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SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report outlines the collaborative process developed over a four-year period to enable Iraqi media, regulators, and members of civil society to mitigate inflammatory content broadcast on satellite television stations. The report is part of a larger initiative undertaken by the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, with support from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to encourage Iraqi journalists, media monitors, and regulators to engage in a locally driven process to prevent media incitement to violence. The authors would like to thank Monroe Price, Libby Morgan, and Lauren Kogen at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania for their collaboration on this report. They would also like to acknowledge the support of George Papagiannis, Karin Mayer, and Amani Soliman at UNESCO.

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Maureen Taylor and Theo Dolan

Mitigating Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq

A Locally Driven Approach

Summary

- The Iraqi media sector is polarized, with news content often representing political positions. In a postconflict environment such as Iraq, this polarized content can become inflammatory, potentially inciting violence and diminishing the chances for Iraq to move forward in its transition to a peaceful democratic society.
- The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania engaged three key parts of the media sector—Iraqi civil society media monitors, regulatory bodies, and news media—to jointly discuss and decide how best to minimize inflammatory language, while still respecting press and expression freedoms.
- The collaborative effort included a media content analysis that identified, defined, and measured the prevalence of inflammatory terms appearing on the newscasts of the top five Iraqi satellite stations before Iraq's national elections in 2010. The research findings were shared with Iraqi media, civil society media monitors, and regulatory bodies to assist them in preventing inflammatory reporting.
- Using a set of guidelines developed by Iraqi media stakeholders and USIP, a pilot group of influential news directors, media regulators, and civil society media monitors created a style guide for conflict reporting, which provides both a reference for media to minimize the use of inflammatory terms and a starting place for Iraqis to address the issues noted in the content analysis and improve media regulation and monitoring.
- Building on the self-regulatory tools developed, USIP is seeking to create a network of civic organizations across Iraq that can monitor media content on a range of potential conflict issues, from elections to oil to ethnic relations.

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- The process—as outlined in this report—of self-regulation in the Iraqi media could be a model for other conflict-affected countries. If a broad range of media stakeholders are armed with the tools, motivations, and structures for effective media oversight, inflammatory reporting can be better constrained.

Introduction

When Iraqi media outlets use language that can contribute to violence, they perpetuate a style of news reporting that began several years ago with real consequences for peace and stability in Iraq and the region. Iraqi media stakeholders largely acknowledge that inflammatory language is a continuing problem, but few agree on what constitutes such language or what can be done to mitigate it.

When an act of speech has a reasonable chance of catalyzing or amplifying violence by one group against another, given the circumstances in which it was made or disseminated, it can be considered dangerous and inciting violence.¹ But defining what constitutes inflammatory language in Iraq and elucidating how it can lead to violence is not easy because such language operates on multiple levels. Many potentially inflammatory terms are part of the national vernacular and appear often in daily conversations and media coverage. But these terms affect different people differently. For some Iraqis, a certain term merely describes a situation in their complex social and political environment. For others, especially those already disposed toward violence, the media's explicit and constant repetition of a potentially inflammatory term can amplify the dangerous nature of the language, with harmful consequences.

USIP developed characteristics and definitions of dangerous speech—or inflammatory terms, as they are more commonly called—in collaboration with Iraqi media professionals. This effort resulted in a lexicon of inflammatory terms² that provides the basis for the analysis in this report, as well as a starting point for combating dangerous language that the Iraqi media propagate during contentious periods, such as elections. An excellent example of the complexity of potentially inflammatory terms can be seen in the various ways the Arabic equivalent of the term *foreign agenda* appeared in news coverage during the 2010 elections in Iraq. Neighboring countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, are widely believed to have played significant roles in the formation and funding of major Iraqi electoral coalitions. Foreign influence in Iraqi politics is a reality, but the use of the term *foreign agenda* can represent myriad perspectives. It can be used innocuously—what this paper calls *neutrally*—to the point that viewers may not notice it:

The leader of one of the leading political parties spoke of foreign agendas today in his speech.

But the term can also be used *implicitly*, cueing a viewer to infer a more nefarious meaning in the foreign agenda under discussion. In such uses, the word or phrase is not merely used in a general statement; its use may create tensions, divide Iraqis, or exacerbate long-standing issues:

There are foreign agendas trying to influence this election. We must be cautious of those who seek to influence Iraqi sovereignty.

Finally, the term may be used *explicitly* to motivate, if not direct, a viewer toward some type of action to address the situation. In this case, not all viewers share a common reaction to the use of the term, but some may feel compelled to act based on the context:

There is a foreign agenda trying to influence Iraqi sovereignty. When we look at the foreign soldiers in our streets, we know that this agenda must be stopped before we fall victim to its interests.

Context matters in determining the danger of inflammatory language. Other key factors include the identity of the speaker responsible for the language, the intent of the speaker to cause violence, and the extent and magnitude of the expression, including the means of dissemination.³ This report offers insight on how a specific set of terms, conveyed by Iraqi media at a key period of Iraqi political development, may instigate violence among Iraq's television viewing public. It further proposes a combination of self-regulatory actions that local media stakeholders can take to staunch the flow of inflammatory media content.

The Roots of Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq

A variety of factors contribute to the prevalence of inflammatory language in contemporary Iraqi media. First, the private sector media in Iraq have developed rapidly and dramatically since 2003, with the Iraqi public increasingly able to access a vast array of news and information.⁴ This is one of the most positive outcomes of recent institutional developments in Iraq, yet the speed of the media transformation also brings negative side effects that are often hallmarks of media environments in transition. For example, audiences are receiving increasingly polarized content. Arab media scholars Marwan Kraidy and Joe Khalil note that "Iraqi television reflects the country's ideological and sectarian fragmentation where even the public channel fails to represent various social, political, and ethnic constituents.... In this media environment dominated by wartime political and security imperatives, there are no stable, commercially viable, advertising-supported channels."⁵ Given their ownership structures and scarce advertising revenues, the channels rely on political patronage for financial support. This becomes particularly problematic during election periods, when political parties and their candidates turn to television stations to carry their campaign messages. The stations become mouthpieces for politicians and positions, often at the expense of other political actors and citizens seeking more evenhanded coverage.

As the private media sector has grown, so has the number of untrained, unprofessional journalists working in the news business. These inexperienced journalists may fall back on divisive clichés, tell stories in simplistic ways, and lack the capacity to report in a conflict-sensitive manner. They also may not know how to confront interviewees who make inflammatory statements. These unprofessional journalistic practices ultimately lead to a poorly informed audience that only gets one side of a potentially combustible story.

Media managers are also an important part of the issue. Under the authoritarian Baathist regime before 2003, the state tightly controlled Iraq's media sector. State media consisted of two television channels, four radio stations, and five daily newspapers.⁶ The Saddam Hussein regime's dominance of the media sector created a top-down ethos among managers and journalists that holds sway in Iraq today, as many of the old guard remain in positions of power in state-run and private media outlets. Some deeply entrenched attitudes and practices—such as self-censorship—that often occur when reporting on conflicts have proven to be difficult to uproot, particularly among influential television channels that emerged after 2003.

A third factor is the ambiguity with which the regulatory body oversees and upholds standards in broadcasting. The Iraqi Communications and Media Commission (CMC) is responsible for regulating the media. During elections, the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) is responsible for monitoring media content. Both the CMC and IHEC have proved to be vulnerable to political pressures and politicized decision making. So when the CMC defines media incitement to violence as "material that, by its content or tone...carries the clear and immediate risk of inciting imminent violence, ethnic or religious hatred, civil disorder or rioting among the people of Iraq," this definition can be interpreted, and subsequently enforced, in ways that benefit some individuals or groups over others.⁷ Such

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politicized regulation can have a chilling effect on free speech and the pursuit of professional journalism.

Political influence over broadcast media is compounded by television becoming the most popular source of news and information in Iraq. Iraqis have access to dozens of domestic terrestrial and satellite stations as well as satellite stations from their Middle Eastern neighbors. In a D3 Systems survey, the majority (75 percent) of Iraqis who responded believed it was very or somewhat important to stay informed about current events. Nearly all Iraqi homes surveyed had at least one television, and 95 percent of survey respondents watched television every day.⁸ This in combination with the factors above contribute to an environment where inflammatory language is tolerated, creating significant consequences for individuals and civil society groups seeking to engage in civic discussion on potentially divisive issues.

Creating an Iraqi Self-Regulating Media System

This report highlights the efforts of USIP and its partners to help Iraqis create a locally driven system that prevents media incitement to violence. USIP's collaboration with local media stakeholders is an attempt to combat inflammatory reporting by creating an Iraqi system of self-regulation. Self-regulation, as opposed to government-agency regulations or outright censorship, occurs when media organizations recognize professional standards and voluntarily commit to uphold them. Regulators and civil society organizations can support the media in efforts to uphold professional standards. Regulators need to articulate clear standards as well as fairly enforce them. Meanwhile, civil society organizations can monitor media coverage and publicize the results of their research, revealing instances of inflammatory news coverage. When all three stakeholder groups work together, a locally driven process to minimize media incitement to violence emerges, while also enabling active discussion on how to balance free speech and free press imperatives with constraining dangerous media-disseminated language.

The Iraqi laws governing media content implicitly assume self-regulation. The CMC developed a broadcasting program code of practice to address media incitement to violence,⁹ stating that "broadcasters themselves are responsible for the content of all material broadcast by them, whatever its source, and it is the responsibility of the broadcasters to ensure that their programs and services operate in compliance with the Code."¹⁰ This code empowers Iraqi media to self-regulate, though any advances in self-regulation ideally should be accompanied by improvements in the media sector's overall legal framework. This means that the Iraqi legislature should draft and enact progressive media laws that conform to international standards. Unfortunately, the process has largely stagnated over the past several years, and laws that have been enacted, such as the journalism protection law in 2011, have drawn criticism from international and Iraqi organizations.¹¹

USIP acknowledges potential limitations for the initiative. First, the overall number of Iraqi media stakeholders involved was not large. Instead, USIP convened a small pilot group of influential actors: news directors from the top five satellite channels,¹² regulators specializing in media monitoring and oversight, and civil society watchdog organizations with experience in media or political monitoring. The goal of working with these leaders in their field was for them to impart their knowledge and skills to others within their organizations. Over time, the scale of the project will increase organically from within each of the three stakeholder groups. Another potential obstacle facing media self-regulation in Iraq is the motivation of certain Iraqi stakeholders to take part. Many outlets that engage in inflammatory reporting do so intentionally, for personal, political, or religious reasons. These media outlets would naturally not be inclined to change their ways. But if their behavior can be marginalized, if unprofessional practices within the news media sector can be discouraged,

and if the public can be increasingly informed about the dangers of media incitement to violence, the commercial viability and public credibility of offending outlets will fall, making their operations much less sustainable unless they change. The initiative intends to encourage such change over the long term.

Steps toward Self-Regulation

USIP developed a five-step process to help Iraqi media stakeholders toward self-regulation. As noted, each step incorporates influential actors from three main media groups—news media, government regulators, and media-related civil society organizations—and facilitates an exchange of experiences and good practices. The process encourages Iraqis to draw on international standards in order to customize training and tools for their own use at their own organizations. Each step is intended to complement the next and be flexible enough to sequence in a way that Iraqis find most helpful.

Step 1: Diagnosing the Problem

USIP recognizes that Iraqi media and civil society are the real experts on how media can contribute to peace in Iraq. At a 2009 conference of seventy-five Iraqi media stakeholders, participants acknowledged that media incitement to violence was a serious problem, but there was no agreement on the extent and nature of its occurrence. In 2010, USIP sought to address the problem by identifying potentially inflammatory terms in Iraqi news coverage and offering alternatives that would minimize the potential for violent responses. The resulting resource, “User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq-Elections Edition,” was developed through extensive consultation with Iraqi media professionals from both print and broadcast media across the country. More than fifty media professionals were asked, through a survey, to identify the most potentially inflammatory terms the media used during election periods and suggest how the terms could be used to present information in a more conflict-sensitive and professional way. A lexicon of the most inflammatory terms was compiled from the surveys and a panel of Iraqi media advisers helped to draft the overall guidelines. The guidelines were then distributed to media outlets, the CMC, the IHEC, and other organizations before the 2010 national elections in an attempt to mitigate inflammatory elections reporting.

The survey findings suggested that certain terms are potentially more inflammatory for an Iraqi audience than others and that the context matters. Four Arabic terms, translated as *uprooting* (related to de-Baathification), *foreign agenda*, *sectarian quota*, and *exclusion*, were frequently mentioned in the survey. *Uprooting* refers to the disqualification of candidates from elections based on their past affiliations with the Baath Party. It first emerged as a central feature of the 2005 electoral campaign, voting, and results certification. *Uprooting* complicated efforts to form cross-sectarian political alliances because it polarized Iraqis and reinforced divisions. *Foreign agenda* refers to the involvement of neighboring countries, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, in Iraq’s affairs. Given Iraq’s history and geographic location, many countries seek to exert their influence over it. But the term *foreign agenda* can be used to discredit and delegitimize political opponents rather than engage with them on substance. The issue of *sectarian quotas*, another complicated subject, was one of the most frequently cited areas of concern in Iraq after 2003. The idea of ensuring a number of posts for each major community in Iraq based on its rough proportion of the population is seen as vital by some; others see it as contributing to the “Lebanonization” of Iraq. There are concerns that a government of the political majority leads to fear of exclusion, within the Sunni community in particular. The term *exclusion* is related to *uprooting* but points to

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Identifying and debating such terms sharpens critical thinking about their meaning and their effects and helps to develop viable alternatives that could assist in creating the foundations for a self-regulating media.

a deeper issue related to former Baathist party members' lack of agreement on the terms of political participation. This is particularly relevant to the Sunni community and played out in relation to the lifting of de-Baathification bans on three high-profile members of the Iraqiya party so that they could take up senior positions in the new government.

The above terms can be subject to debate. In addition to referring to the disqualification of candidates, *uprooting* is a vernacular term that refers to the physical act of pulling something out by the roots. Yet survey respondents repeatedly identified the term as potentially incendiary. Identifying and debating such terms sharpens critical thinking about their meaning and their effects and helps to develop viable alternatives that could assist in creating the foundations for a self-regulating media.

Step 2: Contextualizing Inflammatory Terms

Once inflammatory terms were identified, Iraqi broadcasters, civil society monitors, and regulators needed a reliable methodology to measure their frequency of use, identify the contexts in which they appeared, and understand their intensity in news coverage. In 2010, USIP and the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, with support from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and in consultation with Iraqi advisers, created a content analysis system to reliably gauge the prevalence, intensity, and location of incendiary terms. This system was applied to election coverage on the highest-rated Iraqi satellite stations: Al Sharqiya, Al Iraqiya, Al Sumaria, Al Hurra, and Al Baghdadia. The 2010 content analysis provided a benchmark study to allow stations to track their own use of such terms and compare with competitors.

The content analysis comprised nightly news programs. The research team secured a general sample of thirty days of programs for each of the five stations from the Iraqi media monitoring organization Al Mir'at, which has conducted several monitoring studies and regularly records and archives Iraqi news broadcasts. News programs that ranged between twenty and sixty minutes and were broadcast in the month before the election—that is, the thirty days from February 5 to March 6—were eligible for inclusion in the sample. All short news updates were excluded. This method provided baseline data on how various television outlets framed the news. Random sampling enabled the research team to see if and how potentially inflammatory terms appeared before the election. Appendix A details the method, results, and conclusions of the analysis. Five general findings, which were shared among the Iraqi regulators, news media, and civil society monitors, provided a context to understand specific ways that media could begin self-regulating to minimize the use of inflammatory terms.

General Findings

1. Potentially inflammatory language appeared on all stations studied, but their use and intensity varied. The four most frequently used terms were *uprooting*, *Iranian/foreign agenda*, *exclusion*, and *sectarian quotas*. Other incendiary language identified by Iraqi media did not feature as prominently in the content analysis (see table 1).
2. As it was not in the study's scope to gauge how viewers would receive the terms, the terms were graded on their potential rather than actual effects: They were classified as used in an explicitly inflammatory, implicitly inflammatory, or neutral way in the news coverage. *Explicit use* was defined as using the term in a way that heightened the potential for violence. After hearing the term in a news story, a viewer might have felt motivated, although not directed, to some type of action.¹³ *Implicit use* was less forceful than explicit use, but a viewer could have inferred a meaning behind the use. The term was not merely used in a

Table 1. Prevalence of Inflammatory Terms during Election Coverage by Station
(number of instances)

Term	Al Sharqiya	Al Iraqiya	Al Sumaria	Al Baghdadia	Al Hurra
Sectarian quotas	15	2	2	9	3
Iranian/foreign agenda	12	5	6	13	7
Uprooting/ijtithath	9	6	6	34	12
Conspiracy	9	4	0	1	0
Deprivation	6	0	0	0	0
Exclusion	5	7	13	3	7
Marginalization	4	1	0	0	1
Vote or don't vote	2	0	0	0	0
Authoritative parties	1	0	0	2	3
Sunni Triangle	0	0	1	0	0
Saddamists	0	6	1	0	0
Federalism	0	1	1	0	0
Majority/minority rule	0	1	0	1	0
Resistance	0	1	0	0	0
Agents of foreign powers	0	1	0	1	0
Total terms: 225	63	35	30	64	33

general statement, and it could have created tension or possible disorder. *Neutral usage* was innocuous and possibly not even noticed by viewers, as in a general statement. A neutral use of the term would not motivate the viewer to any action but could still constitute a reference to a potentially incendiary term at the time.

Across all stations, the terms identified in the survey were employed in a neutral way approximately 50 percent of the time. About 7 percent of the terms were used explicitly, while 43 percent were used implicitly.

- Nearly 50 percent of the terms appeared as the presenter introduced a story or commented at the end of a story (see table 2). Anchors tended to ad lib in their introductions and conclusions, falling back on potentially inflammatory terms that were part of the common vernacular. Interviewees also often used the terms.
- The top stories of the day, appearing at the beginning of the newscast, contained the most potentially inflammatory terms. Sound bites from stories featuring politicians speaking at a news conference or in an interview also often contained the terms. Al Sharqiya and Al Baghdadia ran sound bites featuring politicians' speeches that included the terms as well.
- The benchmark study additionally focused on the use of conflict-sensitive journalism standards. Journalists working in conflict environments should use diverse sources, explain the complex causes of conflict, and offer possible solutions to the conflict in their news stories. This type of journalism is difficult for any type of media organization working in any part of the world, so the initial results were not surprising: The Iraq content analysis found that very few news stories during the election period provided explanations of the conflict, offered solutions, or integrated diverse sources.

Step 3: Driving Change from Within

USIP used the results from the content analysis to deliver a capacity building workshop in Erbil, Iraq, in November 2010 for a pilot group of fifteen high-level Iraqi media stakeholders from government, news media, and civil society. The workshop had two mutually reinforcing objectives: to share the findings from the content analysis and to assist participants in collaboratively developing tools to address the findings and prevent media incitement to violence.

The project team brought together Iraqi news directors, media regulators from the CMC and IHEC, and civil society media monitors. The content analysis allowed the five news

The Iraq content analysis found that very few news stories during the election period provided explanations of the conflict, offered solutions, or integrated diverse sources.

Table 2. Location of Inflammatory Terms in News Stories by Station
(number of instances)

Term	Al Sharqiya	Al Iraqiya	Al Sumaria	Al Baghdadia	Al Hurra
Anchor editorializing	23	6	20	42	16
Interview (studio/phone)	13	16	8	0	0
Actuality or real voice quote	11	5	0	18	9
Vox pop	11	3	2	2	2
Headline with or under story	1	0	0	1	5
Editorial comments after story	2	0	0	0	0
Reporter in field	2	5	0	1	1
	63	35	30	64	33

directors to see how their election coverage measured up against their competitors and gain a heightened sensitivity to their networks' use of potentially inflammatory terms. They also responded to the findings during the workshop and discussed with their peers how and why the terms appear in the news. In particular, the five news directors reacted to the data revealing that half the terms appeared in anchor lead-ins to news stories by openly discussing the role of anchors and how the nightly news program is produced.

Significantly, the news directors from the two stations with the highest use of inflammatory terms, Al Baghdadia and Al Sharqiya, viewed the results constructively and did not dispute the findings. The news directors collectively learned how to conduct their own content analysis to mitigate inflammatory coverage within their organizations or use it as a competitive tool in developing improved content. Al Baghdadia's news director committed to assisting editors in discussing and reaching agreements on guidelines and measures (to limit use of potentially inflammatory terms). Training new journalists at his outlet was also an imperative. He further noted that participants could evaluate themselves and their colleagues regarding the use of inflammatory terms and volunteered to facilitate such an evaluation by hosting a training workshop for Iraqi channels at Al Baghdadia.¹⁴

Aside from news media analyzing their own content, several organizations in Iraq currently monitor the media and report their findings. But the monitoring methods and reports are generally weak and have little capacity to influence media. Members of the CMC, IHEC, and three nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Al Mir'at Media Monitoring Center, the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, and the Human Rights Institute in Kirkuk, were introduced to social science methods of content analysis at the workshop. These participants received training in how to collect reliable, objective data that would help them to better monitor the Iraqi media and use their findings to participate in the broader discussions about media in Iraq.

The facilitator, professor Maureen Taylor, helped members of each sector—media, civil society, and regulators—to adapt the content analysis methodology for their own organizations. Participants identified ways to develop their own analyses and committed to sharing the USIP-Annenberg content analysis findings with their organizations. USIP follow up with each organization after ninety days noted several accomplishments. Al Iraqiya conducted a training session for reporters and staff working in the newsroom, modeled after the USIP workshop and using the content analysis materials. Al Sumaria observed its media coverage for a two-month period and monitored the use of inflammatory terms outlined in the workshop. The CMC conducted a training session to discuss content analysis method with its monitors. The Human Rights Institute in Kirkuk met with colleagues and media professionals from various organizations in Kirkuk to discuss the workshop's main goals and lessons. Al Mir'at Media Monitoring Network organized a content analysis training course in Babel to monitor coverage of women in the media.

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In addressing the second workshop objective, Professor Joe Khalil helped participants to add to their toolkit by developing a style guide for conflict reporting.¹⁵ A style guide is a common newsroom resource that provides a practical framework for news production. The style guide for conflict reporting was designed to be tailored to the needs and goals of media regulators, civil society media monitors, and news media. The guide currently includes three appendices: a style guide template for journalists, another template for media monitors and regulators, and a glossary of potentially inflammatory terms that builds on the already established lexicon (see Step 1 above). The guide not only provides journalists with a standard for reporting on conflict issues but enables regulators and civil society organizations to use the guide to monitor the media's coverage of events.

After ninety days, the project team followed up with each participant to check on progress related to implementing the style guide, noting accomplishments. Both Al Sumaria and Al Hurra updated their existing internal style guides based on the workshop, and the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory distributed the guidelines and style guide to more than one hundred reporters working in various media institutions.

Analyzing content and developing style guides are mutually reinforcing activities for refining the practice of conflict reporting in Iraq. The style guide helps to set self-regulatory standards, and the content analysis evaluates if and how the media are meeting those standards. The findings of the content analysis thus can help media outlets learn where they are failing to meet standards. Likewise, over time the style guide can be modified to better instruct journalists in creating more useful news for audiences. The media stakeholders from the workshop are currently working to refine the guide to inform their professional practices, coordinated through a USIP-facilitated Facebook forum.

Step 4: Reinforcing Self-Regulatory Tools

In December 2011, USIP organized a second workshop in Iraq. The eleven participants again represented Iraqi media regulatory bodies, news media, and monitoring NGOs. This workshop built on the momentum of the first one and introduced new media decision makers to the method of content analysis and the evolving style guide. The goal was to increase the overall number of Iraqi media stakeholders who could combat media incitement to violence through self-regulation.

Professor Taylor helped the participants to conduct their own content analysis in order to gauge progress (or lack thereof) in mitigating inflammatory reporting. Professor Khalil and USIP's Theo Dolan helped the participants to continue to revise and customize the style guide for use at their own organizations. USIP is also attempting to form a broader online community of practice for Iraqi participants to continue to collaborate on preventing media incitement. At their own request, workshop participants will have access to all training tools through a private Facebook group. Through this forum, they can interact with each other, USIP, and international trainers on a range of topics in various formats, from moderated discussions to general questions and answers.

The forum is also being used to track individual progress. Erbil participants were each asked to outline a plan of action for their organization after the workshop. In this document, all of them committed to self-defined time frames for joining the online forum, customizing the style guide for their own organization, completing a sample content analysis, and sharing their progress on the online forum. One news media participant's action plan included the following:

1. Presenting workshop tools to the management for approval.
2. Presenting tools for preventing incitement to a wider range of staff within the organization.
3. Developing customized tools as part of an internal workshop.

The style guide not only provides journalists with a standard for reporting on conflict issues but enables regulators and civil society organizations to use the guide to monitor the media's coverage of events.

4. Obtaining approval from the management to apply the customized training tools.
5. Starting a training process to implement customized tools within relevant departments.
6. Testing the tools within two months and sharing the results with USIP and colleagues within three months.

Once again, participants were asked to chart their progress ninety days following the workshop. One civil society participant conducted his own training in Erbil using workshop resources that he had translated into Kurdish. This training was led by the Democracy Development Organization (DDO) based in Erbil. More than twenty organizations attended the content analysis and style guide training, including Kurdistan TV, Zagros TV, Gali Kurdistan TV, Goran TV, Azadi TV, NRT TV, and UTV, as well as the newspapers *Hawlati*, *Awena*, *Kurdistani Nwe*, and *Khabat*. This exemplifies how media stakeholders can work together to minimize inflammatory content and indicates how a self-regulatory approach can emerge through local initiatives.

The combined outcome of both workshops is that regulators, news directors, and media monitoring experts now share a common set of tools that allows them to participate in local and national efforts to monitor and minimize inflammatory news coverage. While the initial news organizations invited to the workshops were the most watched satellite television channels, it is clear that all types of media, across all regions of Iraq, are interested in self-regulation. One way to extend the reach of this process is to further engage civil society in monitoring the media.

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Step 5: A Citizen's Media Monitoring Network

As USIP continues to help individual Iraqi organizations adopt conflict-sensitive journalism techniques, Iraqi media stakeholders will be increasingly able to conduct their own media content analysis related to elections and other potentially combustible issues, such as minorities and extractive industries. But with a general lack of capacity for independent civil society media monitoring in Iraq, many NGO workshop participants asked for additional support beyond the training and tools they had already obtained. As a result, USIP began organizing a network of citizen media monitors from across the country to analyze the Iraqi media's coverage of conflict issues. The core of the citizen monitors consists of civil society participants in both USIP training workshops as well as a handful of others with experience in media monitoring or political and elections monitoring.

In June 2012, nine such civil society organizations convened to discuss the way forward in formalizing a media monitoring network. Over the course of the meetings, the monitors reached consensus on a number of key issues: a mission and vision for their network, a memorandum of understanding and code of conduct for members, a basic organizational structure, and an initial first-year work plan. Eight of nine NGOs ultimately signed on as members of the newly branded Adaa' (Performance) Media Monitoring Network.

Despite the broad consensus, civil society in Iraq is still nascent, and questions about sustainability were discussed. Participant NGOs agreed that creating a network afforded them the benefit of increased geographic coverage in monitoring media in Iraq while also enabling them to draw on different skill sets within the membership, depending on the conflict issue or theme under scrutiny. The goal is for a collective approach to media monitoring to generate high quality analysis that will position the network as a credible oversight body in the eyes of the public. This network should be a partner in promoting self-regulation within the news media, as well as a complement to media monitoring by government regulators.

Conclusion: Taking Control of Content

The approach described above presents a self-regulatory process that incorporates active participation from Iraqi stakeholders in media, regulatory organizations, and civil society. Each step in the process reflects the voices and priorities of these groups as they determine how best to limit news reporting that can incite violence.

In the initial step in the process, Iraqi journalists identified and defined terms that had the potential to incite violence in the run-up to the Iraqi national elections in 2010. This lexicon was compiled and distributed before the elections to help journalists and editors avoid inflammatory reporting. In the second step, content analysis of the 2010 elections coverage identified the prevalence, intensity, and location of the terms so that news media could begin to self-regulate their coverage and regulators and media monitors could undertake more effective oversight. As part of the third step, USIP shared the content analysis findings with Iraqi media stakeholders. A small but influential group of Iraqi news directors, civil society media monitors, and media regulators then learned how to conduct their own content analysis, which each individual organization could customize to assess and modify conflict-related news coverage. During that stage, Iraqi media stakeholders added to their self-regulatory toolkit by collectively producing a style guide for conflict reporting. This resource builds on the lexicon of potentially inflammatory terms and provides a practical framework for media stakeholders to minimize the use of terms that could incite violence. Additionally, the guide provides a starting place to address the issues noted in the content analysis and improve news production and monitoring. In this way, the style guide and the content analysis training are mutually reinforcing self-regulatory tools for Iraqi media stakeholders to mitigate inflammatory reporting.

The fourth stage has included further capacity building to expand the circle of organizations committed to implementing self-regulatory tools to prevent media incitement to violence. The follow-on workshop supported by the Democracy Development Organization in Erbil, which introduced content analysis and the style guide to more than twenty new Kurdish media and civil society organizations, provided a compelling example of how self-regulation can be scaled up while being driven by local organizations.

In the fifth step, the emergent Aada' Media Monitoring Network will build on the previous steps while seeking to fill the gap in civil society oversight on the media. By assembling a core group of civil society media monitoring organizations from across the country, the network will be well-positioned to supplement the baseline 2010 content analysis results by providing additional data showing whether the top five news channels have developed the internal journalistic practices necessary to minimize the use of language that could incite violence. Subsequent content analysis by the network or Iraqi regulators before the 2013 provincial elections will test whether there are stronger, more capable regulatory and civil society organizations equipped to hold media organizations accountable for inflammatory news reporting.¹⁶

Viewed as a self-regulatory toolkit, the lexicon of inflammatory terms, the content analysis methodology, the style guide, and the face-to-face and online interactions have empowered members of the Iraqi media, civil society, and regulatory bodies to form a collaborative network of professionals committed to reducing media incitements to violence. The process toward minimizing inflammatory language now belongs to a pilot group of Iraqi media stakeholders, a group with significant potential for growth that begins within their own newsrooms, regulatory bodies, and monitoring organizations. Through the stakeholders' proactive and improved oversight over time, media content ultimately may be less inflammatory.

Subsequent content analysis... before the 2013 provincial elections will test whether there are stronger, more capable regulatory and civil society organizations equipped to hold media organizations accountable.

The movement toward self-regulation not only helps to raise awareness about how reporting can use dangerous language during elections but can also help Iraqi journalists meet higher standards in their news coverage of other conflict areas, such as the discussion of minorities, gender, security, and other issues. As Iraq moves toward democracy and stability, the discussion of minorities, natural resources, and the country's relationships with its neighbors have emerged as volatile and potentially divisive topics. There now exists a group of organizations prepared to take action and lead the way forward to civil discussions of such topics.

Effective self-regulation by Iraqi media can also protect journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists has identified Iraq as among the most dangerous countries for media workers in the world¹⁷. In 2010, Reporters Without Borders found that 230 media professionals had been killed in Iraq since 2003, with the vast majority targeted for their media work.¹⁸ In 2011, seven journalists were killed and dozens wounded as they covered the news. In this environment, unprofessional reporting practices and inflammatory language can unnecessarily aggravate existing tensions and endanger the lives of journalists, reporters, and editors. There is often a fine line between self-regulation and self-censorship, but improving the ability of Iraqi media to report on conflict issues can contribute to a decline in threats and attacks on media professionals.

The lessons learned as part of the process—that self-regulation is desirable and that many different stakeholders want to participate in it—suggest a model for other conflict-affected nations to follow. The events of the Arab Spring show that a handful of states in the region are experiencing political transitions that will deeply transform media and civil society. Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya may turn toward further instability; there has already been worrying evidence of intensely divisive and potentially inflammatory news coverage in all three countries. Local stakeholders in each country could study the benefits of the Iraq experience in enacting a self-regulatory process that brought stakeholders in media, regulatory organizations, and civil society together to find local solutions to a problem. They also may benefit from custom-fitting the different stages of the Iraq self-regulatory process and creating a useful toolkit for preventing media incitement to violence in their own countries.

International organizations seeking to support the model of media self-regulation outlined above should know that nurturing the process requires professional and committed local partners, which in turn means fostering relationships that are difficult to find and maintain in conflict environments. Even though international organizations often seek the broadest audience possible to justify their efforts, starting with a small and influential cadre of partners is the best way for local ownership to take root and grow. Additionally, international actors should be aware that self-regulation complements rather than duplicates many other international media development efforts that focus on journalism training and media capacity building. Inflammatory reporting can become a viable threat to public safety at any time in countries affected by violence. Incorporating self-regulatory and conflict-sensitive approaches into training agendas can bolster long-term initiatives that seek to prevent, manage, and resolve conflict.

Appendix: Content Analysis Research Methodology and Findings

Content analysis, described as a “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication,”¹⁹ was selected as the most relevant methodology for this project. It is a social scientific method that seeks to minimize the human tendency to interpret material selectively. To do so, coders are trained to identify and classify variables of interest. Reliable content analysis is premised on coders achieving intercoder reliability, meaning that the coders could independently watch a program, code

for the variables of interest, and come to the same evaluation. In addition to quantifying data, content analysis can provide descriptive or qualitative understandings of trends and patterns in media coverage.

Content analysis has been used for decades as a tool to measure global media content. Krippendorff traced the history of media content analysis to early studies of newspapers in the 1800s.²⁰ Longitudinal studies have shown that the core content of newspapers and other media have shifted over time in their portrayal of women or minorities, coverage of elections, and stories about crime.

Content analysis is not meant to point out flaws or criticize media outlets. Rather, it seeks to uncover themes and patterns that content creators may not be aware they are producing. It is a valuable tool for understanding how media—in any national context—produce different types of news content. A sample of any nation’s media coverage during a contentious period will yield interesting findings and detect patterns and ideological frames.

Coding Procedures

Three native Arabic-speaking coders with experience in the Iraqi and Jordanian media sectors performed the content analysis. The coders were experienced media professionals, two of whom had participated in previous content analysis studies.

Maureen Taylor conducted the content analysis training. The coders participated in three training sessions (sixteen hours total) to understand how to identify and code the variables of interest. First, the coders reviewed the definitions of the terms from “User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq-Elections Edition.”²¹ Second, they watched Iraqi news programs to see firsthand how and when potentially inflammatory terms appeared in the news coverage. The coders finalized the training by independently coding news programs and comparing their scores. When there was disagreement on coding, the team discussed the rationales behind their scores and refined definitions so that all agreed upon the scoring of the content. The final exercise ensured that each member of the coding team had achieved intercoder reliability and that the research findings would be reliable.

Sample

The sample for the content analysis comprised nightly news programs from five television stations. The research team secured a general sample of thirty days of nightly news programs for each of the five stations. News programs that ranged between twenty and sixty minutes and were broadcast during the preelection period (N = thirty days from February 5 to March 6) were eligible for inclusion in the sample. The research team randomly selected ten programs from each station for coding.

Inflammatory Terms in Election Coverage

The coders evaluated the news stories for nineteen potentially inflammatory terms that Iraqi media professionals had identified in “User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq-Elections Edition.” As mentioned earlier, the four most frequently used terms, which appeared on all five stations, were *uprooting*, *Iranian/foreign agenda*, *exclusion*, and *sectarian quotas*. A brief explanation of each term is provided below.

Uprooting (related to De-Baathification)

The disqualification of candidates from being eligible to contest the elections on the basis of affiliation with the Baath Party and subsequent legal challenges to throw out the votes

received by some candidates following the elections on the same ground were central features of the electoral campaign, voting, and results certification. It rose to the level of affecting the overall political dynamic and discourse, complicating efforts to form cross-sectarian political alliances. This process, which frequently appeared to be ad hoc and lacking elements of due process, was strongly polarizing and likely created challenges for media organizations covering a major story of the electoral cycle.

Exclusion

The term *exclusion* is related to the above discussion of *uprooting* but points to a potentially deeper issue related to a lack of agreement on the terms of participation in the political process. This is particularly relevant to the Sunni community and played out in relation to the lifting of de-Baathification bans on three high-profile members of the Iraqiya party so that they could take up senior positions in the new government. In the long term, it relates to the reported agreement on setting a two-year deadline to end the work of the Accountability and Justice Commission (formerly the De-Baathification Commission), which will perhaps signal a move toward a more stable and inclusive brand of politics.

Foreign Agenda

A notable difference between the 2006 and 2010 government formation processes was the extent of foreign influence and involvement. Neighboring countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, are widely believed to have played significant roles in the formation and funding of major Iraqi electoral coalitions. Following the elections, various Iraqi politicians made multiple rounds of high-profile visits to neighboring countries. Iran in particular appears to have been involved in securing support for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's nomination for a second term by the Sadrist List. With this as background, the region certainly has an interest in and influence over government formation. Iraqis generally resent this external influence, often seeing it as favoring particular communities. Foreign influence in Iraqi politics is a reality, but the use of the term foreign agenda can also be used to discredit and delegitimize political opponents rather than engage with them on substance.

Sectarian Quotas

The issue of sectarian quotas is another complicated subject and is one of the most frequently cited areas of concern in Iraq after 2003. Some see the idea of ensuring a number of posts for each major community in Iraq based on its rough proportion of the population as vital; many others see it as contributing to the "Lebanonization" of Iraq. The second round of national elections appears to have confirmed precedents of dividing the top three posts among Shia (prime minister), Kurds (president), and Sunnis (speaker of parliament), with a similar distribution of ministries. Statements by Prime Minister Maliki that he was considering a government of "political majority" raised a fear of exclusion among the Sunni community in particular.

Intensity of the Terms

The coders identified the frequency and usage pattern of the terms identified in "User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq-Elections Edition." As it is impossible to gauge how viewers received the terms, the terms were graded on their potential rather than actual effect. The terms were classified as being used in an explicitly inflammatory, implicitly inflammatory, or neutral way in the news coverage. The results of the content analysis showed that Al Sharqiya employed the greatest percentage of explicit references in the study (10 percent of stories contained the explicit use of an inflammatory term). This station used the most terms and had a wider vocabulary of inflammatory terms.

It regularly used seven different terms in its news coverage. Fear of others, fear of conspiracies, and fear of Baathists appear to be the major themes in their news stories.

The high percentage of explicit terms can be highlighted by examining one story in which an interviewee included four explicit references to “conspiracy.” This finding suggests that interviewers and anchors would benefit from training in how to avoid or challenge when guests use a term in an explicitly or implicitly inflammatory way. The high rate of terms in *vox pop* means that editors are selecting these man-on-the-street sound bites for inclusion in the news. Additional training may help editors to understand the potential influence of these terms and recommend them to select other comments or sound bites to capture popular opinion.

Al Iraqiya used thirty-five terms in the 104 coded stories. The explicit use of the terms was very rare, occurring in only 4 percent of the stories. The average number of terms appearing on a nightly program ranged from zero to seven terms per program. The highest number of such terms appeared during two distinct periods. The first two weeks of the election season (February 11–26) contained more than 85 percent of the total inflammatory terms. The first few days of March (March 1–5) were relatively free of inflammatory terms, with only one term appearing per program. However, the nightly news program immediately before the elections contained six such terms, repeatedly warning viewers about exclusion and uprooting.

Al Sumaria had the fewest potentially inflammatory terms in its election coverage. Thirty terms appeared in sixty-seven stories. Most of these terms were used in a neutral way by the anchor when introducing a story. Three terms (*exclusion*, *Iranian/foreign agenda*, and *uprooting*) accounted for 83 percent of the occurrences of inflammatory terms. The term *exclusion* was used thirteen times in the news programs during the election, but its use was almost always neutral.

Al Baghdadia’s news stories during the election included sixty-four inflammatory terms in 135 coded stories. One program was free from inflammatory language (March 6); however, the coders noted that the entire program was very negative in tone about the election and candidates. The average number of terms appearing on a nightly program was 6.4, with a range of zero to ten terms per program. The highest number of such terms appeared in mid-to-late February with the prevalence of terms slowing down as the election drew near. The week from February 17 to 25 featured 40 percent of the total terms. The most commonly used term was *uprooting*, which appeared thirty-four times (53 percent). The term was usually used in an implicitly inflammatory manner nearly every time to potentially incite negative reactions by the audience. Voice actualities also featured inflammatory terms.

During the preelection period, Al Hurra had the second-lowest usage of the USIP-identified terms, using the terms thirty-three times in 112 stories (29.5 percent). The most common terms were *uprooting*, *exclusion*, and *foreign agenda*, which together accounted for 79 percent of the occurrences. The most common term was *uprooting*. All but one time (97 percent) the terms were used in a neutral manner. The term *sectarian quotas* was used once in a way that the coders felt was implicitly inflammatory. It appeared in a *vox pop* about the voting in Kirkuk.

Location of Terms in News Programs

Knowing the intensity of a term is crucial for understanding the term’s potential effect on viewers. The content analysis also examined the location of a term in the story which provides additional insight into inflammatory content. An anchor’s continued repetition of a particular term when introducing or summarizing a story may call viewers’ attention to the term and heighten the potential for it to be interpreted negatively. In a more responsible

approach to journalism, a reporter or anchor can defuse the inflammatory nature of a term used by a person appearing on camera by challenging or questioning the usage.

In consultation with the coders, the research team identified seven major components of a story in which a potentially inflammatory term could appear: anchor editorializing, interviews with a person in studio or on the phone, *vox pop* (people on the street), written headlines with or under a story, editorial comments after a story, reporters on camera in field, and actuality or real voice quote. Table 2 in the report shows the location of the terms on each station.

In addition to looking at the location of the term within a story, the coders noted the order of the stories where terms appeared. The top stories of the day (appearing at the beginning of the newscast) contained the most potentially inflammatory terms. Broadcast media programs open with the top stories of the day, which generally receive the most air time. In our sample, the inflammatory terms appeared most often in the first four stories of the program, although some terms did occur in the later stories.

Notes

1. See Susan Benesch, "Dangerous Speech: A Proposal to Prevent Group Violence," World Policy Institute, New York, January 12, 2012, 2.
2. Iraqi media stakeholders identified potentially inflammatory terms through a survey process detailed in USIP's "User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq-Elections Edition," Washington, DC, available at www.usip.org/publications/user-guidelines-preventing-media-incitement-violence-in-iraq-elections-edition (accessed February 11, 2013). Since a wide range of words conveyed by the media can have dangerous potential, the survey revealed which terms Iraqi respondents believed to be the most incendiary during the period before the 2010 national elections.
3. The UK-based NGO Article 19 released a set of standards that included a six-part test for determining which terms can incite violence or hatred; See Article 19, "Prohibiting Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility or Violence," available at www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/3548/ARTICLE-19-policy-on-prohibition-to-incitement.pdf (accessed February 11, 2013).
4. In the wake of the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Iraq's media landscape underwent a dramatic transformation. By late summer 2003, it was estimated that two hundred new Iraqi news outlets had opened; see M. Zanger, "Iraq's Emerging Press," *Nieman Reports*, vol. 59, no. 4 (2005), 106. By 2006, there were approximately sixty different television stations; See Marwan M. Kraidy and Joe F. Khalil, "A Short History of Arab Television," in Marwan M. Kraidy and Joe F. Khalil, eds., *Arab Television Industries* (New York: British Film Institute, 2010), 26.
5. Kraidy and Khalil, "Arab Television," 30.
6. Deborah Amos, "Confusion, Contradiction, and Irony: The Iraqi Media in 2010," discussion paper series no. D-58, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, June 2010, 10, available at dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4421401 (accessed February 11, 2013).
7. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, a number of Iraqi media outlets have been ordered closed or suspended on charges of encouraging sectarian tensions. Such charges were first invoked by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) under Order 14 (see note 9) and have more recently been employed by the CMC, including during the 2005 elections and following the death of Saddam Hussein in 2008.
8. D3 Systems, "Iraq Media Study—National Audience Analysis," executive summary, IREX, Washington, DC, April 21, 2010, 3, available at www.irex.org/resource/iraq-media-study-national-audience-analysis (accessed February 11, 2013).
9. Before the establishment of the CMC, the CPA had addressed the issue of media incitement through Order 14, enacted in June 2003, which prohibited the media from publishing or broadcasting anything that "incites violence" against any person, group, or property. Order 14 was invoked numerous times in the year before the CMC was established. Although Order 14 remains in existence (as with all CPA orders), it does not appear to have been used in recent years in the same fashion.
10. Republic of Iraq Communications and Media Commission, "General Guidelines," Baghdad, 2010, 9, available at www.cmc.iq/en/pdfcmc/generalsteering1.pdf (accessed February 11, 2013).
11. Committee to Protect Journalists, "Iraq's Journalist Protection Law Doesn't Protect Them," New York, January 24, 2012, available at <http://cpj.org/2012/01/iraqs-journalist-protection-law-doesnt-protect-the.php> (accessed February 11, 2013).
12. The five channels are Al Iraqiya, Al Sharqiya, Al Baghdadia, Al Hurra, and Al Sumaria. Television was emphasized due to consumers' overwhelming preference for this medium.
13. See examples above of explicit, implicit, and neutral uses.
14. This workshop never took place. Al Baghdadia closed its Baghdad studio after the controversy surrounding its airing of terrorist demands during the Our Lady of Salvation Church incident in November 2011.
15. The English version of the guide appears as "Developing an Iraqi Media Style Guide and Conflict Reporting Module," U.S. Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, available at www.usip.org/files/COI%20-%20Images/Style%20Guide-English.pdf (accessed February 11, 2013).
16. Funds permitting, USIP will support the Aada' Media Monitoring Network in conducting this additional analysis, which would contribute to evaluating the overall effect of the proposed self-regulatory process.
17. See, e.g., Committee to Protect Journalists, "Philippines, Somalia Fuel Record Death Toll," available at <http://cpj.org/reports/2009/12/journalist-deaths-2009-record-toll-philippines-somalia.php> (accessed February 11, 2013).

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18. See Reporters Without Borders, "The Iraq War: A Heavy Death Toll for the Media," September 7, 2010, available at <http://en.rsf.org/iraq-the-iraq-war-the-heaviest-death-07-09-2010,38294.html> (accessed February 11, 2013).
19. B. Berelson, *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952), 18.
20. K. Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).
21. See USIP, "User Guidelines." The report initially presented a list of thirteen terms. Media professionals suggested an additional six terms. For the purposes of this research project, and to emphasize those terms that were identified as most potentially inflammatory, the terms are classified here as first-tier and second-tier terms.

Of Related Interest

- *Media in Fragile Environments* by Andrew Robertson, Eran Fraenkel, Emrys Schoemaker, Sheldon Himelfarb (USIP Press, 2011)
- *Prime Time Crime: Balkan Media in War and Peace* by Kemal Kurspahic (USIP Press, 2003)
- *Blogs and Bullets II: New Media and Conflict after the Arab Spring* by Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, and Deen Freelon (Peaceworks, July 2012)
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