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New Iraq, New Arab Public

> Broadcasting against the Israeli forces in the West Bank, and perhaps soon against American forces in Iraq, the al-Jazeera satellite channel . . . will likely do the opposite of what its producers and reporters intend, by showing the hopelessness of opposing American power.
>
> *—Reuel Gerecht (2002)*

> We will see what al-Jazeera is reporting after we have defeated this regime and the United States and its coalition partners, working with others, working with the UN start to bring in humanitarian supplies, medical supplies, a reconstruction effort and put in place a better life for the people of Iraq. I hope al-Jazeera is going to be around to watch that and report that to the Arab public. And I think at that point, the Arab public will realize that we came in peace. We came as liberators, not conquerors.
>
> *—Colin Powell, March 2003*[1]

The chaos that engulfed Iraq after the fall of Baghdad preempted the kind of public discussion of the American military triumph anticipated by Gerecht or reflections on the gratitude of happy Iraqis predicted by Powell. As the occupation of Iraq deteriorated, the welcoming attitude expressed by Gerecht and Powell toward the Arab media rapidly turned to outright hostility. American civilian and military officials alike complained bitterly about al-Jazeera's "lies" and "propaganda," and increasingly identified the Arab media as a key impediment to success in Iraq. As the insurgency escalated, these accusations became ever more focused and intense, with both Iraqi and American officials accusing the Arab media of creating an atmosphere supportive of the insurgency, or even actively collaborating in its terrorism.

The litany of such complaints is long. In July 2003, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz accused al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya of incite-

ment to violence against coalition forces. In September 2003, Mustafa Barzani (then holding the rotating presidency of the IGC) ordered the closure of al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, and in December expelled al-Arabiya for two months for playing an audiotape from Saddam Hussein. In November, after the IGC raided al-Arabiya's offices and banned its broadcasts, Rumsfeld described al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya as "violently anti-coalition" and claimed to have seen evidence that the Arab stations were cooperating with insurgents. In January 2004, a senior CPA official warned al-Jazeera that it would be expelled from Iraq if it did not change its coverage. The first major military confrontation between American forces and Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army was triggered by the American decision to close down Sadr's newspaper *al-Hawza* for its alleged incitement. Dorrance Smith, who had been a senior CPA official responsible for the media, complained in the *Wall Street Journal* (without offering any evidence), "The collaboration between the terrorists and al-Jazeera is stronger than ever. While the precise terms of that relationship are virtually unknown, we do know this: al-Jazeera and the terrorists have a working arrangement that extends beyond a modus vivendi. When the terrorists want to broadcast something that helps their cause, they have immediate and reliable access to al-Jazeera."[2]

American military officials deeply resented their inability to control information from the battlefield, as in the battle of Falluja in April 2004, when al-Jazeera's team led by popular host Ahmed Mansour was the only news operation inside the besieged city. al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya correspondents on the ground reported severe harassment by Coalition forces, and several were arrested or killed while covering events in Iraq.[3] In November 2003, representatives of thirty media organizations—including CNN, ABC, and the *Boston Globe*—complained to the Pentagon about "an increasingly hostile reporting environment," including "numerous examples of US troops physically harassing journalists and, in some cases, confiscating or ruining equipment."[4]

The irony inherent in the fact that a free media proved the bete noir of the American occupation can be heard in one Iraqi's observation: "The biggest mistake the Americans made was allowing Iraqis to have satellite boxes. During Saddam's time, there was no satellite, so he could do what he wanted and nobody ever knew. Now even the

little things the Americans do are played even bigger on Arabiya and Jazeera."[5] In April, the CPA instituted a "truth matrix" to track claims in the Arab media deemed to be inaccurate and then confront offending journalists in an effort to influence their output. To Khaled al-Haroub, the American position amounted to demanding that "the Arab media invent another Iraq, where security prevails and the occupation has everything under control. . . . Wolfowitz wants al-Jazeera to 'show the truth' in Iraq, the virtual American 'truth' that wants to give hope for things that never took place on the ground."[6] On July 15, 2004, Colin Powell told the U.S. Institute of Peace that "when a particular outlet, al-Jazeera, does such a horrible job of presenting the news and when it takes every opportunity to slant the news, present it in the most outrageous way . . . then we have to speak out, and we have."[7] Jihad Ballout of al-Jazeera pointedly responded that "we did not create these photos or these images. We are reporting what's on the ground, we are reflecting the reality." [8] As Maher Abdullah observed, "Blaming the messenger for bad news might help in hiding these [facts] from the public for a while. But it doesn't make them go away."[9] This chapter evaluates these arguments about the role of the Arab and Iraqi media in shaping the politics of postwar Iraq.

In chapter 2 I described the inherent limitations of a weak international public sphere, one able to mobilize a common identity and to shape public opinion but unable to translate its consensus into political outcomes. The situation in Iraq brutally exposed these limitations, posing a harsh challenge to the emerging, if tentative, self-confidence of Arab publics. As Ghassan bin Jadu put it, "The Intifada awakened the Arab elites, . . . but the Iraqi earthquake seems to have exposed to them that they lack any power to influence events."[10] This frustration contributed to the increasingly ugly, hostile tone of the Arab public sphere after the war, as well as to dramatically rising expressions of anti-Americanism. The aftermath of the Iraq war set in motion a profound debate about the Arab public sphere itself, with both external criticism and self-criticism pushing toward serious reflection on the nature of this public sphere phenomenon. In this final chapter I discuss the new Arab public's attitudes toward the new Iraq, as well as the trials and tribulations of both the Arab media and the Iraqi media in the period after Saddam's fall.

Perhaps the most profound shock to the Arab public after the war came not from Saddam's fall, but from the anger and resentment expressed by ordinary Iraqis toward the Arab world. Throughout the decade of public Arab debates about Iraq, the Iraqi people had largely lacked a voice of their own; neither the widely distrusted opposition in exile nor Saddam's regime could authentically speak for the Iraqi people, while Saddam's police state blocked access to any real free expression of their views. For Arabs whose very identity had come to be bound up in their support for the suffering Iraqi people, to suddenly hear themselves castigated by those self-same Iraqis for not being tougher on Saddam was genuinely disorienting and baffling. But it is vital to note a point that is often lost here: Arabs were exposed to these unsettling Iraqi views only because the Arab satellite stations gave them a platform and a voice. Al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya devoted an enormous amount of programming to Iraq, with programs covering all aspects of the new Iraq and putting Iraqis and Arabs into dialogue, exploring Iraqi views and opinions, and allowing them to speak for themselves for the first time.

An Iraqi Public Sphere?

Two months after the fall of the Baghdad, the Iraqi writer Abd al-Mana'am al-Aasim argued that the response to a problematic Arab media should be to "build an effective and credible Iraqi media, able to spread accurate information and to break the walls that have long encircled the minds of Arab citizens, which carry false and misleading information about Iraq and what is happening there."[11] Unfortunately, a combination of a growing insurgency and policy mistakes by the American occupation forces severely hindered the emergence of a credible, independent, and critical Iraqi public sphere. This failure allowed al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, along with Hezbollah's al-Manar and Iran's al-Alam (the only foreign station available without a satellite dish), to become the most popular sources of information for Iraqis themselves.

After the fall of Saddam's regime, hundreds of newspapers began publishing, representing an enormous variety of political trends as well as many flavors of tabloid sensationalism. Some of these news-

papers, such as Saad al-Bazzaz's *al-Zaman*, aspired to be respectable national dailies, while the vast majority were freewheeling tabloids and political party mouthpieces. Only *al-Zaman* and two established Kurdish newspapers reached a significant audience, however, as the tabloids appeared and disappeared routinely. The CPA established an official newspaper, *al-Sabah*, which had a large circulation but was widely perceived to be a mouthpiece for the occupation. Struggles between the Iraqi editorial staff of *al-Sabah* and the American occupation authorities ultimately led to the mass resignation of the entire staff in May 2004.

The CPA-run electronic media quickly came to be dismissed as "state media," reminiscent of Saddam's propaganda organs. The director of the Iraqi version of Radio Sawa, Ahmed Rikabi, quit in August 2003 in protest over Coalition interference, and started instead a popular independent radio station that offered a daily open platform for callers to air their views.[12] In line with the general disorganization and poor preparation that characterized the early days of the occupation, the CPA did not begin television broadcasting until May 13, and then only put out four hours a day of bare-bones presentations.[13] The Iraqi Media Network, run by the Florida-based Harris Corporation, which had no experience either in the media nor in the Arab world, produced an astonishingly dreary and unattractive product that reminded many Iraqis of Saddam's television, ran little news, and was largely ignored by Iraqis. Paul Bremer's weekly appearances on the IMN confirmed the impression that the station's only purpose was to be a mouthpiece for the occupation.[14] In November 2004, Jalal al-Mashtah, the general director of the Iraqi Media Network, resigned over complaints about Harris Corporation mismanagement.[15]

As a result, according to the assistant dean of Baghdad's College of Media, "al-Iraqiya is failing. It's technically backward. Its message is not convincing. It can't compete with other stations."[16] Al-Iraqiya was able to be received without difficulties at home by 84 percent of Iraqis—compared to 33 percent for the satellite stations—as late as April 2004.[17] But despite this advantage, a State Department survey in October found that of Iraqis with access to a satellite dish, 63 percent preferred either al-Jazeera or al-Arabiya, and only 12 percent al-Iraqiya.[18] Al-Hurra, designed to be broadcast over the air rather than by

satellite in Iraq, nevertheless struggled—in April 2004, only 6 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll reported having viewed al-Hurra in the previous week.[19] In short, the Iraqi media under American occupation proved incapable of attracting an Iraqi audience, both because of professional shortcomings and because of tight political control, forcing Iraqis to look elsewhere. Saad al-Bazzaz did rather better with al-Sharqiya, the first privately owned satellite television station in Iraq, which quickly captured a significant audience with its focus on popular entertainment, music videos, reality TV shows, and soap operas.

Where the Arab media stood accused of exaggerating the violence and chaos in Iraq, the official Iraqi media under the CPA lost credibility by erring in the opposite direction. An Iraqi taxi driver described Coalition spokesman Brigadier General Mark Kimmett as "the lord of lies. . . . It is as though he gives opium to the people. He always talks about security and stability in Baghdad, and the happy life in Iraq, while the situation is [in reality] like hell."[20] As the insurgency escalated and personal security came to dominate the concerns of most Iraqi citizens, the CPA did little to establish the foundations of a healthy Iraqi public sphere. Even more, the Iraqi media largely failed to bring to the Iraqi public the kinds of information it would need to rationally and critically discuss the emerging political system.[21] In a July 2004 survey, for example, 52 percent of Iraqis said that they had heard nothing at all about recent UN recommendations on an interim government and 65 percent had heard nothing at all about plans to form an independent election commission.[22]

The CPA never fully resolved the inherent conflict between the concept of a free, independent, critical media and a concept of the media as a vehicle for conveying a particular political narrative. Nor did it resolve the tension between the military imperative of controlling information and the political imperative of creating a free and independent press. As Iraqis grew increasingly frustrated with the occupation—by May 2004, 80 percent of Iraqis surveyed lacked confidence in the CPA and 82 percent disapproved of the American military presence—their authentically expressed views grated on the beleaguered occupation authorities.[23] To the dismay of those who had wanted to believe in American democratic promises, the CPA took an ever more confrontational and even authoritarian attitude toward independent media—Arab and

Iraqi alike. A mid-June edict "prohibiting the local media from inciting attacks on other Iraqis and on the coalition forces" prompted one tabloid to declare that "Bremer is a Baathist!"[24] In late March 2004, the CPA triggered a major political crisis by shutting down Muqtada al-Sadr's newspaper *al-Hawza* for having "published articles that prove an intention to disturb general security and incite violence against the coalition and its employees."

As the insurgency escalated through 2004, journalism became exceptionally dangerous (Blake 2005). At least twenty-four journalists were killed in Iraq in 2004, and many more suffered harassment, threats, and intimidation.[25] It soon reached the point that Western journalists, like American administrators, were largely trapped in the Green Zone, reliant on Iraqi stringers to collect news. As translators and stringers became insurgency targets, even those sources began to dry up. On October 30, 2004, the al-Arabiya offices in Baghdad were the target of a horrific car bombing, and in December *al-Sharq al-Awsat* closed its Baghdad offices in the face of a credible insurgency threat. In short, both a deficient institutional framework and a spiraling insurgency mitigated against the evolution of a vibrant Iraqi public sphere.

The Occupation and the Former Iraqi Opposition

One of the most frequently aired complaints about al-Jazeera was its use of the term "occupation" rather than "liberation" to describe the American campaign against Iraq. Despite these attempts to police word choice in the Arab media, a year after the fall of Baghdad, 92 percent of Iraqis considered the United States to be an occupying force.[26] The failed hopes that Saddam's fall would lead quickly to a peaceful Iraqi democracy had far-reaching consequences for the evolution of Arab public opinion toward the new Iraq.

While explaining the course of the American occupation is beyond the scope of this book, the failure to establish basic services or to ensure personal security, turned many Iraqis against the American presence. Retired general Jay Garner entered Iraq expecting to rely heavily on the former Iraqi opposition, and based his plans on their advice that Iraqis would welcome the American forces as liberators.

Largely ignoring planning documents crafted in the State Department for the post-war scenario, Garner opted for a minimal American presence and a rapid political process based on the opposition returning from exile (Diamond 2004). But it quickly became clear that events in post-war Iraq bore little resemblance to what the Iraqi opposition had promised. Rampant looting, insecurity, and chaos interfered with all reconstruction plans, as Arabs and Iraqis alike wondered how and why the American military could be so incompetent in restoring order. The chaos and looting in Baghdad perplexed and terrified Arab observers, many of whom could not understand how the United States, with all its power and wealth, could be unable to prevent it. The increasingly confrontational relations between Iraqi citizens and American military personnel quickly overwhelmed early images of celebrating Iraqis. The growing bloodshed drove away whatever doubts Arabs might have otherwise felt about American power or intentions in Iraq. After an initial moment of uncertainty and shock, Arab attitudes hardened.

After less than a month, Garner was summarily replaced with Paul Bremer, who quickly and firmly moved to consolidate power within the CPA. Bremer's controversial decision to dissolve the Iraqi army sent tens of thousands of trained military personnel into the ranks of the insurgency. Operating out of one of Saddam's palaces in Central Baghdad, the CPA assumed a dominant position in all aspects of the occupation and reconstruction. Increasingly isolated from Iraqi society within the Green Zone as security concerns escalated, the CPA had little chance of reaching out to the Iraqi public.

Despite Bremer's contentious relationship with the former opposition exiles, they formed the core of the Interim Governing Council created in July 2003 to represent Iraqis and to form the nucleus for the presumed transition to an independent, democratic Iraqi government. The IGC proved unpopular and ineffective, however. Despite including several local Iraqis, the council was dominated by members of the former opposition in exile, whose in-fighting skills and comfort with American officials proved far more valuable in the new environment than local popularity or effectiveness at governing. A September 2003 survey found that 75 percent of Iraqis believed that the CPA controlled the council's policy decisions, with most opting to wait and see about its performance.[27] An October 2003 survey found that 69 percent or

more had not heard enough about eighteen out of twenty-five members to have an opinion about them; only 38 percent said the same about Chalabi, but only 1 percent named him as the most trusted leader.[28] Between November 2003 and June 2004, the proportion of Iraqis expressing any confidence in the Interim Governing Council dropped from 63 percent to 28 percent.[29]

While the IGC was supposed to act as a conduit for Iraqi views to the CPA, "the IGC operate[d] from a building protected from its putative constituents by concertina wire and two U.S. military checkpoints" (Alkadiri and Toensing 2003). Reflecting the notorious internal conflicts and inability to cooperate that crippled the pre-war opposition, the IGC struggled to cooperate; for example, unable to choose a leader, the IGC settled on having a presidency that rotated every month. Members of the IGC were often out of the country, had few tangible accomplishments, and were almost invisible to Iraqi public opinion. Granted the power to appoint ministers for an interim "government," the IGC doled out positions to family members, tribes, business partners, and members of their political parties with little regard for local opinion. Above all, the IGC worked to ensure its own role in a future sovereign Iraqi government, jockeying with Bremer over all political arrangements and ultimately ensuring that all of its members were granted automatic positions in either the new Iraqi government (created on June 28, 2004) or the transitional parliament (as of August 2004). The "Iraqi National Conference" convened in August to put together a transitional parliament was brazenly manipulated by the five remaining core exile parties (with the INC excluded—see below).

The decision to grant leadership positions to these exiled opposition figures had far-reaching implications for the legitimacy of the new Iraq. Few of the exiles commanded any popular support inside Iraq, which gave them deep personal interests in delaying and minimizing the formation of real democratic institutions. Given their low standing with public opinion, the exiles had little incentive to push for rapid elections or for a more representative body—despite demands by figures such as Ayatollah Ali Sistani for early elections and a more democratic mechanism for choosing Iraqi leaders. An October 2003 U.S. State Department survey, for example, found that only 36 percent of Iraqis supported the inclusion of "formerly exiled politicians" in a

future Iraqi government—compared to over 90 percent support for doctors, scientists, lawyers, judges, teachers, and professors and 75 percent support for religious leaders.[30] Despite these failings, the former opposition used their positions to effectively monopolize political power in the emerging Iraq. Iraqi National Accord leader Iyad Allawi was appointed transitional prime minister after the transfer of sovereignty at the end of June 2004, and the exiles virtually monopolized the transitional legislative body created by the Iraqi National Conference in August.

The Iraqi National Congress, in particular, proved to have little to no following inside Iraq, while its leader Ahmed Chalabi rapidly emerged as the single most unpopular politician in the new Iraq. In October 2003, his unfavorable rating of 35 percent was by far the highest of any active politician.[31] In a March 2004 public opinion survey, for example, Chalabi was named by 10 percent of Iraqis as the leader they "don't trust at all" (no other figure scored above 2 percent).[32] A June survey found only 0.3 percent who trusted him, and 42 percent of Iraqis who named a leader they did not trust at all listed Chalabi.[33] The determination of many American neoconservatives to see Chalabi emerge as the leader of the new Iraq clashed with commitments to build an Iraqi democracy. Nevertheless, in addition to his post on the governing council, Chalabi was placed in charge of de-Baathification, and given exclusive access to a wide range of potentially incriminating documents from the former regime.

Even the capture of Saddam—otherwise enormously popular with Iraqis—was tarnished by its exploitation by the former opposition. The ill-advised image of Ahmed Chalabi's visit to Saddam's jail cell, published in the INC newspaper *al-Mutamar*, along with the appointment of Chalabi's cousin Salem Chalabi to oversee Saddam's trial, reinforced the idea that a trial for Saddam had more to do with the Iraqi opposition's ambitions than with justice. As one observer put it, the IGC only "intermittently dealt with improving social welfare, the development of infrastructure, or the restoration of Iraqi self-rule. For the past eight months, the major theme has been the importance of exacting a suitable form of revenge on the leaders who tyrannised the country for thirty-five years."[34]

On June 30 the United States formally transferred sovereignty

to a government headed by Iyad Allawi as prime minister, and the Sunni tribal leader Ghazi al-Yawwar as the symbolic president. In a public opinion survey conducted the month of the transfer of sovereignty, Yawwar was named by only 1.3 percent of Iraqis as their choice for president.[35] Allawi's rise to power came on the heels of Ahmed Chalabi's sudden, shocking fall from American good graces, as the CPA raided the INC leader's offices on the accusation of passing sensitive intelligence to Iran. Allawi's ascendance confirmed all of the worst expectations of the Arab public: rather than a liberal democrat, Allawi offered them the person of an ex-Baathist strongman, with no democratic credentials, little popular support, and an all-too-familiar enthusiasm for the use of force. While he gained some popularity inside of Iraq for his tough approach to the insurgency, his attitudes toward the media remained distinctly authoritarian. In August 2004 Allawi oversaw the creation of a "Higher Media Council", with wide-ranging powers to oversee and control the press, and over the subsequent months government officials routinely intimidated journalists.[36]

Iraqis and Arabs

FATHI [*from Iraq*]: al-Jazeera, you are all dogs, you are all dogs.
JUMANA AL-NAMOUR: Thank you. Ammad, from Doha.
AMMAD [*from Doha*]: . . . As Iraqis we feel that al-Jazeera is very biased in its coverage. . . . Al-Jazeera has an Arabist worldview, and Saddam Hussein's regime was once upon a time representing Arabism or at least a form of it, and al-Jazeera insists on this worldview and on hostility toward the regime that has followed Saddam.[37]

Your station is a symbol of evil and a transmitter of poison and sectarianism and hatred to the new Iraq, you support terrorism and kidnapping and you pray for the return of Saddam or the supporters of Saddam and you concealed every crime of Saddam against Iraq and the Iraqis, you are the station of Zarqawi and kidnapping and terror.

—An Iraqi open letter to al-Jazeera[38]

On July 5, 2003, Ghassan bin Jadu broadcast an episode of *Open Dialogue* live from Baghdad.[39] The show, which brought Iraqis into direct dialogue with intellectuals from Cairo and Beirut, aired sensitive open wounds between Iraqis and Arab public opinion. The speakers and the host were all palpably aware that they were being asked to represent, to interpret, and to in some sense validate the Arab public sphere. One Iraqi, Hilal Idrisi, bluntly categorized Arab public opinion as following two trends: "The first trend didn't have reliable information about the internal situation in Iraq, and the second trend ignored the opinions of the Iraqi people and was part of the lobby defending the old regime." Iraqi after Iraqi attacked Arab public opinion for failing to distinguish between the Iraqi people and the Iraqi regime, for minimizing the terror of life under Saddam, for ignoring or mischaracterizing the mass graves. They declared it an open secret that many Arab journalists and artists were on Saddam's payroll.

The Egyptians and Lebanese participants, for their part, were hurt and offended by these Iraqi accusations. Tariq al-Tahimi, of the Egyptian opposition newspaper *al-Wafd*, responded, "Egyptian public opinion was capable of distinguishing between the people and the regime, and the Egyptian people were capable of saying in their demonstrations in the streets that they demanded the lifting of the blockade of the Iraqi people, and no killing of Iraqis, that bombs don't make democracy, and at the same time they came out in the streets and said: 'we are with the Iraqi people and we are not with Saddam Hussein.'" Walid Barakat, speaking from Beirut, explained that "it may be true that public opinion didn't know everything about what went on inside Iraq, but it knew a lot. . . . It knew the extent of the oppression that the Iraqi people lived under. . . . We all knew about the mass graves and the oppression, . . . and we condemned it in every Arab country." But, he went on, "I think that the mass graves were for the million and a half Iraqis who died because of the American blockade."

Such angry exchanges featured prominently in the Arab public sphere's struggles to make sense of the new Iraq. On a December 2003 al-Jazeera program devoted to Arabs and the Iraqi issue, the Iraqi guests again aired their long-standing grievances with Arab official and popular silence toward Saddam's crimes, while Arab guests angrily defended their long struggles on behalf of the Iraqi people.[40] A similar program that aired on al-Jazeera in April 2005 featured angry

recriminations between the chief editor of Iraq's largest daily newspaper, journalists from Jordan and Egypt, and the editor in chief of al-Jazeera itself. The Iraqi complained that the Arab media failed to grasp the realities of Iraqi society today, refused to acknowledge that Iraq was not fully an "Arab" country, actively or tacitly supported the insurgency, and remained thoroughly corrupted by its prior support for Saddam Hussein.[41] The hostility directed toward the Arab media and toward the Arab world more generally by ordinary Iraqis stunned and confused the Arab public. In the Arab self-understanding, they had courageously rallied and organized and worked for years on behalf of the Iraqi people. They had demanded the lifting of the sanctions, condemned American bombings, and blasted their own regimes for failing to act—often at great personal risk. To now be accused by these very Iraqis clearly hurt them deeply.

But the anger was real. Mustafa Husseini, who traveled to Iraq in June 2003 with a group from the Arab Organization for Press Freedoms to see the condition of the Iraqi media, said that "the biggest surprise for me was the extent of hostility from Iraqis toward us. . . . Everybody said to us, where were you when Saddam Hussein was dealing with the Iraqi people by killing and torture."[42] In the typical words of one Iraqi writer, the Arab media "glorified the Iraqi regime" and deluded Arab viewers about the realities of Iraq under Saddam.[43] Ali al-Ghufli, writing in *al-Khaleej*, worried that a destructive and unfortunate "crisis of confidence" had opened up between the Arabs and Iraq.[44] An April 2004 public opinion survey of Iraqis found that 66 percent felt that Arab governments had been "too supportive" of Saddam's regime and only 11 percent "not too supportive."[45]

As the insurgency spiraled, many Iraqis blamed al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya (especially) for encouraging the violence, and accused both Arab states and the Arab people of doing too little to help. They complained about the choice of guests on the talk shows, especially on Faisal al-Qassem's *The Opposite Direction*, arguing that they were intervening in Iraqi politics by favoring some politicians and discrediting others.[46] The opinion pages of Iraqi newspapers, public opinion surveys, and interviews all confirm that anger with the Arab media went far deeper in the new Iraq than just among the former exiles. While Rumsfeld's accusations of active complicity by Arab journalists in attacks by insurgents seem exaggerated, the hyper-competitive Arab

media did seek out compelling, graphic footage, as well as privileged access to insurgency sources.[47] While themselves drawn to these stations as the best source of information about their own country, many Iraqis became infuriated at how the Arab media portrayed events—to some degree because they felt that the coverage was inaccurate or exaggerated, to some degree because they feared that the coverage encouraged more violence, and to some degree because they worried that the coverage was warping Arab attitudes toward the new Iraq in unconstructive directions. With security the overwhelming priority of almost all Iraqis, critics denied that it was an issue of freedom of speech when—in their view—the broadcasts contributed to the killing of Iraqis.[48]

Sensing that the Arab media offered an easy and popular target emboldened the appointed Iraqi leadership—already deeply hostile to the Arab media from their days as exiled opposition—to attack. The INC in particular pursued a vendetta, seeking to settle old scores by brandishing documents allegedly seized from the former regime's archives to prove that their critics had been on Saddam's payroll. Then–IGC President Jalal Talabani explained his November 2003 closure of al-Arabiya in these terms: "We are not acting against legitimate and objective journalistic activities. We are taking steps to prevent psychological warfare and, more serious, incitement to murder. . . . That is not journalism; that is aiding, abetting, and encouraging criminal terrorist activity."[49]

The attack on the Arab media did indeed prove popular with some Iraqis.[50] In February 2004, an Iraqi Shia cleric blasted al-Jazeera during a Friday sermon and called on the IGC to permanently shut it down: "Al-Jazeera lies, and it creates divisions among the people," he complained.[51] Among his complaints were allegations that al-Jazeera was inaccurately reporting the size and scope of demonstrations in favor of early elections by Shias, and that Faisal al-Qassem during a talk show had displayed photographs of members of the IGC meeting with Israeli intelligence officials. In July Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari accused the Arab media of "incitement" and of "one-sided" and "distorted" coverage of Iraq, warning that "the new Iraqi government will not tolerate these kinds of intentional breaches and violations." Almost immediately upon the transfer of sovereignty at the end of June, Zebari warned al-Jazeera to change its coverage or

be shut down; in July, Prime Minister Iyad Allawi carried through this threat and shuttered the al-Jazeera offices for a month, with no protest from the American embassy. In late August, the police chief of Najaf rounded up at gunpoint all journalists covering the fighting there to lambaste them over their coverage—specifically al-Arabiya's (accurate) report of Ayatollah Ali Sistani's impending return to the city. And in August 2004, transitional prime minister Iyad Allawi ordered al-Jazeera's Baghdad offices closed down, a move described by Daoud al-Basri as "a sovereign decision that responds to the wishes of an Iraqi popular majority and . . . an appropriate and positive response."[52] In late November 2004, interim defense minister Hazem Sha'alan told *al-Sharq al-Awsat* that al-Jazeera was actively supporting the insurgency, claiming that its bureau chief was funneling money to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's aide Omar Hadid (a claim later quietly retracted by another Iraqi official after al-Jazeera aired an exculpatory interview with the alleged Zarqawi conduit).[53]

The hostile Iraqi approach to the Arab media troubled many observers, who took it as evidence that the new Iraq would not be truly democratic. As Hazem Saghiye observed, "I am part of the Arab minority that is closer to accepting the present Iraqi situation than to accepting al-Jazeera. . . . That said, the recent decision by Baghdad to punish al-Jazeera is devoid of wisdom . . . [because] the only thing the current Iraqi regime is able to offer its Arab neighbors is its condition of freedom."[54] On an al-Jazeera talk show devoted to the closure, most callers interpreted the decision as a signal of encroaching Iraqi authoritarianism and American military frustration, as well as a wider American hope of "silencing the conscience of the Arab world."[55] Some Iraqi callers to that program defended the decision, however, on the basis of urgent security concerns. One underappreciated effect of the closure was that it shifted the incentives for al-Jazeera as a news organization: banned from covering official events, it no longer had much of an incentive—or opportunity—to convey the Iraqi interim government's perspective on events. Tellingly, however, when Hazem Sha'alan, Iraqi's interim defense minister and one of al-Jazeera's harshest Iraqi critics, wanted to launch an attack on political rival Ahmed Chalabi, he chose what he knew to be the most prominent and influential media outlet in Iraq: al-Jazeera.[56]

Beyond the implications for Iraqi governance and democracy, the prominence of these exiles proved devastating to relations between the new Iraq and the Arab world. As the pro-war writer Adnan Hussein witheringly complained, Arabs received a delegation from the IGC to Arab capitals "as if they were genies, or even devils. As if they were the historic enemy of the Arab *umma*, and also the Islamic *umma*. As if they were the cause of Arab disasters."[57] In August, the Arab League declined to recognize the IGC, insisting that only an elected government would be recognized (an ironic position for the Arab League, with its less-than-democratic membership roster). In a rare confluence, this position exactly mirrored the popular position taken by the majority of commentators on al-Jazeera.[58] But ultimately Arab states had little choice but to accommodate themselves to the new reality, and within a month (following a supportive Security Council resolution) Secretary-General Amru Musa announced that the Arab League would deal with the IGC as a practical matter of reality and allowed Iraq's provisional foreign minister, Hoshyar Zebari, to be seated as Iraq's representative at the Arab League. The "transfer of sovereignty" to the interim Iraqi government at the end of June 2004 made similarly little impact on Arab opinion, which largely considered such steps to be relatively meaningless; in a July online al-Jazeera poll with over 70,000 respondents, 81.5 percent said that the transfer was not the beginning of the end of the American occupation.

At the same time, Arab regimes offered only minimal support to the new Iraq, while Arab public opinion proved torn between hope for a return to normality and a kind of horrified admiration for the insurgency—which many viewed more in terms of its effectiveness against the American occupation forces than in terms of its impact on the future of Iraq. This infuriated Iraqis, who saw the Arab willingness to "sacrifice Iraqis in the name of fighting America" as identical with perceived Arab support for Saddam for the same reason in the past.[59] To some increasingly impaients observers, the Arab position toward the new Iraq appeared to be motivated more by the expressive concerns of Arab identity than by any clear strategic logic.

The hostility expressed by many Iraqis toward the Arab world led some to wonder whether the very Arab identity of Iraq was in danger.[60] These fears were reinforced by the insistence on federalism, the high profile of

Kurdish parties in the emerging Iraqi government, and some advocacy of the idea by prominent American neo-conservative backers of the war. The announcement of a new Iraqi flag—which replaced the traditional Arab colors with a blue closely resembling that of Israel's flag—fueled the fears. Some Kurdish and Turkoman (and other) Iraqi writers argued that imposing an Arab identity on the new Iraqi state recalled the Baathist tyranny.[61] At the same time, Iraqis—and some Arabs—marveled at how little the Arab world had done to help the new Iraq.[62] In an Arab public sphere increasingly dominated by identity politics, such a debate over Iraq's Arabness was inevitable, and not necessarily destructive. If such a debate forced a rethinking of what it meant to be Arab, as hoped by many Arab liberals and American backers of the war, it could prove salutary. But for the most part the debate instead turned into one critical of the new Iraq rather than critical of Arab identity.

The Iraqi elections of January 2005 offer one final vignette of the interaction between the Arab media and the Iraqi arena. Al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya, and most of the new media covered the elections extensively, positively, and constructively. Despite the continuing ban on official operations in Iraq, al-Jazeera lavished the elections with saturation coverage.[63] Rather than highlighting the negatives, as many had expected, they broadcast uplifting footage of delighted Iraqi voters and broadcast numerous talk shows discussing the possibilities and pitfalls facing a post-election Iraq. Many commentators worked over the contradictions of having democratic elections under conditions of occupation, and a number of influential figures seemed skeptical, but this did not prevent saturation coverage of the elections themselves. Coverage differed from station to station, of course, with one Lebanese critic observing that the stations had become political parties in Iraq in their own right—al-Arabiya backing Allawi and cheerleading for the election, and al-Jazeera worrying about the Sunni boycott and a Shia-dominated government.[64] Even interim prime minister Iyad Allawi, usually a fierce critic of the Arab media, acknowledged the constructive role it had played in the elections: "Arabic satellite TV stations such as al-Arabiya were obviously excited and inspired by the sight of real democracy in the heart of the Arab world. By reporting fairly on the elections, they in turn inspired their Arab audience across the Middle East and beyond."[65]

Arguing the Insurgency

In July 2003 Ghassan bin Jadu introduced a hotly contested program broadcast from Baghdad on the resistance: "One hundred days have passed since the fall of Baghdad. . . . Some considered it a war of liberation and its result freedom, others called it an aggression and its result occupation. In Iraq there is a consensus or a near consensus that the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime was good for Iraq and Iraqis and the region. . . . And so the question for our *Open Dialogue*: is the choice of resistance a good one?"

The Arab public sphere struggled with how to best respond to the Iraqi insurgency. A morbid fascination with a "successful" resistance mixed uneasily with a despairing hope for normality. On the one hand, many were gratified with the successful campaign against the American occupation, and took some vicarious thrill from seeing American forces struggle. But others were worried by its increasingly violent and nihilistic turn, and worried that such an insurgency's effects would not disappear with the American occupation forces. In November, al-Arabiya's news director Salah al-Qullab declared bitterly that "the only thing worse than the occupation is this resistance."[66] In the summer of 2004, in a series of provocative articles asking who exactly was fighting in Iraq and why, the influential Egyptian columnist Fahmy Huwaydi called to "liberate the Iraqi resistance" from those who would hijack a legitimate national independence movement for its own aims. On al-Jazeera, one of the first programs to deal with the insurgency—a May 2, 2003, program focusing on Falluja—marveled that resistance to American occupation might still be possible. But by March 2004, an *Open Dialogue* was focusing instead on "the blind violence in Iraq" (with Ibrahim Jaafari and Yusuf al-Qaradawi among the guests), while an August 2004 program asked bluntly whether the bombings in Iraq should be considered resistance or terrorism.[67]

The horrific introduction of the practice of videotaping the beheading of hostages challenged the Arab public sphere. While transfixed by the images, many Arabs worried that they contributed little to any legitimate goals. The beheading videos seemed to embody a helpless despair, a nihilistic failure of hope. Ahmed al-Rubai declared "shame

on the Arab satellites for broadcasting these tapes. . . . Nobody knows their goals or their intentions, whether they have a just cause or are just thieves."[68] In contrast to the reception to similar attacks on the Arab media, some prominent Arabists—who had opposed the war and conditionally supported the insurgency—agreed with Rubai's sentiments. An online al-Jazeera poll, surprisingly, found only 54.8 percent out of almost 50,000 respondents disagreeing with the claim that the Arab satellite stations were inciting resistance against the occupation—a less than overwhelming show of support from al-Jazeera's own viewers.[69] But, driven by market pressures and by political imperatives, the Arab media continued to broadcast the images.

The revelation of the sexual torture of Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison had a devastating effect on the American image with the Arab public, confirming many of their worst fears and allegations. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the Arab media (including al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya) did not particularly dwell on this scandal.[70] This low profile can be partly explained by the relentless American pressure on the Arab media during this period, which left these stations more cautious than usual. Still, even underplayed the story of Abu Ghraib proved devastating to the American narrative for Iraq; as one analyst noted, "Arabs who had given Washington the benefit of the doubt and hoped for a new beginning in Iraq instead saw a tragedy of errors being committed by the U.S. and its representatives. . . . In live call-in programs, viewers with no apparent political affiliations wondered how the world's superpower could allow such inhumane practices to take place."[71] As former Jordanian ambassador Adnan Abu Odeh observed, the Abu Ghraib revelations bought al-Jazeera some "breathing space," deflecting the American public relations campaign against al-Jazeera, which remained "the most honest reflection of Arab public opinion and its most powerful shaper."[72] Interestingly, the highest profile response in the Arab public sphere came with an episode of *The Opposite Direction* that focused not on Abu Ghraib, but on torture in Arab prisons.

The disparity between Arab and Iraqi priorities can be seen clearly in the response to the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003. Hostility to Saddam was overwhelming among most Iraqis outside the Sunni hard-core of the Baathist regime, as the memories of decades of

tyranny and repression had seared horrific scars on the collective Iraqi psyche. The revelations of mass graves confirmed the worst fears and experiences of Iraqis, and the newly free press gave ample opportunity for Iraqis to share their stories of suffering and dispossession. As documented in chapter 5, al-Jazeera programs such as Jumana al-Namour's *al-Jazeera's Platform* frankly and emotionally argued about the mass graves and their implications. American observers failed to appreciate the undercurrent of anti-American feeling beneath this hatred of Saddam, however. The enormous suffering of the Iraqi people under sanctions had not simply been Saddam's propaganda, and every Iraqi knew of the American and British role in sustaining the sanctions. Indeed, the rapid American military victory paradoxically confirmed for many Iraqis (and Arabs) a widely held conspiracy theory that the United States had secretly preferred to maintain Saddam in power.

Saddam was far less central to Arab concerns than to Iraqi or American concerns, however. Many Americans hoped that capturing Saddam Hussein and broadcasting images of the disheveled former dictator far and wide would deflate the insurgency, and convince Arab public opinion of the inevitability of a successful transition to a new Iraqi regime. But the impact disappointed on both counts. The insurgency continued unabated, fueled far more by competition over future power in Iraq and deepening resentment of the American presence than by the former dictator. Despite much-circulated jokes about other leaders such as Bishar al-Assad and Moammar Qaddafi rushing to avoid Saddam's fate, the shock of seeing the deposed leader disheveled and in chains provided only a momentary pause. Because the Arab consensus about Iraq had long been more about the Iraqi people than about supporting Saddam Hussein, few were particularly exercised by his fate. One of the first al-Jazeera programs to deal with his capture concentrated on whether Saddam should be treated as a war criminal or as a prisoner of war, with SCIRI's Hamid al-Bayati one of the guests.[73] In a predictable development, lawyers from all over the Arab world offered to lead his defense, and American and Iraqi officials began to have nightmares of a Milosevic-style trial giving the deposed leader a forum to air his views and, perhaps, to reveal embarrassing details.

In the summer and fall of 2004, the interaction between the insurgency and the Arab media became a topic of intense concern on

all sides (al-Marashi 2004). In addition to its wider campaign of terrorism, suicide bombings, and targeting of Iraqi "collaborators," the Iraqi insurgency began kidnapping a wide range of people, especially foreign aid workers, and releasing videotapes of the hostages and—sometimes—their graphic beheading. As Jon Alterman (2004) observed, the Arab media became an integral part of the insurgency strategy: "Many of these kidnappings and beheadings are best thought of as made-for-television events; a calculated set of actions and images directed toward influencing a mass audience." Such "collaboration"—whether intentional or not—was a primary justification for the controversial decision by interim prime minister Iyad Allawi to close al-Jazeera's Baghdad bureau and ban it from officially covering events in Iraq. These videos, just like Osama bin Laden's videotaped statements, posed an impossible dilemma for the satellite stations. On the one hand, they were clearly newsworthy, and in the face of fierce competition for market share not even the pro-American al-Arabiya felt comfortable declining to air them. On the other hand, airing the videos clearly played in to the insurgency's strategy, leaving the satellite television stations vulnerable to charges of at least tacit collusion. In Allawi's pungent phrase, "The terrorists feed on the oxygen of propaganda—we cut this off, they will die."[74]

Many Iraqis, as well as a number of Arab and Western critics, took these hostage videos as a decisive indictment of al-Jazeera and the other Arab media. In an influential *Washington Post* article, Mamoun Fandy complained, "As I scanned Arab satellite television channels and Arabic newspapers, I found a lot of reporting on the brutal attacks, but very little condemnation and a widespread willingness to run the stomach-turning video and photos again and again."[75] Al-Jazeera management, for its part, bitterly denied that it had ever aired a video of a hostage being beheaded, at one point even offering a $10,000 reward to any critic who could document such a broadcast. But the overall criticism clearly hit home: did al-Jazeera and the rest of the Arab media help to create a political and normative environment that encouraged such atrocities? If they did, how could they possible contribute to a meaningful reform of the Arab world?

Al-Jazeera itself, like other stations, clearly saw the importance of the debate over airing the hostage videos, and openly debated its own

coverage. No less than four different al-Jazeera programs discussed the kidnappings in a two-week span in September. On September 6, *al-Jazeera's Platform* held an open call-in discussion on the topic of "kidnapping foreigners in Iraq." On September 21, *The Opposite Direction* hosted a fierce argument between Tala'at Ramih and the Iraqi Karim Badr. This episode left a bad taste in the mouths of many, as Ramih offered a defense of the beheadings that struck many critics as morally repugnant.[76] At the same time, it is clear that such views existed in the Arab world, and exposing them to public scrutiny can be seen as an important service—particularly given that Ramih was held up to considerable scorn as the evening wore on. Finally, on September 24 Sami Haddad hosted a more general discussion of the future of Iraq given the horrors besetting the country. Far from stacking the deck with hostile commentators, Haddad invited Entifadh Qanbar, former spokesman for the Iraqi National Congress, former opposition leader Wafiq al-Samarrai, Iraqi politician Abd al-Amir Alwan, and the conservative American analyst Patrick Clawson of the Washington Institute for Near Eastern Affairs. On several occasions, al-Jazeera even actively intervened to plea for the release of particular hostages.

On September 20, Yusuf al-Qaradawi's al-Jazeera program *Sharia and Life* discussed the kidnappings and executions, with Qaradawi endorsing the Iraqi's people right to resist military occupation but sternly denouncing the targeting of civilians. The context of this program is particularly interesting. Qaradawi had recently been accused of issuing a *fatwa* authorizing the killing of American civilians in Iraq, a charge he hotly denied and of which considerable evidence suggests he was innocent.[77] Nevertheless, Qaradawi's alleged *fatwa* became a cause célèbre, with a leading al-Jazeera critic, Shakir al-Nabulsi, leading a petition drive for him to be brought before the International Criminal Court for supporting terrorism. Ironically, even as Qaradawi became the object of an intensely hostile campaign in the United Kingdom and in the Arab world, his refusal to sanction the killing of innocents in Iraq simultaneously brought the wrath of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. In November 24, Zarqawi released a statement denouncing the "sultans of the airwaves"—especially Qaradawi: "You have betrayed us in the darkest circumstances. . . .You have left the mujahadeen alone to confront the biggest enemy." Munir Shafiq argued that Qaradawi's condemnations

of the beheadings and hostage-taking, broadcast regularly on al-Jazeera and widely disseminated in the Islamic world, evidently had had some impact on Zarqawi's standing and strategy, prompting this unusual and bitter open attack.[78] Qaradawi and other moderate *ulema* "weaken the forces of extremism in Islam," according to Shafiq, by rejecting their right to carry out atrocities or to pass judgment on other Muslims. The controversy over Qaradawi, and al-Jazeera's crucial role in amplifying his influence, goes to the heart of the debates central to this book.

Many Americans expressed surprise with the enthusiastic coverage of the elections by al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya, and the rest of the new media.[79] They should not have. As this book has amply documented, the new Arab public has long been intensely interested in elections and the prospects for democratic reform. For all their suspicion of the American project in Iraq, the new media largely shared the ambitions for creating a democratic Iraq, and for bringing greater democracy to the rest of the region. The Iraqi elections allowed many Americans, perhaps for the first time, to appreciate the potentially positive role for al-Jazeera that its Arab defenders had seen all along.

The Arab Public Sphere: Criticism and Self-Criticism

> The Arab media today is worse than the media in 1967, because it is not objective and it is not impartial.
>
> —Abd al-Rahman al-Rashed[80]

Mamoun Fandy argued in April 2003 that the Iraq war would have the same impact on the Arab satellite television stations as the 1967 War had had on Egypt's Voice of the Arabs: discrediting them and destroying their reputation once the contrast between their rhetoric and reality became painfully clear. While the Arab media has seriously debated the implications of its performance in the war (see below), it has not suffered any such lapse in credibility, however, and has remained as popular and influential as before.

Rather than being discredited by the sudden collapse of Baghdad, the new media were buttressed by the rapid shift to a new storyline of a struggling American occupation and an emerging Iraqi insurgency,

as well as by the American failure to find Iraqi weapons of mass destruction or evidence of ties between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda. Competition among the Arab satellite television stations tended to push toward more radical and explicit reporting, while Arab audiences continued to tune in with morbid fascination at the unfolding events in Iraq. American criticism of al-Jazeera (and to a lesser extent al-Arabiya) enhanced the credibility and popularity of those stations. Finally, many Arab viewers agreed with al-Jazeera's Washington bureau chief Hafez al-Mirazi: "Was the Arab media right from the beginning? . . . The Arab world did not believe and denied from the beginning the questing of WMD and it saw the American presence in Iraq as an occupation, so why should it back down now?"[81]

It would be wrong to say that the new public sphere went on as before, however. The Arab public is extraordinarily self-conscious, and there was a powerful and urgent self-critique of the news coverage and of Arab public opinion in general. As Khaled al-Haroub noted, the Arab criticism of the satellite television networks was, if anything, more intense and more hostile than the criticism from the West.[82] Prompted not only by American allegations of bias and incitement, but also by the rage expressed by many Iraqis toward their erstwhile Arab supporters and by the dissatisfaction of many Arab elites with their coverage of Iraq, the Arab public sphere looked inward. The launch of the American satellite station al-Hurra in February 2004 sparked another (rather more self-satisfied) round of reflection and discussion of the Arab media's strengths and weaknesses.

In the face of intense American and internal Arab criticism, al-Jazeera took the unusual step of establishing an honor code to govern its programming. Program after program on al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya dissected the performance of the Arab media during and after the war, with fierce critics of al-Jazeera routinely invited onto that station's programs to present their case. In a typical move, Faisal al-Qassem invited one of his own fiercest critics, Shaker al-Nabulsi, onto his program to present his criticisms. Opinion pages of Arab newspapers filled with ruminations on the quality of the Arab media and the validity of the critiques. These intense internal debates are, ironically, powerful evidence of its own existence as a public sphere: self-referential, self-critical, and aware of its role in the Arab political system.

In a July 17, 2004, episode of *Open Dialogue* tied to the second annual al-Jazeera Media Forum, Ghassan bin Jadu brought together prominent critics and defenders of the new Arab media to discuss these questions: "What is the dividing line between the media function and propaganda?" asked bin Jadu, and "Had the Arab media crossed that line? Has our Arab media discourse erred in overemphasizing nationalist or ideological dimensions or political over professional ones or objectivity or credibility? Has propaganda triumphed over professionalism. . . . Or are the criticisms themselves only propaganda from the outside?" *Al-Hayat* journalist Hazem al-Amin complained that "during the war we all contributed in the Arab media to deceiving viewers with dreams which led to the state of general Arab frustration today. . . . We did not feel our responsibility to the viewers or readers, we gave false information which contributed to creating a general atmosphere which continues to have implications." Bin Jadu objected to Amin's accusations: "When you accuse the Arab media of distortion this is a great problem, as if it were an intelligence agency or a political one or a propaganda organ and part of everything that happened, as if it were like Mohammed Said al-Sahhaf."

Most of the guests agreed that the Arab media discourse was primarily inwardly directed rather than addressing the West. Since most in the West do not speak Arabic, argued Azzam Tamimi, the Arabic language broadcasts could only be really directed to those who speak Arabic—wherever they might happen to live. While bin Jadu pointed out that Western decision makers followed the Arabic media closely, and used it as a window into Arab public opinion, Mahmoud Shimam pointed out that Western leaders had other sources of information; while the Arab media might have this as a secondary function, its primary purpose was clearly to address and to inform Arab public opinion. Why, then, did Western leaders object so strenuously to the Arab media, asked bin Jadu? Several guests hypothesized that the problem was the flow of graphic images from al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya coverage of Afghanistan and Iraq into the Western media. But others placed the blame on the United States, which insists on controlling the interpretation of world events and the flow of information, and therefore "does not want us to have an honest free media."

Over the course of 2004 the critics of the Arab media stepped up

their attacks, reinforcing American accusations of incitement and complicity in the Iraqi chaos. The Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat*—along with writers associated with the former Iraqi opposition—stood out for the severity of its criticism. Its editor, Tareq Alhomayed, argued that "our greatest crisis is the Arab media. What al-Jazeera has done in its broadcasts from Falluja, alone, is baffling. What we see is not reporting but wails and tears. This is not the role of the media."[83] Daoud Basri accused al-Jazeera of waging a "war of sectarianism and terror."[84] Another Iraqi writer cried out that "the inciting media is murdering the dreams of an emerging Iraq."[85] Kuwaiti writer Ahmed al-Rubai called on the Gulf Cooperation Council to sign a joint declaration "in order to stop media incitement to terrorism and murder. It is clear that there are Gulf stations funded by Gulf money that specialize in incitement to violence and terrorism and that are spreading a culture of killing. . . . These stations celebrate violence in Iraq."[86] Mamoun Fandy claimed that there were no real journalists in the Arab world, arguing that anyone who thinks that Arab satellite television might play a constructive role "is at best deceived and at worst a liar or ignorant."[87]

And what was the effect of the Arab media? Abd al-Bari Atwan worried that its newfound independence from oppressive state censorship might be one of the first casualties of the American concerns, which would be an ironic and depressing outcome of a campaign allegedly fought in the name of spreading democracy.[88] Al-Jazeera struggled to meet the intensely competing demands of its American critics, both directly and through indirect pressure on the Qatari government, its vocal Arab critics, and its mass audience. Its honor code, issued in the spring of 2004, aimed at deflecting attacks on its "professionalism," although such a document alone did little to assuage its critics. Its coverage of Iraq became somewhat more cautious, although it is difficult to know the extent to which this reflected a response to pressure or its own reflection on its political role. In 2005 reports began to circulate that al-Jazeera would be privatized, allegedly under American pressure, which many feared would lead to the silencing of the station under a new (presumably Saudi) ownership. Al-Arabiya, for its part, over the course of 2004 aligned itself closely with the Allawi interim government (including airing an extremely positive documentary about

Allawi shortly before the Iraqi elections and airing a large number of his campaign commercials) and a general pro-American agenda, to increasingly positive reviews in the West (Shapiro 2005).

And so the debate raged. For its defenders, al-Jazeera and the other satellite stations continued to widen the margin of freedom in Arab discourse, to challenge Western hegemony in the media sphere, and to inform and mobilize the Arab public. Others pointed to the failures of the American media during the war, and defended the Arab media's performance as standing up rather well by comparison. But above all, the Arab public sphere continued to engage with Iraq as Arabs deeply concerned with the future of that country and of the Arab world.

The Arab Public Sphere Beyond Iraq

There is little in this book to support hysterical claims that al-Jazeera was "Jihad TV" or "killers with cameras," actively collaborating with insurgents.[89] The Arab public sphere's engagement with Iraq was far more ambiguous and conflicted than its broad-brush caricatures would suggest. There was genuine disagreement, open argument, and at key moments profound uncertainty about how to interpret events and about the appropriate "Arab" response. But what about the Arab media beyond Iraq? What about its coverage of Palestine, of Osama bin Laden and the war on terror, of political reforms, of America? What is its wider significance to the dynamics of Arab politics? Has it reached its limits, and as such demonstrated wider structural problems with international public spheres? In this concluding section, I touch on several of these questions and argue for the potentially positive role of the new Arab public sphere.

Even at the height of the criticism and self-criticism of the Arab media, even during the most difficult days of the insurgency in Iraq, al-Jazeera and the rest of the new Arab public remained the premiere site for reformist discourse in the Arab world. The simple fact that the most widely viewed television stations in the Arab world dedicated themselves urgently to criticizing the repressive status quo and demanding fundamental change cannot be overemphasized. The period of the run-up to the Iraq war, the war itself, and the immedi-

ate aftermath was perhaps the least reform-oriented in the history of this new Arab public. Rather than immediately sparking a discussion about democratic reform, the invasion of Iraq sparked intense suspicion and fear of the United States, and drove reform and democracy temporarily off the public agenda. But the intense demand for internal reform was deeply central to the identity and the agenda of the new Arab public, regardless of American policies. Over the course of 2004, the op-ed pages of *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and a dozen other Arab newspapers, just like the talk shows of al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya and a half-dozen other satellite television stations, filled with debates about the pros and cons of particular reform proposals. Most Arab arguments insisted on distance from the American reform promotion agenda, with a typical formulation being something along the lines of "we need to change, even if the Americans say so."

Al-Jazeera remained the cutting edge of reform talk. As early as September 30, 2003, Faisal al-Qassem stepped away from Iraq to examine "political and governmental reforms in the Arab states," asking specifically whether the Arab states were sincere in their recent public calls for such reform; in the accompanying online poll, 84 percent of al-Jazeera viewers said that the Arab regimes were not sincere, and not capable of reforming themselves. By the winter of 2003, the Arab public sphere had returned with a vengeance to the question of reform. Most notably, on December 6, Ghassan bin Jadu hosted a remarkable episode of *Open Dialogue* on the topic of "political reform in the Arab world," featuring two of the most prominent public intellectuals in the Arab world, Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Fahmy Huwaydi.

American reform programs, from the still-born Greater Middle East Initiative to the 2004 "Forum for the Future," sparked endless rounds of debate. On February 20, 2004, Sami Haddad hosted American conservative Patrick Clawson, radical Arabist Muta Safadi, liberal human rights activist Haytham Muttaa, and Islamist Abd al-Wahhab al-Affendi to discuss the Greater Middle East Initiative. A week later, Ghassan bin Jadu hosted a discussion of "calls for change in the Arab world," featuring (among others) former Iraqi dissident and now official in an American democracy promotion program Layth Kubba. Four different programs in March discussed the abortive Tunis Arab summit to discuss these American proposals. The

G-8 summit in June dedicated to pushing Arab reform similarly generated great interest. In late September, Ahmed Mansour hosted a program about "American demands on the Arab states" that featured highly skeptical views about American intentions: "imposing American values on the Middle East," "Arab oil and American economic hegemony," "the invasion of Iraq and serving Israeli interests" were among the main topics discussed. But six weeks later (November 5), after the reelection of George W. Bush, Sami Haddad hosted a fascinating discussion between the leading Arabist journalists Abd al-Bari Atwan, the deputy director of Egypt's Al-Ahram Center Mohammed el-Sayid Sa'id, and the prominent American neo-conservative strategist Reuel Gerecht.

While American initiatives received considerable attention and publicity in the new Arab public, the impetus toward reform came very much from within. Al-Jazeera, and much of the rest of the new public, explicitly cast Arab leaders and Arab governments as obstacles rather than as allies in the pursuit of Arab interests and Arab identity. Consider some representative al-Jazeera programs between the spring of 2004 and early 2005: "corruption and unemployment in the Arab world" (April 29); "reform projects and the Arab position toward them" (May 4); "Arab prisons" (May 18, after Abu Ghraib); "the future of reform projects" (May 25); "reform in the Arab world" (interview with Israeli Arab leader Azmi Bishara, June 14); "corruption in Arab countries" (September 25); "the reality of change in Arab countries" (December 4); "Arab elections" (December 7); "The Great Leader" (mocking Arab cults of personality, December 21); "the Arab future and the issue of reform" (January 1, 2005); "dangers that threaten freedom of opinion in the world" (January 12); "religious and intellectual freedom" (with Yusuf al-Qaradawi, January 30). When George W. Bush indicated that he had been inspired by a book by Natan Sharansky, a former dissident and now Israeli politician, al-Jazeera responded by interviewing Sharansky about his book and how it might apply to the Arab world (January 27).

In short, al-Jazeera and the new Arab public have been consistently and forcefully insistent on discussing reform in the Arab world, putting almost every issue—social, economic, cultural, political—and every regime under fierce public scrutiny.

Kefaya: The New Arab Public Moves

The Kefaya movement, which galvanized Egyptian politics with a series of increasingly bold public demonstrations against extending Hosni Mubarak' regime for a fifth term, can be seen as the quintessential expression of this new Arab public. Composed of a diverse coalition of oppositional movements—from new Islamists (the leading figures of the al-Wasat party), liberals (Ayman Nour), Nasserists, and Arabists—the Kefaya movement revolved around a core demand for change from below. Its slogan of "enough" articulated exactly the frustrations of the new Arab public described in this book: enough weakness, enough apathy, enough impotence, enough corruption. The Kefaya movement expertly worked with the new Arab media, especially al-Jazeera (where many of its leading figures had long been regular guests). It maintained a popular Web site, which laid out the movement's agenda, reproduced articles and analysis from around the Arab media, and announced future protests and demands. Beginning in 2003, the movement's demands for change focused on the 2005 presidential referendum, in which Hosni Mubarak looked set either to stand for a fifth term or hand off power to his son Gamal.

The roots of the Kefaya movement lay in precisely the contentious politics described in this book. Its organizers began to form into a network, and to develop their approach to demonstrations, through engagement in the protests against the sanctions on Iraq and the Palestinian uprising in the late 1990s. The first identifiable Kefaya protest came in March 2003, when a protest against the invasion of Iraq turned into an unprecedented anti-Mubarak demonstration.[90] Kefaya's narrative was that of the new Arab public, a restless, impatient demand for an end to the exhausted, incompetent Arab order combined with a fierce resentment of American foreign policy. Their modus operandi was television-friendly protests, at first quite small but soon escalating into larger and more dramatic demonstrations and spreading out of Cairo into the provinces. And their arguments clearly resonated with the wider Arab public: in a late February 2005 online al-Jazeera poll, over 90 percent of respondents opposed a fifth term for Mubarak.

In 2004, Ayman Nour, the leader of the new opposition party Hizb

al-Ghad, was arrested on the floor of the Egyptian parliament and his immunity from prosecution stripped on a technicality. Nour's arrest became a cause célèbre in the West and the Arab media alike. The Arab media, including al-Jazeera and to a lesser extent al-Arabiya, covered it heavily, keeping a steady focus on Egyptian political repression and giving a regular platform to Kefaya activists. These stations sent cameras to even the smallest early protests, magnifying their presence and legitimating their demands as part of the wider Arab agenda. Americans also took note, and in 2005 Condoleeza Rice bluntly informed the Egyptian regime of the need to release Nour and to begin political reforms. Shortly thereafter, Nour was released (though he still faced charges), and then Mubarak stunned the Egyptian political world by announcing his decision to change article 76 of the constitution and allow multiparty presidential elections.

While this was claimed as a success of American diplomacy, or even as a positive spinoff of the Iraqi war, most Egyptians saw it as a triumph for the new Arab public, which had been demanding exactly such changes for years. The Kefaya movement strongly opposed American foreign policy, including the occupation of Iraq, and pointedly rejected any relationship with the American embassy. Even Ayman Nour complained of being tarred by association with the United States and insistently distanced his party from the American reform agenda.[91]

The Kefaya movement demonstrates both the strengths and the limitations of the new Arab public. The combination of a focused, courageous, and dedicated domestic social movement with the magnifying power of the new Arab media proved capable of transforming the political environment. Kefaya pointed a way toward overcoming the inherent limitations of the weak Arab public sphere, by adding the hard organizational and mobilizational work on the ground that the media alone could not offer. Multiparty presidential elections and the constitutional change were not small developments. The simple fact of ongoing, regular political demonstrations and protests aimed inwardly rather than at Iraq or Palestine revolutionized the political balance. On the other hand, the limits on this change were painfully apparent. Kefaya demonstrations faced continuing repression and harassment, and as the months went on experienced ever-greater physical risks at the hands of security forces. Ayman Nour and Hizb al-Ghad, like all

other opposition parties, were subjected to legal and extralegal harassment, and no observer seriously doubted that Mubarak's National Democratic Party would dominate whatever elections were held. The government arrested hundreds of members of the still-banned Muslim Brotherhood, including its most popular leader, Essam el-Erian. When terrorism against tourists reared its ugly head, with attacks in Khan al-Khalil in April and against several tourist sites in May, many Kefaya activists worried that the government would take the excuse of terrorism to clamp down on what new tolerance existed. During the national referendum over changing the Constitution on May 25, regime thugs brutally attacked opposition protestors, singling out women for abuse.

The new Arab public moved throughout the Arab world in the spring of 2005, with mixed results. Probably the most visible of these movements came from the "Cedar Revolution" in Lebanon, after the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri. In the aftermath of his murder, vast crowds appeared seemingly spontaneously demanding a full investigation. Their demands soon extended to the withdrawal of Syrian troops, a goal achieved by the end of April. These protests demonstrated phenomenal media savvy, playing to the television cameras and carefully "branding" the social movement to highlight its youthfulness, idealism, and attractiveness. The Arab media again proved vital to the success of the movement, directly conveying the excitement and drama of those crowds to a vast Arab audience. When Bashar al-Asad, president of Syria, complained that the Arab media was exaggerating the size of the protests and demanded that the cameras "zoom out" to reveal their true size, the protestors enthusiastically embraced his demand, turning "zoom out" into their own frequently chanted demand. The protestors tapped in to the primal Arabist narrative—of a popular movement for change against an oppressive status quo—even as they won over American audiences attracted to their idealistic rhetoric (and attractive young Lebanese girls). In an online al-Jazeera survey, over 80 percent of respondents sided with the Lebanese protestors, rejecting Syrian claims to be an embattled, targeted Arab state. Still, when Hezbollah mounted a massive counter-rally in central Beirut, al-Jazeera and the Arab media covered it on equal terms, which complicated any simple narrative of a united Lebanese public opinion.

Beyond Egypt and Lebanon, stirrings of this new Arab public could be seen, albeit less dramatically. The Jordanian opposition pushed back fiercely against plans by the government of Faisal al-Fayez to restrict the political activities of the professional associations. Clearly learning from the Lebanese and Egyptian experiences, Jordanian activists pointedly flew the national flag and tried to ensure coverage on al-Jazeera and the other satellite stations. The Jordanian government proved equally sensitive to those lessons, taking special efforts to bar satellite television coverage of the protests. In early April, King Abdullah replaced Fayez's government with the "reformist" Adnan Badran, at least in part in an attempt to prevent these domestic disturbances from getting out of hand. Bahrain similarly witnessed a series of remarkable demonstrations, including a series of heavily covered protests over the arrest of a human rights campaigner and other demonstrations demanding constitutional reforms. In all, the ferment of Arab politics in these months—dubbed an "Arab spring" by many onlookers—had less to do with Iraq than with this gathering force of the new Arab public.

Beyond Politics: Popular Entertainment and the Culture Wars

This book has focused on the political dimension of the new Arab media. It is worth mentioning, at least in passing, one other important component of this new Arab media: a cultural revolution sparked by popular entertainment. Alongside the news and politics stations on the satellite television packages are a wide range of popular entertainment stations. These stations make Western and Arab movies, television serials and soap operas, and other kinds of entertainment programming widely available. While there have been few studies to date of its effects, it seems potentially important that Arab viewers now have such ready access to everything from *Friends* to the National Basketball Association to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

One of the most popular formats on these entertainment stations has been reality television, and indeed anything that includes a participatory, interactive component. An Arabic version of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* proved wildly popular for a time, and indeed was

aired directly opposite Faisal al-Qassem's *The Opposite Direction* in an evident attempt to take away some of his audience. Even more popular have been music competition programs such as *Super Star* and *Star Academy*, which featured live contests between singers from all over the Arab world where voters could phone in their choices to determine the outcome. These programs contributed to the growing sense of shared Arab identity, even as singers emerged as the "national" champions of particular Arab countries: Moammar Qaddafi called in to one program to cheer on a Libyan finalist, for example. The Saudi government banned the use of cell phones for voting on *Star Academy* in January 2005, declaring it an un-Islamic activity, but this did not prevent a Saudi contestant from winning that year's contest (he was later arrested by the Saudi morality police for spreading corruption when he was mobbed by adoring female fans at a shopping mall). And in 2004, MBC was forced to end production of an Arabic version of *Big Brother* by Islamist protests in Bahrain, where it was being filmed.

Finally, music video clips have emerged as a particularly hotly contested cultural form in recent years. Music videos featuring aggressively sexy young musicians such as Nancy Ajram, Haifa Wehbi, Ruby, and Elissa aired on a growing number of satellite television stations to great effect. As these young singers, with their skimpy clothes and provocative lyrics, rose to cultural prominence, they sparked a growing backlash. In January 2005, Kuwait's minister of information was driven from office, in part because of Islamist anger at his permitting these singers to perform in the country; a similar controversy had hit Bahrain the previous year. A lawsuit was filed in the UAE in February 2005 against a satellite television station for airing music videos that clashed with Islamic values. In March 2005, Egyptians protested against overly erotic music videos, while the Egyptian government banned several of them from the airwaves. When Shaaban Abd al-Rahim, who came to be seen as "voice of the Arab street" with his incendiary political hits such as "I Hate Israel" and "Attack on Iraq," came out with a video endorsing the re-election of Hosni Mubarak in April 2005, political observers had to take his influence (and his acumen in reading the popular mood) seriously indeed.

Some Final Lessons

The Lessons of Iraq

The experience of Iraq has hardly been a positive one for the Arab world. But in one important way, the Arab public sphere's intense focus on Iraq offers real promise. In both 2001 and 2002, roughly one-third of all al-Jazeera talk shows focused on Palestine; in 2003, almost 45 percent focused instead upon Iraq. Almost all Arabs agree about Palestine, meaning that these talk shows almost always reinforced an existing consensus—but in an area where positive progress seems unlikely.

Iraq, as this book has demonstrated, has been an issue that brings out the most intense disagreements in the Arab public sphere. Rather than a firm consensus, the arguments over Iraq have revealed uncertainties, disagreements, and a multiplicity of perspectives—all within the same self-defined Arab identity. Arguing over Iraq may be ugly, but the very intensity of these arguments suggests an openness to disagreement and to public argument. And, while at the time of writing it may seem unlikely, events in Iraq could well develop in a more positive direction, allowing the Arab public sphere to participate in a more constructive manner than in Palestine. The January 2005 elections, for example, generated mostly positive coverage, and rare optimistic views from a generally deeply worried Arab public.

Expectations of a "democratic domino effect," as Iraqi freedom spills over into neighboring countries, have been vastly overstated; if anything, the chaos and horrors of Iraq have acted as a sobering example of the risks of change. But since most of the new Arab public demands reform for their own reasons, not because of American interests or American pressure, the very act of arguing about Iraq could help to increase the pressures on Arab regimes to respond . . . especially if the United States proves willing to hold its own allied regimes, such as Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, accountable to its own liberalizing rhetoric.

A Real Public Sphere . . . The new Arab public sphere is a genuine public sphere, characterized by self-conscious, open, and conten-

tious political argument before a vast but discrete audience. Al-Jazeera call-in shows were particularly distinctive in this regard, as almost any voices could potentially be heard and individuals were placed into unscripted, uncensored dialogue over which hosts could exercise only some control. Al-Jazeera was only one part of this evolving public sphere, however, as competing television stations, the press, and the Internet offered a plethora of platforms for these public arguments.

These public arguments are plainly consequential, shaping not only political attitudes but also conceptions of political identity and the strategies of all political actors. Reform has been a consistent obsession of this new public, a constant topic of intense public argument in the op-ed pages and on the talk shows.

. . . But a Weak Public The Arab public sphere remains cut off from any viable means of directly influencing policy outcomes. This generates frustration and anger, but also offers a curious empowerment. By virtue of not being beholden to states, the Arab public sphere has the opportunity to construct a more reasoned and authentic public opinion, which can in turn challenge the political status quo. But such freedom can also lead to an absence of accountability, encouraging dramatic declarations of principle over pragmatic discussion of competing alternative policies.

A Populist Public or a Liberal Public? Vocal criticism by some Arab liberals highlights the very real possibility that even as the Arab public gains visibility and influence it may have decidedly nonliberal characteristics. The emphasis on identity—and particularly on a narrative of collective suffering and disenfranchisement—runs counter to liberal presuppositions. The political impact of the new Arab public sphere rests heavily, I would argue, on whether it evolves in a liberal or a populist direction.

Prior to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, most signs pointed toward a liberal evolution, as the new Arab public challenged the repressive status quo, demanding reform and action and accountability. Rather than spurring democratization in the region, as some Americans had hoped, the occupation of Iraq has undermined the liberal qualities of the Arab public sphere and strengthened its populism. This

could stand as one of the greatest unrecognized tragedies of the war. But even here, the urgent imperative toward open dialogue and the celebration of disagreement mitigate against any notion that al-Jazeera and the new Arab public simply celebrate a "competing authoritarianism" (Rubin 2002). As noted in chapter 2, this celebration of argument and internal publicity offers a frank challenge to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, just as it challenges Arab dictators and American foreign policy. The new Arab public will not soon lose its populism: its celebration of Arab identity, its confrontational attitudes toward the West, its support for Arab causes in Palestine and elsewhere, its caustic dismissiveness toward Arab rulers. But such populism is not in itself incompatible with progressive change.

A Call for Dialogue

Many supporters of the invasion of Iraq agreed with Reuel Gerecht that a show of American power in Iraq would increase respect for the United States. A key element of the neo-conservative argument for war rested on the belief that Arabs respected force, not reason, and—oddly adopting the analysis of Osama bin Laden—would flock to "the stronger horse." This has not happened. The invasion and occupation of Iraq generated enormously greater anti-American sentiment throughout the Middle East. Rather than dealing a decisive blow against Islamist extremism, it seems to have significantly encouraged its spread and strengthened al-Qaeda and its sympathizers. And rather than offering a decisive demonstration of an irresistible American power, the occupation of Iraq has shown Arabs an unpopular, ineffective, and illegitimate occupying power, one increasingly equated with the hated Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

The new Arab public sphere offers an unprecedented platform for an Arab public opinion deeply critical of the authoritarian status quo. The urgent calls for reform and insistent critique of the Arab status quo in much of the new Arab media accords well with American hopes for the region. Given the intense interest al-Jazeera had always shown in democratic reform, an eventual transition to democracy in Iraq would likely receive positive coverage in the Arab public sphere.

The chaos and insecurity of post-war Iraq, particularly when viewed through the lens of the intense pre-war fears and antagonisms, pushed coverage and commentary in a more critical direction, however. The hope that America might change the Arab world through the "demonstration effect" of an occupied Iraq was deeply misguided. I would like to conclude this book by arguing for a very different approach to the new Arab public.

The Bush administration's approach to the Arab public sphere treated it as either an enemy to be defeated (in a "war of ideas") or as an object to be manipulated (via public relations). Between its harsh attacks on the Arab satellite stations and its decision to launch an Arabic language satellite television station (al-Hurra) in order to have its own (controllable) voice in the Arab arena, American policy has seemed designed to marginalize and weaken the Arab public sphere as an effective political voice. But these policies have largely failed. Anti-American attitudes have skyrocketed, al-Hurra has failed to capture an audience, and Arab public opinion remains suspicious.

Given the urgency of fighting effectively against radicalism in the struggle against terror, these failures offer a powerful incentive to contemplate a real dialogue with the Arab public sphere. The most effective approach would be for the United States to enter more directly into the Arab public sphere and to engage with it as a public sphere, relying on reasoned argument rather than power (Lynch 2003a; Eickelman 2002). Instead of pressuring al-Jazeera, the United States should embrace the opportunity it offers to reach a vast Arab audience preconditioned to yearn for change. Instead of wasting vast sums of money on a satellite television station nobody watches, the United States should enter the Arab public sphere as it really exists.

This would not offer a miracle solution to the problems of the Middle East. But it would hold out the unique opportunity for the United States to align itself with a new Arab public that in many ways wants the same things America claims to want. Opinionated, well-informed, and proud of their identity, these Arabs tend to be offended by American propaganda and highly suspicious of American motives. But at the same time they overwhelmingly support demands for comprehensive reforms in the Arab world, and have little patience for the entrenched, repressive status quo. By treating them as enemies, the

United States not only risks losing a powerful potential ally for change, but also pushes these influential voices into a hostile camp. These Arab voices oppose key American policies in the Middle East, particularly with regard to Israel and Iraq. Dialogue is unlikely to change this in the near term.

But opposition to American policies should not be equated with irrational "anti-Americanism," nor should rationally articulated opposition be dismissed as "extremism." The new Arab public is open to argument and committed to public debate. If the United States proves willing to engage seriously with the new Arab public sphere, changing policies where appropriate, that public could prove receptive. Such real dialogue with the new Arab public offers a route toward a coalition for moderation and for genuine progressive change in the Arab world.