

Media Environment Guide Iraq Oct 09

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1. Overview

The Republic of Iraq has a population of 29.5 million (UN, 2008). Kurdish-speaking Iraqis comprise 15-20 per cent of the population. In 2008 GDP per capita was 3,477 US dollars, according to the IMF.

Iraq enjoys far greater media diversity now than under the rule of Saddam Husayn, when the media environment was dominated by a few state-controlled TV channels and publications.

Current media outlets include an estimated 200 print titles, 60 radio stations and 30 TV channels in Arabic, Turkmen, Syriac and two Kurdish dialects. Several large players dominate the media market, with a plethora of niche broadcasters catering for diverse views.

However, most media organizations remain under the control of their sectarian and party patrons. For private media, sales and advertising revenues usually do not produce a reliable income stream.

Iraqis get their news mostly from television. Radio use overall in Iraq has declined in recent years in tandem with the rise of TV, and most Iraqi radio stations have lost audience.

In May 2009 Iraq's state-run media appealed for a financial lifeline from the government, after the annual budget of the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) was slashed by 70 per cent, from 93m US dollars in 2008 to 28m US dollars. The IMN is a government holding company for a network of TV stations including the official channel Al-Iraqiyah TV, newspapers including Al-Sabah, and radio stations.

Attempts continue to regulate the burgeoning media scene. In summer 2009, the government put forward proposals to introduce a new media law, prompting warnings from journalists' groups about the threat of renewed censorship. The draft law has yet to be implemented.

The government has found that banning TV channels, often for inciting sectarian violence, tends to drive broadcasters abroad, from where Iraqi viewers can still be reached via a thriving satellite market.

Meanwhile, media continue to develop in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, which has its own press and broadcasters.

United States army psychological operations (psyops) broadcasting units operate at a local level in Baghdad and other locations across Iraq, transmitting on local FM frequencies using transmitters that have a very limited range. Programming typically includes pop music, interlaced with public information messages and numbers for an anonymous tips line.

2. Media freedom

Freedom of expression is protected by the constitution and generally respected by the authorities. However, it has been "seriously impeded by sectarian tensions and fear of violent reprisals", the US organization Freedom House found in its 2009 annual report.

Press freedom and the safety of journalists and media workers remain causes for concern. Iraq is widely regarded as being the most dangerous place in the world to work as a journalist.

In 2008, for the sixth consecutive year, Iraq was the deadliest country in the world for the press, according to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists.

In the view of Paris-based Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF), "freedom of expression is far from attained in Iraq".

Journalists often come under pressure from politicians not to publish articles criticizing the government, and the threat of legal action is frequently used against the media.

The US Department of State 2008 human rights report said that self-censorship was widespread among the media in Iraq. "The law prohibits reporters from publishing stories that defame public officials. Many in the media complained that these provisions prevented them from freely practising their trade by creating strong fears of persecution," it added.

Violence against the media, primarily by militia and insurgency groups, continues, albeit at a lower level than in recent years.

RSF noted in October 2009 that "instead of targeted threats from militias or terrorist groups, Iraqi journalists now have to cope with hostility from officials and politicians who deny the media access to certain areas. Abusive prosecutions and defamation actions against newspapers that expose corruption are now common. Even supposedly pro-government media are not spared."

There are no restrictions on access to the internet, although the government has mooted proposals to block websites deemed offensive.

3. Regulation

The Communication and Media Commission (CMC, website: <http://www.cmc.iq>), set up in 2004, is the government body responsible for media regulation. All television and radio channels operating in Iraq must be licensed by the CMC.

In October 2009 the CMC website listed the following licensed broadcasters: 21 terrestrial TV channels; 17 satellite TV channels; 36 FM radio stations; and nine AM radio stations.

In September 2009, government-controlled Al-Iraqiyah TV quoted Safa-al-Din Husayn of the CMC as saying there were more than 57 unlicensed TV stations.

The CMC is also responsible for licensing mobile telephony, and is the national internet domain registrar for the .iq country hierarchy.

A report in May 2009 by Albany Associates, part of a consortium (including BBC World Service Trust and the US-based non-profit organization IREX) that won a competitive tender to provide comprehensive media development assistance in Iraq, recalled that the CMC's chief executive had left his post when his term expired in April 2008. As the government made no move to fill vacant CMC Board positions, the Board lacked the quorum necessary to make key decisions, including the replacement of the CEO. As a result, the CMC was effectively paralysed, while attempts had been made in the interval to strip the body of various aspects of its regulatory remit, the report said.

The Albany Associates report noted that the entire legal and regulatory framework in Iraq was in flux in mid-2009. New laws were being proposed that would pull all aspects of communications regulation back into the government, would abolish or significantly diminish the CMC, and would give the government a monopoly over key aspects of communications infrastructure. There was even talk of providing the IMN (currently designed to be a public service broadcast network independent of the government) with regulatory control over private media. "These moves would effectively re-establish the Ministry of Information that was abolished in 2003," the Albany report warned.

"Most experts would agree that moving from a converged independent regulator - as Iraq currently has in the form of the CMC - to government control of the communications sector would represent a giant step backward," it added.

In summer 2009, proposals by the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to introduce a new media law and to block websites deemed offensive sparked warnings

from journalists' groups about the threat of renewed clampdowns and censorship.

The government said the draft law would guarantee the rights of journalists, improve their security and allow them to practise their profession in greater safety.

Government officials maintained that the laws would punish anyone who attacked a member of the media, guarantee reparations to journalists and their families who suffered major injury or death as a result of their profession, and afford protection to anonymous sources.

Another measure stipulated that all journalists would have to be licensed by a quasigovernmental body that would also have the final say on the hiring of journalists by domestic media.

The proposals also included vague language prohibiting reporters from using the media to "compromise the security and stability of the country... or to achieve a personal benefit that may be detrimental to others, or plagiarize ideas," Western news agencies reported.

Media freedom watchdogs, however, condemned the proposals as thinly veiled censorship.

4. Television

- Al-Iraqiyah - Government-controlled satellite and terrestrial TV channel. Formerly known as IMN television, the station launched in May 2003 and broadcasts 24 hours a day. The station is available in major cities and towns across Iraq and via satellite and is said to be the most-viewed channel in Iraq. The station has been observed carrying messages discouraging viewers from terrorism and extremism.

Other IMN TV channels:

Al-Iraqiyah 2 (also called Atyaf: broadcasts in English, Kurdish, Assyrian via satellite and terrestrial networks)

Al-Iraqiyah Sport channel

Al-Firqan channel (Islamic)

Al-Iraqiyah 5 (Live)

Website: <http://www.iraqimedianet.net>.

4a. Private channels

- Afaq ("Horizons") TV, satellite channel broadcasting from Baghdad, appears to be affiliated with the Islamic Da'wah Party, has been observed to adopt a pro-government, pro-Al-Maliki editorial line. Programming is mostly news and political talk shows.

Website: <http://www.afaqtv.com/> (this domain name expired in October 2009 and is pending renewal or deletion)

- Ahl al-Bayt ("The House of the Prophet Muhammad"), a Shi'i religious satellite channel aimed at Iraqi audiences, broadcasting on Arabsat and Atlantic Bird satellites. Website: <http://www.ahlulbayt.com>

- Al-Ahd TV - Iraqi satellite television channel aligned with cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

- Al-Anwar ("The Lights") - A Shi'i satellite channel broadcasting on the Hot Bird 6, Nilesat 102 and Galaxy 25 satellites. Website: <http://www.alanwar.tv>

- Ashur TV (Assyrian), this terrestrial and satellite TV station transmits on UHF channel 45 in Baghdad. It is run by the Assyrian Democratic Movement. Website: <http://www.ashurtv.org>.

- Al-Diyar TV ("The Homeland") - Began full transmissions in June 2004. The station is run by Iraqi media figure Faysal al-Yasiri in cooperation with the pan-Arab satellite pay-TV service Arab Radio and Television Network, ART, which contributed to setting up and financing the channel. Under Saddam Husayn's regime, Faysal al-Yasiri served in various high-level media posts, including head of Iraqi Radio and Television. Website: <http://www.aldiyarsat.net/>

- Baghdad Satellite Channel - Began transmission in August 2005 on the Nilesat and Eutelsat W6 satellites. The station has a Sunni Islamist orientation, appears to be aligned with the Al-Tawafuq Front grouping of political parties, and is opposed to the US military presence in Iraq. Many of the station's programmes appear to be of an Islamic nature. Website: <http://www.baghdadch.tv/>

- Al-Baghdadiyah - An Iraqi satellite channel broadcasting on the Optus D2 , Badr 4, HotBird 8, Nilesat 102 satellites to the Middle East, Europe and the Asia-Pacific.

InterMedia reports that the channel is owned by the Iraqi Islamic Party. Website: <http://www.albaghdadia.com>

- Dijlah ("Tigris") satellite channel - Based in Mosul, launched at the start of August 2004. It broadcasts in Kurdish and Arabic.

- Al-Fayhaa satellite channel ("The Vast", old Arabic name for Basra) - formerly Basra-based satellite channel which relocated to the United Arab Emirates. The channel relocated again to Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq in late 2006. Owned by Iraqi Shi'i businessman Mohammed Al-Ta'y. Website: <http://www.alfayhaa.tv/>

- Al-Furat ("The Euphrates") - Satellite and terrestrial TV channel based in Baghdad, began transmissions in June 2004. InterMedia reports the station is owned by the Supreme Council for the Islamic revolution of Iraq (SCIRI). Website: <http://www.alforattv.net/>

- Al-Nakheel ("Palm Trees") - a religious terrestrial channel that broadcasts from Basra.

- Al-Hurriyah ("Freedom") - Satellite and terrestrial television channel that broadcasts in Arabic on UHF channel 31 in Baghdad, and via the Atlantic Bird 2 satellite. It is run by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's PUKMedia division. Website: <http://www.alhurriatv.com>

- Ishtar satellite channel - Arbil-based Assyrian television service owned by the Ishtar Broadcasting Corporation. Broadcasts on the Intelsat 8, Nilesat, Hot Bird and Galaxy 25 satellites for viewers in Asia-Pacific, Middle East, Europe and the Americas. Website: <http://www.ishtartv.com/>

- Al-Masar TV - Satellite and terrestrial TV channel operated by the Islamic Al-Da'wah Party. Broadcasts on the Atlantic Bird 4 and Russian-owned Express AM22 satellites. Website: <http://www.almasartv.com>

- Al-Furatayn ("The Two Euphrates") - Privately-owned terrestrial channel broadcasting from Hilla. Website: <http://www.foraten.net/>

- Al-Mashriq TV ("The East") - Privately-owned television channel which started broadcasting in June 2004 on UHF channel 54 in Baghdad. Channel describes itself as "Al-Mashriq, the television of Iraq and Iraqis".

- Al-Mirbad TV - Independent Basra-based TV channel funded by the UK Department

for International Development, aided by the BBC World Service Trust. Broadcasts terrestrially in Basra, Al-Amara and Nasiriyah, and via the Arabsat 2D satellite. Website: <http://www.almirbad.com>

- Al-Salam ("Peace"), a religious terrestrial and satellite channel based in Baghdad, aligned with Shi'i cleric Hussayn al-Sadr. The station airs three 50-minute news programmes daily, and aims to promote peace and reconciliation in Iraq. Available via the Nilesat satellite.

- Nahrain TV ("Rivers") - Basra-based satellite and terrestrial TV channel which is operated by the Iraqi Media Network Southern Region. Nahrain was financed by an initial 25m-US dollar investment from Naguib Sawiris, chief executive of Orascom, an Egyptian telecommunications group. Broadcasts via Arabsat, Nilesat and Hot Bird satellites for views in Middle East and Europe. Website: <http://www.imnsr.com/>

- Al-Ghadeer - Pro-Shi'i satellite and terrestrial channel based in Najaf. Website: <http://www.alghadeertv.com>

- Al-Rafidayn satellite channel - Operated from Egypt and associated with the pro-Sunni Iraqi Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS). Strongly opposes US presence in Iraq. News bulletins often lead with statements on behalf of the AMS, programming is highly critical of the US. Broadcasts on the Nilesat 102 satellite. Website: <http://www.alrafidain.tv/>

- Salah-al-Din satellite channel - Operated from Salah-al-Din Province, broadcasts via the Nilesat and Eutelsat W6 satellites. Website: <http://www.salahaddintv.net/>

- Al-Sharqiyah ("The Eastern") - Privately-owned satellite and terrestrial TV channel launched in March 2004 by Iraqi businessman Sa'd al-Bazzaz, who is also the publisher of the Arabic-language daily newspaper Al-Zaman. It describes itself as "the first private, national media project that does not represent any political, ethnic or sectarian group".

Al-Sharqiyah does not air religious programming and does not carry the calls for prayers or Friday sermons. The channel frequently broadcasts the slogan seen in its logo "Al-Sharqiyah - the truth television", and broadcasts Iraqi-made soap operas, reality programmes and music videos. News programmes concentrate heavily on domestic news, with very little time given to international stories.

On 1 January 2007, the Iraqi government ordered the station closed on grounds of inciting sectarianism after one of its well-known news readers was observed wearing

black mourning clothes following the 30 December 2006 execution of Saddam Husayn.

Previously based in Baghdad, the station now broadcasts from Dubai. According to surveys, Al-Sharqiyah is the second most popular TV station in Iraq.

Al-Sharqiyah broadcasts 24 hours a day via satellite and terrestrially. It has offices in Baghdad, London and Dubai Media City. Website: <http://www.alsharqiyatv.com>

- Al-Rasheed, a terrestrial privately-owned channel from Baghdad. Formerly operated as a satellite broadcaster, website is no longer available.

- Al-Sumariyah (reference to Sumer, an ancient region of southern Mesopotamia in present-day southern Iraq) - This satellite and terrestrial TV states that "we are an independent Iraqi satellite TV network that transmits on Nilesat and Arabsat from its temporary offices in Lebanon. Al-Sumariyah was established by a group of professional businessmen in 2004. It includes a solid staff of 300 employees in Iraq and 150 in Lebanon." The station is owned by CET (Communication Entertainment and Television) SAL (Offshore), and makes its own programmes in Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. Broadcasts terrestrially in Baghdad, and via Arabsat and Nilesat satellites. Website: <http://www.alsumaria.tv>.

- Turkomaneli TV - Launched in Kirkuk in April 2003 and broadcasts on behalf of the Iraqi Turkoman Front. The channel is available on UHF channel 56 in Kirkuk, and on the Eurasiasat satellite at 42 degrees east. Website: <http://www.kerkukfeneri.com>

- Al-Watan TV - Terrestrial TV station broadcasting on UHF channel 25 in Baghdad, supporting the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council. Website: <http://www.alwatan-tv.com/>

Biladi TV ("My Country"), privately-owned Shi'i TV channel owned by former prime minister Ibrahim al-Jafari, known to be very close to the Al-Dawa political party of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Al-Lafitah TV - Iraqi satellite channel on Nilesat and Arabsat. Al-Lafitah said it would launch another satellite channel dedicated to "the life and thoughts" of former Iraqi President Saddam Husayn. The channel was due to start broadcasting at the end of November 2009.

Iraqi Educational TV Channel - launched by UNESCO and the Education Ministry in October 2008; the 6.5m-dollar project is financed by the European Union.

5. Radio

- Republic of Iraq Radio - The successor to Iraqi Media Network (IMN) Radio Baghdad, which was operated by the Coalition Provisional Authority. It is on air in Baghdad on 98.3 MHz FM, and on 675 kHz mediumwave. It has also been observed in southern Iraq on 603 kHz. Republic of Iraq Radio started broadcasting via the 13 degrees east Hotbird satellite to Europe in April 2005, and can now be heard via the Arabsat, Atlantic Bird, Hispasat and Galaxy satellites in Europe, the Middle East and the Americas. The station is also available with a live audio stream available from its website at:

<http://www.iraqimedianet.net>

Other IMN radio stations include Radio Scheherazade (for women) on 103.3 MHz in Baghdad; Radio Al-Jil (for youth) on 105.2 MHz; Holy Koran Radio.

5a. Private stations

- Radio Al-Ahd - Run from Baghdad by Al-Sadr Movement, broadcasting on 101.0MHz. The radio station was raided by US troops on 8 May 2008 and the station was off the air for a period.

- Ashur Radio - First observed on FM in Baghdad in July 2004. Programmes in Arabic and Assyrian are broadcast at 0910-2000 local time (0610-1700 gmt) on 99.3 MHz FM in Baghdad. Ashur was one of the ancient capitals of the Assyrian Empire, situated on the River Tigris in northern Iraq. A clandestine radio station of this name broadcast on 9155 kHz shortwave prior to the 2003 Iraq war.

- Bilad Radio operates on 999 kHz mediumwave in Baghdad. Programming consists entirely of Koranic recitations and the call to prayer. The station is on the air daily at 0800-1600 hours local time (0500-1300 gmt). Website: <http://albilad.org/>

- Dar al-Salam Radio (Haven of Peace) broadcasts from Baghdad and identifies itself as the radio of the Iraqi Islamic Party. The station was first monitored in March 2004. The station broadcasts on 91.0 MHz FM in parallel with 1116 kHz in Baghdad. Website: <http://www.darusalam.net/>

- Radio Dijla (Tigris Radio) is Iraq's first independent talk radio station and broadcasts on 88.2 MHz FM in Baghdad.

The commercial station, which is the first independent talk radio station in Iraq, was

founded by Dr Ahmad al-Rikabi, a former London bureau chief of US-funded Radio Free Iraq. Rikabi helped to set up Coalition-run radio and TV stations in his role as head of the Iraqi Media Network. Radio Dijla claims to be one of Baghdad's most popular radio stations, with listeners and contributors from across all communities and backgrounds.

The station is also available with a live audio stream available from its website at: <http://www.radiodijla.com>, and is also available via the Hot Bird and Atlantic Bird satellites.

- Radio Friendship, Voice of Iraqi Women (Radio al-Mahabbah, Sawt al-Mar'ah al-Iraqiyah), a Baghdad-based station aimed at a female audience, first noted in June 2005 on 96.0 MHz. Programming was mostly music, with three to five minute news bulletins in Arabic on the hour.
- Al-Huda Radio ("The Righteous") - Religious radio station, broadcasting on 92.8 MHz in Karbala. Website: <http://www.al-hodaonline.com>
- Radio Al-Hurriyah - Run by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan of Jalal Talabani, broadcasting on 97.8 MHz in Baghdad Website: <http://www.hurriya.net/>
- Al-Mirbad Radio - Independent Basra-based radio station funded by the UK Department for International Development, aided by the BBC World Service Trust. Broadcasts on 93.3 MHz in Basra, 89.3 MHz in Al-Amara and 101.4 MHz in Nasiriyah. Website: <http://www.almirbad.com>
- Radio Al-Mu'tamar - Run by Iraqi National Congress of Ahmad al-Chalabi, broadcasting on 101.4 MHz in Baghdad
- Al-Mustaqbal ("The Future") Radio. This station is operated by the Iraqi National Accord movement (INA) of Ayad Allawi and transmits from Baghdad on 95.5 MHz. The station no longer broadcasts on 1305 kHz. The radio describes itself as "the voice of the Iraqi National Accord." The INA movement has a website in English and Arabic at <http://www.wifaq.com>.
- Al-Nas Radio (People's Radio) broadcasts nationally on 594 kHz from Baghdad and on newly-opened 96.5 MHz FM outlet. Rebroadcast's German external radio Deutsche Welle for four hours per day. Website: <http://www.radioannas.com/>
- Radio Nawa, launched in January 2005, broadcasts from Sulaymaniyah in both Arabic and Kurdish with a news and current affairs format. Now broadcasts on 89.0 MHz in

Baghdad, with a network on 11 FM outlets, mostly in Kurdish regions. Website: <http://www.radionawa.com>

- Radio Al-Rashid - Run by Al-Diwalia Co (Al-Janabi Group), owned by Saad al-Janabi, the leader of the Iraqi Republican Assembly Party, an Iraqi expatriate who returned home after the fall of the Saddam regime. The Emir of Qatar, Sheik Hamad Bin Thani donated transmitters, while the US-based Harris Corporation provided equipment and staff training in Lebanon and the UAE. The transmitters are located in the Dura district of Baghdad and studios are in Jadriyah. Broadcasts on 91.5 MHz in Baghdad.

Website: http://www.alrasheedmedia.com/index_radio.htm

- Al-Salam ("Peace") Radio - promotes diversity and harmony in Iraq. Broadcasts on 1035 kHz medium wave in Baghdad.

- Radio Sawa Iraq: Local strand of the US government-funded pan-Arab radio station, broadcasting on a number of FM outlets throughout the country. According to the US Broadcasting Board of Governors, "Radio Sawa is the most listened-to radio station in Iraq, with 23 per cent weekly reach, and is among Iraqis' top three sources for news on the radio".

Website: <http://www.radiosawa.com>

- Sawt al-Asimah ("Voice of the Capital") - Run by the Baghdad Mayoralty, broadcasts on 104.7 MHz

- Radio Sumer FM - An affiliate of Al-Sumariyah TV broadcasting on 99.8 MHz in Baghdad. According to the station's English-language website, the radio station was founded in 2004, and broadcasts music, entertainment and educational programmes in Arabic. Website: <http://www.sumerfm.com>

- Radio Dimuzi FM - privately-owned radio station broadcasting on 104.1 MHz in Baghdad. Telephone FM, which previously operated on this frequency, is no longer observed.

- Radio Ur FM - privately-owned commercial radio station, operated by a UAE-based company. Broadcasts on 99.8 MHz in Baghdad. Website: <http://www.ur.fm/>

- Voice of Iraq - claims to be "Iraq's first independent radio station, covering an area of 12 million inhabitants", and operates on 1170 kHz. Website: <http://www.voiraq.com>

6. Press

The Iraqi newspaper market is dominated by titles owned by or affiliated to political or religious movements.

The daily papers with the largest circulation, all published in Baghdad, are Al-Mada, Al-Mutamar, Al-Sabah, and Al-Zaman (also published in London).

- Al-Adalah - Daily published by the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Website: <http://www.aladalanews.net>

- Al-Ahali - Independent weekly published by the Al-Ahali publishing house in Baghdad. Website: <http://ahali-iraq.net/>

- Al-Anbaa - Fallujah-based daily newspaper, founded in 2006.

- Badr - Political daily newspaper published by the Culture and Information Institution of Badr Organization. Website: <http://badrtoday.net/>

- Baghdad - Daily published by the Iraqi National Accord Movement. Website: <http://www.baghdad-news.com/>

- Bahra - General political weekly of the Assyrian Democratic Movement. Website - <http://www.zowaa.org/BahraADM.htm>

- Al-Basa'ir - Weekly published by the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq. Website: <http://www.basaernews.com>

- Al-Bayan - Daily, published by the Islamic Da'wah Party, the Shi'i party which numbers Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his predecessor Ibrahim al-Jafari among its leaders.

- Al-Bayyinah - Daily, published by the Hezbollah movement in Iraq. Website: <http://www.al-bayyna.com/>

- Al-Bilad al-Yawm - Baghdad-based, independent daily newspaper in Arabic published by Al-Bilad al-Yawm media establishment. Currently appearing weekly on a temporary basis. Editor-in-Chief: Tariq al-Ma'mouri.

- Dar al-Salam - Weekly of the Iraqi Islamic Party.
- Al-Da'wah - Daily published by the Islamic Da'wah Party.
- Al-Dustur - Independent daily published by journalist Basim al-Shaykh. Website: <http://www.daraddustour.com/>
- Al-Furat - Political daily. The paper identifies itself as "the first political Iraqi newspaper published simultaneously in Paris and Baghdad via satellite by Al-Furat Establishment for Press, Publishing, Distribution and Advertising". Website: <http://www.alfourat.com>
- Al-Iraq al-Yawm - Weekly newspaper published by Isra Shakir.
- Ishraqat Al-Sadr - Islamic weekly associated with Muqtada al-Sadr.
- Al-Mada - Independent daily published by Al-Mada Institution for Media, Culture and Arts. Website: <http://www.almadapaper.com>
- Al-Manarah - Independent political daily published by Sawt al-Janub press, print and publishing institution in Basra. Website: <http://www.almannarah.com>
- Al-Mashriq - Daily published by Al-Mashriq Institution for Media and Cultural Investments. Website: <http://www.al-mashriq.net/>
- Al-Mutamar: Daily published by the Iraqi National Congress, led by Ahmed Chalabi.. Website: <http://www.inciraq.com/>
- Al-Sabah: Daily published by the Iraqi Media Network, often reflects the position of the government. The paper provides a positive portrayal of the Nuri Al-Maliki administration and Iraqi officials. Articles often focus on reconstruction and reconciliation, as well as security developments. Al-Sabah takes an upbeat editorial position regarding the future of the country and the government's efforts to bring about progress in these three areas. Falah al-Mish'al was dismissed from his post as chief editor of Al-Sabah in October 2009. Website: <http://www.alsabaah.com/>
- Al-Sabah al-Jadid - Independent political daily. Website: <http://newsabah.com/>
- Sahwat al-Iraq - Political daily newspaper published by Iraq Awakening Conference. Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Dari al-Dulaymi

- Sawt al-Ahali - Political daily (published weekly for the time being) of the National Democratic Party. Website: <http://www.sawtalahali.com>
- Tariq al-Sha'b - Political and cultural weekly of the Iraqi Communist Party
- Al-Ufuq - Political daily published by Al-Ufuq Cultural Foundation
- Al-Ummah al-Iraqiyah - Baghdad, biweekly newspaper published by the New Iraqi Nation Movement led by Mithal al-Alusi
- Al-Zaman - London-based independent daily, owned by Sa'd al-Bazzaz, a former editor-in-chief of the now-defunct Iraqi government daily Al-Jumhuriyah and current owner of the Al-Sharqiyah TV channel. Said to be the preferred choice of Iraqi newspaper readers, this title is now printed in Baghdad, Basra, Bahrain and London. English online edition also available. Title is often critical of the US-led occupation, and shows a slight Sunni and nationalist slant in its reporting. Website - <http://www.azzaman.com>
- Al-Zawra - Weekly published by the Iraqi Journalists Association

7. News agencies

- National Iraqi News Agency (NINA) - Independent news agency founded by a former employee of the Saddam-era Iraqi News Agency, now operating in Arabic and English. NINA claims to be politically neutral and free from government and international influence. The agency's material is used by a number of Iraqi news media such as Al-Mutammar , Al-Sabah al-Jadid and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) Baghdad-based Al-Ittihad. Website: <http://ninanews.com>
- Forat Iraqi News Agency (FINA) - Pro-Shi'i, Karbala-based news agency. The agency follows an editorial line that is consistent with the Maliki government, such as the need for national reconciliation and the condemnation of sectarianism and terrorism. Website: www.foratnews.com

8. Internet and new media

Internet use is generally low for direct access, owing to a lack of infrastructure in homes. However, the prevalence of internet cafes has contributed to extensive usage among

Iraqi youth. According to the International Telecommunication Union, there were an estimated 275,000 users in December 2008, representing about 1 per cent of the population.

Iraq's internet penetration rate is among the lowest in the region. According to the Open Net Initiative (ONI), an official with an Iraqi mobile network operator attributed this to the lack of a high-speed internet backbone connecting cities within the country to the outside world and the lack of a unified national telecommunications law and regulatory framework. Private telecommunication companies complain that telecom regulations are poor and that regulatory decisions have been made by the government's Ministry of Communications, which lacks independence.

Internet services in Iraq are provided by the State Company for Internet Services (SCIS), an offshoot of the Ministry of Communications. Private telecommunications operators in Iraq include Zain, Asiacell and Etisaluna. Zain is the market leader. Newcomer Korek Telecom has made a big investment in the telecoms sector.

Asiacell has announced its readiness to invest in fibre-optic technology, both as a national framework and an international submarine connection. This could have a very positive impact on the availability and affordability of broadband in Iraq, according to the "Iraq Telecommunications Report Q3 2009" published by Business Monitor International.

Iraq does not have an official national internet filtering policy, nor is there evidence that the state internet service provider (ISP) practises filtering. However, this is likely to change. The government has declared plans to block "immoral" web content, monitor internet activities and regulate internet cafes. In addition, the government has launched legal offensives against independent news media and websites.

While only about five per cent of Iraqis have internet access at home and electricity blackouts are routine, more than 80 per cent have a mobile phone. Many Iraqis own two or three mobiles.

8a. Websites and blogs

In June 2009, the social networking website Facebook had over 45,000 users in Iraq, according to the Inside Facebook website (www.insidefacebook.com). This represents rapid growth from just a few hundred users in the first quarter of 2009. Much of the growth has been attributed to Facebook's announcement in March 2009 that the site was available in Arabic. However, Iraq's Facebook audience is still small compared with

countries like Israel at 1.2 million users, Saudi Arabia and the UAE at 600,000 each, and Kuwait at 170,000, according to Inside Facebook's Global Monitoring Report.

The first Iraqi blogs emerged in 2002. While many prominent Iraqi bloggers left the country to live abroad after 2003, several have returned and are blogging from inside Iraq again. A notable example is Salam Pax (Salam al-Janabi), who began blogging in September 2002, at "Where is Raed?" In 2003, a collection of his blog entries from before, during and after the invasion of Iraq was published under the titles "The Baghdad Blog" (UK) and "Salam Pax: The Clandestine Diary of an Ordinary Iraqi" (US).

The Iraqi blogosphere is dominated by blogs in English rather than Arabic.

8b. Impact

Various groups in Iraq have used social networking websites in different ways and for different purposes.

For example, some Iraqis upload to YouTube video clips about everyday life in their country during the United States-led occupation, while insurgent groups upload video clips that show assaults on American and Iraqi forces in addition to pro-insurgency propaganda. Militant groups also use the internet to recruit new members. As the internet continues to be a battleground for coalition forces and insurgent groups, militants have reportedly developed online encryption tools which provide secure internet communication for the Iraqi insurgent groups. (Source: ONI)

Bloggers in Iraq can provide different insights, information and stories compared with mainstream journalists, as well as a closer perspective on day-to-day life, particularly when most foreign news organizations have withdrawn their reporters from Iraq or restricted them to fortified premises in the capital. But blogging in Iraq, although limited to a small community, can also be hazardous. Some Iraqi bloggers have reported being physically attacked in their homes by armed groups because of their blogging activities. For example, see <http://www.mideastyouth.com/2009/10/01/a-new-attack-on-iraqi-bloggers/>

8c. Key sites

Note: All the following blogs and websites are in English unless otherwise stated.

<http://iraqblogcountexp.blogspot.com> - Iraq Blog Count

<http://salampax.wordpress.com> - Salam Pax, the Baghdad Blogger; one of the first internationally known bloggers, began blogging pseudonymously before the 2003 US-led invasion. He is now blogging again from Baghdad, having returned there in January 2009.

<http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/> - Baghdad Burning blog by "Riverbend", an Iraqi female blogger

<http://baghdadgirl.blogspot.com/> - Baghdad Girl blog by Raghda Zaid, originally from Mosul but now based in Sharjah, UAE

<http://saminkie.blogspot.com/> - an Iraqi psychiatrist blogs on Iraq, patients, daily life and his thoughts in general

<http://hammorabi.blogspot.com/> - by Dr Hassan, an Iraqi expatriate living in the UK

<http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/> - daily news and comments on the situation in post-Saddam Iraq by Zeyad, a 24-year-old dentist in Baghdad

<http://iraqthemodel.blogspot.com/> - Iraq The Model, offering "new points of view about the future of Iraq"

<http://ishtartalking.blogspot.com/> - Ishtar Talking, blogging from Basra

<http://iraqi4ever.blogspot.com/> - Iraq 4 Ever, by dentistry student Ferid blogging from Baghdad

<http://astarfrommosul.blogspot.com/> - A Star from Mosul, blog by Najma, a student of Communication Engineering at the University of Mosul.

<http://secretsinbaghdad.blogspot.com/> - Tell Me A Secret blog, by Khalid Jarrar

<http://raedinthemiddle.blogspot.com/> - Raed In The Middle, blog by Raed Jarrar

<http://afamilyinbaghdad.blogspot.com/> - A Family In Baghdad - blog by the Jarrar family (an Iraqi mother and three sons); in English and Arabic

<http://abutamam.blogspot.com/> - Free Iraq blog, in English and Arabic

<http://washingtonbureau.typepad.com/iraq/> - Inside Iraq, a blog updated by Iraqi

journalists working for the American newspaper group McClatchy Newspapers, giving first-hand accounts of their experiences. Based in Baghdad and the outlying provinces, their full names are withheld for security purposes.

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2220886029> - All Iraqis On Facebook - a Facebook group that describes itself as "an attempt to connect all Iraqis and Iraq lovers on Facebook"

9. Kurdish media

Overview

The Iraqi Kurdish media scene has mushroomed in the past decade, largely thanks to the semi-autonomous status the region has enjoyed since 1991. This period witnessed the appearance of daily newspapers and satellite TV stations for the first time.

The overwhelming majority of media outlets are controlled by political parties, with most parties owning TV channels, newspapers and radio stations.

Although the Kurdish media have thrived in the past decade, the relationship between journalists and government has been a thorny one. The rigid Saddam-era media laws, still in effect in the region, often give rise to complaints by journalists of arrests, intimidation and harassment, while the government accuses them of working against national interests.

The US Department of State 2008 human rights report said that there had been a marked increase in intimidation of independent journalists by extrajudicial means in the Kurdistan region that year. Local security forces had harassed and jailed editors of major independent publications for publishing articles that were critical of the regional government or Kurdish party officials, especially for alleged corruption.

Kurdish press

The PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) owns two dailies: Kurdistani Nuwe and Arabic-language Al-Ittihad, while it also provides funding to the daily Aso.

The KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) runs two dailies: Khabat and Arabic language Al-Ta'akhi.

Former PUK deputy leader Nawshirwan Mustafa's Wisha Company owns daily Rozhnama.

There are several other weeklies and twice-weeklies, prominent among them are independent twice-weekly Hawlati, weekly Awene, PUK-funded Chawder and Kurdistan Islamic Union-owned weekly Yekgirtu. Hawlati decided to publish a weekly issue in London, the paper's website reported in April 2009.

Although adequate statistical data on the popularity of the press is not available, various sources consider Hawlati to be the highest circulation newspaper, printing some 20,000 copies. However, Khabat reported in August 2008 that an opinion poll had showed that it had the largest number of readers among daily newspapers in Kurdistan.

- Al-Ittihad ("The Union") - Baghdad-based, daily newspaper in Arabic published by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Website: <http://www.alitthad.com>

- Khabat ("The Struggle") - Arbil-based, daily newspaper in Sorani Kurdish published by the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Website: <http://www.xebat.net>

- Kurdistan Nuwe ("The New Kurdistan") - Sulaymaniyah-based daily newspaper in Sorani Kurdish published by the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. Website: <http://www.pukmedia.com>

- Al-Ta'akhi ("The Fraternity") - Baghdad-based daily newspaper in Arabic published by the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Website: <http://www.taakhinews.org>

- Hawal ("The News") - Sulaymaniyah-based weekly independent newspaper in Sorani Kurdish.

- Komal ("The Group") - Sulaymaniyah-based weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish published by the Iraqi Kurdistan Islamic Group.

- Roji Gel ("The Nation's Sun") - Weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish; published by the Kurdistan Liberation Party. Based in Arbil. Website: <http://www.rpk93.org>

- Hewler, formerly Hawler Post - Arbil-based. Twice-weekly privately-owned newspaper in Sorani Kurdish, supported by KDP. Website: <http://www.hewlerpost.com>

- Aso ("The Horizon") - Kirkuk-based, daily newspaper in Sorani Kurdish financed by the

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

- Jamawar ("The People") - Arbil-based, weekly independent newspaper in Sorani Kurdish.

- Chawder ("The Monitor") - Sulaymaniyah-based, Pro-Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish; owned by PUK Political Bureau member Mala Bakhtiyar.

- Yekgirtu ("The Union") - Weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish published by the Kurdistan Islamic Union in Arbil. Website: <http://www.kurdiu.org>

- Al-Ufuq ("The Horizon") - Arbil-based, Arabic-language supplement of weekly newspaper Yekgirtu published by the Kurdistan Islamic Union. Website: <http://www.kurdiu.org>

- Awene ("The Mirror") - Sulaymaniyah-based, weekly independent newspaper in Sorani Kurdish. Website: <http://www.awene.com>

- Media ("The Medes") - Arbil-based, weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish; published by the Democratic National Union of Kurdistan. Website: <http://www.yndk.com>

- Kurdish Globe - English-language, Arbil-based weekly pro-Kurdistan Democratic Party newspaper. Website: <http://www.kurdishglobe.net>

- Regay Kurdistan ("The Kurdistan Path") - Arbil-based, weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish published by the Communist Party of Iraqi Kurdistan. Website: <http://www.kurdistanpcp.org>

- Govari Gulan ("Gulan Magazine") - Arbil-based, weekly pro-Kurdistan Democratic Party magazine in Sorani Kurdish.

- Roji Welat ("The Country's Sun") - Kirkuk-based, weekly newspaper in Sorani Kurdish published by the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party. Website: <http://www.pcdk.com/rojiwelat.html>

- Levin - Sulaymaniyah-based, monthly independent journal in Sorani Kurdish. Website: <http://www.degeken.com>

- Rozhnama ("The Newspaper") - Sulaymaniyah-based, daily newspaper in Sorani

Kurdish run by the Wisha ("Word") Company of former PUK deputy leader Nawshirwan Mustafa. Website: <http://www.rozhnama.com>

Kurdish broadcast media

Satellite television: There are three 24-hour satellite TV stations in the region: Kurdistan Satellite TV and Zagros TV are owned by the KDP, while the PUK owns KurdSat and Geli Kurdistan TV.

Kurdistan Satellite TV is based in Salah-al-Din, north of Arbil, Zagros TV is based in Arbil, while KurdSat and Geli Kurdistan TV are based in Sulaymaniyah.

Kurdistan Satellite TV is the oldest of the three, having launched in 1999. All three are entertainment channels, running very similar programmes using almost the same scheduling formats. They run several news bulletins throughout the day, with news about party and government officials topping the agenda.

The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) started test broadcasts of its satellite TV channel, Spede TV, in May 2008.

Roj TV is based in Brussels, although it is licensed in Denmark. It broadcasts in both Sorani and Kurmanji dialects of Kurdish as well as in Turkish, Arabic and Farsi. Turkey accuses the station of being the mouthpiece of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and has repeatedly sought to have the station closed.

The station has more comprehensive pan-Kurdish coverage than its rivals, reporting on the situation of the Kurds in the four countries where they are mostly concentrated - Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria - as well as on the Kurdish diaspora in the West.

Terrestrial television: There are dozens of terrestrial TV stations in the region, mostly run by the political parties. Most of them are entertainment channels, usually broadcasting in the evenings only.

Rangala TV, the first privately-funded TV channel exclusively for children in Iraqi Kurdistan, was launched in August 2009.

- Kurdistan Satellite TV: KDP owned satellite TV. Website: <http://kurdistantv.net>

- KurdSat: PUK-owned, Sulaymaniyah-based satellite TV. Website:

<http://www.kurdsat.tv>

- Roj TV: Brussels-based, Denmark-licensed Kurdish TV, aimed at Kurdish populations in the Middle East and the Kurdish diaspora. Website: <http://www.roj.tv>

- Zagros TV: KDP-owned, Arbil-based satellite TV. Website: <http://www.zagros.tv>

- ATB TV in Kirkuk. Local TV channel ATB began test broadcasts in Kirkuk in June 2004, initially for eight hours a day. The channel is affiliated with the Kurdistan Communist Party.

Radio: There are many local radio stations in the region, mostly run by political parties. Most of these are entertainment radios which are only on air for several hours a day. The major exception to this is Radio Nawa, a 24-hour news radio station which went on air in 2005 and can be received throughout the region and on the internet at <http://www.radionawa.com>.

Radio Nawa is the first outlet of a larger independent media organization, currently publishing a cultural magazine, running a website and producing music albums. The organization aspires to run a newspaper and a satellite TV in the future.

The KDP launched Radio Paytakht (Radio Capital) in the regional capital Arbil in May 2008.

Dangi Goran (the voice of change) is a radio station launched by the Wisha media company in Sulaymaniyah in April 2009. It broadcasts on 91 MHz on FM in Sulaymaniyah, and plans to extend coverage in Iraqi Kurdistan to include Arbil and Duhok.

VOA airs four hours daily of programming in both the Sorani and Kurmanji dialects to the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, also reaching Kurds in the neighbouring countries of Iran, Turkey and Syria.

Voice of Russia radio station began broadcasting in Kurdish in Iraqi Kurdistan in May 2008.

Kurdish news agency

Peyamner News Agency, or PNA, is a Kurdish news agency based in Arbil, Iraqi

Kurdistan. It provides news, analysis and commentaries in Kurdish, English, Arabic, Persian and Turkish. It was founded in 2004. Its Kurdish section, provides news in both dialects of Kurmanji and Sorani. Peyamner concentrates on news from Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdish inhabited areas of Iran, Turkey, Syria and Kurdish diaspora in Europe and America.

Peyamner also owns radio stations in Arbil, Sulaymaniyah and Duhok, with distribution via the Hotbird satellite. Website: <http://www.peyamner.com>

Notable Kurdish online sources

- Sbay ("Tomorrow") - Media website: Run by Wisha Company of former PUK deputy leader Nawshirwan Mustafa. Website: <http://www.sbeiy.com>

- PUK Media: PUK media website in Kurdish and Arabic. Website: <http://www.pukmedia.com>

- Kurdistan regional government website in English, Arabic and Kurdish. Website: <http://web.krg.org>

- Dengekan ("Voices"): Independent media, culture and arts website in Sorani Kurdish. Website: <http://www.dengekan.com>

- KurdMedia: Independent media website in English. Website: <http://www.kurdmedia.com>

[Description of Source: Caversham BBC Monitoring in English -- Monitoring service of the BBC, the United Kingdom's public service broadcaster