

The Iraqi Press:  
**The Heritage of  
the Past and  
the Challenges  
of the Future**

ASSESSMENT

For International Media Support

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# 1 Introduction

Since the 4th of April 2003, Iraq has witnessed a major transformation in its media landscape. From just five daily newspapers, within the first three months the number of the weekly and daily newspapers rose to more than 180. The change has not just been restricted to the quantity of the titles available, but there has also been a substantive qualitative shift in ownership structures and in public's free access to information.

During the past 35 years, the majority of Iraqi press was owned either by the state or by the ruling party (except one newspaper which belonged to a Kurdish party who had entered into an alliance with the government). Those newspapers received their instructions from what was then called "The National Information Bureau" which was operated by the ruling party. This "bureau" was responsible for directing the editorial policy of these newspapers.

Later in 1974, the press came under "code 142", which demanded that every ministry and administrative department adopt "the political report of the 8th Regional Conference of the Baath Party" as its programme and working guide. The code also included the Ministry of Culture and Information which oversaw the mass media in the country.

In addition, Iraqi media were subjected to further strict laws like "The Censorship Law on Classified Materials and Motion Pictures" which prohibited "presenting and showing any thing that would be considered to be supporting infidelity, sectarianism, deprecation and crime, or encouraging acts of sabotage and violence, or affecting the order, internal security and promoting drinking alcohol, gambling, or reactionary ideologies, chauvinism, racism and Anti-Arabism". It prohibited the publication of any materials that expressed favourable opinion of "defeatism, serving imperialism and Zionism, or any materials that didn't match the aims, interests and ambitions of the masses, or making any damage to the Arab World, its goals and its crucial and fateful issues". The law prohibited the production and circulation of any materials that hurt the feelings of the friendly countries or defamed the reputation of the national liberation movements in the world, or any material of low level, intellectually or artistically, that harm the good taste.

These limitations were increased by decisions of the revolutionary Commanding Council which had the power over the constitution. "Article 225" made it a mandatory seven years prison sentence for any person who humiliated the president, the RCC, the Baath Party or the National Assembly by using public means. This legal instrument was amended in 1986, after which, if the insult was deemed to be "clear and public", aimed at provoking general opinion against the regime, the sentence could range from life imprisonment and seizure of assets to death penalty.

## 2 Iraqi media past and present

### 2.1 The secret world

In such severe prohibitions, Iraqis, and the media in particular, lived within a secretive world that denied Iraqis from their fundamental right to information. In that secret world, Iraqis didn't have any idea about the most important issues that constituted turning points in their lives and had a crucial importance to them. These included issues such as:

- The nationalization of American businessman Calouste Gulbenkian's share (5 %) in Iraqi oil revenue in 1969, this share was put in a secret bank account to serve the expenses of the national command of the Baath party.
- The budgets of Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior. The annual oil revenues and the way the regime was spending it.
- The truth behind what really happened on 17th July 1979, when a third of RCC members and a quarter of the Regional Command members were executed. This massacre paved the way for Saddam Hussein to assume the power following the Baker dismissal.
- The number of human lives in the Iraqi-Iran war, or during the Second Gulf War.
- Weather forecasts were considered as a secret of war throughout the Iraq-Iran war.
- The articles of "the Algeria Agreement" which remised the Iraqi sovereignty in its regional waters in return for ceasing Iranian support to the Kurds.
- "The border security agreement" which granted Turkish troops the right to enter into Iraqi territory up to 20 km to chase Kurdish insurgents.
- The articles of "the Safwan agreement" which was signed by the former Minister of Defence, Sultan Hashim, in 1991. This agreement gave the international corporations the right to control the plans of development, importing, and industry in Iraq, so all talk about the national sovereignty became a futile exercise.
- The Iraqi press did not publish any features or indications about the size of prostitution in Iraq which spread into the neighbouring countries, especially Gulf States, because living standards deterioration in Iraq. This phenomenon was never mentioned, except in a mysterious sentence uttered by Saddam Hussein when he made use of it to provoke the Iraqis against Kuwait before he invaded it. (The glorified Iraqi woman was sold for one Kuwaiti Dirham!).
- Iraqis didn't know the huge expenses of the elite surrounding Saddam and his family during the UN sanctions.
- The huge bribes paid by the regime to politicians, parliamentarians and publishers through oil allocations to get their official support.
- The Halabja massacre which led to the killing of 5000 Kurdish civilians within hours, when the regime attacked them using poisonous gas. Despite the facts, the Iraqi audience were presented with news which indicated the liberation of the town from Iranian troops and clearing it of traitors.
- The Anfal campaign which led to the disappearance of about 180,000 Kurds.

News as an objective presentation of facts had totally disappeared from Iraqi press. The facts were presented in a selective way and in a teleological style. The real facts were lost in a media run by invisible minds.

Even the journalists themselves didn't know the real facts about what had happened. Often, they didn't bother themselves about searching for a truth that they couldn't publish or talk about. They realized, by experience and by instinct, that the censor would not be punished if he exaggerated in his prohibitions, but he would be punished if a piece of information considered to be a violation, was leaked. Thus the censor would add more taboos because of his own fears and survival instincts. And the journalists did the same. The level of self censorship increased each time a journalist would see colleagues being taken away from their working places and disappearing forever, or coming back crashed.

The journalists used to wait for the official phrasing which was issued by the regime through the official news agency. With the huge amount of the untold, the media eventually became dedicated to two basic goals:

1. The popularization of the leader coupled with centralizing his authority.
2. Presenting ideological justifications to wars that lost its political goals.

Three main pillars of the state media relationship have remained even in today's post Saddam Iraq:

- The state perception that the mass media is a governmental instrument and an approach to mobilize the masses to serve its own interests.
- The concept of secrecy still governs the state relationship with the media.
- The continuity of state censorship on media.

It is hard to say that the state control on media ended with the closure of the Ministry of Information because the complete history of its previous excesses have left traces on the culture of an entire generation of journalists who were raised and formed inside the culture and media of one party. Even under the current relative freedom, there are many who see the negative aspects of this freedom. The plethora of newspapers, multiple views and the absence of the state censorship seem to some as terrifying chaos. After the turmoil caused by an article published in the New York Times which exposed the fact that the US Department of Defence was financing Iraqi press, three newspapers came out with leading articles blaming government for being indifferent toward this case and asking the government to interfere and to put in measures on the media. As-Sabah Al-Jadeed and Al-Mada all published articles calling on the government to interfere in the press affairs and its financial sponsors and to support the independent newspapers. After the crisis of the Danish cartoons, which created an angry atmosphere around the press, Islamic fundamentalists took advantage of this atmosphere to show that the press is inseparable from offending Islamic faiths; this situation forced the press to deal cautiously with such sensitive issues.

## **2.2 Media and the constitutional reform**

The former rules of censorship have not been cancelled by any official decree, although the current situation and the ability of anyone to issue newspapers and to establish radio stations, or even TV channels without waiting for an official license from the government has superseded the rules and rendered them ineffective. But the code issued by Paul Bremer, formerly the US Civil

Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq, who prohibited publishing any materials that could incite to violence, was used as a lawful excuse to close down the Baghdad office of the Qatar-based Satellite TV-channel Al-Jazeera and suspended the Al-Da'awa newspaper which was published by the group connected to Iraqi Shiite cleric, Moqtada al-Sadr.

The new constitution for Iraq acknowledges the freedom of the press in a short sentence of six words only. This sentence is stated in Article 36 which stipulates: "The state guarantees, without disturbing the public order and decency:

1. The freedom of expression with all means.
2. The freedom of press, printing, advertisement, Information and publishing".

But with the importance of this text in informing the individual his rights, the constitution formalizes a reversion in this aspect, and omitting the phrase included in Article 11 of "The Transitional Administration Law" which links the guarantee of these rights with "The International Declaration of Human Rights" (IDHR) as well as "The International Pledge of the Political and civil Rights". Article 19 of the IDHR states that:

- "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

The "International Pledge of the Political and Civil Rights" and the "International Pledge of the Social , Economical and Cultural Rights" have been developed and then ratified by the UN General Assembly in 16-1-1966 and were put into effect in 1976 according to which:

1. Every person has the right to embrace opinions without any harassment.
2. Every person has the right of free expression. This right include his free will to request different kinds of information and ideas, to receive it and circulate it to others without any border considerations whether it were written, printed or in artistic matrix or with any other means.

The constitutional text about the freedom of expression would remain no more than words on a page unless the conditions and requirements are provided to guarantee this freedom and put it into effect. Mr Muhammed Shabboot, the editor of As-Sabah daily said. "Without providing these requirements and conditions, the freedom of press would be fragile, breakable and easily violated by any, breakable and easily violated by any power that finds no benefit in accomplishing the essential freedom in this country".

There is no law or conversant, so far to organize the implementation of this freedom and to prevent its misapplication, especially when one talks about the media as a power, which is liable to misuse.

Nowadays, there are on-going arguments, both inside and outside the press, about who would draw the limits and the intersections between the freedom of expression and its responsibilities. Some old school journalists want these limits to be imposed by higher authorities (whether it be governmental or religious), and in the new constitution, restrictions were seen to be put before freedom guarantees. (Without disturbing public order and decency). This article could be interpreted in different ways, and is liable to be exploited.

Who would decide the public decencies? What are these decencies in multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and above all, multi-militia society?

On the other hand, article 44 in the national constitution strengthens the freedom of expression. It states: "there is no restriction on practicing any of the rights and freedoms stated in this constitution unless by law or according to a law in condition that the restrictions would not harm the essence of the rights or freedom".

But this freedom would be mere ink on paper, according to Mr. Shabboot, in the absence of a law to protect the press, its freedom and its authority, from other official and realistic authorities.

Mentioning freedom in the constitution is not enough without laws, legislations and rules to protect what is mentioned in the constitution. The media needs various ways of protection because all the official and unofficial forces in the community are seeking to impose their control on the media and to conduct it in away that agree with its interests. In all societies, especially in Iraq, the executive authority represents the biggest danger to the freedom of press, especially if this authority gets the support from the clerics and from unofficial militias capable of acting without any obligations.

Mr. Shihab Al-Timimi, the President of the Journalist Union reflects this duality between the need to legislate and the awe from it: "if you ask about the laws and legislations concerning the media in this new era, I would say that all the laws and legislations concerning publishing and issuing newspapers have been cancelled after the collapse of the regime. We don't have any obligations now. The journalist union has realized the need to such legislations. But the call to issue legislations makes us aware of the danger that these legislations could impose restrictions instead of serving as protection".

The new Iraqi constitution ignored to mention "free access to information and to circulating it". "Free access" is another facet of the freedom of expression that is mentioned in International conventions. This ignorance is due to the fact that the state owns the keys of control on information, especially those concerning affairs of governance, and this gives the government the ability to control the outflow of information. This ignorance came from "the culture of the secret world" which dominates in the governmental establishments, which have the ability to conceal the information that doesn't include propaganda for the ministries.

The danger of this concealment increased with the spread of corruption inside these establishments where the role of the media is to throw light upon the aspects of corruption and to make people the real censors on the government performance.

## **2.3 Migrations and generations**

Despite the absence of the lawful environment that protects the free press and limits its responsibilities, a quantitative leap has occurred in the media and the current space of freedom cannot be compared with the old era.

This journalistic leap happened in a period that witnessed a lack of professional journalists and destroyed infrastructure of the media corporations. The last three decades witnessed a series of waves of migration by journalists;

- In 1970's because of the application of Baathification policy in media and culture which drawn by the 8th Regional Conference of the ruling party.
- In 1980's because of recruiting journalists to serve in the Iraqi-Iran war.
- In 1990's because of the sanctions and the low standards of living,
- And today migration continues because of the threats and dangers that journalists are facing during their daily work.

Now, we have a wide gap between two generations of journalists. Most of the professional and experienced journalists are still practicing their job using old methods and tools. They don't know how to use computers in printing or researching. The sanctions increased their isolation from the great developments in media industry. It is suffice to say that the mobile phones only entered Iraq after the collapse of the regime. The internet was under severe censorship, and many unfavourable web sites were cancelled. Use of satellite dishes was considered a capital offence. Being isolated from modern technology, the journalists were also isolated from the modern media theories. The teaching and practicing were captive of the "developing media philosophy" which believes in the necessity of displaying the posterities of the governmental performance and concealing the negativity in order not to affect the morale of the masses. Many of the journalists of that generation were involved in the praising cultures which was widespread in the Baath press; praising the leader and his wars.

Those journalists have now lost their credibility in spite of their swift attempts to integrate into the new situation. It must be pointed out that the collapse of the Baath regime doesn't mean that its role in the media has come to an end. The shortage of journalists has forced the new parties to hire many journalists who still maintain their loyalty to the old regime and focus only on the negativity of the new era. The Baath leaders outside Iraq are financing many newspapers and TV channels and take advantage of the lack of restrictions on the media.

Dr Abdul-Halim Ruhaymi, the President of the National Corporation for Media and Publishing, said "you can not suppose that every journalist in Saddam era was a Saddamist. Maybe he was working unwillingly ... But still there is the ideological side, with the passing of time, many of those will emerge after reject the Baath ideology and go along with the new reality. Those people who worked during Saddam era will be changed and will abandon the Baath ideology.

I know there are some Saddamists working in the newspapers and harassing anyone against them, just because they think differently. This is the price of freedom. You cannot tell anyone who speaks to stop speaking. The journalist who insists on the Saddamist culture must be identified so we can get rid of the Saddam microbes. This procedure is not easy. It needs continuous actions, and in free press they can assume their real positions and the Saddamists can be blockaded and besieged".

The young generation of journalists is capable and conversant of modern technology. They can use computers to write, and the internet to research. But they suffer from the deficiency of the basics of journalism, and even of the general knowledge which is necessary to working with the press. They don't have a real ability to write the news in a proper way. Those journalists find working with radio stations and TV channels more attractive than the press.

In spite of the many training courses and workshops held in Amman to train young journalists, many initiatives have just proved to be a waste of time



and money, because they were being held in expensive and luxurious hotels and was not coupled with applying new principles in practical exercises. These training courses have been marked by repetition; repetition in the trainers, trainees, and the subjects because there was no coordination between the donors and between the Iraqi corporations to present a unified conception about the needs of training.

There are three information colleges in Iraq. But the curricula still depend on the "committed information" instead of the free media principles. The new newspapers, and especially the party and state newspapers, are still dependent on the same old principles in their policy. The committed information principles are still widespread in many Iraqi newspapers. However, that doesn't mean that there are no ambitions and serious efforts to overcome this concept toward free and neutral journalism.

The large leap in the media happened with a complete destruction of the media infrastructure, because of the war and aftermath when the transmission establishments were bombarded, and then radio stations and TV channels were looted and Iraqi news Agency (INA) ceased to operate.

## 3 The three sectors

There are three kinds of media sections in Iraq today:

1. State financed media.
2. Parties, and civil society organizations, financed media.
3. Independent media.

### 3.1 State financed media

The state financed media consist of: Al-Sabah daily newspaper, Iraqi Satellite Channel and the central broadcasting station, "Voice of Iraq" in addition to many newspapers and regional satellite channels in Basra, Mosul, Najaf and Kirkuk. This media was supposed to be run by an independent corporation, the Iraqi Corporation of Broadcasting and Transmission. The corporation was established according to "Order 66" issued by Paul Bremer on 20th March 2004, to be the independent alternative to the Ministry of Information which had been closed. The corporation drew upon a strategy of a media funded by public funds. But the old traditions found their way into the present and created ambiguity between the media financed by public funds and the media of the recent government. So, the corporation and its mandate were changed according to the ruling government when sovereignty was transferred to the Iraqis on 28th June 2004 and Dr Iyad Allawi became Prime Minister. The corporation was reformed on 23rd June 2004 and the Chairman of the Information Bureau of the Prime Minister became the President of the new Corporation in spite of its independent status.

This led to the situation that the contradictions inside the corporation, which in one way or another were a reflection of the conflicts inside the Governing Council, re-emerged and the corporation was reformed again and new members were included. The six members of the corporation unanimously elected Mr Ruhaymi as President, and they elected the President of the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) which includes Iraqia Satellite Channel, Baghdad Radio and As-Sabah daily newspaper. The conflict proceeded later during the Jaafari government. The corporation witnessed crucial conflict between the new Prime Minister and those loyal to Dr Allawi. This conflict led to a series of changes in the Presidency of Iraqia Satellite Channel and in Al-Sabah.

These changes established a rule according to which all the appointments were issued and executed by the Prime Minister or by the Presidency. This upper autocracy contradicts with the ambitions of Mr. Abdul-Jabbar Mishal, the deputy editor of As-Sabah, when he said "we, who work in this newspaper, define our daily procedures and policy. What distinguishes Al-Sabah, as a part from "IMN" is its neutrality; it does not belong to a certain sect or a certain party. We are working within the area of free press. This demands a high degree of professionalism which presents itself in getting the piece of news accurately and from the event sources, and from the sources of political decision in the country. So we can say the newspaper is a network to transfer the news, the events, and the information from the scene to the reader. We don't include in the news any indication or signal that could lead to misinterpretation. That means, we are neutral, but that doesn't mean that we do not have an opinion. Every day a page is dedicated to writers to

express their own opinion. We believe in freedom. There are no "red lines" on the writers. We are against violence, terrorism and defamation of any political, social and religious figures, except that every thing is allowed".

The "Neutrality" of the state-financed media was on serious trial during the electoral campaigns. Dr Allawi took advantage of Iraqia Satellite Channel. So the barriers between the Prime Minister and the President of the Electoral slate 143 disappeared, especially when he showed himself speaking as Prime Minister and behind him there was an advertisement for his electoral slate. When his slate held a meeting to propagandize its political agenda, the official channel covered the event live on TV. At the same time, only limited space was given to other slates. Three days before the last election, when Al-Jazeera Satellite TV-Channel broadcast a programme humiliating the grand cleric Sistani, the Jaafari slate made use of that programme to create popular anger inside the Shiaa used by the official TV in support of the alliance slate which was supported by Sistani.

The President of the Iraqi Corporation of Broadcasting and Transmission confirmed that his corporation has no control on the Iraqi Media Network because of the direct interference of the government. The Corporation hopes, as he said, to obtain its authorities from the national assembly and to depend on a media council that includes the editors of the newspapers to draw up plans to develop the media and lay its foundations.

### **3.2 Media of Parties and civil society organizations**

After the collapse of the single party regime, dozens of new parties emerged. Some of these parties were founded in 1930's some were founded in 1990's after the second Gulf War; other parties were founded after the collapse of the regime. High Commission's estimations during the elections showed that there are about 200 party and political blocs. The majority of these parties were absolutely unknown to the Iraqis who had lived under the supremacy of one party. The parties were in need of the media as a means to inform the people about their political programmes. And the Iraqis, in return, needed to know much more about these parties and their leaders.

These parties issue dozens of newspapers. The quality of these papers depends on the financial capability of the party and on the availability of journalists in Iraq. These newspapers have begun to hire journalists that do not belong to the party, and in some cases they do not even share the views of the party they work for. This has given journalists a chance to jump from newspaper to another according to the salaries and the flexibility in practicing their job.

The journalist is no longer committed to the state press or connected to it neither in his writings nor in his salary. On the other hand, the newspapers have realized that most of non-political Iraqis do not trust party newspapers, because they remind the people of the former Baath press. Thus, newspapers have found it necessary not to restrict the circulation to the readers within the party only, but to move towards a wider audience by reducing the newspaper's ideological views and giving more space to other opinions, as well as extending coverage of general culture. One of the contractors in Mosul said that the party newspapers are not easily sold and some sellers don't distribute them at all out of fear of terrorists.

Some parties are issuing or supporting other newspapers that seem to be independent from these parties, while at the same time continuing to publish their own newspapers. For example, Al-Adala newspaper, owned by

a member of SCILI, is semi-independent, whereas the official newspaper of the party is Al-Istiqama. The two main Kurdish parties also support Al-Mada newspaper, to pass their political views outside their party newspapers. This phenomenon is demonstrated very clearly in Mosul where the Kurdish parties are funding Arabic newspapers to spread the idea of "Federalism" as a base for democracy among conservative Arabic communities who feel suspicious of any trend toward separation. Among these newspapers are: Wadi Ar-Rafidain, Al-Masar and Bela Ittijah.

Apart from the political and religious parties, about 2000 civil society organizations work within all aspects of life. Most of these organizations undertake their own publishing; some of them take advantage of the press to present their own views. Many newspapers allocate pages on a weekly basis for the activities of these organizations.

In addition to these organizations, ethnic minorities (Turkmans, Assyrians, and Chaldeans) also issue newspapers and magazines in their own languages, as well as in Arabic to inform the public about their cultural backgrounds and their ambitions to get political representations. These newspapers are centred in Mosul and Kirkuk where the ethnic mix is at its peak.

Most of the ethnic weekly newspapers are financed by ethnic parties and are thus under the control of those parties.

People of Mosul do not believe in the political process, they do not trust the parties, the political fronts and the political blocs, because they think that this multiplicity harms the unity of the city and its Arabic character. Basically, they do not accept any separatist trends or the imposition of any entity on them having always lived peacefully with the ethnic and sectarian mix. They find fault with these parties and their trends towards separation; they believe in the idea of one party, one goal, one destiny and one nation. This ideology is deeply rooted in the minds of the Mosul conservative nationalist community.

In addition to these newspapers, other newspapers are issued by chiefs of tribes, like Al-Nahda in Basra, Al-Mashriq in Baghdad. The Sheikhs are seeking for nobility and political role through their tribes.

### **3.3 The independent media**

The Iraqi journalist is often asked: "who does this newspaper belong to?" If it belongs to a certain party, the contents and ideas of the newspaper would be known immediately. If a journalist says that the newspaper is "independent", he would be asked again to explain who supports it financially.

It is very difficult to talk about independent newspapers in the true western concept of independence. However, there are several newspapers that belong neither to the state nor to the parties.

Currently, 20 daily newspapers in Iraq are considered independent, such as: Az-zaman, As-Sabah Al-Jadeed, Al-Mada, Ad-Dustor, As-Safeer, Al-Sabah, Al-Manar...etc, in addition to a few weekly newspapers.

Some of these newspapers are financially supported by businessmen who have political ambitions, some get support from neighbouring countries as in the case of Az-Zaman which is supported by Saudi Arabia. Al-Mada Daily gets support from the two main Kurdish parties, whereas Al-Mashriq Daily gets its support from the Kasnazani religious sect, who owns estates and agricultural projects.

## 4 The framework and the finance

Most newspapers have adopted a certain working framework based on sections or departments, some of which are:

- The Political Department, which runs the first page, the news and Arabic and International features. The Iraqi press has been focusing, recently, on the pages dealing with internal political issues and its influence on regional and international levels.
- The Domestic Department, which depends on a network of informants and correspondents in several ministries, parties, and civil society organizations. It has some links to the Political Department.
- The Cultural Department, which runs pages of literature and art.
- The Entertainment Department, which runs the last page, as well as some pages that have an element of entertainment.
- The Economics Department, which runs the page dealing with economy matters.
- The Sports Department, which runs the sports pages.
- The Designing Department which designs the newspaper.
- The Accounting Department, which oversees the circulation, advertisement and the purchasing of paper.

Each department is lead by a director; the directors refer to the editor-in-chief, or the editorial staff. The chain of responsibility includes: editor-in-chief, managing editor, secretary editor. The boundaries between these three positions are not clear. In most cases, the accounting department is separated from the editor-in-chief and is usually linked with the owner of the newspaper. Most of the newspapers have no administrative board to determine the annual strategy of the newspaper.

The political party newspapers are based on the chain of command within the party. The party supervisor oversees the general policy and writes the paper's editorials. The supervisor, mostly, is a member of the central committee or the political bureau of the party. Some independent newspapers like Az-Zaman are run by the family members who usually own the newspaper.

It is very difficult to indicate the circulation of any newspaper. This is due to the fact that there is no distribution company to present certified numbers about the circulation. Distribution of newspapers is carried out through "newspapers stock market"; in one of Baghdad centres, newspapers come directly from the printing houses and are handled by professional contractors who distribute the newspapers through a chain of sub-contractors until the newspapers reach the individual readers.

In order to distribute the newspapers outside of Baghdad to the Iraqi provinces, the contractors use the general transportation services. Some newspapers have tried to establish distribution networks but came into conflict with the old network; a distribution mafia which did not abstain from using weapons to protect their interests.

When the distribution numbers were investigated for this study, there seemed to be a huge gap between the claims of the newspapers and the numbers received from the contractors. But it is evident that Al-Sabah is the

most widely-distributed newspaper because it is a state-owned newspaper and earns the biggest share of advertisements that appeal to various sections of readers. The editor of Al-Sabah claims that the newspaper is printed in 51,500 copies a day, while the distribution contractors claims that the real quantity in the market is 25-30 thousand copies per day and the unsold returns is about 10 thousand copy a day.

Other newspapers distribute 3-8 thousand a day (as shown in table). The distribution channels include small stores, bookshops and bookstands. According to the distribution contractors, there are about 350 bookstands in Baghdad. The most common method of selling newspapers is to use a network of sellers who stand at crossroads and public squares and make advantage of the traffic jam to sell their newspapers to people passing the streets. According to the sellers, the biggest demand is for the political newspapers, second in demand is the daily sport newspapers followed by Az-Zaman , Al-Ryadi, Al-Mala'eb and Al-Ryadi Al-Jadeed.

The price of the newspapers plays an important role in the selling process according to contractor Abbass Na'em. One copy is usually sold to the seller for 150 ID, and then for 250 ID to the reader. This should be seen in comparison with the average salary of the worker being 300 000 – 500 000 ID.

Because of the security situation, the Iraqi post office system is totally inoperative, hence subscription by postal mail is non-existent.

The major parties distribute their newspapers to their members and partisans through party structures.

The estimates highlight the fact that most of the newspapers do not depend on the newspaper sales as a viable source of revenue. Printing a newspaper of 16 pages costs approximately 1200 USD, excluding the cost of the paper, employees, equipment and renting of office space. Consequently, the publisher loses substantial revenue if he doesn't have his own printing press, in which case he tends to reduce the quantity of the print run to reduce his losses in spite of the demand, as the editor of Al-Sabah Al-Jaddeed, Ismael Zayer points out.

Despite the secrecy of the financial sources of the newspapers, three main sources can be identified; in addition to the state financing its newspapers and parties financing their newspapers, there is also regional financing carried out by neighbouring countries. This is obvious in Basra city, where neighbouring state Iran supports a number of religious newspapers. Some estimates suggest that there are 110 parties and religious organizations in Basra, most of who have domestic influence but no expansion beyond their region. Most of these parties and organizations issue newspapers and periodicals; some also have radio and TV stations, all funded by Iran and Shiites in the Gulf states.

Similarly, Kuwait is financing some newspapers that belong to civil society organizations. In Basra, there are Iraqi correspondents working for Kuwaiti newspapers and TV channels. Funding, however, is not restricted to flowing from neighbouring countries. After the collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime, the British troops sought to expand its financial support to include the media through the CPA and through other organizations who adopt several designations, such as the international CSO Save the Children, which has issued newspapers and magazines, the last one being Al-Amal magazine which covered children's affairs. The point was to win the hearts and minds of the people of Basra and to establish good relations with the people in an

attempt to reduce the hostility toward the troops and the perception of them being an occupation force. The British forces carry out a project, in which they circulate press leaflets to the journalists through press conferences. In Mosul, "The 101 Airborne Brigade" headed for supporting newspapers by providing some equipment, like computers, as well as offering journalistic courses. The Brigade allocated 800 USD to be paid to every newspaper issued in Mosul. The commander announced that he would hold a weekly press conference in the province hall.

Mr. Ruhaymi complained about the dangers of the outside financing. He said "the owner of the newspaper or the editor has to show the source of the newspaper financing. If he said that the newspaper costs him 1000 USD per day and his income was less than that, there had to be other sources of funding. If he says that a specific company gave him the money, he must demonstrate the statement of account. Once these statements are disclosed, we will find out that some countries are paying for the Iraqi press. The question would be: why is this country paying this money? If a certain country pays money, that means a cruel intervention in Iraqi affairs, because this country wants to apply its politics here. We have to know the sources of financing to be able to put regulations for it. It is very important for the citizen who reads a newspaper to know in advance that this newspaper is talking for the benefits of Iraq, not to the benefit of another country. To disclose such statements of account doesn't mean closing the newspaper, but just to present it to any official department such as ministry of justice".

## 5 The advertisement

Advertisements form a significant source of revenue for the press in Iraq. The editor of As-Sabah Al-Jadeed, Ismael Zayer, estimates that 40-70% of the income of the five largest newspapers come from advertising. According to Mr. Zayer the daily income from the ads for his newspaper amount to about 25 USD a day. This source of income fluctuates. It reached its peak before the elections when the High Commission of Election spent about 90 million US dollars on advertisements calling the Iraqis to participate in the elections. For this reason many of the weekly newspapers turned into daily newspapers before the 15th January elections to be able to get more ads.

In addition to the ads of the elections, larger corporations have ads published daily to advertise their services. These mainly count the communications companies, Iraquna, Ather and Asiacell as well as electronics and cigarettes companies.

Ministries constitute the third source of advertisements, such as the Ministries for Defence and the Interior who have substantial budgets for advertising in the media. Other ministries also place ads in newspapers for public tenders and bids.

The state newspaper, Al-Sabah, generates the lion share of ads. Because it is the most widely distributed newspaper in Iraq, and because it is the "state newspaper" as stated by the editor, Mr. Shaboot. According to him, the income generated from advertisements amounts to about 25,000 USD per day. Many newspapers complain about the unjust distribution of market shares of the advertisement market and the mismanagement that is associated with this distribution. The advertisement market, many feel, is contorted by persons who have political influence, such as Mr Fakhri Kareem, the editor of Al-Mada, who undertook the National Assembly campaign and the campaign of Asiacell communication company, whereas Dr Ahmed Chalabi undertook the Anti-terrorism Pentagon campaign and the campaign of Ather, another communication company. There are commercial companies who undertake the assignment of publishing ads in certain newspapers. Their commission constitutes up to 50% of the total cost of ads.



## 6 Provincial press

Throughout the modern history of Iraq, Basra has been the second station for media after Baghdad. The British mandate issued the first modern newspaper, Basra Times, in early 20th century. Throughout the Baath regime, Basra was prohibited from having its own locally produced media and was forced to depend on the central media. Basra, like Baghdad, witnessed relaxation of the media restrictions after 2003 that saw the publication of Adhwaa newspaper which was supported by religious group, Al-Aufuq, an economic newspaper, and Olempy, a sports newspaper. During the first surge, the number of daily and weekly newspapers in Basra exceeded 30, all of them local and supported by institutional governorates, some of them depended on the owner of the newspaper and their families. But the number of newspapers decreased as it was the case in Baghdad, due to the cessation of financing, misdistribution and the respective lack of journalistic cadres. Basra witnessed an upsurge in the zeal of many youths wanting to work for the press and TV channels. But those youths suffered from the absence of training courses, which were restricted to the journalists in Baghdad. They are still in need of access to such courses to acquaint them to the basics of press and media work.

The newspapers in Basra also faced the problem of printing. There is only one printing press in the city, Al-Ghadeer printing press, so the newspapers had to be stored on CD and sent to Baghdad for printing. The design and colour separation was carried out in Baghdad which cost a lot. Most of these newspapers were forced to stop because of financing problems and misdistribution.

The liberal newspapers faced threats from the Iranian influence through the religious parties which were used to restrict the freedom of the media.

During the Baath regime, there was only one weekly newspaper in Mosul, Al-Hadbaa, which was the voice of the ruling party for nearly a quarter of a century. After less than one month after the collapse of the regime, Mosul had more than 40 weekly newspapers. The majority of these newspapers were independent, and focused on the domestic affairs of the city. These newspapers were published in small numbers with 8 pages and printed on paper of poor quality in the city printing press. The printing machines were old and the printing staff had no experience in producing such publications. On the other hand, the cost of issuing a newspaper was less than the cost in Baghdad and other provinces. Most of Mosul newspapers print only 2,000 copies a week. Only three or four newspapers manage to sell 1,000-1,500 copy per week. The highest average sales peaked at 3,000 copies per week. The relative success of Mosul press goes back to the lack of Baghdadi newspapers in the city and their relative high cost when compared with Mosul newspapers, which are sold for 250 ID. The news agenda of Mosul newspapers also focuses more on the affairs of Mosul which makes them more appealing to the local public.

As with the situation in Baghdad and other provinces, Mosul newspapers also suffer from the lack of cadre and low salaries. There are no more than three journalists working in a newspaper, most of whom have no prior experience in the field of journalism wherefore they lack the ability to deal with different fields of the profession. They lack the experience and the practice. Most

of them were previously writers and intellectuals and lack fundamental journalistic skills. For all these reasons, these newspapers have become inactive, especially after the growth of the newspapers in Baghdad, and as the price of Baghdad newspapers were settled according to local rates.

Despite the pioneering spirit of the post Saddam press movement, the newspapers in Mosul have suffered an obvious deterioration, which increased gradually along with the deterioration of the security situation in the city. The escalation of assassinations and attacks on Iraqi national guards and American troops increased after June 2004 when the Iraqi took over the authority of the city.

The journalists have also become targets of the insurgents and more than seven journalists have been assassinated in the city. After the first battle in Falluja, Mosul became the stronghold of the terrorists who exerted their pressure on the newspapers and threatened the owners. At that time the American troops halted financial support to the weekly newspapers. In the end of 2004 the military control of the city fell into the hands of the insurgents. The security forces retreated and the newspapers were forced to close down. The city witnessed many killings and threats. The terrorist groups put many newspapers on the black list which affected the press in Mosul. Most of the newspapers were closed down after Ramadan clashes in 2005, and many journalists left their jobs after receiving threats.

# 7 Obstacles and horizons

## 7.1 Obstacles

There are serious dangers threatening the independent newspapers which have led to their decline in Baghdad and other provinces as can be seen in the tables below. But at the same time, there are many other factors that have encouraged the development of independent newspapers, these include:

1. The enthusiasm of the Iraqis who for 35 years lived under the culture of the single party and a growing trend to read independent newspapers which show them the different views and reflect the reality in an objective way.
2. The enthusiasm among media professionals and the educated elite in general who view newspapers and their ability to work within a free press unrestricted and without any ideological constraints.
3. There is an inclination within the coalition troops and the foreign organizations that support democracy in Iraq, to support a democratic free press.
4. The growing trend among political parties to pass on its ideas through the independent newspapers rather than limiting themselves to their own political newspapers.
5. The tendency of some Iraqi businessmen, as well as businessmen from the region, to invest money in the independent media seeking not only to play a political role but to get a share in the forthcoming commercial market.

But the obstacles facing the independent press are still huge:

1. The spectre of the single party culture on the people, especially the "over-40 generation", still haunts the press. This has been reinforced by the sectarianism of the Sunni and Shiites political blocs.
2. The tense security situation makes the independent newspapers potentially vulnerable to sabotage and the journalists targets of killings whereas the state newspapers are under the protection of military forces and the party newspapers are protected by the parties' militias.
3. The lack of private financing. Neither the government nor the coalition forces give any kind of support to independent newspapers, and the majority of market shares of the advertisements rest with the state and party newspapers.
4. The absence of legal protection of the freedom of the independent press when it criticizes the government or the political powers.

## 7.2 Television instead of press

The first surge of the printed press did not last long. The majority of the newspapers were discontinued with the decline of the parties after the first election. Many newspapers ceased to operate because of lack of predictable funding arrangements and a professional staff to run the newspaper. More than 120 newspapers disappeared within two years. Now there are only about 50 weekly and daily newspapers in all of Iraq. This reduction has been more rampant in the provinces where the independent press almost disappeared completely, especially after the end of electoral campaigns.

With the continued deterioration of the security situation, any hopes about a flourishing advertisement market have faded. According to the editor of *As-Sabah Al-Jadeed*, this trend raises fears that some day the only remaining printed press in Iraq will be limited to the press that belonged to the state or the parties.

More seriously, the demand for newspapers has also declined. Only the educated middle class, who seek political analysis, buy newspapers. The Iraqis in general have turned to TV channels which present the events immediately to people where they can sit and watch the news safely in their homes. TV is not just for entertainment, for the ordinary citizen, it is a source of information about security, informing citizens whether it would be safe to send their kids to school, to go shopping or not, staying at home or to move to another place. All these things are decided according to the televised news. Consequently, TV has become the primary and fastest source of information.

The following are among the most significant Iraqi channels:

#### *Al-Hurra Channel*

Al-Hurra is part of the American transmission to the Arab world. It is very important to the Iraqis, especially in its capacity to transmit news and reports. It is characterized by its liberal character and its international reports dominated by a distinct American style. The channel calls for the new Iraqi direction and have highly qualified correspondents, cameramen and interviewers. Al-Hurra, however, presents programmes directed to Iraqis.

#### *Al-Iraqia Channel*

This channel belongs to the Iraqi Media Network. Al-Iraqia was established to represent a "kind of public service institution", financed by public funds and supposed to be independent; being state media, not government media. The channel faced many difficulties from the beginning due to the continuously changing of General Directors. Among its programmes that have generated a large audience among the Iraqi community is "Terrorist in the hands of justice" which is broadcast on evenings at 9 p.m. In this programme, Iraqis have seen the first images of the terrorists. The channel presents talk show programs including various Iraqi politicians. Entertainment plays a significant role including presentations from the Iraqi music scene.

#### *Al-Furat Channel*

A religious channel which belongs to Sciri. The channel presents many religious figures. Al-Furat is directed to serve and spread Sciri's ideology, so it is a channel directed, particularly, to the middle and southern of Iraq.

#### *Al-Sharqiya Channel*

Al-Sharqiya was among the first channels to be established after the collapse of the Saddam regime. It follows a liberal line. The channel has presented some series that provoked a big uproar among Iraqis because these series made fun of the current situation, and criticized the situation negatively. However, by taking to the streets with interviewers and cameramen, the channel managed to eliminate the barriers between it self and the Iraqi people.

#### *As-Sumaria Channel*

This channel is directed by the Iraqi director and producer, Faisal al-Yasiri, who works as the Production Director for Rotana Channels owned by the media icon, the Saudi Prince al-Waleed bin Talal. The most prominent programme presented by As-Sumaria so far has been "Iraqi Star" which managed to

attract the Iraqis for a whole month. This programme showed Iraqi amateur singers from different cities and towns of Iraq.

*Bayn Alnahrayn (Mesopotamia) Channel*

This channel depends on airing TV-drama shows, especially Egyptian soap operas, as an entertainment.

Mr Ali Rubay'e, an Iraqi media professional working for one of the satellite channels, has suggested that it is too easy now to move from one channel to another and increasingly difficult to find out which channel supports whom or what the channel is focused on. For example, the Iraqi Accordance Front accessed most satellite channels as a means to reach a broad audience among the public with its electoral campaign; whereas the United Iraqi Alliance used many channels but concentrated on one for its electoral campaign. According to Mr. Rubay'e, a new channel was born one month before the election calling people to vote for the Liberation and Conciliation list, which were led by Mr. Mishaan Al-Jubouri.

According to Mr. Qasim Al-Janabi, an Iraqi writer and researcher, the penetration of political propaganda into programmes of TV channels must be reconsidered because the basic thing in the media is to search for the truth and stay clear of political and personal marketing. He added that this kind of propaganda violates the meaning of journalism. He said that this will lead to the rebirth of what could be called "the Yellow Media" characterized by not searching for the good sides of any particular or political group, but expanded to publish scandals of other sides for the sake of raising profits for those who finance these channels. This trend will not benefit the Iraq people and threatens the future of Iraqi media.

## 8 The needs

1. Formal confirmation that freedom of the press and circulation of information are essential and integral parts of democracy, and working through the press institutions and unions to determine the text of all laws and instructions. To include these rights, and install structures in the parliament and in civil society organizations to support these rights. The confirmation that the responsibilities and obligations of journalists cannot be restricted by higher authorities but through their obligations toward honest covenants. It is necessary to take advantage of advanced experiments in journalism unions and councils.
2. Spreading the concepts of free press and reconfirming the objectivity of the news. Holding training courses mixing teaching with practicing. The training courses may include three dimensions. Training courses outside Iraq to study new innovative experiences –training courses inside Iraq through institutions– proceeding the training inside group of selective newspapers that have Iraq journalistic experiences, accompanied by training of the trainers and focusing on the youth of Baghdad and other provinces.
3. Focusing the efforts to support the independent media and establishing a solid basis for its independence through developing the media managements to work in creative style, providing predictable financial sources depending on supportive employments like commercial companies and publishing houses. It would be essential to organize websites with subscriptions and looking for new means of circulation through subscriptions. Developing different models of media institutions like those who depend on cooperative style, or sticks, or financed by companies, or those who circulate freely depending on advertisements. All these fields of action are still unknown to a journalism industry that has been dependent throughout its history on the support of the state or parties. So it would be a must to hold training courses to see the advanced experiences in these fields.
4. To take cognizance of the advanced experiences in drawing up strategies to develop the advertisement and organizing campaigns to spread the importance of advertising in certain newspapers. Organising internal campaigns to prevent the monopoly of advertising by the state newspapers or the ruling parties newspapers, and to fight the corruption which is coupled with advertising.
5. Confirmation of the transparency of the newspapers who intend to fight corruption. Their financial sources must be open to the contributors and the readers to win their trust.
6. The comprehension of the new experiences in structuring the media institutions, the methods of management, planning and the daily work styles. It is necessary to create assurances to stabilize the journalism cadre through fixed and movable labour contracts that protects the rights of the employees thereby stabilizing the media institutions.

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