While some calls were clearly prearranged (see Fandy 2000 for a critical account of the management of these callers), this varied by program. *Al-Jazeera's Platform*, which aired nightly for much of this crucial postwar period, was probably in this sense the least "managed" of the programs, which contributed to the openness and unpredictability of the discussion in this uncertain period. All told, al-Jazeera broadcast twenty-eight of these "open" programs between April 11 and May 31, taking calls from twenty to thirty Arabs from dozens of locations from around the world in each program. These dialogues could turn emotional, with exaggerated claims and angry denunciations—but this was an accurate reflection of al-Jazeera's agitated and confused audience rather than something imposed by al-Jazeera's editorial decisions. Indeed, the decision to move in a less scripted and more open direction at this pivotal moment is nothing short of remarkable—and contrasts sharply with the American preference for tighter control over information and a more restrained media. Rather than relying on a limited pool of regular guests, al-Jazeera focused in this first month after the war on introducing Iraqi voices to its Arab audience, even when those Iraqis offered opinions and information sharply at odds with mainstream Arabist opinion. The personality of the host played a large role in shaping these programs, with some seeming to encourage negative, angry arguments and others insisting on more measured, constructive dialogues. Taken as a whole, these programs offer an unparalleled window into an Arab public opinion in flux.

Even if al-Jazeera had wanted to impose an agenda on Arab public opinion, the experience of these live talk shows suggests the difficulty of doing so. In an April 13 program ostensibly devoted to the prospects for democracy in Iraq, the first caller ignored Qassem's introduction and instead asked, "Where is the mercenary opposition in the unfortunate events happening in Baghdad?" Qassem immediately challenged him: "You call them mercenaries, this is a big word." The second caller, from Saudi Arabia, wanted to discuss reports of Saudi volunteers killed in combat in Iraq. The third caller, from France, declared that "Saddam was a tyrant and a dictator, and an American agent, and now the Americans are trying to save themselves from this agent. . . . I think that Saddam will never be tried, because a trial would reveal America's secrets."

Qassem struggled to return to the topic, asking each caller about the possibility of democracy, but had little success in keeping the callers focused. When pressed, one caller was dismissive: "Do you know the first thing the Americans did when they conquered Umm Qasr? They established an occupation of the oil installations, made them secure. . . . Fine. Are oil refineries more valuable than the Iraqi people? Are they more valuable than ancient and Islamic artifacts?" In an April 16 program ostensibly devoted to the Nasiriya meeting, the first caller wanted to talk about al-Jazeera's coverage of Iraq, while the second went into a long rant about Muslim suffering and backwardness. When one caller on April 16 claimed that Kuwaitis had been among the looters sacking the Baghdad Museum, Abd al-Samid Nasir interrupted him: "This is crazy. . . . There is no evidence for this statement, let's stay away from crazy accusations." On April 18 Namour interrupted a guest who began insulting Kuwaitis—telling them to go to the American embassy to thank their masters—by insisting that her program would look only to the future and not allow the settling of old scores. An Iraqi calling from London on April 20 lashed out at al-Jazeera and at Arabs in general as an embarrassment: "You incite Sunni against Shia, with your heretical style of incitement, leave Iraq alone. . . . Go liberate Palestine with your empty words, a million people were killed by Saddam, and you Arabs believe in peace. . . . The Americans are liberators, not invaders, but you are ignorant and your minds are occupied, you are backward and a joke in the West. . . . I hope that Sharon defeats you"

(through this tirade, Qassem did not cut him off, and at the end he politely thanked him for his opinion).

These programs took on an enormous range of subjects. The first post-war episode of *al-Jazeera's Platform*, described above, laid out an agenda of the challenges facing the new Iraq. On subsequent nights, the challenges explored included the factions of the Iraqi opposition, "democracy in Iraq," the security situation, the destruction of Iraqi culture, the Nasiriyah meetings to select a transitional government, reconstruction, the future of Iraqi relations with Kuwait, religious movements, the Arab "volunteers" who came to fight in Iraq, health conditions, education, security, the emerging Iraqi media, relations between Iraqi citizens and the American troops, political parties, labor, the role of mosques, the role of tribes, military institutions, the service sector, children and families, banking, the judiciary, electricity, and even athletics. The talk shows made repeated attempts to explain the collapse of the regime, were remarkably open to self-criticism, and were deeply interested in American intentions. Nor did they ignore positive signs or insist on a single, negative storyline; on April 19, for example, Fayrouz Ziyani hosted a remarkably upbeat discussion of "Baghdad's return to life," while a program in May looked optimistically at elections at Baghdad University. There was also considerable self-criticism, with programs on April 20 and April 29 assessing the performance of the Arab media during the war. As time went on, however, and security conditions worsened and the reconstruction stalled, these discussions turned increasingly angry and embittered.

In these remarkable open discussions, it is possible to see Arabs from all over the world struggling to make sense of events, looking both to the past and to the future with a mix of anger and hope. Hundreds of different callers reached the air each week, expressing views from across the political spectrum. The discussions sometimes degenerated into score-settling and abusive comments directed toward particular Arab regimes, toward Kurds or Shia or Sunni Iraqis, toward Saddam Hussein, and toward the United States and the United Kingdom. Many callers aired conspiracy theories, some defended Saddam as a great national hero, and many claimed Zionist motives behind the American campaign. Islamist callers denounced the "Crusader campaign," and called for an Islamic state in Iraq as the only way to

avoid ethnic strife or American domination. Many other callers denounced Saddam Hussein and celebrated Iraqi liberation from "the tyranny." Concern about ethnic or religious strife in Iraq was often heard, with many callers and hosts urging Iraqis toward unity—either against the occupation forces or in cooperation with them—and other callers attacking al-Jazeera for inflaming conflict simply by discussing the prospect in public. There was considerable focus on the future, speculation about the possibility of creating democracy in Iraq, and almost universal mistrust of American intentions. In short, these talk shows reveal an Arab public divided and confused on many issues, while sharing a core set of assumptions and concerns that powerfully shaped their responses to specific questions. What the talk shows emphatically do not show in this period is either a stifling consensus or a calculated campaign of incitement or negativism on the part of al-Jazeera personalities.

The possibility of a democratic Iraq was discussed frequently, but skeptically. Most callers and guests expressed great hope for democracy, but deep skepticism that America intended to create democracy in Iraq. Indeed, Faisal al-Qassem, al-Jazeera's most popular personality, chose "democracy in Iraq" as the topic for his first program after the fall of Baghdad (April 13). "Has Iraq become a model of democracy in the Arab region as the Americans promised? What is the likelihood of this happening? Is it only like Iblis' dream of Heaven? Have the Americans carried the project of democracy to the Arabs as they did to the Germans and Japanese after the second World War? Can democracy be achieved in a country such as Iraq with its ethnic and tribal and national divisions?" But most callers were skeptical of American intentions. Most were frightened of the chaos and anarchy unleashed by the fall of the regime, but suspected that this must somehow have been by American design—how could a country able to defeat Saddam's army in three weeks be unable to police the streets of Baghdad? As one Palestinian caller said, on April 29, "I don't see any plans to establish a government in Iraq which represents the Iraqis. . . . It is not possible that a government will be established in Iraq that doesn't represent the interests of America and the interests of imperialism only." A caller on April 20 bluntly told Qassem that "those who dream or imagine that the Americans will bring democracy to Iraq or to the Arab world . . .

are deluded." Why? Because, the caller said, "who will be empowered by democracy in a country such as Iraq or any Arab country? An Islamist regime will triumph, and I don't think that America came to establish an Islamist regime in the region." But when the caller doubted that America would ever really support democratization, Qassem challenged him: "If you ask people in Latin America, they might say yes."

While anger and fear permeated the discussions, positive developments and hopes for the future did come up on al-Jazeera talk shows. On April 14, Ayman Banourah began a program on the security situation by observing that "security conditions seem to be moving toward improving in some ways." Sami Haddad's April 18 program looked frankly but hopefully at the question of rebuilding Iraq, bringing up a range of pragmatic issues such as Iraqi debt and obstacles to investment with an economic expert from the United Nations and with Patrick Clawson, an American expert with close ties to the Bush administration. On April 19, Fayrouz Ziyani led a discussion of "Baghdad returning to life." In the April 21 program on the fate of Saddam Hussein, many guests hoped that his disappearance would allow Iraq to "open a new page." An April 22 program on the future of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations gave full voice to Kuwaitis great excitement about a more positive future. A Saudi caller on May 10 expressed his confidence that Iraq's future was bright because every country occupied by America emerged better for the experience.

Other programs accentuated the negative, giving voice to sensationalist claims about the American occupation. On April 15, Qassem began a program on "the American project in Iraq" by reflecting on the Palestinian experience: "When the Palestinians signed the Oslo agreement with Israel 10 years ago, the boosters of this agreement spoke of transforming the Gaza Strip into a new Singapore, they promised prosperity and progress and growth, but instead of the promised heaven, Palestinians face hell, they have lost the roof over their heads as their region has turned into devastation. . . . Is this same scenario to repeat itself in Iraq?" In an April 15 discussion about the future of Iraq, Abd al-Samad Nasir's callers tended toward the angry and negative. A Saudi caller warned against neglecting the Islamic dimension, while a caller from France demanded to know whether the Iraqi people "needed death and destruction . . . in order to get democracy from Amer-

ica," while others worried about further American interventions and blamed the invasion on Israel. A woman from Doha asked what future Iraq could possibly have when Donald Rumsfeld made jokes about the chaos in Baghdad being an example of Iraqis exercising their freedom. A woman from London expressed the view that "the American presence in Iraq is not about oil first. . . . All the Western leaders . . . have been very clear that it is a Crusader campaign aimed at preventing any unification under the flag of an Islamic caliphate."

The Arab response to the fall of Baghdad, then, was deeply shaped by preexisting convictions about the Iraqi opposition, by horror over the war, and by deep skepticism about American intentions. It was not, however, inevitably or uniformly hostile. A strong undercurrent could be heard of Arabs desperate for progressive change. Arabs keenly watched and publicly argued about every decision taken by the American authorities, with American deeds speaking far more loudly than words. The failure to establish order in Baghdad particularly baffled Arab observers who had difficulty crediting the explanation that an America able to defeat Iraq so handily could be too incompetent to provide basic infrastructure or protection.

The power of news coverage to shape these public arguments can be seen clearly in the topics, concerns, and fears that came up in these discussions—both in chosen topics and in unscripted phone calls. The reporting of the razing of the Baghdad Museum had a profound impact, with multiple callers invoking it as evidence for American lack of concern for anything other than oil. An April 14 program hosted by Ahmed Mansour focused on "the destruction of Iraqi civilization," for example, with Mansour offering few challenges or objections to guests or callers. A caller on April 16 explained his belief in American imperialist intentions in Iraq by noting that "we have seen on al-Jazeera the American flag raised more than once in Iraq." Other discussions brought the news coverage directly into question. On April 15, for example, Faisal al-Qassem asked a Kurdish analyst who seemed relatively sanguine about the course of events in Mosul about an al-Jazeera report featuring a woman screaming about an invading militia; the guest replied that "I imagine that this is greatly exaggerated."

Al-Jazeera itself came up repeatedly as a topic of discussion. Many callers began by thanking al-Jazeera for its coverage, and by expressing

sympathy about Tariq Ayoub (the journalist killed in the American bombing of the al-Jazeera offices in Baghdad). But others attacked al-Jazeera, questioning its news coverage and its politics—again, live and uncensored. In an April 16 program, for example, the first caller was an Iraqi living in Syria, who began by complaining that "the Iraqi people suffered from a media blackout in the age of Saddam Hussein, and we hope that now after his fall you will bring our voices to the world and especially to the Arab people, . . . and we hope that your correspondents in Iraq open the arena to Iraqi citizens to express their feelings in your programs." Later the host read from a fax sent by an Iraqi living in the Gulf, who complained that "your program and the programs of the other Arab satellite stations increase differences and spread hatred among the Arab peoples." On April 17, a Saudi caller noted that "it is painful that all the Arabs remain unheard in their views, they have no opinions to be heard . . . except for a simple small voice on 'al-Jazeera's Platform.' " But another caller to the same program complained that "since the fall of Mosul there has been a harsh campaign by the Arab satellites to distort the image of Kurds, with no justification."

On April 18, a caller from London pointed out that al-Jazeera did not offer coverage of many of Iraq's provinces, so that viewers had no idea what was happening—for better or worse—in much of the country; he also argued—in what would become a common criticism of the media in general—that many good things were happening in Iraq that went uncovered by al-Jazeera, leaving too negative a picture of the new Iraq in the minds of its viewers. On April 19, a caller from Saudi Arabia complained that al-Jazeera had failed to cover a speech by Shaykh Ahmed Kabisi that had insulted the emir of Qatar by name, which he felt meant that al-Jazeera was losing its hard-won credibility. On April 20, a caller asked Faisal al-Qassem to comment on a story about Iraqi prisons reported on Abu Dhabi TV but which al-Jazeera had not reported. On April 22, a caller lambasted the Arab media, and especially al-Jazeera, for "conspiring with the occupation" by labeling its programs "Iraq after Saddam" or "Iraq after the War." A Kuwaiti caller on April 25 offered condolences to frequent al-Jazeera guest Abd al-Bari Atwan and to al-Jazeera for the loss of "their dear friend, Saddam Hussein."

While Iraqi critics often attacked al-Jazeera for inflaming sectarian and ethnic strife, the hosts of these programs generally tried to prevent

rather than encourage such incitement. But the reality of such sentiments ensured that they would emerge in live, uncensored television. For example, on the April 12 program a caller from Qatar declared himself "saddened to hear in these difficult conditions for the Iraqi people as they pass into freedom such words as I just heard, words which encourage, which divide Sunnis and Shia." The studio guest weighed in to declare that "the truth is, there is a clear desire in the United States and in Britain to inflame Iraq's ethnic and religious divisions in order to justify an American military presence." When several callers complained about al-Jazeera's allowing such views to be aired, the host responded forcefully: "Of course, we listen to your opinion, just as we listened to [the caller] from Saudi Arabia, we respect all opinions and we provide them with our free platform, the al-Jazeera Platform [the name of the program]."

On an April 16 program, a woman from Holland went into a long, violent rant against the Kurds, blaming them for the fall of Iraq; Nasir allowed this to continue for some time before interrupting. But another caller urged all Iraqis of all political, ethnic, or religious roots to unite and to overcome their divisions for the greaer good. A Saudi caller on May 10 declared that Iraq's future would be guaranteed only if all the Shia would go back to Iran. On another program (April 17), the first caller, an Iraqi from Germany, began to denounce Shia and Kurds, and Jumana al-Namour firmly cut him off: "You are expressing a point of view, but in a negative and confrontational way, and we expect on our program that everyone will present their point of view without insulting anyone, without harming anyone. . . . I am sorry, but we cannot continue with your words, which are hateful and destructive." When another caller began to heap abuse on non-Kurdish Iraqis, Namour quickly intervened: "Most of our callers have affirmed that what Iraq needs now is unity and constructiveness and patriotism and looking to the future." On April 22, the host firmly instructed viewers that "in recent days some callers seem to be confused about the purpose of this program, . . . which is to present your views, not to be a platform for insults or poison or incitement or defamation of some individual or group."

From the perspective of the Arab order, blame for the fall of Baghdad spun in dangerous directions. For a Jordanian caller on April 16,

the fall of Iraq at American hands "was the result of the collective treason of all Arab rulers, and at their head Saddam Hussein, who did not do what he needed to do to protect Iraq." From another direction, a caller on April 18 complained that "when the tyrant was present, many Arab regimes helped him . . . and did not give any real help to the Iraqi people." On the same program, a caller from Austria declared that "I am horribly saddened by the condition of all the Arab peoples, . . . and I condemn intensely the position of all the Arab states, who cringed and did not help Iraq, but put their land and their airspace at the service of the imperialist aggression against Iraq." A caller on April 25 yelled, "Our rulers are our real enemies. . . . America will not fall until all these treasonous regimes fall."

Kuwaitis, as well as Iraqis (see below), had every opportunity to be heard in these discussions. On April 21, a Kuwaiti caller urged al-Jazeera to respect what Kuwait had been through and why it hated Saddam. On April 22, Faisal al-Qassem hosted a discussion between a member of the Kuwaiti Parliament, a political science professor from Baghdad University, and an Egyptian journalist about the future of Iraqi-Kuwaiti relations in which all parties frankly agreed that it would be difficult for either side to easily forget about the past even with Saddam gone. On April 28, former Kuwaiti Minister of Information Saad bin Taflah was invited to talk about Kuwaiti criticisms of the Arab League. Bringing such contentious subjects into the public sphere could easily inflame controversies and divisions, but at least the problems were not avoided and neither position was silenced.

The programs made clear the enormous doubt and uncertainty felt by many about Iraq's future. One caller on April 17 complained that America spoke of freedom and democracy but brought death and destruction, that many of the prominent figures in the Iraqi opposition had once been part of Saddam's regime, and that the opposition and the Americans both wanted to divide Iraq into ethnic cantons. An Egyptian caller urged the Iraqi people to come together: "This is not a time for division, it is not a time for one group to be against another, for we are all Muslims, and nobody can describe himself as a Sunni or a Shia, for he is at the same time a Muslim." Several other callers repeated this plea for unity. Another caller from Saudi Arabia similarly urged the Iraqis to hold fast to their values and their unity,

and denounced the looters and thieves as "the greatest traitors to the Iraqi people." A Saudi caller stated simply, "I do not love Saddam, but I hate America, and any government in Iraq that it forms, no matter how it appears on the surface, on the inside is a lie." And another caller called on Iraqis to "wage war against America." But a caller on April 18 reminded viewers that "it is very early to judge America, whether it came in Iraq's interest or against it. . . . Perhaps America came for Iraq's oil, but what does it bring in exchange?" And, pointing to the disappearance of Saddam Hussein, he asked "Don't Arabs realize that this man was not a hero and not an Arab nationalist . . . that he did not work in the interests of his people?"

Iraqi Voices and the Iraqi Opposition

Iraqis, both inside Iraq and outside the country, were now frequent callers to the program, and the hosts repeatedly urged more Iraqis to phone in. The hostility expressed by many of these newly heard Iraqi voices toward the Arab public shocked and dismayed Arabs who had made sympathy for the Iraqi people central to their political identity.

The views of the Iraqi callers and guests spanned the range from enthusiastic support of the war to furious opposition. It was as common to hear callers, such as one on April 20, thanking George Bush and Tony Blair for liberating Iraqis from the tyranny as to hear another on the same day denouncing America for talking about democracy as it killed and maimed innocent Iraqis. The first caller to the April 21 program on the fate of Saddam Hussein, an Iraqi in London, declared his sympathy for all the martyrs in Iraq and Palestine, but then announced, "We must all hope that Saddam is gone, that the tyranny has ended, and everyone in the Arab world knew that he was a tyrant, and he is to blame for the Americans ending up in our country." An Iraqi caller on April 18 issued a heartfelt plea to Arab rulers: "I call on you in the name of Arabism and the name of Islam, as a humble Iraqi citizen, your family in Iraq is in desperate need of your support and your assistance, our hospitals lack even the most basic treatments … we do not need now more empty words." The first caller to an April 29 program on the formation of a temporary Iraqi government, an Iraqi

in Germany, proclaimed his thanks that "the American administration has given us the chance for there to be a democratic patriotic [*watani*] government."

Another Iraqi caller on April 19 was more confrontational: "Where were the Arab states and the Arab leaders with their false tears? And those demonstrators who said we sympathize with the Iraqi people?" He blasted not only the Arabs, leaders and masses, but also the Arab media for trying to inflame conflict between Sunnis and Shia, Arabs and Kurds, and he attacked al-Jazeera for reporting on the Baghdad Museum but not sending a correspondent into the south to investigate the mass graves and to present Saddam's crimes to the Arab viewers. An Iraqi American calling on May 9 urged Arabs to realize the desperate need felt by all Iraqis to come together and avoid internal divisions and ethnic or religious violence, and blasted Arabs for treating Saddam as an "Arab nationalist hero" despite all of his crimes. On a May 10 program, caller after caller repeated their delight that "thirty-five years of Saddamist occupation" of Iraq had ended.

These programs encouraged Iraqis to share their stories of life under Saddam. On April 17, an Iraqi living in Sweden said that he had been a prisoner in an underground prison in Iraq, and Namour urged him to give details of his experience and the location of the prison, wanting him to share his experiences with an Arab audience. Later in the show another caller told a similar story about her brother, who had spent twenty-three years in one of Saddam's prisons. On April 20, Faisal al-Qassem patiently allowed an Iraqi women from Sweden to tell her story of her family being arrested in 1991, their houses destroyed, and many of her relatives killed. And on May 26, Jumana al-Namour hosted an emotional program about the mass graves, described below, which actively solicited stories about the horrors of life under Saddam.

While al-Jazeera (and the Arab public sphere more widely) actively sought out Iraqi voices, they remained hostile toward and contemptuous of the Iraqi opposition parties that quickly took center stage as the Iraqi face of the occupation. In the attempts to explain Arab attitudes toward the new Iraq, too little weight has been given to the impact of the American decision to rely heavily on an exiled Iraqi opposition with a long, negative history within the Arab public sphere. Seeing these hated, despised figures—who were widely considered

to be American puppets—placed in positions of power and authority rankled the Arab public, who saw this as clear evidence that the United States did not really intend to create a democracy: how could a democratic system be created or led by manifestly unpopular figures such as Ahmed Chalabi?

Chalabi came in for particular abuse as a symbol of opportunism and American hypocrisy. The April 17 program hosted by Jumana al-Namour asked whether "Iraqis will accept that Chalabi's supporters monopolize leadership positions." The declaration by Mohammed Zubaydi, a colleague of Chalabi's, that he was in charge of Baghdad, though quickly terminated by the American forces, aroused howls of protest from Arabs already worried that Chalabi would be installed as an American puppet in Baghdad. For example, an Iraqi living in Romania responded derisively to a question about the Iraqi opposition (April 15): "If they are so brave, then why did they leave Iraq, disappear into America and Britain, and sit there talking about overthrowing Saddam and talking a lot?" Another caller mocked that "from the Gulf to the sea, everyone knows who is Ahmed Chalabi, who is Baqr al-Hakim, who is Iyad Allawi. . . . The truth is that they sold themselves cheaply."

Some callers even came to the defense of the Iraqi opposition, with one saying on April 17 that "anyone would be better than the police who ruled Iraq for thirty years. . . . Perhaps they have picked up some useful skills while living abroad, and learned a bit about democracy and humanity." On April 19, an Iraqi from Sweden described Chalabi as "a fighting man, one who has since 1991 defended the Iraqi issue, and better than those who have changed their loyalties in twenty-four hours," and urged all Iraqis and all Arabs to thank Bush for liberating Iraq from tyranny. But more typical was a caller from France on April 18: "The Iraqi opposition has come to Iraq, and it will be the real authorities in Iraq and will speak for the Iraqi people. . . . But the Iraqi people hate the opposition, this opposition which lived in London and in Washington and in Paris while the Iraqi people suffered under Saddam… . In truth they are traitors and American agents." Or, on April 20: "They come over Iraqi corpses and blood on American tanks, and whom should we trust? The criminal Ahmed Chalabi? They are all American agents." And on the same day, an Iraqi caller demanded to know "who is Ahmed Chalabi? . . . They do not represent the Iraqi

people, the only ones who can represent the Iraqi people are those who suffered under the embargo. . . . Ahmed Chalabi will do the same thing as Saddam Hussein." Qassem challenged this caller: "Why do you have such expectations of someone who has been out of the country for decades, that you don't know anything about?" The Iraqi caller responded, "I only expect them to fail, for they are traitors. . . . The Iraqi people know very well who is Ahmed Chalabi."

Other opposition figures were treated with more respect. On April 12, Ghassan bin Jadu hosted a discussion about the Iraqi opposition with several members of different factions—but none from the Iraqi National Congress or the six parties that made up the American-backed opposition. All denounced Saddam Hussein's tyranny and blamed him for the suffering of the Iraqi people, but were sharply critical of the "six." Ibrahim Jaafari of the Dawa Party—which rejected participation in the American campaign, and which quickly emerged as the most popular political party in Iraq—defended his party's long struggle against Saddam, and warned that "the people who rejected Saddam Hussein, despite his dictatorship and long control, will reject any other occupation."

In an April 15 program, Faisal al-Qassem introduced the controversial Sunni tribal leader Mishaan Jabouri (allegedly an ex-Baathist with close ties to Saddam's intelligence services) as "a prominent opposition figure who led an Iraqi party and at the same time was one of the leading people beating the drum for the American project." Jabouri objected to the description, insisting that he had been beating the drum for an Iraqi national project, to overthrow Saddam Hussein for all time with or without American aid. When Jabouri criticized the Americans for failing to establish order, Qassem confronted him: "Before the war began, I asked you personally, will the Americans bring a democratic and development project to Iraq? And you were extremely enthusiastic. . . . So why do you now suddenly retreat from this and throw accusations at the Americans?" Jabouri responded that no honorable Arab could accept being a carrier of an American project, but that Iraq's national interest had agreed with the American national interest in overthrowing Saddam Hussein. Now, Jabouri insisted, the time had come to look out for Iraqi interests even if they conflicted with American policies. A few days later (April 18), a caller sympathetic to

the Iraqi opposition blasted al-Jazeera for hosting Jabouri—"In Mosul there are professors and doctors and specialists who studied in Britain and America and France, but you interview only Mishaan Jabouri?"

The meeting held outside Nasiriya on April 16 to discuss a transitional regime received a great deal of attention, as Arabs struggled to divine American intentions for Iraq's future. Three al-Jazeera talk shows discussed the Nasiriya meeting over two days. In the first, Jordan's former Crown Prince Hassan bin Talal—who had sparked a media frenzy by appearing at an Iraqi opposition meeting in London the previous year—spoke generally about Iraq's future. Despite occasional interest in Washington over a Hashemite role in Iraq, however, Hassan inspired little interest within the Arabist public. More interesting were two call-in shows hosted by Abd al-Samid Nasir (April 16) and Jumana al-Namour (April 17). On April 16, a caller from Qatar dismissed the Iraqi opposition figures in Nasiriya as just wanting to rule Iraq, even if it meant allowing in American imperialism. Another caller mocked that "the Iraqi opposition can't do anything except on the backs of America and Israel. . . . It can't do anything for the Iraqi people, the first interest will always be that of America and Israel." A caller from France complained that "the meeting was called by Jay Garner, and Garner is well known for his warm relationship with Sharon, and I think that the Iraqi people are very close to the Palestinian people and won't be happy with this." Yet another caller declared that "I don't think that this meeting held by the opposition in Nasiriya will accomplish what the Iraqi people deserve, because the umma . . . because freedom which the Iraqi people deserve cannot come on the backs of American tanks." But another caller pointed out that while there were both negative and positive aspects of the meeting, it should not be forgotten that "a free Iraqi voice could speak on Iraqi land, and this is the first step toward change." Even this caller expressed disgust with the platform of "federalism and democracy and secularism and separating religion from politics," and worried that these ideas would lead to great differences and conflicts in the near future.

Several callers denounced the ethnic conception of Iraq embodied in the opposition's federalist vision, and rejected the idea that Iraqis should be described as Sunnis, Shia, Kurds, and other ethnic religious groups. A Jordanian caller described what had happened in Iraq as "just

like what happened in Afghanistan and elsewhere at the hands of the criminal Bush. . . . But what is important is what we should do now." An Iraqi living in Norway said that "as an Iraqi citizen, personally, I reject this meeting. . . . How can one person, such as Jay Garner, I don't know his name, come and rule my country?" And, he went on, "I think that 99 percent of the opposition is from the mukhabarat (Iraqi intelligence). . . . How can there be an opposition outside of the country?"

On April 25, Namour hosted another discussion on what to expect from a new Iraqi government, in the light of Jay Garner's seeming preference of relying on the Iraqi opposition to oversee a transition to democracy. The first caller, an Iraqi from Germany, declared, "We don't know anything about these people, we have no way to evaluate them." Namour pushed him by quoting Garner's promise that the Iraqi people would choose their government, to which the caller responded dismissively: "The Iraqi people can't make this choice. . . . The Americans will choose. . . . They don't want democracy because it would not serve their interests." An Iraqi caller argued that Saddam had infiltrated the "clean" opposition with his agents, pointing fingers at Chalabi and other prominent opposition figures, and despaired that this "dirty" opposition was so well funded and had such support in the media that real opposition had little chance. Another denounced them as American and Zionist agents. But a Kurdish caller wanted to vouch for Garner, pointing to his assistance in building democratic institutions in northern Iraq in the 1990s. Garner's invitation to opposition figures the following week prompted yet another program, on April 28, discussing the appropriate role of the former opposition in the new Iraq. An Egyptian caller defended them, pointing out that even if they were forced to live in exile by Saddam they were still Iraqis and deserved to be treated with respect. Many of the callers were as offended by the American presumption to name Iraq's new leaders as by the composition of the meeting.

Toward a New Iraq?

These debates on al-Jazeera offer an extraordinary glimpse into the deep Arab uncertainty and fears after the fall of Baghdad, and the kinds of arguments and ideas that dominated Arab arguments. Con-

trary to conventional wisdom, there was no enforced conformity or single voice dominating these discussions. The al-Jazeera hosts generally tried to stay out of the way of the callers, rather than impose their own viewpoints, and the callers represented a diverse cross-section of Arabs from all over the world. Iraqis were well represented, and voices welcoming the overthrow of Saddam and expressing hopes for the future and thanks to America could be heard—even if they were significantly outnumbered by more pessimistic and critical views.

As insecurity mounted inside Iraq, however, and the occupation seemed unable to restore order or even basic services, opinion began to harden. The "wait and see" attitude evident in a significant middle ground of callers and guests gave way to a tangible disappointment with perceived failed American promises.