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The Dynamics of Iraq's Media: Ethno-Sectarian Violence, Political Islam, Public Advocacy and Globalization

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Abstract

A recurring theme in debates on the future of Iraq is that the state is facing an imminent civil war among ethnic Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs, and among the Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects. As tensions continue to escalate, the Iraqi media will play a crucial role in these developments. The pluralization of a private media sector in post-Ba'athist Iraq has served as a positive development in Iraq's post-war transition, yet this has also allowed for the emergence of local media that are forming along ethno-sectarian lines. The Iraqi media have evolved to a stage where they now have the capability of reinforcing the country's ethno-sectarian divisions. This policy paper examines the evolution and current state of Iraq's media and offers recommendations to local Iraqi actors, as well as regional and international organizations as to how the media can counter employment of negative images and stereotypes of other ethno-sectarian communities and influence public attitudes in overcoming such tensions in Iraqi society.

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The views contained inside remain solely those of the author who may be contacted at almarshi@policy.hu. For a fuller account of this policy research project, please visit <http://www.policy.hu/almarshi/>

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Few analyses of the Iraqi media have been conducted despite the emergence of hundreds of newspapers and several satellite channels in the nation, in stark contrast to the five state owned dailies and single satellite channel that existed during the Ba'ath era. This policy paper addresses the need for a proactive analysis of the Iraqi media and its portrayal of ethno-sectarian differences in Iraqi society. Before offering policy recommendations, it is important to describe the media scene itself: What media is owned by political ethno-sectarian factions? How are ethno-sectarian differences and conflicts, both rhetorical and violent, represented in the Iraqi media? Do media outlets exacerbate Iraq's ethno-sectarian relations? Are there any Iraqi media outlets seeking to address these relations in a positive manner? What kind of programs are Iraqis watching? What efforts are there to provide a space for the public to communicate and express its grievances? Do the media try to produce local entertainment, as compared to relying on foreign entertainment for Iraqis to "escape" the grim realities of daily life in their country? What recommendations can be made to ensure that Iraq's media serves a constructive role in its post-war dynamics, rather than serving as an element that exacerbates the state's current internal tensions?

Observers of the situation in Iraq often predict the nation faces an imminent civil war among ethnic Kurds and Arabs, and among the Sunni and Shi'a Muslim sects, while others argue this civil war has already begun. Differences between various ethnic and sectarian groups have been ever-present in Iraq, but they were rarely articulated in official, public debate, nor used as a basis by politicians, religious and community leaders to criticize the others. Even in Ba'athist Iraq, while members of every community may have suffered discrimination, at least the media rarely employed the terms "Shi'a," "Sunni" and "Kurd" in a negative manner as it would harm national unity. Following the 2003 Iraq war, the emerging media mentioned such ethnic and sectarian terms for Iraq's people, but in the context of calling for national unity.

However, the debates prior to the adoption of the Iraqi Constitution in October 2005 and the December 2005 election of a permanent Iraqi Assembly marked an emerging trend in Iraq's politics - its divisive ethnic and sectarian discourse that has now proliferated into the media. Following the February 2006 bombing of the revered Shi'a Al-'Askariyya shrine in the city of Samarra, a spiral of violence consumed the center of Iraq, including Baghdad where sectarian killings between Arab Sunni and Arab Shi'a groups have become daily phenomena. These tensions manifest themselves in the political sphere, as certain Arab Shi'a parties have advocated a federal entity in the predominantly Shi'a south as means of separating themselves from the violence ridden center. Another conflict that receives scant attention is that of the future of the oil rich city of Kirkuk, contested by Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, and often resulting in violent clashes. This conflict also represents itself in the political sphere, as Kurdish parties have called for placing Kirkuk under their federal jurisdiction, which Arab and Turkmen communities oppose.

Private Iraq media, with ownership in the hands of competing political factions, have emerged in post-war Iraq, reflecting the country's conflicting ethno-sectarian agendas. At the same time, media have also emerged independent of Iraq's political mosaic, and seek to provide a public space for education, entertainment and cathartic release for the daily violence that dominates Iraqi public life.

The media has taken on a public advocacy role as well, pressing policy makers to address deficiencies and shortcomings in providing security and infrastructure needs, by highlighting these problems, and giving Iraqi citizens a platform to express their views. Ethno-sectarian channels conduct public advocacy as well, but primarily on behalf of their communities.

The media in Iraq cannot isolate itself from global trends in international media, and Iraqis can watch media produced outside of the region, ranging from the British series "Mr. Bean" to cartoons, music shows and films produced in the Arab World or the US. The desire for Iraqis to produce content that reflects their aspirations has resulted in the adaptation of several foreign program formats, such as reality TV, to a local Iraqi context. These Iraqi entertainment programs can provide an alternative to the "Iraq" that the Iraqis usually witness on TV; that of the news depicting unrelenting violence in

their country. The literature on conflict resolution and the media stresses that entertainment programming is one method to reduce tensions in deeply divided society. Both state and private media can play important roles in using entertainment for this goal.

Though this study focuses on the content of local Iraqi media, regional channels are also important to the story. Although data on the rate of consumption of local Iraqi media or regional channels are not yet available, there were general observable trends in how the Iraqis consumed media based on the author's experience in the country. Satellite dishes were forbidden under the Ba'athist government, and many Iraqis sought to purchase them after the war ended in 2003. At this time, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya were the only outlets for regional news free of state control and ironically, for domestic Iraqi news. Due to Iran's proximity, the Iranian Arabic-language Al-'Alam was able to broadcast terrestrially into Iraq and could be picked up by television sets without the need for a costly satellite dish. By 2004 and 2005 two trends were emerging in Iraq vis-à-vis the regional channels. First, certain Iraqis, including those politicians in the transitional government, were offended that the Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya referred to the Iraqi insurgents as the "Iraqi resistance" (*al-muqawwama al-'iraqiyya*) thus bestowing on them some sort of regional legitimacy. Second, Iraqis desired news and entertainment created by Iraqis, reflecting their concerns and desires.

Iraqi channels proliferated within the period of 2004 to 2005, but were often unprofessional in terms of news coverage, forcing many Iraqis to continue to depend on the regional channels for news. At the same time, a number of Iraqis were also growing tired of the ethno-sectarian nature of the Iraqi media, and preferred getting their information from these Arab satellite channels, which did not have the "ethno-sectarian" commentary that usually accompanied the news on Iraqi channels.

A professional and independent media that can allow views expressed by all of Iraq's communities is an important step towards establishing a viable democracy. Nevertheless, in a country relatively new to independent media,

freedom of expression can be abused.¹ This paper concludes that Iraq's ethno-sectarian media are providing the psychological groundwork for bitter divisiveness and conflict, with one channel already making direct exhortations for violence against other Iraqi communities. It also concludes that the media need to be addressed for the sake of Iraq's long term stability. Media divided along ethno-sectarian lines have the potential to further the gap between Iraq's communities and weaken any kind of national belonging. Whether the state of Iraq will survive division is debatable, but the nation is already on a course of partition in terms of identity, helped by media which encourage this trend.

It is urgent to address these matters before more political factions decide to use their media as mouthpieces to exacerbate the conflict, whipping up ethnic and sectarian feelings or even directing the conflict. So far, most political factions have used their media to stress unity among Iraq's communities, but they nevertheless have the potential to instigate conflict with these means if it suits their interests. The ultimate aim of this policy paper is to address this growing problem in Iraq: how the media exacerbates cleavages in Iraqi society, and how, rather, it can be used to facilitate a positive attitude in bridging the differences among its communities.

1.2 Methodology

An overview and assessment of the media in Iraq is needed, and it is crucial to reflect the literature of media in other deeply-divided societies. This policy paper will examine ownership and financing of the various media and how that is linked with the ethno-sectarian discourse emerging in Iraq. It is based on hours of viewing the programs of Iraqi satellite channels, supplemented by interviews with Iraqi journalists and questionnaires delivered

¹ An important study in this subject in the Balkans is Izabella Karlowicz's "The Difficult Birth of the Fourth Estate: Media Development and Democracy Assistance in Post-Conflict Balkans," in Miklos Sukosd and Peter Bajomi-Lazar eds., *Reinventing Media: Media Policy Reform in East-Central Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Center for Policy Studies, 2003).

to the channels. Rather than focusing solely on newspapers or terrestrial channels, this project examines prominent TV stations that happen to broadcast both terrestrially and via satellite. According to various surveys, more than 90% of Iraqis receive most of their information, whether it is news or entertainment, from satellite TV stations. According to one statement in a report on the Iraqi media, "Many people do not buy newspapers because the satellite channels communicate every single piece of news."² The proliferation of Iraqi channels that broadcast by satellite also demonstrates another important factor: media owners are sending their messages to local Iraqi audiences, the Arab world and the large Iraqi diaspora, which still provides financial support for many of Iraq's political parties.

This policy report is based on four sets of data:

- An investigation of which independent and political factions own the TV media in Iraq (with a brief overview of their print and radio media).
- Questionnaires distributed to Iraqi media in coordination with the Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research in London.³
- An analysis of programming content dealing with entertainment, locally produced and imported.
- A discourse/content analysis of programming of the stations deemed as having a potential for affecting ethno-sectarian tensions.

The last set of data provides most of the information for this policy paper. Examining the programs and their content helps determine the priorities and audiences for these stations. The analysis examines media content beginning with a national event that had ramifications for all of Iraq's communities: the bombing of the Shi'a Muslim Al-'Askariyya shrine in the city of Samarra, in February 2006. Iraqis attribute the spark in intense inter-communal conflict in

² International Media Support, "Media Development in Post-war Iraq Report," April 2003, p. 16.

³ The author would like to thank Douglas Griffin of the Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research and Professor Monroe Price, Susan Abbott, Sylvie Beauvais and Libby Morgan of the Center for Global Communication Studies at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania for their assistance in providing information and insight.

Iraq to this event, and at this juncture a sample of prominent Iraqi media representing all societal groups had emerged.

The programming content of various Iraqi satellite channels was analyzed by “frames” the stations used. In the context of this paper I have used Snow and Benford’s definition of a frame: “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environment.”⁴ By watching satellite media channels in Iraq, the analysis seeks to determine how prominent Iraqi media, both political and independent, frames ethno-sectarian violence.

1.3 The Target Audience

The state of the Iraqi media provides the need for offering recommendations to address three areas: media regulation, media education, and media institutions. The policy recommendations are directed to actors on the local and international level.

On the local level, this report seeks to address the Iraqi regulatory body, the Communications and Media Commission of Iraq (CMC), the Iraqi National Assembly and policy makers involved with the media. On a societal level in Iraq, this paper addresses educational facilities, such as Baghdad University’s Department of Communications, as well as journalist associations in Iraq. It also addresses international donors, including foreign ministries and NGOs who have had experience in providing aid to media in post-conflict societies, as well as organizations such as UNDP and UNESCO, which have experience with the Iraqi media.

This policy paper also targets an audience of policy makers and non-governmental organizations who simply seek to gain a broader understanding of the underlying dynamics of the ongoing violence in Iraq. To this general audience interested in Iraqi affairs, this report seeks to demonstrate that

⁴ D.A. Snow and R. Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest,” in A.D. Morris and C.M. Mueller, eds., *Frontiers in Social Movement Theor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p. 137.

violence in Iraq is not simply fought on the streets, but is represented in the tele-visual and thus socio-cultural sphere. In this regard, the paper demonstrates how the media's public advocacy programs serve as an alternative means of political participation in Iraq, and how various forms of entertainment serve as alternatives to violent media in Iraq, as well as a possible means of overcoming divisions in Iraqi society.

1.4 Defining the Problem of Media and Conflict

The media have the capability of affecting vast audiences and in a time of conflict become important actors, at times on par with the actual combatants themselves. Media often serve as a means of transmitting hostility, directly or indirectly, whether it is between states or ethnic groups, and can exacerbate tensions by spreading misperceptions or exaggerations. The question that first needs to be answered is whether conflict media, or in other words media that engender conflict, can emerge from within the Iraqi context.

According to the conflict resolution literature, the constructive transformation of a conflict can only occur if it affects the mentalities of either an individual or a society. The media have the potential to play a significant role in this transformation, by building confidence among the parties and challenging misperceptions. However, this is the exception rather than the norm. While a review of the literature on media and conflict resolution (a sample is provided in the "References" section) demonstrates isolated cases where the media have had a constructive role in a conflict, in most cases the media have exacerbated conflict rather than resolved it, and the case of Rwanda illustrates one of the most extreme scenarios.

Have the media in Iraq reached a point where they can be characterized as conflict media? To answer this question I have appropriated a model from the Rwanda context, as that is the case that has most vividly demonstrated the role of media and conflict. Radio Rwanda, a state-controlled station, was used by the Hutu-dominated government to mobilize troops and ordinary citizens against the Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front in the nineties. At the same time, another radio entity was emerging, backed by the Rwandan President's close circles and militias, practicing undisguised hate-speech against the

Tutsi. *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) emerged as a private radio station, financed by individuals who had high level positions in the government before and during the genocide. RTLM played a direct role in the killings of moderate Hutus and Tutsis by broadcasting information on where to manage road-blocks, identifying individuals who were supposed to be eliminated, giving their address and license plates, inviting listeners to give information to help find specific persons, and asking Hutus to join their militias. The relation between Radio Rwanda, whose owners, editors and journalists were also involved in the establishment of RTLM, has some ramifications for the Iraqi context. Extremist elements in Rwanda were able to infiltrate the official state media, while keeping their own private media as well. The author does not want to suggest that a Rwanda-like genocide can occur in Iraq, but rather seeks to illustrate the structural similarities between the media in both countries.

Four factors are developed in an International Media Support (IMS) Report to explain the emergence of a conflict media in Rwanda.⁵ These four factors can be adapted to any scenario where conflict and media are intertwined, and I have adopted the IMS model for Iraq by placing the factors in sequential order. In other words, I argue that a process needs to occur for media to evolve into conflict media.

- a strong ideology
- control over a mass medium/media
- psychological preparation to hate
- a call to violence

The first factor, a strong ideology, is propagated by prominent academics, journalists or politicians who develop theories of their ethnic or sectarian group. Such theories in the media portray their group as a “stronger race,” and “a race with a glorious past,” or as “victims” who have to unite in order to deal with a threat posed by other groups so that they will not be “eliminated” from the political process or “annihilated” from within the state altogether. In the

⁵ Monique Alexis and Ines Mpambara, “IMS Assessment Mission: The Rwanda Media Experience from the Genocide,” International Media Support Report, 2003.

final case, violence conducted by one community against the other is portrayed as a “matter of self-defense.”

Once an ideology is framed, there is a need to articulate it, which brings in the second factor: control over strong mass media to disseminate the message. In these media outlets, journalists and editors are in many instances non-professionals whose priority is advocating an agenda rather than informing the public. The spread of a conflict media is a key step in conflict escalation. According to the conflict resolution literature, differences between ethnic and sectarian groups are not in themselves a precursor to conflict. Rather, it is the leaders or political movements representing the ethnic and sectarian groups who mobilize their communities to “gear up” for a conflict. In this conflict escalation process, control over mass media is essential.

The third step, after a faction consolidates both an ideology and control over a media outlet, is the most crucial. It is this step - the psychological preparation to hate, which seeks to prepare the audience for a violent conflict - where the media are transformed into a tool of conflict. Such preparations include misinformation, as an uninformed audience is easier to manipulate. Usually rumors or conspiracies are presented as the opinion of the “ordinary man” of that particular ethnic or sectarian group. This preparation also seeks to sow division, by framing peace with other groups as “impossible” and framing those who seek reconciliation as “traitors.” This step also seeks to use demonizing frames of the opponent through dehumanizing the other group or groups.

The fourth factor in the emergent conflict media begins when it makes direct exhortations to violence. The media emerges with the omni-presence of violent frames. “Enemy,” “accomplice,” “traitor,” “massacre,” and “murder” are examples of violent frames, and lists of killed victims are framed as “victories,” while the perpetrators of massacres would be deemed as “heroes,” which would encourage even more killings. This policy paper seeks to address where the Iraqi media falls within this framework and how recommendations can be made to prevent the Iraqi media from being transformed into a conflict media. We now turn to the Iraq media scene to analyze its evolution in terms of the conflict-related evaluative grid.

2. OWNERSHIP, PROGRAMMING AND CONTENT IN IRAQI MEDIA

Ethno-sectarian “media empires” have formed in Iraq and are a quite pervasive element in Iraq’s Fourth Estate. The extent of these media empires are illustrated in the appendix, to demonstrate how powerful media have coalesced around ethno-political groups in Iraq who have print, radio and TV communications at their disposal. Ethnic factions among the Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, and religious-sectarian factions among the Sunni, Shi’a and Christians all have their own means of communicating to their ethno-sectarian constituencies in Iraq and abroad in the Iraqi diaspora. Independent media, with no ethno-sectarian affiliation, exist, but do not have access to the funds that the political parties can provide. If Iraq is to truly consolidate democratic foundations, its media will need to include objective and independent outlets that represent a broad spectrum of Iraq’s society. By dividing Iraq’s media into five categories, I seek to assess if the Iraqi media is furthering democratic consolidation or becoming an arena for the political ethno-sectarian divisions in the country. I categorized the Iraqi media into the following:

- media owned by the Iraqi state
- media owned by political Islamist groups (religious/sectarian factions)
- media owned by ethnic political parties
- media owned by entities calling for violence
- media owned by independent entities

The findings of this policy paper are based on the programs and media content of a selection of Iraqi satellite channels that represent each of these five groups. The programming and media content of news, political, socio-cultural, religious programming and entertainment are analyzed.

The first section analyzes the channel’s representation of issues of ethnicity and portrayal of differences between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen. Additionally the coverage of Islam, particularly political Islam in Iraq, is examined to analyze whether the media’s portrayals exacerbate sectarian Shi’a-Sunni divisions.

The second section looks at how violence in Iraq is reported and whether the channels encourage violence among Iraq's various groups, or whether they seek to bridge the differences.

Third, channels are examined as to whether they may provide an alternative space for overcoming differences amongst Iraq's divisions. This section examines how some channels provide a space for civic involvement in political affairs through various talk shows and call in programs. In this area, channels often serve a public advocacy role, by providing a means to present the citizen's demands to the government.

Finally, the fourth section examines how the channels appropriate foreign genres in a local context and how they contribute to democratic consolidation or ethno-sectarian division. It will also examine what channels are resistant to foreign programming, while others import foreign programs, both political and entertainment.

3. STATE OWNED MEDIA

The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Iraq established the Iraqi Media Network (IMN). In its initial phases the Network included a terrestrial TV channel, two radio stations, and the *Al-Sabah* newspaper. The IMN faced two challenges. The first was to demonstrate that it could serve as a public service broadcaster, serving as the voice of all Iraqis. The second was to establish a satellite channel that had the broadcast infrastructure and lively and informative programming to compete with the regional satellite channels being watched in Iraq, such as Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya, and the Iranian based Arabic language channel, Al-'Alam. In this regard, the IMN was restructured into the Al-Iraqiyya network and expanded to two terrestrial TV channels and the Al-Iraqiyya satellite channel. The satellite channel began transmissions in May 2003. While it was first broadcasted from the morning to the evening, it now broadcasts 24 hours a day. It is the only national public service channel; its financing comes from the coffers of the Iraqi state, and the Ministry of Finance approves the channel's budget.

The development of Al-Iraqiyya reflected the evolution of Iraq's post-war political process. In its initial phases, the channel was used by the CPA as a

means to communicate with the Iraqis, and thus considered a tool of “American propaganda.” It eventually established itself as a channel free of US editorial interference, but then began to reflect the agenda of the interim Iraqi government of Iyad ‘Allawi, who attempted to co-opt the channel to support his party in the January 2005 election. Given that the current government in Iraq is dominated by an alliance of Shi’a Islamist groups, known as the United Iraqi Alliance, and an alliance of ethnic Kurdish groups known as the Kurdish Coalition, the station has an inherent Shi’a-Kurdish bias, according to its critics. In the past, the station rarely showed news conferences of leading Sunni Islamist political parties and ethnic Turkmen complained of a predominantly pro-Kurdish bias. The station has tried to address these issues by allowing more of its content to be devoted to Arab Sunni and Turkmen guests, who use the channel to express their grievances, if not criticize the government directly. Since Iraq’s majority population is Shi’a, the station reflects this sectarian group’s majority status by featuring the Shi’a call to prayer.⁶

In its depictions of violence in Iraq, the station reflects a pro-government line. For example, the content of Al-Iraqiyya’s programming tends to feature mostly pro-government frames that stress “optimism” in the progress being made in “reconstruction” and “security.” The operations of the Iraqi security forces are highlighted, giving viewers the impression that they are taking an active policy in quelling insurgent and sectarian violence, a key frame that seeks to buttress the legitimacy of the Iraqi state itself. The channel usually has access to live footage of Iraqi government military campaigns, which serves as an additional reminder to Al-Iraqiyya’s audience that the state is in fact taking action against the violence in Iraq. Members of the Iraqi security forces killed in action are referred to as “martyrs” (*shuhuda*). The predominantly American forces in Iraq are usually referred to as “Coalition” or “Multi-national Forces” and the insurgents are usually called “terrorists”

⁶ The crucial difference between this call to prayer is the inclusion of an additional line referring to ‘Ali bin Abi Talib, the first Shi’a Muslim Imam.

(*irhabiun*).⁷ Supposedly random interviews with people on the street are designed to give the impression of public condemnation of the “terrorists” activities in Iraq. Al-Iraqiyya also seeks to frame state violence as legitimate by featuring public service announcements calling upon the Iraqi public to volunteer information on the “terrorists.”

One of the programs on Al-Iraqiyya is the show “Terrorism in the Hands of Justice,” which is a show that depicts violence in Iraq. The proceedings are filmed live in a courtroom setting where those accused of taking part in “acts of terrorism” deliver live confessions. The stage seeks to represent the state which is taking concrete steps to crack down on the violence. The program shows confessions of insurgents who admit that they are working for financial motives, in other words to depict them as “criminals” opposed to a “legitimate national resistance.” However the show has ramifications for Iraq’s inter-communal violence. An account writes of the show, “On one episode an interrogator accused the members of important Sunni tribes—the Juburi, Janabi, and Duleimi—of all being terrorists. The show only heightened Sunni fears that the Shia security forces were targeting them en masse.”⁸

Al-Iraqiyya also accuses its competition, the other regional satellite channels, of stimulating the ongoing violence in Iraq, a direct acknowledgement by the state’s public broadcaster of the power of TV to incite violence. In January 2006, the channel reported that the “suggestive material” of “certain” satellite channels had the potential to incite viewers to “conduct criminal and terrorist acts.” Al-Iraqiyya did not specify whether it was referring to pan-Arab channels Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya, or local channels inside of Iraq. The station’s news program interviewed Iraqi psychologists who

⁷ Those taking part in the violence in Iraq against Coalition forces, the Iraqi government and civilians have been referred to as either “resistance fighters,” “terrorists” or “foreign jihadists.” For the sake of this article, the term used most often in the media on Iraq, “insurgent” has been employed. The term is by no means neutral however. It was the same term that British authorities in the twenties used to refer to those Iraqis taking part in the 1920 revolt against the UK’s role in the Mandate of Iraq.

⁸ Nir Rosen, “Anatomy of a Civil War: Iraq’s Descent into Chaos,” *Boston Review*, November/December 2006, <http://www.bostonreview.net/BR31.6/rosen.html>.

stated the other channels had the capability of influencing its viewers to conduct violence.

Al-Iraqiyya attempts to minimize the differences between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a by broadcasting live coverage of Friday sermons where religious leaders from both communities preach against the nation's sectarian divide and stress "Iraqi unity." It also holds televised meetings between Shi'a and Sunni leaders as a means of inter-sectarian dialogue. Even music videos are imbued with lyrics and images with Iraqi nationalist themes.

Al-Iraqiyya also provides a space for Iraq's citizens to interact and communicate with politicians and/or the government, providing an alternative for the acts of violence that are in themselves protests against the Iraqi state. Shows such as "The Iraqi Podium" allow for a live call-in segment where viewers can direct questions about political affairs to the guests, ranging from various civil society leaders to journalists, academics and intellectuals. For example, the program "Open Encounter" hosts government officials and political leaders to discuss elections, military operations and the agendas of various Iraqi political parties, with studio audience participation. Corruption, a topic rarely discussed on state channels in the Arab world, is addressed on programs such as "You and the Official." Other programs deal with local socio-economic issues: in "The People's Concerns," the viewer can phone in to express their opinions on government corruption and unemployment. "Al-Iraqiyya with You" serves as a forum for public advocacy where the hosts of the program seek to capture on film the poverty and unemployment among the Iraqis and then call upon the Iraqi government to address these social problems. Al-Iraqiyya seems to be moving toward a role as public service broadcaster, rather than an official state channel owned by a Ministry of Information as in most Arab states.⁹

⁹ For those who can read Arabic, a link to all the Iraqi channels (and their programs) discussed in this policy paper can be found on the project's website <http://www.policy.hu/almarashi/>. Otherwise detailed English summaries of these satellite channels and their programs can be obtained via BBC Monitoring or the Open Source Center (OSC).

Given Al-Iraqiyya's role as a public service broadcaster, most of its shows deal with politics, economics, social issues or religion. It used to broadcast older Egyptian dramas in its beginning phases, but does not import as much foreign programming as the independent channels or even the more secular Kurdish and Turkmen owned stations.

4. MEDIA OWNED BY POLITICAL ISLAMISTS

4.1 Arab Shi'a Media

All the Shi'a political parties operate their own radio stations, newspapers and satellite channels. The strongest Shi'a parties dealt with in this study are political Islamist groups that seek a greater role for Islam in the state and public life, though they may differ on matters of how large a role Islam should play in Iraq. The four prominent Shi'a Islamist political factions include the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the Al-Da'wa Party, the Sadr Trend of Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Iraqi Hizbullah.¹⁰

The Al-Furat satellite channel, based in Baghdad, began broadcasting in November 2004. SCIRI owns and finances the channel and it is run by 'Ammar 'Abd al-'Aziz, the son of the party's leader.

The dominant frames on Al-Furat are the "progress" SCIRI is making as the largest constituent party in the Iraqi government in terms of "reconstruction" and providing "security." Therefore, the channel's content supports the government, as well as the possibility of a federal Iraq. It marks victimization in terms of attacks by Sunni Arab militants referred to as "*takfiri*." "*Takfir*" is a euphemistic term that literally means, "those who condemn others as 'unbelievers,'" and usually refers to members of the Al-Qa'ida Organization in Iraq, or in general foreign volunteers from the Arab world who came to Iraq

¹⁰ Each of these factions also owns various newspapers, radio stations, and terrestrial TV channels, such as SCIRI's Ghadir TV, the Da'wa Party's Al-Masar TV, the Sadr Trend's Al-Salam TV and Ayatullah Sayyid Hadi al-Mudarissi's short lived Ahl al-Bayt TV.

to combat the US and Iraqi security forces. Nevertheless, Iraqi Sunni Arabs argue the term is used as a justification for operations against their community for allegedly giving tacit or overt support for their co-religionists fighting in Iraq.

Since Al-Furat is owned by SCIRI, a Shi'a political Islamist group, much of its programming is religious, but the channel does not focus on issues of ethnicity and avoids direct references to the Shi'a as a distinct religious group. Rather, the channel emphasizes Iraqi unity based on an inclusive Iraqi Muslim identity. In other words, the channel tries to gloss over the ethnic differences between Arabs and Kurds, and stresses the unity of Islam in Iraq, both Shi'a and Sunni. The news program rarely refers to Iraq as part of the "Arab world" as do other Arab Sunni or independent Iraqi satellite channels.

Religious programs include "The Talk of Friday," which interviews religious figures, and a cartoon show with Islamist themes, "The Most Virtuous People on Earth." The station has coverage of Friday sermons, primarily from Shi'a mosques. The channel also prominently features the activities of the leader of SCIRI, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Hakim. During the run up to the December 15, 2005 elections for the permanent National Assembly, Al-Furat featured campaign ads only for the Shi'a coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance, and not for other parties. As part of its religious programming, women presenters on this channel don the Islamic headscarf.

Given that SCIRI is dominant in the government, this channel tends to frame violence in Iraq with a pro-government stance, just as the Al-Iraqiyya channel does. Since members of SCIRI have a prominent role in the armed forces, the channel prominently features the role of the "security forces" and their efforts to "eliminate terrorism" in Iraq by reporting on their activities in the first few minutes of the news programming as well as by providing extended coverage of security operations. When some of these security forces were implicated in a scandal involving the Ministry of Interior (headed by a SCIRI member) maintaining a secret underground prison, these incidents were played down on the Al-Furat channel. The channel has also featured speakers who have criticized other Arab states for failing to condemn the violence committed by "terrorists" in Iraq. Promotional ads on the channel also serve to condemn the violence. One ad features what appears to be a handwritten note by a child in Arabic, with a stick figure of a child looking at another stick

figure of what appears to be an angry insurgent. The text of the note reads: "I wish I could stop you. If I were bigger and stronger, I would not let you destroy my country. I would hand you over to the police because you are bad, and Iraq needs everything you have stolen from it."

Coverage of inter-sectarian violence against Iraqi Shi'a Muslims are prevalent in Al-Furat's coverage, although the station does not advocate revenge but rather patience and obedience to those Shi'a leaders who have called for restraint.

The channel frames a federated Iraq (one of the primary political platforms of SCIRI) as a positive development, and calls on all Iraqi communities to unite

Public advocacy programs include a live call in program "Al-Furat and the People," and "Al-Furat Reports," an investigative show which deals with domestic issues affecting the lives of everyday Iraqis. "Deported in The Homeland" covers internally displaced families who have relocated due to sectarian violence. It can be gleaned from the interviews that most of the victims in this show are Shi'a gathered from their last names or when they express certain phrases primarily used by Shi'a in Iraq. While the channel has a distinct Shi'a leaning, songs in between programs support peace and unity among Iraq's various ethnic and sectarian communities.

Al-Furat's programs are mostly religious. It does not feature popular entertainment shows such as Arabic dubbed Latin American soap operas, Hollywood films, or music videos from Arabic pop-stars.

4.2 Arab Sunni Media

The Arab Sunni Islamist factions developed political associations relatively (than which other groups?) later in Iraq's post-war dynamics. A mistaken assumption prevalent in external discourses on Iraq is that Iraqi Sunni Arabs dominated the Ba'ath Party, even though Kurds and Shi'a made up some of its leadership and party cadres. Iraqi Sunni Arabs, however, were also involved in forming exile organizations, such as the Islamist Iraqi Islamic Party, and many of them returned to Iraq to represent their constituencies in post-war Iraq. In addition to the Iraqi Islamic Party (is this right?), other

prominent Sunni groups include the General Dialogue Conference, Association of Muslim Scholars (technically not a political party), and the Unified National Movement. These parties coalesced into the Al-Tawafuq Front. The satellite channels that represent the front's political agenda are the Rafidayn Channel and The Baghdad Satellite Channel. The latter began to transmit in August 2005 and will be the focus here. The channel depends on advertising primarily from the Arab Sunni community, but also receives advertising revenues from the Sunni political parties in Iraq.

A dominant frame on this channel is "resistance" to the US military forces, referred to as "occupation forces." It also views a future federated Iraq as a "foreign scheme" to divide the nation, reflecting Arab Sunni fears of Kurdish and Shi'a entities in the north and south of Iraq, respectively, that would leave them in a landlocked rump state. Another prominent frame is that of the Arab Sunni as the victims at the hands of "militias" that are linked to the government or have "infiltrated" the security forces. Given the channel's sympathies to the Al-Tawafuq Front, it only featured campaign advertisements for the Front during the Iraqi elections in December 2005, and carries live press conferences of the Front. Such sympathies manifest themselves in a news program that features the headlines from various Iraqi newspapers with Sunni Arab Islamist tendencies. Islamist themes are also evidenced by anchorwomen who don the head scarf, as in the SCIRI's al-Furat channel. Religious programming includes "Explaining the Holy Quran," where Arab Sunni clerics offer religious interpretations of the sacred text, "In the Shadow of the Shari'a," discussing topics on Islamic law, and "Fatwas on the Air," which examines various religious rulings. Political programs feature a mix of guests, including government officials, but mostly feature Arab Sunni politicians.

The station's view of violence in Iraq is also the same as the Front's in that it opposes the American military forces stationed in the country, which the station refers to as "occupation forces." Unlike Al-Iraqiyya or Al-Furat this station refers to insurgents as "armed men" rather than "terrorists."

The channel also has programs for Iraqis to express themselves, many of whom vent their frustrations over unemployment and the lack of basic utilities. "Baghdad Daily" features on-the-street interviews to give the "common man"

view of current events in Iraq, particularly related to the security situation and the reconstruction efforts. "Your Place is Empty" focuses on the plight of Iraqi prisoners, a good number of which happen to be Arab Sunnis, showing the circumstances of the prisoner's arrest by interviewing the prisoner's families.¹¹

Although the Baghdad Satellite Channel's shows are mostly religious in nature, some deal with culture, the arts, and sports. The channel imports other programs that deal with Islam, but does not feature popular entertainment shows such as soap operas or films, either imported from the region or internationally.

5. MEDIA OWNED BY ETHNIC PARTIES

Iraqi Kurds, Turkmen and Christian Assyrians have established their own ethnic media empires, with the Kurds having a "head start" as they have enjoyed relative autonomy in the north of Iraq since the end of the 1991 Gulf War. A sample of their media outlets is included in the Appendix.

5.1 Kurdish Media

The Kurdish satellite channels examined in this policy paper are The Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) Kurdistan Satellite Channel, which began broadcasting in 1999, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) satellite channel KurdSat. Both channels are non-profit and financed by their parties. While the directors of both channels stress that their stations have editorial independence from the PUK and KDP respectively, the content suggests that both channels serve as mouthpieces for the parties.

The dominant frames in both channels are the progress of the Kurdish north, the ability of the KDP and PUK to provide security, support for Kurdish members of the government, support for a federated Iraq, with a northern

¹¹ While most of the prisoners that appear on this show are Sunni Arabs, there are no accurate figures on Iraq's prison population, so it is difficult to ascertain whether the program is accurately representing the prison population.

Kurdish state that includes the oil- rich city of Kirkuk, and victimization in terms of attacks by Sunni Arab militants referred to as “terrorists.”

The content of the two channels owned by the Kurdish parties are similar in that they offer news about their political parties, events in the Kurdish areas of Iraq (referred to as the Kurdish Regional Government), and political and socio-cultural programs in the Kurdish language. On the KDP’s Kurdistan Satellite Channel, programs review the headlines from the Kurdish papers. The content of the political programs primarily deals with events of the KDP, while the political programs of the PUK’s Kurd Sat are devoted to the activities of the PUK.

KDP channel programs dealing with social affairs range from “Hello People,” a call in show addressing social issues in the north of Iraq, to the locally-produced “Kamo,” a children’s show hosted by a puppet. Social-cultural programs on the PUK include shows such as “Kultur we Rawshangari.” An example of programming that is influenced from abroad is “Star Kurd,” an entertainment music show.

6. MEDIA OWNED BY ENTITIES CALLING FOR VIOLENCE

Though the Iraqi media described in the preceding sections belong to ethno-sectarian factions, and at times expose sectarian tensions and give the impression that their communities are under attack, they usually call for restraint and national unity, and do not specifically exhort viewers to engage in violence. However, at least one channel has recently emerged that not only calls upon Iraqis to take part in violence, but also serve as a means for insurgent groups to publicize their attacks.

6.1 The Case of Al-Zawra

Al-Zawra satellite channel emerged first as a satellite entertainment channel that also served as a mouthpiece for the Iraqi politician Mish’an al-Juburi during his parliamentary bid during the December 2005 elections. With his

expulsion from the Iraqi National Assembly, this channel eventually evolved into a platform for insurgents.

The channel's slogans include "Al-Zawra, The Voice of the Excluded and Marginalized," and "Al-Zawra, Favors the Nation, The Nation as a Whole." The station does not have a fixed schedule, but rather regularly airs videos produced by the insurgents, with footage of attacks against multinational forces. After a government crackdown, old footage was looped continuously, 24 hours a day.

The channel is privately owned by the family of Mish'an al-Juburi. Mish'an comes from the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, from the Juburi tribe. He was a member of the Ba'ath Party, and became the leader of the post-2003 Arab Front for Reconciliation and Liberation and a parliamentarian in the post-war National Assembly. He later fled Iraq on charges of embezzlement. His son Yazin al-Juburi is the managing director of the station and has been the target of an assassination attempt.

When former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's death sentence was announced on November 5, 2006, Al-Zawra featured videos and songs supportive of the outlawed Ba'ath party, as well as exhortations for Iraqis to join groups fighting the US "occupation forces" and the Iraqi government and its "sectarian gangs." The Iraqi government ordered the station to be closed down on charges of "inciting violence." The closure order came from the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, which also ordered the closure of the less well known Salah al-Din satellite channel. The closure was justified by the Ministry, not under regulation of the Communications and Media Commission (CMC) but under the Anti-Terrorism Law, a distinction which Al-Juburi was sure to make clear in an interview with an Arab newspaper: "The decision to close the station was issued by the Interior Ministry and not by a relevant body, like the Iraqi Communication and Media Commission, which is responsible for granting transmission and frequencies licenses."¹² *Al-Sharqiyya* (an

¹² Ma'ad Fayyadh, "Mish'an al-Jaburi lil-Sharq al-Awsat: Sana'ridh liqitat yu'akad tamthil bijitha Saddam," (We will show a video to prove that Saddam's body was mutilated), *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 14, 2007,

<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issue=10274&article=4059>

independent channel with Arab Sunni sympathies that will be discussed later) carried footage of Iraqi security forces allegedly raiding the offices of the two channels.

However, the station has been able to circumvent the closure through its use of transnational satellites, and it is unclear where its operations are now centered. Mish'an claims that the station still has many centers in Iraq, protected by Iraqi "resistance groups." Other conflicting reports claim that the channel is based in Irbil, in the north of Iraq, or in Syria. Both the Kurdish Regional Government and the Syrian government deny such claims.

As al-Zawra has shifted its transmission tactics, its content has become increasingly incendiary. After the government's closure of the office the channel's content focused on footage of insurgent attacks against US and Iraqi forces. The channel produces its own announcements that directly incite violence by calling on Iraqis to join the "jihad" against "US and Iranian occupation." It also attacks Iran reflecting a pro-Iraqi Arab Sunni sentiment that alleges Iran is aiding its coreligionists in Iraq. Announcements on the channel denounce the "crimes of Muqtada and of the gangs 'Aziz al-Hakim," a reference to Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the primarily Shi'a Sadr Trend, and 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Hakim, leader of the SCIRI group. The station calls upon the "free youth of Iraq" to join the groups that are "defending" the nation to keep "Baghdad free from the Safawis," referring to the 16th to 18th century Safavid Empire of Iran, but meant as a derogatory term against Iraq's Shi'a. The channel also features footage of what it alleges are "Sunni civilians" attacked by Shi'a militias. The channel's discourse and that of its owner has reached a point where even Iraqis refer to a "Misha'an" rhetoric.

Al-Zawra's news anchors, a male, and a female wearing the veil, are dressed in military uniforms, and regularly read statements delivered by Iraq's insurgent groups. Most of their news footage is provided directly by groups such as the Islamic Army in Iraq, an Islamist organization primarily comprised of Iraqis. It also carries relatively sophisticated documentaries produced by the insurgent groups, which feature English subtitles and are directed to

Western viewers. One documentary claims that an armed group “wiped out” an entire American unit; the same documentary claimed that 15,000 Americans had been killed by improvised explosive devices. The station also carries video footage of attacks carried out by Nizar al-Juburi, who achieved notoriety in Iraq as the “Baghdad Sniper.” Foreign reporting of this channel has claimed that Al-Zawra is an “Al-Qa’ida channel.” However, though the channel often features grisly footage of insurgent activity, it has never aired videos produced by the Al-Qa’ida Organization in Iraq and its owner has declared that he refuses to do so.

There are no statistics about the numbers of viewers of this channel, but there are scattered reports about viewer reactions in Iraq and the Arab world. In Iraq, parliamentary critics of the station have been vocal about the station’s content, and death threats have been directed to its owners. At the same time, one correspondent in Iraq quoted one of the channel’s young fans as saying, “I watch this channel every night. I don’t like encouraging violence, but it is something unusual in the argument against the Americans. I am hooked.”¹³ Another report states how a Saudi cleric has issued *fatwas* (religious declarations) encouraging Saudis to watch “the channel of the *Mujahidin*” (religiously inspired fighters), declaring that, “it teaches the art of jihad, a matter the youth of our *Umma* [religious community] desperately need.”¹⁴

The Iraqi and US governments have made efforts to have the Egyptian satellite provider, Nilesat, shut down the channel’s satellite transmission over its transponders. More than a month after the closure of its terrestrial operations and offices in Iraq - in late December 2006 - Al Zawra began to broadcast what it claimed was new footage of “Iraqi resistance” activities over its satellite channel. By January 2007, Al-Zawra was broadcasting continuous footage of old jihadist videos. This suggested that Nilesat, bowing to pressure,

¹³ Michael Howard, “Insurgent TV Channel Turns Into Iraq’s Newest Cult Hit,” *The Guardian*, January 15, 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,,1990545,00.html>

¹⁴ “Media Aid: Iraq’s Al-Zawra TV Serves as Insurgent Propaganda Vehicle,” Open Source Center (OSC) Media Aid, OSC Document: FEA20070202087288, December 17, 2006 to February 1, 2007.

had stopped transmitting new Al-Zawra broadcasts that it sent from undisclosed locations in Iraq.¹⁵

Al-Juburi has claimed that the Egyptian government prevented Nilesat from broadcasting any new material. The Egyptian Culture Minister challenged this claim, stating “it is none of our business what the channel airs once it has booked its share in the satellite and has paid all fees due.” The chief engineer of Nilesat said that it was Al-Zawra which asked the satellite carrier to continue transmitting old material: “They asked us - please, when we don’t send, loop for us what you have.” In regards to the diplomatic pressure claim, the chairman of Nilesat denied ever receiving an Egyptian government request nor an American or Iraqi government request to cut the channel’s transmission.

The Information Minister of Egypt stated that Iraqis had threatened the Egyptian diplomatic mission in Baghdad if Nilesat continued carrying Al-Zawra. Some Egyptian sources claimed that these threats came from Muqtada al-Sadr’s militia, the Mahdi Army. That led to the decision to stop broadcasting new material. This explanation does not explain why Nilesat continues to loop Al-Zawra’s jihadist footage, which the Iraqi government and Sadr’s militia would most likely still find offensive. Al-Juburi claims that the station (Nilesat) did cave into US pressure: “The Egyptians confirmed that they came under US pressure. Anas al-Fiqi, the Egyptian Minister of Information, admitted this, and Anas Basyuni, chairman of Nilesat directorate, agreed that US Ambassador in Cairo, Ricciardoni exerted pressure on them to stop the transmission of Al-Zawra.”¹⁶

In terms of the effectiveness of Iraqi government actions, al-Juburi claims that the channel still broadcasts “from underground areas controlled by the

¹⁵ Marc Santora and Damien Cave, “Banned Station Beams Voice of Iraq Insurgency,” *The New York Times*, January 21, 2007, p. 8.

¹⁶ “Israr al-Zawra wa ‘Alaqatha biharith al-dhari wal-musalihin wal-jaysh al-islami,” (The secrets of al-Zawra and its relations with Harith Al-Dhari and the Armed Men and the Islamic Army), Al-Arabiyya Net, January 29, 2007.
<http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2007/01/29/31185.htm>

Iraqi resistance, especially in northern Baghdad all the way to Mosul and Al-Ramadi, using mobile transmission equipment out of fear of the US forces shelling them.” He also claims that “Our six correspondents remain on the run, roaming the Iraqi countryside in a satellite truck, from which they beam their programming to an Egyptian satellite distributor called Nilesat, which then retransmits the channel across the Middle East.”¹⁷ Lawrence Pintak interviewed Al-Jaburi and described how his channel continued to operate:

... his teams in Iraq have sporadically managed to feed video to Cairo “through SNG [satellite news gathering],” which apparently refers to the same kind of portable satellite dishes used by television news teams to transmit their material from the field. He says the material is recorded on a “server” in Cairo, then forwarded to Nilesat. “And it keeps transmitting even if we are not transmitting from Iraq,” he adds. Much of the footage is shot on inexpensive video cameras and cell phones.¹⁸

In February 2007, Al-Zawra also began transmission on the Saudi based regional satellite system Arabsat, on the BADR-4 satellite.¹⁹ This means that audiences in Iraq as well as the greater Arab world can watch its contents. Misha'an al-Juburi has sought to broadcast the channel via European carriers such as Eutelsat in France.²⁰

The case of Al-Zawra represents a worse case scenario for the Iraqi media, demonstrating the ineffectiveness of punitive measures, such as the closure of its Baghdad office, in the face of new transnational transmission technologies. Essentially, this entertainment channel evolved into an insurgency channel. If such a scenario could emerge, it is plausible that a channel owned by other political, ethno-sectarian factions, or even an

¹⁷ “Media Aid: Iraq’s Al-Zawra TV Serves as Insurgent Propaganda Vehicle,” Open Source Center (OSC) Media Aid, OSC Document: FEA20070202087288, December 17, 2006 to February 1, 2007.

¹⁸ Lawrence Pintak, “War Of Ideas: Insurgent Channel Coming To A Satellite Near You,” January 10, 2007, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/pdblog_detail/070110_war_of_ideas_insurgent_channel_coming_to_a_satellite_near_you/

¹⁹ BBC Monitoring, World Media, February 1, 2007, p. 27.

²⁰ Ma'ad Fayyadh, op. cit.

independent channel, could evolve into a militia channel. For this reason, punitive legislation and action against media that incites violence is only a partial solution. Even the speaker of Iraq's parliament declared that the Al-Zawra channel incident demonstrated the dangers of shutting down a channel and called for media responsibility. The recommendation section in this paper suggest that the one of the solution to this dilemma rests in creating alternative media that can attract audiences through creative means of communicating national reconciliation.

7. INDEPENDENTLY OWNED MEDIA

There are several channels that do not receive funding from any political or religious groups, depending on advertising revenues and financing by wealthy Iraqi or Arab investors, as well as by foreign governments, and primarily broadcast entertainment programs. The independent satellite channels examined in this policy paper are Al-Baghdadiyya, Al-Diyar, Al-Fayha, Al-Sharqiyya, and Al-Sumariyya. While the content of Al-Baghdadiyya, Al-Fayha, and Al-Sumariyya are directed towards an Iraqi audience, the channels are based in Cairo, Dubai, and Beirut respectively, due to the security situation in Baghdad. These channels are independent, but critics argue that due to sectarian ownership, Al-Baghdadiyya and Al-Sharqiyya have a Arab Sunni bias, while Al-Fayha has an Arab Shi'a bias.

Al-Baghdadiyya's director is Arshad Tawfiq, a former Ba'athist diplomat, who has stated that the station is financed by Iraqis. Al-Sharqiyya is owned by Sa'ad al-Bazzaz, the former editor of the newspaper *Al-Jumhuriyya* in Ba'athist Iraq. Al-Diyar is directed by Faysal al-Yasiri, a former media figure in Ba'athist Iraq, and the channel is partly owned by a group of Iraqis and the regional Arab Radio and Television (ART) company. Al-Fayha is an independent Iraqi channel owned by an Iraqi Shi'a businessman. Al-Sumariyya is owned by a group of Iraqis under the rubric of CET (Communication Entertainment and Television), and depends on advertising revenues from both Iraqi and Arab companies

7.1 Ethno-sectarianism and Islam

The aforementioned channels claim to be independent in both financing and content of any ethno-sectarian or political Islamist faction. In surveys distributed to these channels, when asked if they refuse to air any material, they indicate a refusal to air programming that incites ethnic or sectarian divisions. The stations seek to reduce tensions among Iraq's ethno-sectarian political factions in various ways. For example, Al-Sumariyya does not carry live statements or press conferences of any Iraqi politicians, indicating the station's effort to maintain its neutrality, and claims non-affiliation with any sectarian, ethnic or political party. It stays clear of the Arab-Kurdish-Turkmen conflict as well as the inter-sectarian Shi'a-Sunni conflicts as well. The channel does not carry religious programs; rather it usually gives summaries of statements of religious figures during its news broadcasts. While other channels carry state-run public service announcements calling for national unity, Al-Sumariyya produces its own announcements that call for peace among Iraq's communities. The station also features on-the-street interviews with the Iraqi public, and interviews with program guests, who stress unity among Sunni and Shi'a.

Al-Sharqiyya claims that it has no connections with any political, ethnic, or religious faction, and refuses to air any programming that encourages sectarianism. However, it openly supported Iyad 'Allawi, a secular Iraqi politician during the electoral campaign in December 2005. The channel has minimal religious programming, and it airs programs such as the "The Horoscope," an entertainment program that deals with astrology, which is considered a taboo in Islam.

Al-Baghdadiyya stresses that it seeks to promote "the unity of Iraq and promote Iraqi culture" and it refuses to air any content that is "against" this unity.²¹ The channel urges Iraqis "to unite" through various advertisements and music clips and ensures that its guests include Arab Shi'a and Sunni, Kurds, and Christians. The channel has minimal religious content. In its

²¹ "Media Aid: Survey of Al-Baghdadiyah Television," Open Source Center, October 5, 2005.

responses to the questionnaire, the channel claims to have sought to increase entertainment programs such as music shows and drama series that are not usually found on channels owned by Islamist parties. In fact, the popular show “Other Eye” brings in guests to discuss topics considered taboo from an Islamic perspective, such as local Iraqi superstitions, magic in Iraqi folklore, as well as hypnosis and exorcisms. Other programs that demonstrate the secular nature of this channel include “Shahrazad’s World” which deals with current fashion trends and beauty tips.

7.2 Televised Violence

Independent channels deal with violence in Iraq in different ways, with some highlighting ethno-sectarian fighting and attacks against US/Coalition forces, while others following a policy of not airing violent scenes. For example, al-Diyar rarely shows live footage of the aftermath of insurgent attacks. Its news programs usually focus on domestic news, with an emphasis on social affairs rather than violence.

Al-Sumariyya describes itself as “an independent satellite television which aims at showing the world the true face of Iraq, and not only images of violence.” While the channel depends on advertising revenues, other sources of financing come from Iraqi shareholders who insist that news programming not just focus on the violence, and support the station for its emphasis on entertainment as a means to take the public’s mind off of the bloodshed in Iraq. Lead news items on Al-Sumariyya include events occurring in Iraq, but the channel, like al-Diyar, does not show live coverage of the aftermath of insurgent attacks.

In contrast, Al-Fahya’s news programs deal primarily with the security situation in Iraq. Additionally, it runs public service announcements highlighting anti-terrorist measures, like al-Iraqiyya and al-Furat.

Of the independent channels, Al-Sumariyya employs the most neutral/objective language in its news programs. When presenting casualties among the Iraqi security forces, Al-Sumariyya uses the term “killed” as opposed to “martyred,” the term employed by Al-Fahya as well as by Al-Iraqiyya and Al-Furat. While Al-Sumariyya refers to the insurgents as

“gunmen” and US forces as “Coalition forces,” Al-Fayha presents the insurgents as “terrorists”; Al-Baghdadiyya use the terms “armed men” and “occupation forces,” respectively.

Themes of violence and post-war instability are also prevalent in entertainment programs on these channels, including satirical comedies, dramas and even music clips, discussed in the section below.

7.3 Public Advocacy

All the independent channels feature public advocacy programs. These programs offer the Iraqi citizen a chance to address constructive criticisms to the Iraqi government through studio interviews or on the street interview or viewer call ins. For example, Al-Sumariyya’s “Who is Responsible?” interviews Iraqi citizens on the hardships they face in Iraqi society, and then allow the invited guest on the show, usually a government official, to discuss how they are dealing with these problems. “Files” deals with lack of infrastructure and basic utilities, and questions both the national and state officials about these problems. “Behind You, Behind You” also highlights particular social problems faced by individual Iraqis.

Al-Diyar also offers programming that deals with the daily hardships faced by Iraqis, such as lack of basic utilities and insecurity. Iraqis can voice their concerns on the news program “The Screen is Yours” which interviews random citizens on social and political issues that concern them. Al-Fayha’s “Hand in Hand We Build Up Our Homeland” is a news program dedicated to the reconstruction efforts and “What If You Were...?” features comments by ordinary Iraqis expressing what they would do if they were head of a various government ministry. This program deals with the shortcomings of the various ministries that deal with reconstruction and unemployment. The shows “Iraqi Testimonies” and “Bars” deal with the political conditions of Ba’athist Iraq and allows those Iraqis who were victimized during this period to relate their experiences.

Al-Sharqiyya features programs that seek to aid Iraqis in need. “Materials and Labor” is a reality TV-type show where the station finances the repair of homes destroyed due to the violence in Iraq. “Blessed Wedding” is another

reality program that finds a young couple in need of funds to hold a wedding. The station then finances the ceremony and films the festivities. “The Ration Card” is similar to a lottery program where prizes are given out to the numbers associated with a family’s ration card, a system initiated during the UN sanctions period. This channel uses sarcasm to poke fun at political life in Iraq, and such satirical programs, often banned in the region, are quite popular in Iraq. One of the most well-known shows in this genre is “Karikatira,” a comedy skit program that finds humor in scenarios of post-war Iraq.

Al-Baghdadiyya also uses the station’s resources to aid Iraqis. “A Drop of Hope” is a reality show where Iraqis with medical conditions are financed by the station for his or her treatment abroad. “Youth Chat” is a talk show which allows teenagers and college level students to discuss issues of popular culture such as film and television, and social issues that are of concern to them. It takes various issues such as fuel, electricity and water shortages and frames them in a comic matter. “The Dialogue of the Deaf” is a critique of Iraq’s social problems, with skits similar to Al-Shariyya’s “Karikatira” that mock the political establishment.

7.4 Global and Regional Influences and Local Reactions

Al-Sumariyya’s programming is primarily dedicated to entertainment, including music videos and soap operas. Other series are imported from Egypt, Latin America and the United States, for example dubbed Disney programming such as the “Lion King” and “Aladdin, and Warner Brothers shows such as the young Superman series “Smallville.” One of the effects of globalization is evident in the show “Iraqi Star,” the local equivalent of “American Idol.” The advertising during this program generates significant revenues for the channel. Programs in a similar format include “Stars of Poetry,” a contest for aspiring Arabic poets.

Al-Diyar is also primarily an entertainment channel (entertainment constitutes approximately 80% of its content). It imports foreign films and

comedy series, both American and Egyptian. Nevertheless, the majority of its programs, including local soap operas, are produced in Iraq.²²

Al-Sharqiyya was the first to respond to an Iraqi desire for entertainment that related to their daily lives, and what is an indirect acknowledgement that some were growing tired of imported series dramas from Egypt or Latin America. Most of its Arabic drama shows are produced locally and filmed in the Iraqi dialect. One of the most popular series it produced was "Love and War," a soap opera detailing the lives of Fawzi and Fatin, a couple who lives through the March 2003 Iraq War and the ensuing post-war chaos.

Like Al-Sharqiyya, Al-Baghdadiyya claims to be an "Iraqi channel for Iraqis." It has made an effort to increase the number of Iraqi-produced programs and estimates that 90% of its programming is produced inside of Iraq.²³

8. IRAQ'S MEDIA AND THE REGIONAL SATELLITE ENVIRONMENT

This policy report survey does not provide a program analysis of Middle Eastern regional satellite channels broadcast into Iraq, such as the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera, the UAE-based Al-Arabiyya, the Iran-based Arabic language Al-'Alam. While they have large audiences in

Iraq, this report seeks to analyze those media that serve as a reflection of the factions and communities in Iraq itself. Nevertheless, the regional satellite channels do play a role in ethno-sectarian tensions in Iraq, and media policy will have to consider how to deal with the ramifications of ethno-sectarianism and how it is portrayed both in the Iraqi media and regional media outlets.

The influence of regional satellite channels in ethno-sectarian tensions in Iraq was amply demonstrated in January 2007 during a heated exchange on an Al-Jazeera political debate program between an Iraqi Shi'a, Sadiq al-Musawi, and the owner of the Al-Zawra channel, Mish'an al-Jaburi. The tensions began at the opening of the show when Mish'an offered a prayer for

²² Stanhope Centre for Media Research Questionnaire.

²³ Stanhope Centre for Media Research Questionnaire.

“the soul of the martyred President Saddam Hussein.” Al-Musawi was immediately offended by this action as Saddam, whom he referred to as Mish’an’s “father,” “had killed Kurds.” Mish’an responded on numerous occasions “You are a Persian shoe!” Calling al-Musawi a “shoe” (*qundara*) is deeply offensive in the Iraqi culture, and he also alleged that al-Musawi’s loyalties lay with Shi’a Iran. In this case, not only did a regional channel potentially exacerbate tensions in Iraq, but also highlighted regional sectarian tensions.

There are no statistics for the rate of consumption of channels like Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiyya or Al-‘Alam in Iraq. The studies that have been conducted have been by private firms for various clients. One of the recommendations in this study calls for a media consumption survey released to the public, so that one can better grasp how the Iraqis are consuming media in a time of bitter conflict.

While this study focuses on how the dangers posed by ethno-sectarianism in the Iraqi media, this section demonstrates that ethno-sectarian tensions in Iraq can also be heightened by regional channels.

9. THE FUTURE OF IRAQ’S MEDIA

The Iraqi media has expanded since the end of the 2003 Iraq war. Citizens can have various outlets, such as talk shows, call-in programs, and man-on-the-street interviews to express their desires, complaints and frustrations. Additionally, news makers and prominent members of civil society can use televised panel discussions to give their opinions about salient issues in the nation’s development. While most media in the Middle East serve as tools to legitimize the state, in Iraq various media outlets have assumed their Fourth Estate role by challenging the incumbent government for its shortcomings. Specific programs often carry out this role by highlighting the daily difficulties faced by the average Iraqi, with channels calling on the government to address their needs. Issues such as government corruption, poverty and unemployment may be taboo subjects in Middle Eastern countries with only a handful of state-owned channels; in Iraq various media address these challenges directly. Additionally, some Iraqi channels feature entertainment

(either locally-produced or imported), particularly humor, music and drama, to relieve the stresses of Iraq's post-war society. All of these developments are positive indications for the future of Iraq's media and for its civil society. Nevertheless, there are some disturbing trends emerging as well.

Well before the 2003 Iraq war, the Iraqis were viewed by foreign media through a "tri-ethnic prism" focusing on divisions between Shi'a, Sunni and Kurds, while ignoring Turkmens, Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, Yazidis and Sabaens, as well as the country's more traditional fault lines, such as class, rural-urban, religious-secular and tribal divisions *within* the three communities. It has been a fashion in the foreign media to essentialize Iraqis into three "ethnic" categories leading to erroneous notions such as viewing Iraq's Shi'a as an "ethnic" group or neglecting that the majority of Kurds are also Sunnis as well.

Nevertheless, an examination of the media sphere in Iraq suggests that past misguided observations have unfortunately become reality. Indeed, Iraq's media are increasingly divided along ethno-sectarian lines, with an independent media competing for audiences that have grown weary of ethno-sectarian media. One article refers to this situation as the "Lebanonization" of the Iraqi media: "With Iraq's TV menu growing increasingly sectarian, it is possible to draw a parallel with Lebanon's highly sectarianized hodgepodge of channels-linked directly or loosely with political parties-which regularly report sect-specific news."²⁴ The Iraqi media is pluralistic, but also fragmented. This plurality can be positive: the Iraqi media serve as outlets for all of Iraq's ethno-sectarian communities, regardless of political persuasion, profession or gender. Such developments are beneficial for Iraq's painful transition to democracy. Marginalized groups who otherwise would have no means to communicate their desires in Ba'athist Iraq theoretically have the means to do so.

However, there are negative aspects of pluralism when it emerges as a result of chaos. Media pluralism in Iraq allows for ethnic and sectarian political

²⁴ Paul Cochrane, "The 'Lebanonization' of the Iraqi Media: An Overview of Iraq's Television Landscape" *Transnational Broadcasting Studies*, June-December 2006.

groups to consolidate powerful media empires, including print, radio and TV, broadcast in Iraq and internationally. While there is freedom of the press, the freedom of journalists to cover a story or have access to information is severely restricted. Certain political parties are content when their media expresses their political platform, but will violently target journalists and media professionals who may report on news in a way that displeases them. Pluralism, without regulation, can also lead to the rise of media that can be abused as a means of encouraging violence.

The ethno-sectarian control of Iraq's media landscape reveals another trend in Iraq's political dynamics - the lack of political parties running on non-ethno-sectarian platforms that can transcend Iraq's divisions. Secular parties, such as the Iraqi National Accord, the Iraq Communist Party, the United Nation Party, or the Independent Democrats Grouping, own newspapers but not satellite TV stations, the most widely consumed media in Iraq. These parties have not been able to rally enough followers and have fared poorly in Iraq's elections. These parties simply do not have access to the funds that the ethno-sectarian political parties have.

At the beginning of this paper, four phases were identified as necessary for the emergence of a conflict media: 1) a strong ideology, 2) control over a mass media, 3) psychological preparation to hate, and 4) a call to violence. I would argue that Iraq's media ethno-sectarian media has entered phase three. This policy paper (and the appendix which outlines the reach of the faction in Iraq's politics) demonstrate that the sectarian Islamist groups as well as ethnic parties are dominant in the Iraqi media. Following the bombing of the Shi'a Al-'Askariyya shrine in the city of Samarra in February 2006, the various sectarian and ethnic media outlets escalated tensions but eventually called for restraint among Iraq's communities.

The content analysis of the various ethno-sectarian channels did not find coverage that directly demonized the other communities. However, each sectarian and ethnic group uses their media to demonstrate that they are the victims in Iraq's ongoing violence. While they do not explicitly exhort violence against other communities, as would happen in phase four, their continued portrayal of respective victimization serves as a means of encouraging Shi'a Arabs and Sunnis to "defend" themselves in the ensuing sectarian violence.

After the 2006 bombing, for example, the Arab Sunni oriented Baghdad Satellite Channel focused its coverage on the Arab Sunnis killed in retaliation, while the Arab Shi'a oriented Al-Furat's coverage focused on the actual damage to their sacred structure. According to one account, "Al Furat was even more aggressive, encouraging Shi'a to 'stand up for their rights.' On a Shi'a radio station's talk show, one caller announced that those responsible for the attack were Abu Bakr, Omar, and Othman, the three first caliphs whom Sunni venerate and whom Shi'a reject as usurpers of the position that rightfully belonged to Imam Ali, the prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law."²⁵

When a particular channel reports a violent incident in Iraq, as, for example, an Arab Shi'a militia killing an Arab Sunni family in their home, or when another channel reports on Arab Shi'a killed in a marketplace by Arab Sunni suicide bombers, neither channel directly calls for revenge against the other. In these cases, the channels may not even invoke the term "Shi'a" or "Sunni." Usually viewers can identify the victims by the location of the attack, or the perpetrators by the method of attack used. A Shi'a channel will not specifically mention that they were the victims of "Sunni aggression" and vice versa, though that association is strongly implied, and often the location of the attack implicitly reveals the identities. For example, if Baghdad Satellite Channel states that the Abu Hanifa Mosque was attacked by mortar rounds, an Arab Sunni viewer will most likely infer that the rounds were launched by the Shi'a Mahdi Army from the adjacent neighborhoods. The respective audience members that feel victimized may take matters into their own hand in "self-defense," which in most cases manifests itself in revenge attacks. Even if the "victimized" fail to act, the worsening security situation may generate support for their respective militias, and not the state, to provide protection.

The biases and victimization in Shi'a and Sunni reporting was expressed by Ahmed Rikabi, an Iraqi journalist who has had extensive experience in post-war media. On the CNN program, "International Correspondents" he said in reference to the Iraqi media:

²⁵ Rosen, "Anatomy of a Conflict."

Well, the sectarian tension is so strong in Iraq today. And I think this guy whose name is Omar, it's clearly that this is a Sunni guy, when he goes and tries to cover an incident in a Shi'ite area, he feels like one of the victims. He doesn't go and feel like a neutral person covering this. And so is the case for the Shi'ite Ali, who goes to that Sunni area and trying to cover. You also feel the fear. He feels that those people standing there, they might kill him as well. So that probably also affects him somehow. I mean, whether he is very objective or whether he is very normal or neutral or unbiased, but he can't help it that he's got a certain name. And that name might get him killed. And that will influence his way of thinking or approaching the subject.²⁶

A month later, Al-Rikabi stated explicitly that the media in Iraq has emerged as a tool of conflict: "We are witnessing a civil war. And this civil war is conducted by different religious groups and different political groups. And of course, the media is an extension of this sectarian violence we are witnessing today."²⁷

If Iraqi ethno-sectarian media has reached stage three, it is laying the psychological groundwork for hating the other. To reach stage four, these factions would need to make direct exhortations to violence. If the security situation were to worsen, the other political factions would have the option of using their media as mouthpieces to exacerbate the conflict, by whipping up ethnic and sectarian feelings or even directing the conflict. So far, these other factions have used their media to stress unity among Iraq's communities, but they nevertheless have the potential to instigate conflict with these means if it suits their interests.

According to the author's fieldwork on the media in Iraq, a common perception held amongst the Iraqi public, and even journalists themselves, is that different factions have used the newspapers, radio and TV as "tools of war." As the Iraqi political parties rarely communicate directly with each other, they have expressed their grievances through the media, with some media discreetly encouraging violence against the incumbent government. While observers of the situation in Iraq argue whether a "civil war" has emerged in

²⁶ International Correspondent, *Cable News Network*, 14:00 EST, October 13, 2006

²⁷ International Correspondent, *Cable News Network*, 14:00 EST, November 17, 2006

Iraq, a “civil war of words” has at least emerged in the Iraqi media according to some Iraqi journalists that I interviewed. Most, but not all, of the journalists I spoke to were hesitant to be quoted by name. Saleh Al-Shibani, an Iraqi journalist, stated in regards to political factions who own newspapers, “Every party, every party leader, basically everyone who can afford it has launched a newspaper. And each newspaper speaks for the entity it represents, makes a claim to the truth, assuming the right not only to criticize but to insult its adversaries; this is particularly easy in the light of the legal void.”²⁸ Another Iraqi journalist Muhammad Sahi wrote a critical essay in the *Al-Zawra* Newspaper, a weekly published by the Iraqi Journalists Association, unrelated to the *Al-Zawra* satellite channel. His article serves as a lament of the state of the Iraqi media. He writes of the media: “They not only increased sectarianism and deepened ethnicity in society, but also are responsible for the fading of the concept of nationalism and patriotism and their actual dimensions.” He cites a list of the vast array of media aligned to political factions, which he argues are “mere fronts, whose main goal is to promote the ideologies and ideas of their affiliated political parties and forces,” and that they “have confused the Iraqi citizens and created a psychological barrier, in one way or another, between them.” According to Sahi, the pluralism in the Iraqi media has divided, confused and enraged the Iraqi viewer: “This explains why conflicting news reports about the same event are being aired by various satellite television channels depending on their affiliation, a matter that enrages Iraqi viewers.” He admits that some channels are trying to avoid promoting sectarianism, but they do cover statements made by Iraqi politicians who he states are divided by “sectarian inclination that escalate sectarian tension and crisis.” Sahi’s final assessment of the Iraqi media is as following:

Accordingly, the Iraqi street and viewers are being divided with regard to their favored channels and news coverage based on their political loyalties and inclinations. Hence, it is inevitable for them to adopt the

²⁸ Nermeen Al-Mufti, “Can You Help Me Not Miss Them?” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 787, March 23-29, 2006.

political discourse of their favored television channels and to act in accordance with the statements made by political leaders. The Iraqis have found themselves to be indirectly involved and supporting some political leaders or perhaps even among their followers.²⁹

Most of the plans to stabilize Iraq, such as that of the Iraq Study Group released in late 2006, suffer from one inherent weakness: they view the conflict in Iraq by primarily focusing on “hard power” or “hard conflict.”³⁰ The purpose of this assessment has been to illustrate media’s potential as a tool of soft power, and to demonstrate that the pattern of Iraqi media development should be viewed as a matter of concern for Iraq’s long term stability. While attention on Iraq’s situation focuses on actually acts of insurgents groups or sectarian militias, one has to also realize that ethno-sectarian divisions, even if they are opaque, have proliferated in the tele-visual and print spheres as well, and have the potential of exacerbating tensions.

This potential was demonstrated in the light of events that occurred in Sadr City in late November 2006, when multiple car bombs caused the highest amount of casualties in a single incident since the cessation of the war. The Iraqi government accused various networks, both Arab and Iraqi, of inflaming the conflict through their coverage, and threatened prosecution of these channels. The President of Iraq, Jalal Talibani, went as far as blaming the media for inciting the violence. The fact that government officials have been so vehement in their criticisms of various television channels and newspapers is an indirect acknowledgement of the power of the media. Their criticisms also reveal the challenge of dealing with the violence in Iraq that is fought not only on the streets, but also in the tele-visual sphere. The government sought to make an example of the Al-Zawra station in November by closing down its office. However, satellite television and the internet have proven that strict

²⁹ Muhammad Sahi, “Television Map in Iraq; Iraqi Satellite Television Channels between Politics and Promotion of Sectarianism,” *Al-Zawra*, March 27, 2006, p. 2.

³⁰ Iraq Study Group Report can be found at the website of the United States Institute for Peace <http://www.usip.org/isg/iraq_study_group_report/report/1206/index.html>

punitive measures are ineffective in dealing with media that can be transmitted trans-nationally.

Events in Iraq could stabilize and as a result the Iraqi media may not proceed beyond stage three. Nevertheless, in the long term, various ethno-sectarian media outlets in Iraq still could prove problematic in another fashion. Rather than a media sphere, Iraq has ethno-sectarian media “spherecules” that have the potential to further the gap between Iraq’s communities, developing identities along ethno-sectarian lines and weakening any kind of national belonging. Additionally, these media “spherecules” owned by Islamist groups have the potential to increase sectarian nationalism in the guise of political Islam in Iraq. At the same time, there are independent media that are trying to provide an alternative to the ethno-sectarian media. The recommendations below are directed to internal as well as external actors as to how to prevent the Iraqi media from developing into a media that enhances conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In Izabella Karłowicz’s work on media development in post-conflict Balkans she offers recommendations over three phases: set up, implementation, and capacity building. This framework can also be applied to the Iraqi situation. While the post-war Iraqi media has passed the “set up phase,” there are still some important recommendations that can be made that were ignored in the first phase. In the case of the Balkans, Karłowicz’s recommendations are designed to highlight “the dangers of poorly planned assistance to the development of the Fourth Estate in post-conflict areas, which may cause an outburst of ethnic conflict rather than fostering peaceful cohabitation.”³¹ An “outburst of ethnic conflict,” or in the Iraqi case, “ethno-sectarian conflict,” has become a reality. The media should emerge as a “safety valve” for the nation by ensuring that these differences are debated on the airwaves, rather than in the streets. The key for the future of Iraq’s stability is using the media to

³¹ Karłowicz, p. 127.

address the grievances of all of Iraq's ethno-sectarian communities, thus transforming this debate into a constructive one.

1. Assess the Iraqi Media Landscape

Any attempt at making recommendations should first begin with an assessment of the Iraqi media landscape for local and international organizations.

1) Create a National Media Directory

An Iraqi or international organization should compile a comprehensive national directory of all local media (radios, newspapers, terrestrial TV stations). This step is crucial as most media in Iraq developed in the post-war chaos, before the establishment of any regulatory or licensing body. Such a directory should provide an assessment of which media have a proven record of promoting ethno-sectarian tensions, and will be a useful guide for international donors. This policy report concludes that the only satellite channel that can be considered entirely non-partisan and non-sectarian is the Al-Sumariyya channel, and local Iraqi media specialists and journalists have echoed this statement.

2) Conduct a Media Consumption Assessment

The Iraqi media landscape is changing quite dramatically. A second assessment needs to be conducted of Iraq's media consumption in Iraq, including how many people watch a particular channel or specific programs on a channel, as well as channels from foreign countries. A local Iraqi body or international organization should take the initiative in commissioning a survey of the Iraqi media consumption. While such surveys are costly, a set of regularly updated surveys should be shared *publicly* as a common database for Iraqi actors, regional media organizations and international donors to better assess the media environment. Reputable agencies such as InterMedia have conducted media surveys for specific clients. One of the weaknesses of this paper is that while various private surveys, plus interviews with local journalists, indicate that consumption of ethno-sectarian media is on the rise

in Iraq, reliable statistics on Iraqi audience preferences and media consumption are lacking. Such trends need to be documented in a proper survey to help both local and international actors and policymakers in devising the most effective strategy to prevent the emergence of a media that encourages violence or at least provide a viable alternative.

3) Conduct an Audience Research Survey

There are no reliable statistics of audiences in Iraq. Audience research can determine how age, location, and income affect media consumption. Such information will be valuable to advertisers and boost the revenues of independent media in Iraq, thus strengthening an alternative to media dominated by political factions.

2. Improve and Implement Media Regulation

Bodies have formed in Iraq to regulate the media, such as the Communications and Media Commission of Iraq (CMC) formed in 2004. The function of the CMC is similar to the American Federal Communications Commission (FCC) or the UK's Office of Communication (OfCom). The CMC is a body designed as an independent regulatory authority for Iraqi communication industries, including television (both satellite and terrestrial), radio, telecommunications and wireless communications such as internet. The CMC falls under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi parliament according to the 2005 Constitution. In terms of this policy paper, the CMC is important as it is charged with establishing the framework and editorial guidelines for the content of TV and radio programs. In the past, these functions were controlled by the Iraqi Ministry of Information, with the Ministry essentially using the media to disseminate Ba'athist propaganda, so the establishment of the CMC is a positive step. (The Ministry was eventually abolished after the 2003 Iraq War.)

Several recommendations can be made to the CMC and other Iraqi governmental entities. In Karlowicz's study, she writes:

In some countries where conflict was fuelled by ethnic hatred (e.g. Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia, Kosovo) an initial "hard hand" on the media

may be necessary to stop further incitement of violence. Temporary and emergency measures such as a hate speech regulation, applicable to both the print press and broadcast media, may be necessary to keep the fragile peace under control. However, such measures should *only* be implemented at the very initial phase of the mission when journalistic self-regulation is largely absent.³²

The interim administration of Iyad ‘Allawi demonstrated its “hard hand” when it closed the offices of the pan-Arab channels Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiyya in August 2004 for “incitement to hatred.” It charged that these channels bestowed regional legitimacy upon the insurgents by framing them as an “Iraqi resistance.” Now, the Commission will also have to deal with the local Iraqi channels as well.

1) Increase Awareness of Media Regulation in Iraq

The CMC needs to increase its profile among journalists. The author realized that many of the journalists he interviewed had not even heard of the body. Other journalists have expressed critiques of the Commission, arguing it has not done enough. Sa’ad Al-Saraf of the Star TV Network stated in regards to the CMC: “Indeed, there seems to be a sort of ‘look the other way’ approach to enforcing the commission’s rules, such as the ban on ‘spreading sectarian, racial and religious sedition and strife.’”³³

2) Enhance the Existing Broadcasting Code of Practice, Create a Code for Reporting Ethno-sectarian Issues, and Further Fund the Monitoring Body)

The CMC operates under an Interim Broadcasting Program Code of Practice that was inherited from a former CPA Order 65, which restricts media messages that “incite violence.” The second recommendation calls upon the Iraqi National Assembly to urgently deal with a draft law introduced by the CMC to replace the CPA Order. The CPA Order has a stigma in Iraq, as many would point out that it was those CPA Orders that called for the closure of Muqtada al-Sadr’s outspoken *Al-Hawza* newspaper, which ultimately ended up only inciting violence between his forces and the US military. Passing this

³² Karlowicz, p. 131.

³³ Cochrane, “The ‘Lebanonization’ of the Iraqi Media.”

law will give both the CMC and its codes more legitimacy in the Iraqi media environment.

If this legislation passes, the “Interim” Broadcasting Program Code of Practice would presumably become “permanent.” The Code, as is, seeks to protect freedom of speech, as long as that freedom is not abused by inciting violence or upsetting ethno-religious dynamics in Iraq. However this Code will need to be more specific in defining what constitutes “incitement to violence.” Agreeing on this matter should be done with the CMC and with a body of Iraqi journalists so that such a code can be based on consensus. Such a Code must give concrete examples of how tele-visual media in the past have “incited violence.” Second, such a code should specify the punishments that will be meted out to channels that intentionally incite violence. Additionally this Code should acknowledge how ethno-sectarian violence may be encouraged indirectly by the media, particularly by giving concrete examples, and indicate that equal punishments will be incurred for such infractions. The court system in Iraq is inundated with cases, so a special body for media arbitration should be created for the media outlets to settle media related disputes.

While enhancing the existing Code of Practice will be a positive step, this policy paper recommends creating a specific Code for Media Reporting on Ethno-sectarian Issues. This recommendation is based on a past precedent where the CMC created a Code for Media during Elections, which laid out rules on how the Iraqi media should cover the 2005 electoral campaigns. Creating a separate Code for Ethno-sectarian Issues will demonstrate that the CMC acknowledges the problem, and is serious about resolving it. An educational film would provide the opportunity for live examples of media in the past that conducted unfair reporting, spread rumors, or incited violence, directly or indirectly.

The question remains as to how to prevent ethno-sectarianism in the Iraqi media, while still allowing for free speech. The first step is for the CMC to elaborate on a code of ethica journalistic practices when reporting on ethno-sectarian issues. Such a code will demonstrate to all Iraqi media outlets that the CMC’s actions are based on a set of values reached by consensus, rather than arbitrary sanctions imposed by an organization akin to the former Ministry of Information.

In order to ensure that stations comply with this code, the CMC will have to ensure continuous monitoring of the Iraq media. The CMC has an established Monitoring and Research Department which surveyed the media during the elections to ensure compliance with their elections reporting code. The relevant entities in the Iraqi legislature should increase funding to the CMC so it can expand this Department to carry out this monitoring task. In the long term, this Department should make public the findings of this body, with regards to the media's incitement of ethno-sectarian tensions, as well as issue a report of media seeking to defuse tensions.

3) Apply Specific Measures to Deal with Ethno-sectarian Media

The government and the CMC should adopt measures making special provisions for political, sectarian and religious broadcasters. License renewal can be connected to requirements that these channels have a board or staff that are heterogeneous. These stations could be required to include programming that reflects Iraq's ethno-sectarian mix in a positive manner.

3. Increase International Assistance

1) Create an Iraqi Media Loan Fund

International donors and NGOs have aided with media development projects and this trend should continue. A loan fund should be established to develop support, capacity building and training for non-partisan media in Iraq. An example of such an initiative includes the South African Media Development Fund which was developed in conjunction with the Free Voice of the Netherlands and Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa (OSISA).

2) Create an Iraqi Media Development Network

International actors have made positive contributions to the Iraqi media. Various ministries of the governments of the UK, Germany and the Czech Republic have offered assistance to the developing media in Iraq. Al-Mirbad Radio and TV in the south of Iraq was established with a grant from the UK Department for International Development, with the BBC World Service Trust providing training and infrastructure needs. The German Foreign Ministry

sponsored Telephone FM, a youth program produced in Germany and then broadcast by FM stations in Iraq. The independent news outlet Aswat Al-Iraq was established with aid from the Reuters Foundation and UNDP. The Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and International Media Support (IMS) have been active in developing the Iraqi media. Other NGOs have had experiences in training Iraqi practitioners in Jordan, while others are seeking to develop Iraq's cultural, entertainment and film media. These various actors should "pool" their expertise together in a common network so that each party benefits from the others' experiences with the Iraqi media.

4. Improve Media Education

The solutions to the status quo in the Iraqi media landscape cannot solely rest with legislation against media outlets that incite hatred. Media regulation does not solve the problem of educating journalists on social responsibility and reporting during times of conflict. One of the problems in Iraq is that professional standards and practical training for journalists are relatively new in a society that repressed its media in the past. Though journalism schools existed during the Ba'athist era, instruction focused on promotion of the views of the Ba'ath Party. Under the circumstances of ethno-sectarian reporting in Iraq, international media organizations should raise awareness of international standards in journalism to local media practitioners.

1) Improve Training for Iraqi Media Practitioners

In a survey distributed to the Iraqi radio and TV channels, the most common request was the need for "technical training of their staff." Often media stations in Iraq would receive donations of high-tech equipment that their staff did not know how to use. Granted, the security situation makes such future cooperation difficult in the country itself, as foreign trainers may be hesitant to travel to Iraq. Such difficulties can be overcome by holding workshops abroad to train Iraqis to serve as media trainers once they have returned to Iraq. International assistance should be dedicated to financing Iraqis to take part in these training sessions abroad. Training should include technical matters and issues of media law and ethics, such as those offered at the Program for

Comparative Media Law and Policy at Oxford University
(<http://pcmlp.socleg.ox.ac.uk/>).

2) Improve Local Media Educational Institutions

International assistance should also be directed towards developing the institutional capacity of Iraqi media. Education in these institutions could focus on how journalists can conduct balanced reporting at a time when their nation is on the brink of a “civil war,” and thus create an alternative to an ethno-sectarian media. Baghdad University’s College of Mass Communications, as well as other Iraqi universities with Communications departments, are in desperate need of updated technical equipment. Faculty at these universities can benefit from intellectual development by revising their syllabi and curricula; this process can be facilitated by hosting Iraqi media professors in foreign universities.

Outside of the university system, most media practitioners agree that an independent institute should be created in Iraq to offer professional and mid-level training to Iraqi media practitioners. In this capacity, international donors can offer financial and technical expertise for establishing such an institution.

5. Protect Iraqi Journalists

A free and pluralistic media cannot emerge when the journalists are themselves targets of the violence they seek to cover. Improving education for Iraqi journalists may seem like a moot point, when once they have acquired their skills they could be targeted in Iraq’s ensuing violence. Protecting Iraqi journalists would seem to be crucial, yet it is most complex, as it involves security organizations not necessarily involved with media. The plight of the independent journalist in Iraq in between conflicting ethno-sectarian media should be emphasized. Refusing to comply with pressures from competing political factions to portray a party in a positive or negative light can result in significant dangers. Organizations such as the International Federation of Journalists have called on the Iraqi and US governments to make a commitment to protecting journalists and freedom of the press, as well to bring to justice those who target journalists in violent attacks. Yet, the question is

how to protect journalists, if the Iraqi security forces can barely protect themselves? Iraqi journalists could embed with Iraqi security forces, but that may also make them a target, or influence their reporting. Given the current security situation in Iraq, an independent/NGO/international organization should develop a standardized program that deals with reporting in conflict zones and offers training for Iraqi journalists to learn to better protect themselves while covering potentially dangerous topics or areas.

6. Create a "Peace Media" Alternative

While this policy paper has highlighted how media have emerged as powerful tools in increasing awareness of ethno-sectarian divisions in a deeply-divided society, it has also shown that they have the potential to shape and influence public attitudes in overcoming tensions. The media can channel communication between parties and serve a dialogical role in the ethno-political context, ultimately building confidence between parties. The cases of such a "peace media" are rare, yet there are organizations that can offer advice to Iraqi journalists on how to create such a media.

1) Learn From Other Applied Experiences in Peace Media

The NGO Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has had extensive experience in creating "peace media" and offers three strategies for transforming the media in areas of conflict. First, they advocate the media playing a role where they deliver a free flow of accurate and constructive information and counteracting misperceptions. Second, they suggest that the media can build confidence and mediate between conflicting parties by fostering dialogue and communication between the parties. Finally, they state how the media can serve a "watchdog" role, or as instruments of early warning for the potential escalation of a conflict.

SFCG also advocates a holistic approach to societies where conflict has occurred or has the potential to break out. In their opinion, addressing only media institutions fails to bring in other actors who have a role in the conflict. They stress that a sustained effort to transform a conflict has to involve efforts to change the mentalities of individuals, as well as societies, and thus they

seek to involve governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, businesses (including media owners), public opinion leaders, academics and marginalized sections of the society into their programs.³⁴

The Search for Common Ground techniques include holding training workshops for media practitioners in African countries such as Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sierra Leone, the Balkans in Macedonia and Albania as well as the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Cyprus and its Greek-Turkish project. Their assistance focuses on three different aspects of local media structures in conflict zones that seek to create a media culture that allows for a variety of opinion, provide professional training for journalists, and provide equipment to local media.

2) Develop a Peace Media Strategy

The following techniques adopted by Search for Common Ground should be applied inside of Iraq.

- Workshops on dialogue facilitation and collaboration for Iraqi media practitioners
- Workshops to educate journalists, station owners and producers on how to defuse inflammatory coverage
- Training local journalists and students in conflict resolution skills using various media and materials
- Joint media projects between the various ethno-sectarian groups
- Facilitating meetings between owners of independent and ethno-sectarian media
- TV and Radio programs fostering dialogue and cooperation between journalists from different ethno-sectarian groups
- Documentaries about initiatives that bring ethno-sectarian groups together
- Drama series that use entertainment to convey themes of ethno-sectarian cooperation
- Programming for children that deals with these themes

³⁴ Sandra D. Melone,, Georgios Terzis, and Ozsei Beteli, "Using the Media for Conflict Transformation," Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, April 2002, p. 10.

3) Focus Attention on the Entertainment

Peace media strategies should focus on entertainment, such as films, drama series and comedies, as these programs can reach wider audiences and provide a release from the daily violence in Iraq. Entertainment that can include fictional characters representing all of Iraq's communities, as well as actors from Iraq's ethno-sectarian mosaic, can provide a tele-visual alternative for the Iraqi public to the news of continued inter-ethnic and inter-sectarian strife.

4) Provide Literature on Peace Media

Existing material on peace media and journalism is primarily in English. Useful articles and handbooks should be translated into Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish to be distributed at media institutions and educational facilities.

This paper demonstrates that the media landscape in Iraq is at a juncture where it has the potential to exacerbate the ethno-sectarian tensions that already exist. Rather than waiting for the media to turn into instruments of hate, the policy recommendations in this report are essentially proactive measures that should be taken to ensure that the media can serve as tools of reconciliation, if not cohesion, rather than further distancing these communities.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OF ETHNO-SECTARIAN MEDIA IN IRAQ

Political Islamist Media

Arab Shi'a Media

SCIRI

- Al-'Adala (Justice) daily paper
- Al-Wahdah (Unity) weekly paper
- Al-Ghadir radio station
- Al-Furat (The Euphrates) satellite channel

The Da'wa Party

- Al-Da'wa (The Call) daily paper
- Al-Bayan (Announcement) weekly paper
- Al-Masar radio station
- Al-Masar TV channel

Sadr Trend

- Ishraqat al-Sadr daily paper
- Al-Hawza al-Natiqa (The Active Hawza) weekly paper
- Al-Salam radio station
- Al-Salam TV station

Iraqi Hizbullah

- Al-Bayyinah (Evidence) paper

Arab Sunni Media

Iraqi Islamic Party

- Dar al-Salam (House of Peace) radio station
- Dar al-Salam (The House of Peace) newspaper daily paper

General Dialogue Conference

- Al-'Itisam (The Guardian) daily newspaper

The Unified National Movement

- Al-Sa'ah (The Hour) biweekly newspaper

The Association of Muslim Scholars

- Al-Basa'ir (Insights) daily newspaper

Ethnic Based Media

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)

- Khabat daily newspaper in Kurdish
- Al-Ta'akhi (Brotherhood) daily newspaper in Arabic
- Voice of Iraqi Kurdistan radio station
- Kurdistan Satellite Channel

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

- Al-Ittihad (The Union) daily newspaper in Arabic
- Kurdistan Nuwe daily newspaper in Kurdish
- Al-Hurriyya (Freedom) radio station
- Al-Hurriyya (Freedom) terrestrial Arabic TV station in Sulaymaniyya
- Voice of the People of Kurdistan radio station
- KurdSat satellite channel

Iraqi Turkmen Front

- Turkmenelli (The Turkmen Nation) daily newspaper in Turkish
- Turkmenelli (The Turkmen Nation) radio station in Kirkuk, Tal Afar and Mosul
- Turkmenelli (The Turkmen Nation) terrestrial TV in Kirkuk

Assyrian Democratic Movement

- Bahra al-Diya (The Light) newspaper
- Ashur (Assyria) terrestrial Arabic TV station in Sulaymaniyya in Mosul

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(Internet links to the majority of the references can be found on the website of this project, <http://www.policy.hu/almarashi/>)

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